

Understanding “Practical Knowledge”*

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1 Introduction

According to one traditional conception, knowledge is always a “passive” or “receptive” state that reflects the way things are in the mind-independent world.¹ Against this assumption, Elizabeth Anscombe argues in *Intention* that (what I will call) *agential knowledge*, or a person’s knowledge of what she is intentionally doing, breaks this mold: it is always “practical” rather than “speculative” knowledge, insofar as it is somehow “the cause of what it understands” (Anscombe 1963a, 57, 87-89).² In this Anscombe follows St. Thomas Aquinas, who in turn follows Aristotle, who writes in *De Anima* III.10 that νοῦς can be among the sources of human movement: “thought, that is, which calculates means to an end, i.e. practical thought (it differs from speculative thought in the character of its end)” (433a14-15).³ One way to read the second half or so of Anscombe’s *Intention* is as an extended attempt to show how this concept of practical knowledge is the key to understanding intentional action itself, thereby shining some

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¹As is usually the case with assumptions, this conception is taken for granted much more often than it is explicitly stated. But it is revealed clearly enough in the epistemologists’ standard lists of sources of knowledge (perception, reason, introspection, memory, testimony, etc.) and things we can thereby know (that this is a barn; that Jones owns a Ford; that $2+2=4$; and so on). It is, though, usually acknowledged that practical “know-how” may not fit this standard; on its relevance to my inquiry, see footnote 9 below. For critical diagnosis of a similar assumption in philosophical work on consciousness, see Hurley 1998.

²Hereafter, *Intention* will be cited simply as ‘I’, followed by page numbers.

³Compare *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2: “Intellect itself . . . moves nothing, but only the intellect which aims at an end and is practical” (1139a35-b1). For some more of Aquinas’ sources, see Section 3 below.

light into “the utter darkness in which we [find] ourselves” when we regard a person’s knowledge of her actions as a strictly “speculative” affair (*I*, 57).

However, despite its centrality to Anscombe’s project, her concept of practical knowledge has not been widely understood.⁴ Part of the blame for this lies with Anscombe herself: she is hardly systematic, and she appeals to the concept of practical knowledge with a bewildering array of formulations, several of which it is hard to see as connected to the others.⁵ A second explanation is that while much has been done of late to unpack Anscombe’s conception of agent’s knowledge, this has usually preceded without attention to the Aristotelian and Thomistic texts whose ideas she is frequently incorporating – a lack I hope to remedy in this paper by relating Anscombe’s views to Aquinas’ discussion of practical cognition in the *Summa Theologiae*.⁶ But a final reason for this lack of understanding is the tendency among many of Anscombe’s readers to focus just on her better-known claim that a person always knows “without observation” whatever he or she is intentionally doing (*I*, 13), without doing as much to explore Anscombe’s idea that there is something *else* distinctive about practical knowledge in contrast to knowledge that is “derived from the objects known” (*ibid.*, 87).⁷ This is important, because the former doctrine is widely regarded as problematic, and an exclusive focus on it can bar us from considering what else

⁴For example, at the end of a generally sympathetic discussion of Anscombe’s critique of causal theories of action, Stewart Candlish and Nic Damnjanovic write that “Anscombe’s account of ‘practical knowledge’ is hard to interpret ... and so it is difficult to see the alternative to either interior acts of intention or causalism that she has in mind” (Candlish and Damnjanovic 2013, 700-701). Less enthusiastically, David Velleman (2007a, 103) complains that Anscombe’s conception of practical knowledge appears “not just causally perverse but epistemically mysterious”; however, he softens this assessment somewhat in pp. xxi-xxv of the preface to the 2007 reprinting of *Practical Reflection*.

⁵Thus Anselm Müller (1999) identifies six different ways that agent’s knowledge is characterized in *Intention*: (1) it is knowledge “without observation”; (2) it is knowledge that measures its object, rather than being measured by it; (3) it is knowledge that is the outcome of practical reasoning; (4) it involves the knowledge of *how* to do certain things; (5) it is knowledge that is contradicted by being thwarted; and (6) it is knowledge that is a constitutive component of action. The account I offer below has the virtue of unifying most of these characterizations, though I have little to say about practical know-how, and ultimately I reject (with important caveats; see Section 5 below) Anscombe’s conception of practical knowledge as necessarily non-observational.

⁶For a more thorough study of Aquinas’ conception of the practical intellect, see Naus 1959. Aquinas’ views are also discussed by Peter Geach (1972, 324-327), Anthony Kenny (1979, 34-37), and (in a rather different context) Linda Zagzebski (1991, 57-59, 88-91). Thanks to Daniel Rockowitz for this last reference.

⁷I don’t think it should be controversial to say that this is a common way of exploring Anscombe’s views. For example, Falvey 2000, Pickard 2004, and Paul 2009a all develop Anscombean positions that focus exclusively on the idea that agent’s knowledge is non-observational, and say little or nothing about what makes this knowledge distinctively “practical”. For work that cuts against this tendency to varying degrees, see Velleman 2007a; O’Brien 2003, 2007; Roessler 2003; Moran 2004; Newstead 2006, 2009; Rödl 2007; Rödl 2011; Setiya 2007, 2008; Grünbaum 2009, 2011; Haddock 2010, 2011; McDowell 2011, 2013; Thompson 2011; Marcus 2012; Small 2012; Kern and Horst 2013; Ford 2013; Lavin 2013b; Horst 2013. However, for most of these authors the characterization of agent’s knowledge as non-observational remains primary, and comparatively less is said about the practical/speculative distinction. I survey much of this literature in Schwenkler 2012.

might be right in Anscombe's view.⁸ Together with the seeming inevitability of what Anscombe calls the "incurribly contemplative conception of knowledge" that she takes to be characteristic of modern thought (*ibid.*, 57), all this makes the concept of practical knowledge seem an unlikely place to found a theory of action.⁹

However understandable, this situation makes it very difficult for Anscombe's readers and interlocutors to be confident that we have gotten her view right, and thus to evaluate its philosophical promise. This is especially true if, as I suggested above, the claim that agential knowledge is practical knowledge is doing more philosophical work in *Intention* than the claim that it is knowledge without observation. As several of her commentators have noted,¹⁰ in the argument of *Intention* the concept of non-observational knowledge appears early in the text as Anscombe offers a preliminary characterization of which actions fall under the "certain sense of the question 'Why?'" that she takes to have application only to intentional actions (*I*, 9). This characterization of agential knowledge is purely negative – it tells us that it is *not* knowledge through observation, and Anscombe supplies several examples, including that of our way of knowing the positions of our limbs, to help us understand it. But of course agential knowledge is not *precisely the same* sort of knowledge as the knowledge of one's bodily position, even if they share some features in common.¹¹ Moreover, Anscombe herself is aware of many of the difficulties that arise when we try to understand agential knowledge as non-observational – she raises them herself in §§28-30 of *Intention* and considers what she regards as several insufficient responses to them before moving in §31 to considerations that build toward proposing the concept of practical knowledge as the key element in a better solution. If we take Anscombe's concept of non-observational knowledge for granted without understanding what is supposed to make this knowledge practical, then our grasp of her position is bound to be very partial, and focused on considerations that in her view were really quite secondary. Yet as I

⁸Perhaps the most influential criticism of the claim that intentional action requires non-observational knowledge of what one is doing has been Donald Davidson's example of a man intentionally making a stack of legible carbon copies without knowing that he is doing this (Davidson 1980, 50) for other early criticisms see Donnellan 1963 and the papers cited in Velleman 2007a, 19n. Of the authors cited in the note above who address this question, only Horst, Marcus, Newstead, Rödl, Thompson, and Small defend an unqualified version of this doctrine; all the others hold that the domain of non-observational agent's knowledge is restricted in some way.

⁹There has, of course, been a lot of recent discussion of the concept of practical *know-how*, and whether it is reducible to propositional knowledge-that. However, while the concept of know-how is certainly relevant to Anscombe's theory of action (see e.g. *I*, 88; and cf. Müller 1999; Hornsby 2005; Setiya 2008; Rödl 2011), agential knowledge is not *simply* a kind of know-how, but rather a first-personal way of knowing *what is happening* when one exercises the practical capacity to do a certain thing.

¹⁰See e.g. Hursthouse 2000; Moran 2004; McDowell 2011.

¹¹For some resistance to this idea, see McDowell 2011, who argues that bodily self-knowledge is rendered non-observational partly through its ties to agency. However, McDowell does not believe that the knowledge of one's bodily position provides a sufficient model for understanding agential knowledge, since as he admits (*ibid.*, 142), bodily self-knowledge is not the cause of what it understands.

noted above, this is exactly what many of her recent interlocutors have tended to do.

Against this tendency, my aim in this paper is to make a case for the centrality of the concept of practical knowledge to the proper understanding of intentional agency, separating this concept from the more common conception of agent's knowledge as knowledge that is independent of perception. To do this, I will address two main questions:

First, in what sense is agential knowledge “practical” knowledge, or knowledge that causes what it understands?

Second, does the fact that agential knowledge is “practical” in this sense guarantee that a person must always know without observation whatever she is intentionally doing?

I address the first question in Sections 2 and 3, proceeding as follows:

- Section 2 examines an account several recent authors have offered of what Anscombe means in calling agential knowledge “practical”, which centers on the idea that such knowledge is the *formal cause* of its object, or the principle that unifies an action into an order of means and ends. I begin by developing this idea and distinguishing it from the more familiar conception of practical thought as an efficient cause of bodily motion (§2.1), then argue that on its own this account is insufficient, since more needs to be said about how the “material” elements of a person's intentional activity relate to her knowledge of what she is doing (§2.2). This latter point sets the stage for the argument of the following section.
- Section 3 adds what I think is missing to the account of agential knowledge as the source of an action's means-end unity, drawing on a reading of Thomas Aquinas' discussion of practical cognition in the *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas' conception of practical knowledge, which I argue on textual grounds is plausibly attributed to Anscombe as well, centers on the idea that knowledge is practical insofar as it “aims at production”, and its object is something the agent has the power to effect. I go on to argue that agential knowledge has this characteristic because of its role in the process of agential self-guidance, by which an agent ensures that she is acting as she means to, and bringing about her desired ends.

In light of this argument, I turn in Sections 4 and 5 to address the second question, exploring how the practical character of agential knowledge relates to the idea that a person must know without observation whatever she is intentionally doing:

- Section 4 begins with an important contrast between the practical thought of an infinite agent, such as God, and that of a finite human being, namely that whereas God's knowledge is the source of activity that does not depend on preexisting matter for its reality, the activity of a human agent always requires reshaping what is already given in the material world. In

light of this contrast, I argue that it is possible for a human agent to be mistaken about what she is intentionally doing (§4.1), to do something intentionally without knowing that she is doing this (§4.2), or for such a person's knowledge of what she is intentionally doing to be grounded in perception (§4.3).

- Finally, Section 5 argues that even when it is grounded in perception, still the knowledge of what one is intentionally doing may count as non-observational in one important sense, namely insofar as observational knowledge is exclusively “passive”, whereas an agent's perceptually-grounded knowledge of her action still plays an active role in causing what it represents.

That is, on the account I develop here *the “practical” knowledge of what one is intentionally doing is distinguished from “speculative” forms of knowledge not by its independence from perception, but rather by the role it plays in bringing its object into existence.*

2 The “Form” of an Action¹²

In this section, I explore the idea that a person's knowledge of what she is doing is the *formal cause* of its object, or that in virtue of which a person's movements and their effects constitute a unity of means and ends.¹³ This terminology is deliberately Aristotelian: it appeals to the intuition that the “material” elements of a person's behavior – the fact that one's body is moving about in certain ways, and causing certain things to happen in the world – don't on their own amount to an action, any more than the material properties of some sounds or marks are enough to make them a unit of meaning. Taken on its own, this latter idea is common to all analytic philosophers of action, but part of what makes Anscombe's position distinctive is that in her view, what distinguishes an action is not a matter just of how it is *produced*, but also how it is *understood* by the one who acts. I motivate and develop this position in §2.1, then argue in §2.2 that this conception of agential knowledge as “formal cause” is not enough on its own to explain what is distinctively practical in an agent's self-understanding.

2.1 Thought and action

Consider Vashti, whose present behavior can be described in many different ways. She is moving her hand downward. She is striking an egg against the side of a bowl with the force necessary to crack it. She is making a soufflé. And she is preparing breakfast for her daughter. Suppose that Vashti is doing

¹²Thanks to Jen Frey, Eric Marcus, and Kieran Setiya for lots of helpful discussion of the ideas I explore in this section.

¹³For talk of “formal causality” in connection with Anscombe's conception of practical knowledge, see Hursthouse 2000; Moran 2004; Newstead 2006, 2009; Stoutland 2011a,b. Other important work that develops Anscombe's position along these lines is in Thompson 2008; Rödl 2007; Rödl 2011; Ford 2011; Marcus 2012; Lavin 2013b

all these things intentionally. What is distinctively “agential” about Vashti’s knowledge of her intentional actions? What makes it different from another person’s knowledge of what Vashti is up to, and also from the knowledge Vashti might have of things she is doing *without* intending to do them? In virtue of what might Vashti’s knowledge of what she is intentionally doing be a kind of *practical* knowledge?

I’ll begin with the concept of practical reasoning, since according to Anscombe understanding this is a necessary first step toward understanding practical knowledge (see *I*, 57). Simplifying greatly, Anscombe conceives of practical reasoning as a way of proceeding from a general action-type to a particular bodily action by identifying means to a given end:¹⁴ for example, to crack an egg in order to make a soufflé in order to provide breakfast for one’s child in order to feed her. She insists, however, that this concept of a practical syllogism should not be thought of as identifying a kind of mental process from which intentional action results: instead, it is a way of making explicit a rational order inherent in intentional activity itself, something that “informs” purposive activity throughout the time a person is engaged in it.¹⁵ According to Anscombe, a practical syllogism is just a formal way of representing what is less formally represented by the answers a person might give to a series of questions asking for the reasons for her action, under various descriptions of it. Thus suppose we begin to query Vashti:

“Why are you moving your hand in that way?”

“To crack an egg.”

“And why are you cracking the egg?”

“To make a soufflé.”

“And why are you making a soufflé?”

“It’s for my daughter’s breakfast.”

In these responses, Vashti reveals that these four descriptions of what she is doing – moving her hand, cracking an egg, making a soufflé, and preparing breakfast for her daughter – constitute a sort of logical progression, in which “each description is introduced as dependent on the previous one, though independent of the following one” (*I*, 45). The answers identify the rational structure of Vashti’s intentional activity, relating her actions under these descriptions in a series of means-end relationships: each of the first three descriptions characterizes Vashti’s actions as a means to something further, while the final one specifies her (proximate) aim, or what Anscombe calls “the intention with which” she is

¹⁴Thanks to Jen Frey for this formulation. For more on Anscombe’s conception of practical reasoning as a form of means-end calculation, see Müller 1979; Vogler 2001, 2002; Ford 2013.

¹⁵See *I*, 79-80. This is not to deny that (conscious or – more likely – unconscious) practical reasoning may *sometimes* precede an action and give rise to it; here see the discussion in §27 of *Intention* of the possible moral relevance of “interior acts of intention”. Anscombe’s point is just that no such thing is *necessary* for an action to be intentional, or to be a way of realizing an end through certain means. She may be wrong about this, but it’s hard to say this confidently without first understanding the alternative she is proposing. For much more on this subject, see Jennifer Frey’s forthcoming paper “Practical Knowledge and Double Effect”, which has had a major influence on my argument here.

acting as she is (*I*, 46). If what Vashti says is true, she is moving her hand because she is cracking an egg, and doing this because she is making a soufflé, and so on. And all of this will be true not because of anything that went on in Vashti's mind before she began to act, but rather because of her standing practical knowledge of what she is doing.¹⁶

Yet how is this possible? How can what a person *knows* about her action make a difference to what *happens* in the world?¹⁷ Anscombe's answer to this question rests on her conception of intentional action as a *unity of means and ends*: something cannot be an action unless it is the sort of thing to which the question "Why?" has application, where this question seeks to draw out an action's means-end order – an order, she says, "which is there whenever actions are done with intentions" (*I*, 80).¹⁸ As we have seen, this order of means and ends is an explanatory order, and thus an order of causes: that Vashti is making breakfast is part of what *explains why* she is moving around as she is. However, this is a different form of causal relatedness than the one we inquire after when we ask, say, "Why did the tree fall?" or "Why did the ball roll down the hill?" – though of course such connections of efficient causation are essential to everything we intentionally do. For when we say that someone is X-ing because she is Y-ing, we describe her X-ing not as an *effect* of her Y-ing, as the fall of a tree may be the effect of its being struck by an axe, but as a *means* to it, or something she is doing in order to obtain something further. And Anscombe holds that nothing in the world as it is independent of practical reason – nothing in the movement of certain molecules, or even of certain human bodies – could ground this kind of connection.

We can get at what is distinctive in this idea by contrasting it with another, probably more familiar conception of the place of thought in human action, captured nicely in a passage from Hobbes's *Leviathan*. Hobbes writes:

There be in Animals, two sorts of *Motions* peculiar to them: One called *Vitall*; begun in generation, and continued without interruption through their whole life; such as are the *course* of the *Bloud*, the *Pulse*, the *Breathing*, the *Concoction*, *Nutrition*, *Excretion*, &c.; to which Motion there needs no help of Imagination: The other is *Animall motion*, otherwise called *Voluntary motion*; as to *go*, to *speak*, to *move* any of our limbes, in such manner as is first fancied

¹⁶To head off an objection before it arises: "It has become fashionable to say, in contexts such as this one, that this falsifies the 'phenomenology' of skillful action. This presupposes that the presence of knowledge in action would make itself felt in the manner of a sensation. But knowledge has no 'phenomenology'. Descriptions of how it feels to do something one knows well how to do are irrelevant to our inquiry" (Rödl 2011, 227n).

¹⁷As Anscombe puts it, in a paper published the same year as the second edition of *Intention*: "What bearing can what the agent thinks have on the true description of what he does? Someone may want to say: if what he does is a happening, a physical event, something 'in the external world', then that happening must be something that takes place, whatever the agent thinks ... If we ask: Why? the answer is: because what the agent thinks simply cannot make any difference to the truth of a description of a physical fact or event" (Anscombe 1963b, 4).

¹⁸For a powerful defense of the claim that this kind of means-end structure is essential to intentional activity in general, see Lavin 2013a.

in our minds ... And because *going*, *speaking*, and the like Voluntary motions, depend alwayes upon a precedent thought of *whither*, *which way*, and *what*; it is evident, that the Imagination is the first internal beginning of all Voluntary Motion. (Bk. I, ch. vi¹⁹)

For Hobbes, thought is the cause of action insofar as what happens inside of a person is the “internal beginning” of her body’s movements: there are, he writes, “small beginnings of Motion, within the body of Man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions, [and which] are commonly called ENDEAVOUR” (ibid.). As a result of these internal motions, human beings move around the world in many complex ways. Change the internal motions, and our movements change as a result; silence the mind altogether, and only our bodily functions remain.

By contrast, at the core of Anscombe’s conception of action is the idea that practical thought is not an efficient cause that sets the visible parts of our body into motion, but the principle that *unifies* an action, or that in virtue of which certain physical happenings are constituted as part of a person’s intentional activity. As she writes, when we are interested in human actions:

It is not that we have a special interest in the movement of these molecules—namely, the ones in a human being; or even in the movement 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 the 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 a 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 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 ask the question. (*I*, 83)

The analogy with linguistic meaning is instructive. Anscombe’s point is that the question “What does it say?”, asked of a series of marks on a blackboard, bears a very different relation to its object than does, say, the question “What does it weigh?”, asked of something like a bag of apples: in the latter case, the object of the inquiry has a unity independent of the question being asked about it, as there could have been bags of apples even if questions about weight had never occurred to anyone. But questions of meaning relate to words and sentences differently than this: the unity of a word or sentence is *semantic* or *propositional*, a unity not of matter but of meaning, and so the “it” whose significance we query when we ask “What does it say?” would not be anything unitary – would not be

¹⁹I owe the reference to Velleman 2000, 123.

any *one* thing, as opposed to a mere aggregate of sounds or marks – if this form of questioning did not exist. And Anscombe holds that the same holds for human actions: in her view, the unity of an action is *teleological*, a unity of not of matter but of means and ends, and so the “that” whose purpose we query when we ask “Why are you doing that?” would not be anything unitary – would not be any *one* event, as opposed to a mere series of things that happen – if this form of questioning did not exist. Like speech and writing, action depends on thought not just because the complexity of many of our bodily movements could only have arisen through cognitively sophisticated causes, but also as its unifying principle: in each case, the unity in question has its source in reason.

To get at the idea in a slightly different way, consider a variant of Wittgenstein’s famous question from *Philosophical Investigations* §621: “What is left over if I subtract the fact that I know what I am doing from the fact that I am doing something intentionally?”²⁰ One of Anscombe’s great insights is that facts about one’s actions considered simply as bodily movements²¹ with various further effects do not on their own determine what one is doing. In our example, Vashti is moving her hand because she is cracking an egg, cracking an egg because she is making a soufflé, and making a soufflé because she is preparing her daughter’s breakfast. That Vashti *knows* that this is what she is doing is not just a further feature of the example that is present in addition to these happenings, but something without which these things would not be happening at all: if we “subtract” from the example Vashti’s knowledge of what she is up to, then what remains will not be enough to determine what, if anything, she is cooking (someone moving around in just these ways could be making an omelette instead of a soufflé, lunch instead of breakfast, etc.), or to relate any of the remaining facts about her movements in an order of means and ends (Vashti could unknowingly be moving her hand and cracking an egg, but only due to her practical thought can she be doing the former thing *because* she is doing the latter). As Anscombe puts it, such knowledge is not “a mere *extra* feature of events whose description would otherwise be the same”, since “without it what happens does not come under the description–execution of intentions–whose characteristics we have been investigating” (*I*, 88). In this way, the knowledge of what one is doing is partly constitutive of action itself, and in this respect *causa rerum intellectarum*, the cause of the things that are understood.

2.2 Form and matter

Many questions arise at this point. One concerns something about which I have been deliberately obscure so far, namely whether the cognitive state I

²⁰Wittgenstein’s original question asked “What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raised my arm?” As David Velleman notes (2000, 1), solving this piece of “Wittgensteinian arithmetic” has been the focus of most analytical work in the philosophy of action for the past half-century.

²¹That is, bodily movements characterized in terms of what Anscombe calls “vital descriptions”, which represent them simply as “movements with a normal role in the sensitive, and therefore appetitive, life of animals” (*I*, 86), rather than as aspects of a person’s intentional activity.

have described sometimes as practical *thought*, practical *reasoning*, or a person's *understanding* of what she is doing, must always amount to practical *knowledge* of its objects. This is an important question, but I propose to postpone it until Section 4, and until then I will continue to use this looser terminology. In the present section, my aim is to articulate a few other concerns for this account of an agent's practical knowledge as the unifying principle or "formal cause" of her actions. My purpose in raising these concerns is not to argue that we should reject this account, but rather to identify some ways in which it needs further development – a task I'll then take up in Section 3.

The first concern is this: if the idea that agential knowledge is the formal cause of its object is understood *just* in terms of its being necessary for a person's action to be intentional under a given description, then this characterization will include many instances of knowledge that seem straightforwardly "speculative" or "theoretical". For example, in the case we began with I described Vashti as moving her hand to crack an egg to cook a soufflé to make breakfast for her daughter. Intuitively, Vashti cannot be cracking an egg to cook a soufflé if she does not know (or at least believe) *that this thing* (*viz.*, the thing she is cracking) *is an egg*: subtract this knowledge, and Vashti won't any longer be *cracking an egg* intentionally, but only banging something against a bowl. Yet if this kind of status is all that's required for knowledge to be practical, then it's hard to see how the claim that agential knowledge is practical knowledge could do any of the work that Anscombe wants it to do: for one thing, the knowledge that a certain thing is an egg seems paradigmatically observational; for another, it concerns something that is paradigmatically not an action.²²

This first concern is related to a second one, which is that not just any knowledge whose content is of the form *I am X-ing* (or: *I am X-ing because I am Y-ing*) will be knowledge of an action that is intentional under this description. Anscombe supplies many examples: a person crossing the road may notice that he is thereby operating the traffic lights (*I*, 14), a person pumping water may learn that he is casting a peculiar shadow and beating out a certain rhythm with his movements (*ibid.*, 38), and someone opening a window may realize that she is thereby shining a spot of light on the wall (*ibid.*, 51). In each of these cases, a person knows that he or she is acting in a way that falls under a certain description, but under this description the person's action is not intentional. While it may be true that these agents would have to have this knowledge (or at least correspondign beliefs) if they *were* to be acting intentionally in these ways, on its own their knowing that they are doing these things is not enough to constitute them as acting intentionally. It seems to follow, then, that the idea of agential knowledge as a formal cause of its object, at least as we have developed it so far, cannot explain on its own what makes an action intentional.

One might respond that that there are two quite different thoughts that can be expressed with a sentence of the form "I am X-ing because I am Y-ing", and the distinctive character of agential knowledge lies partly in which of these thoughts an agent grasps. For example, consider again the last of the three

²²Of course, the knowledge that *one is holding* an egg is a different matter.

cases mentioned just above: someone opening a window who notices that she is, quite by accident, thereby shining a spot of light on the wall might say, “I am shining that light because I am opening the window”. Now imagine someone else acting in a similar way, but this time on purpose, perhaps to entertain a child: she might say, “I am shining that light because I am entertaining the child”. Both statements have the same surface form (“I am X-ing because I am Y-ing”), but only the latter expresses knowledge of a *means-end* order whose reality is dependent on the agent’s knowledge of it. By contrast, what the person in Anscombe’s original example knows is just a matter of natural-causal fact, and so her knowledge of this causal relationship is not the principle of its reality.

This seems correct as far as it goes, but it leads to my third concern, which is that simply thinking of what one is doing in terms of an order of means and ends seems not to be enough to enough to render one’s actions intentional under those descriptions unless one’s practical thinking influences the *material* elements of one’s activity, or how one moves one’s body and thereby alters things in the surrounding world. The difficulty is similar to one that Anscombe raises early in *Intention*, in connection with her account of expressions of intention as a special form of prediction:

I once saw some notes on a lecture of Wittgenstein in which he imagined some leaves blown about by the wind and saying ‘Now I’ll go this way ... now I’ll go that way’ as the wind blew them. The analogy is unsatisfactory in apparently assigning no role to these predictions other than that of an unnecessary accompaniment to the movements of the leaves. But it might be replied: what do you mean by an ‘unnecessary’ accompaniment? If you mean one in the absence of which the movements of the leaves would have been just the same, the analogy is certainly bad. (*I*, 6-7)

In the present case, while I have argued that for Anscombe the knowledge of what one is doing is certainly not an *unnecessary* component of a person’s intentional activity, since without it there is no such activity to speak of, the difficulty remains that in describing this knowledge *only* as what supplies the “form” that unifies a person’s movements and their effects into a means-end order, we have made it seem as if without this knowledge those movements themselves could be exactly the same, at least under many of their “purely material” descriptions. It is as if one were to say in connection with Wittgenstein’s example that if we were to “subtract” from it the leaves’ knowledge of where they are going, they could not be moving around intentionally, as their movements could not count as an execution of their intentions: this may be true, but it doesn’t address the concern that the leaves’ thoughts about their movements are *idle* thoughts, precisely because they are materially inert. In order for the leaves to be agents, and for their knowledge of their movements to be the kind of knowledge a person has of what she is intentionally doing, it cannot be just a lucky accident that those movements correspond to their thoughts about them: an agent’s intentional movements must be *guided* or *controlled* by her practical thinking, not

just a matter of how she is blown about by the wind.²³ Because of this, to explain what makes agential knowledge practical it is not enough just to say that this knowledge is necessary for an event to fall under a given intentional action-description: or rather, we seem not to have explained how our movements ever *could* fall under such descriptions, until we explain how the knowledge of what one is intentionally doing is a knowledge of oneself *as an agent*, and not a merely passive subject of motion.

I should emphasize again that my purpose in these examples is not to challenge the claim that agential knowledge is the formal cause of its object, but only to show what is required to develop this idea adequately. The point is just that the account needs something more: *simply* knowing that one is doing something, even if this knowledge is a necessary condition of one's doing that thing, won't be enough to put one in a distinctively agential relationship toward the object of one's knowledge. Moreover, when one does stand in such a relationship, the object of one's knowledge does not unfold independently of one's knowledge of it: the knowledge of what one is doing is not just a feature that permits one's actions to be *described* in a certain way, but something that governs the way one's actions unfold.²⁴ We need to say more about what makes a cognitive act practical as opposed to speculative, such that it is a distinctively agential manner of knowing (or, perhaps, something less than knowing) that is suited to supply the intentional "form" to the "matter" of one's behavior and its effects. I argue in the following section that just such an account can be found in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, and that there is good textual basis for thinking that these ideas are in the background of Anscombe's position in *Intention*.

²³David Horst makes a related point in a recent paper, writing that one who has first-personal, practical knowledge of what he is doing must know "dass die Handlung, die er so vorstellt, *unter seiner Kontrolle* ist, insofern sie die *Wirkung* ebendieser Vorstellung ist". In having practical knowledge of what I am doing, "weiß ich auch um den kausalen Nexus, der mein Denken und mein Handeln verknüpft, und kraft dessen es kein Zufall ist, dass ich tue, was ich denke" (Horst 2013, 378-379). Similarly, Horst and Andrea Kern write that the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge "bezeichnet nicht einen Unterschied zwischen Inhalten des Gewussten, sondern einen Unterschied in der *Form der Beziehung* zum Inhalt des Wissens" (Kern and Horst 2013, 353). They continue: "Während theoretisches Wissen demnach in einem *passiven* Verhältnis zu seinem Gegenstand steht, steht praktisches Wissen in einem produktiven Verhältnis zu seinem Gegenstand" (ibid., 354).

²⁴For a related point, compare Richard Moran's discussion of the concept of "conscious belief" in *Authority and Estrangement*: he writes that "to call something a conscious belief says something about the *character* of the belief in question ... a conscious belief enters into different relations with the rest of one's mental economy and thereby alters its character. We speak of the 'consciousness' in 'conscious belief' as something that informs and qualifies the belief in question, and not just as specifying a theoretical relation in which I stand to this mental state ... We apply the term 'conscious' to the belief itself for reasons related to why we apply this term to certain activities of the person, where this qualifies the activity in ways that do not obtain with respect to someone else's awareness of it ... so that, for instance, sleepwalking, walking normally and unreflectively, and walking with conscious deliberateness are all distinct kinds of activity. In this last case, the person's consciousness of his activity is not something that stands outside it observing, but infuses and informs it, making a describable difference in the kind of activity it is" (Moran 2001, 30-31).

3 Practical Knowledge

“Can it be”, Anscombe asks, “that there is something that modern philosophy has blankly misunderstood: namely what ancient and medieval philosophers meant by *practical knowledge*?” (I, 57). She goes on to suggest that this misunderstanding, and the “incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge” it underwrites, “is the explanation of the utter darkness in which we found ourselves” in trying to understand how what is known “in intention” could be one and the same object that can also be observationally known (ibid.): namely, a form of bodily movement that is also the execution of an agent’s intention.

Yet as I have noted, while Anscombe is clear that retrieval of the ancient conception of practical knowledge is needed if we are to find our way out of this darkness, she is far less clear about what that conception *is*. My argument in Section 2 was a first step toward filling this gap, as I argued that the role of agential knowledge as the unifying principle of a person’s intentional activity gives this knowledge the standing of an Aristotelian “formal cause”: much as the form of a living organism is what constitutes its proper parts into components of a single substance, so the knowledge of what one is doing unifies her movements and their effects into a single activity that embodies a means-end order. However, I then argued that on its own this account can make agential knowledge appear curiously idle, and too detached from what transpires in the material world. My aim in this section is to address this worry by discussing the account of practical knowledge developed by Thomas Aquinas in his theory of divine cognition, and showing its relevance to Anscombe’s concerns. In particular, I argue that for Aquinas, a cognitive act is distinctively practical insofar as it aims at effecting change in the world, where doing so lies within the power of the knower. I begin with a summary of Aquinas’ position (§3.1), then develop it further in connection with the issues raised above (§3.2), arguing along the way that it’s reasonable to interpret Anscombe as adapting these Thomistic ideas to her ends.²⁵

²⁵I take it that *Read Anscombe in light of Aquinas* is a generally sound interpretive principle; for a good illustration of its value, see Vogler 2002. As Anscombe’s daughter Mary Geach writes: “Anscombe drew on [Aquinas]’ thought to an unknowable extent: she said to me that it aroused prejudice in people to tell them that a thought came to him: to my sister she said that to ascribe a thought to him made people boringly ignore the philosophical interest of it, whether they were for Aquinas or against him” (Geach 2011, xix).

3.1 Manners of knowing

For Aquinas and other medieval thinkers such as Augustine,²⁶ the pseudonymous “Dionysius the Areopagite”,²⁷ Averroes (Ibn Rushd),²⁸ and Moses Maimonides,²⁹ the concept of practical or “productive” knowledge figures most prominently not in theories of human action, but in accounts of the distinctive nature of God’s knowledge of the created world. In Part I, Question 14 of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas frames his discussion in terms of the idea that knowing is usually understood as a “receptive” act, where the form of the known object is taken up by the mind of the knower. He insists, however, that such a thing cannot take place in God, whose acts are not dependent on anything outside himself.³⁰ And he responds to this seeming dilemma by arguing that knowledge may take different forms depending on the nature of the knower,³¹ and thus “since God’s nature exists in a manner higher than that by which creatures exist, his knowledge does not exist in him in the manner of created knowledge” (*ST* I, q. 14, a. 1, ad. 3). In particular, Aquinas argues that since created things depend on God for their being, God can know his creation simply by knowing his own ideas of it, as they exist in his own mind: God’s essence

²⁶E.g. in *On the Trinity*: “Yet He [viz., God] does not ... know all His creatures, both spiritual and corporeal, because they are, but they ... are because He knows them. For he was not ignorant of what He was going to create. He created, therefore, because He knew; He did not know because he created” (Bk. IV, ch. 13, §22). Aquinas cites this passage at *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 14, a. 8.

²⁷E.g. in *On the Divine Names*: “... God does not have an individual knowledge of itself and another knowledge of all beings in common. For knowing itself will the cause of all in any way be ignorant of those which are from it and of which it is the cause? Hence God knows beings by a knowledge of God, and not by a knowledge of beings” (ch. 7, §2, 869b-c).

²⁸E.g. in his *Decisive Treatise, Determining the Nature of the Connection Between Religion and Philosophy*: “... God the Exalted knows [material particulars] in a way which is not of the same kind as our way of knowing them. For our knowledge of them is an effect of the object known, originated when it comes into existence and changing when it changes: whereas Glorious God’s Knowledge of existence is the opposite of this: it is the cause of the object known, which is existent being” (ch. 2, 10.18-22).

²⁹E.g. in his *Guide for the Perplexed*: “Our knowledge is acquired and increased in proportion to the things known by us. This is not the case with God. His knowledge of things is not derived from the things themselves: if this were the case, there would be change and plurality in His knowledge; on the contrary, the things are in accordance with His eternal knowledge, which has established their actual properties ... He fully knows His unchangeable essence, and thus has a knowledge of all that results from any of His acts” (Part III, ch. xxi).

³⁰For an argument along these lines, see *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 14, a. 5, obj. 3. (Hereafter referenced as ‘*ST*’). All quotations from Question 14 of the Prima Pars are from Davies’ revised translation in Aquinas 2006; all others are from the 1920 Blackfriars translation in Aquinas 2008.) As the quotations above suggest, this is roughly the way that the problem of divine knowledge was framed by Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius as well; for Averroes and Maimonides, the problem is one of understanding how an unchanging God can have knowledge of change in the created world, given that knowledge requires correspondence with the thing that is known. It bears noting that neither of these puzzles is the same as the more familiar worry about the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom; they apply equally to God’s knowledge of the non-free world.

³¹The background to this distinction is the traditional principle *Omne quod est in aliquo est in eo per modum eius in quo est*: Whatever is in something, is in it according to the mode of that in which it is. On several of Aquinas’ various appeals to this principle, see Wippel 1995 and Tomarchio 1998.

“contains a likeness” of the things that he has the power to make, and so his self-knowledge is sufficient for knowledge of everything that lies in his power (ibid., a. 5c). Thus, he says, it is a mistake to think that God’s knowledge of creation requires him to be in reception of anything, for in this knowledge “the principal object known . . . is nothing other than [God’s] essence, which contains all the species of things” (ibid., ad. 1), just as fire contains the heat that it imparts to other objects.

This idea, that one may know an object not just by having one’s mind reflect what is anyway there, but also by being the one who through her knowledge brings that very object into existence, is at the center of Aquinas’ conception of practical cognition. Aquinas argues that practical and speculative forms of knowledge can be distinguished in several different but interrelated ways, each of which mirrors an element in Aristotle’s discussion of practical thought in *De Anima* III.10:³²

- First, as Aristotle claims that the object of appetite is always something attainable, or a “good that can be brought into being by action” (433a29-30³³), so Aquinas writes that the *objects* of practical knowledge must be things “producible by the knower”: thus e.g. human knowledge of God or the natural world is necessarily speculative, whereas it is possible for us to have practical knowledge of artifacts.
- Second, following Aristotle’s claim that practical thought “calculates means to an end” (433a14), Aquinas identifies a practical *mode* of knowing, in which producible things are considered “as producible”. By way of contrast Aquinas gives the example of an architect who “defines, analyses and examines the qualities proper to houses in general” – in this case the object of his knowledge is something that lies within his power, but the mode in which he knows it is not a practical one, as it involves only ascertaining *what* a house is, without any concern with *how* to make one.
- Finally, following Aristotle’s remark that practical thought “differs from speculative thought in the character of its end” (433a15-16), Aquinas says that knowledge can be either speculative or practical in terms of its *end or purpose*. According to Aquinas, knowledge is practical insofar as it aims at production or some other form of action, and speculative insofar as it aims just at “the consideration of truth”: thus e.g. the knowledge of builders who “consider how some house could be built, not with a view to building it but merely for the sake of knowing” will have a speculative

³²For the following distinctions, see *ST* I, q. 14, a. 16c. Though her reference there is to Aristotle, I suspect that this passage is in the background of Anscombe’s threefold distinction in §33 of *Intention* between “the theoretical syllogism”, the “idle practical syllogism which is just a classroom example”, and “the practical syllogism proper”, where in the last case “the conclusion is an action whose point is shewn by the premises, which are now, so to speak, on active duty” (*I*, 60; and cf. Anscombe 2005).

³³In *Intention*, Anscombe quotes Aristotle as saying that practical reasoning must concern “what is capable of turning out variously” (*I*, 60). She doesn’t provide a reference, so I’m not sure if this is the same passage. The underlying point, however, seems to be the same.

end or purpose even though it is practical in its object and mode – such knowledge is what we call “idle speculation” about how something might be done, because it is not, as Anscombe puts it, “on active duty” (*I*, 60). By contrast, for knowledge to have a practical end or purpose is for the knowledge to have the aim of getting something done.

For Aquinas, then, the distinction between practical and speculative knowledge is multi-dimensional: there are several respects in which knowledge might be called “speculative” rather than “practical” or vice versa, and two of these respects are independent of one another. Thus he offers the following division:

1. Knowledge is *purely speculative* whenever it is speculative with regard to its objects (the first sense above), as nothing that does not lie within the power of the agent can be the object of knowledge that is practical in either of the other two senses;
2. Knowledge is *purely practical* whenever it is practical with regard to both its mode and its end (the second and third senses above), since in this case it must also be practical with regard to its objects; and
3. Knowledge is *partly speculative and partly practical* when it is practical with regard to its objects and either:
 - (a) Practical in respect of its mode but not its end, as e.g. when one considers what it *would take* to make something, though not in order actually to produce it; or
 - (b) Practical in respect of its end but not its mode, as e.g. when one defines *what it is* to be an artifact of a given kind in order later on to determine how best to make it.

Thus he concludes that God’s knowledge is purely speculative where it concerns his own essence (for even God does not have the power to change this); and where created things are concerned it fits characterization (3(b)): these things lie within God’s power, and his knowledge of them aims at bringing them about; but since we know created things speculatively, therefore God “knows (yet much more perfectly than we do) all that we speculatively know about things by defining and analysing”, and therefore his knowledge of these things is speculative in respect of its mode (*ST* I, q. 14, a. 16c).³⁴

For our purposes, what is most important in this discussion is not the typology of divine knowledge, but the richness in Aquinas’ account of practical cognition. Aquinas’ main idea is that knowledge is practical to the extent that is a *doer’s* way of knowing: practical knowledge always concerns something that one *is able* to bring about, and in knowing such a thing in a practical way one

³⁴This last point is somewhat obscure to a modern ear. Another way to draw this conclusion would be to say that given God’s power he has no need to calculate means to his ends, and therefore his knowledge is never practical in its mode. I am not sure whether Aquinas would endorse this.

may either be thinking of *how* to bring it about, or be thinking of it *with the aim* of bringing it about, or both. As he writes in his commentary on *De Anima* III.15:

... the intellect that produces movement is the intellect that acts for the sake of something, not for the sake of reasoning alone. And this is practical intellect, which differs from theoretical intellect as regards its end. For theoretical intellect inquires into the truth not for the sake of something else, but for the sake of truth alone, whereas practical intellect's inquiry into truth is for action's sake. (*In De Anima* III.15, 43-49)

Importantly, Aquinas emphasizes elsewhere in the *Summa* that this distinction between speculative and practical intellectual activity does not require a distinction between two different intellects, or even two different intellectual powers: rather, the very same intellect whose activity is sometimes speculative, because directed solely toward the apprehension of truth, can become practical insofar as it not only knows, but also “directs the known truth to operation” (*ST* I, q. 79, a. 11, ad. 2) – i.e., takes as its object the production of a certain sort of thing.³⁵ And in this way, he says, the practical intellect of a human being “is related to what it has cognition of in the way that God is related to what He has cognition of” (*ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 5, ad. 1): a person's knowledge of what she intentionally brings about is similar to God's knowledge of the natural world.

3.2 Why the form matters

I argued in Section 2 that it is not enough to understand agential knowledge as “practical knowledge” *just* insofar as this knowledge is required for a person's movements and their effects to constitute a certain means-end order. The most important reason for this was that such a characterization seems to be compatible with its being entirely a happy accident that one's movements and their effects correspond to one's knowledge of them, and so is not enough to capture what is distinctively agential in the way one knows what what one is intentionally doing. Aquinas' conception of practical cognition seems not to share this defect, however: on his account, one can have practical knowledge only of things that lie within one's power, and only insofar as this knowledge is aimed toward the exercise of this power in the activity of bringing those things about. In this section, I will explore how these ideas can help to give us a more satisfactory account of how agential knowledge is the cause of what it understands.

Begin with Wittgenstein's example of the wind-blown leaves, whose judgments about where they are going keep perfectly in line with their movements. On Aquinas' view, what disqualifies these thoughts from amounting to practical knowledge of those movements is simple: namely, that the leaves are entirely powerless to influence the way they are moving, but are only blown about by

³⁵ As Naus (1957, 17-34) argues, it does not seem that this was always Aquinas' position; in his early writings he says things that conflict with it.

the wind. The same goes for Vashti's knowledge that the thing she is cracking is an egg: though this is in some sense a "formal" condition on her intentional egg-cracking, still it is not practical knowledge because whether or not a particular thing is an egg is a matter that human beings are (at least presently) powerless to effect, due to our inability to change non-eggs into eggs and vice versa. It therefore fails to meet the first of the three conditions specified above: that this is an egg is something Vashti knows "purely speculatively", even as her knowing this is necessary for her to exercise her agential powers in certain ways. Anscombe puts this point by saying that knowledge like this is part of "the account of exactly what is happening at a given moment (say) to the material one is working on" (*I*, 89) – and though this knowledge is extremely useful in practice, nevertheless it's intrinsically speculative.³⁶

We can, then, build on the idea that agential knowledge is the principle of an action's means-end order by adding that such knowledge is essentially knowledge of something that *lies within an agent's power*: when a person knows what she is intentionally doing, the object of her knowledge is responsive to her will. But this alone is not enough to resolve our difficulties, since it is possible to know in a "speculative" way things that one has the power to change but has decided just to leave as they are, such as – to use an example of Anscombe's (*I*, 90) – the fact that one is sliding down a bank, having been pushed by someone else. So we should turn to the next element in Aquinas' account of practical cognition, which is that a cognitive act can be called practical rather than speculative insofar as it's concerned with *how* to do a certain thing – that is, with identifying means to a given end. Anscombe notes, however, that sometimes such thought is "idle", and leads only to judgments about what *might* be done (if one wanted ...): thus e.g. the person sliding down the bank might think about what she could do in order to keep herself going, without any intention of actually doing so. By contrast, a "proper" case of practical reasoning will be one where "the conclusion is an action whose point is shewn by the premises, which are now, so to speak, on active duty" (*I*, 60). And it seems clear that agential knowledge, understood as knowledge of what one is presently intentionally doing, would have to be practical in this latter respect – that of its "end" – even if it doesn't involve any means-end calculation.³⁷

My suggestion, then, is that we read Anscombe as emphasizing the *scope* and *aim* of agential knowledge as the features that make it distinctively practical: in order for a person to know practically that she is X-ing (or X-ing because

³⁶In a similar vein, Aquinas remarks that an agent's practical deliberation may "take for granted" certain principles that are borrowed from some other way of knowing, including "any facts received through the senses—for instance, that this is bread or iron" (*ST* I-II, q. 14, a. 6c). Thanks to Stephen Brock for pointing this passage out to me.

³⁷For Anscombe, "The mark of practical reasoning is that the thing wanted is *at a distance* from the immediate action, and the immediate action is calculated as the way of getting or doing or securing the thing wanted" (*I*, 79; and cf. the discussion in §30 of *Intention* of whether deliberation is required to exercise an acquired skill). I admit that I am uncomfortable with the implication that such non-calculative agential knowledge would fit characterization (3(b)) above, of knowledge that is speculative in its end but not its mode, since it seems quite unlike the knowledge of the builder who identifies what a house is in order to make one later on.

she is Y-ing), then it must lie within her power to do this or not to do it, and her knowledge that she is doing this must be ordered toward the end of her acting this way.³⁸ But how exactly are we to understand this idea of knowledge that has an active or productive end or aim? I take this idea to be at issue in Anscombe's example of the shopper and the detective:

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. (*I*, 56)

Anscombe's idea is that though what is written on these lists may be exactly the same, the lists – or at least, the shopper's and the detective's cognitive representations of them – are different in that the aim of the detective's list is just to *report* the man's purchases, whereas the shopper's list is not supposed to describe but rather to *direct* his activity. One aspect of this distinction is what Anscombe notes here: if the detective writes down something that the man does not buy, then his list contains an error; but if the shopper fails to get something that is included on his list (and not because he couldn't find it, or didn't have the money, or decided it wasn't worth buying after all, etc.), this will constitute an error in what he has done, whereas his list will still be perfectly in order.³⁹ But the difference also comes out if we consider the distinctive *causal role* that the shopper's list plays in what he buys. For example, suppose that the shopper is picking up a stick of butter from a display case. If he intends to be buying butter and not margarine, then it seems that the following counterfactual must hold: all else being equal, if he comes to believe that he is picking up margarine

³⁸For a similar suggestion in connection with the nature of practical reasoning, see Müller 1979; Vogler 2001, 2002. This is the element in his threefold division that Aquinas emphasizes as well: e.g. at *In VI Eth.*, lect. 2, §§1133 and 1135; *ST* I, q. 79, a. 11; *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 3; and *ST* II-II, q. 47, a. 5.

³⁹Though she credits this distinction to Theophrastus, Anscombe surely had found it in Thomas Aquinas as well. E.g. *ST* I, q. 14, a. 8 ad. 3: "... just as the knowable things of nature are prior to our knowledge, and are its measure, God's knowledge is prior to natural things, and is their measure. In the same way a house mediates between the knowledge of the architect who made it and that of those who get their knowledge of the house from the house itself once it is made."

rather than butter, he will put the margarine down and look for some butter instead; whereas if he retains the belief that he is picking up a stick of butter, he will go ahead and put it in his basket.⁴⁰ In this respect, the man's knowledge that he is picking up butter rather than margarine plays a role in *guiding* or *controlling* his activity: this knowledge is part of the way that he ensures he buys the things he means to. And here we might contrast this to a different sort of situation, where the man selects something from the display case just to see what it is: in this case, if the man judges at first that he is picking up a stick of butter and then realizes that it is margarine instead, this will be a reason to revise his judgment, but not to put the margarine down and look for something else. In this second case, the man's judgment that he is selecting butter is expressive of *theoretical* knowledge, because it is formed "for the sake of truth alone", and not with the aim of getting any particular thing done. By contrast, to have practical knowledge of a certain aspect of what one is doing is to know it in a way that plays a guiding role in the execution of that action (so described), in which case that aspect of one's self-knowledge has as its aim the production of the thing it represents.

This sort of structure is more explicitly evident in Anscombe's well-known example of the man pumping poisoned water, which I discuss at more length in Section 4. Of this example, Anscombe says that if a man claims that he is not intentionally poisoning the inhabitants of the house whose cistern he is filling with poisoned water, we might try to find out whether this claim is true by "eliciting some obviously genuine reaction by saying such things as ... 'Well, then you won't be much interested to hear that the poison is old and won't work'" (I, 48). Saying such a thing would be a way of calling into question whether the man's action falls under the description "poisoning the inhabitants": if the man's judgment that he is poisoning the inhabitants is a *practical* judgment (i.e., a judgment that aims at the production of what it represents), then when this is questioned he will likely express frustration or try to fix things by switching to some more effective poison.⁴¹ As Anscombe admits, such methods of determining a person's intentions are always imperfect, since the man might either react in a way that disguises his true intentions or simply abandon the intention to poison the inhabitants when he realizes he is not succeeding. Nevertheless, they are premised on the assumption that *doing something intentionally involves using one's knowledge that one is X-ing to keep one's X-ing on course, and modifying one's behavior where appropriate*.⁴² And

⁴⁰The point of the qualification "all else being equal" is to rule out a case where e.g. the man's intentions also change, perhaps because he decides that he can just as well buy margarine.

⁴¹Similarly, Anscombe remarks that if the man "distracts the attention of one of the inhabitants from something about the water source that might suggest the truth", then the question 'Why did you call him from over there?' must have a credible answer other than 'to prevent him from seeing'; and a multiplication of such points needing explanation would cast doubt on his claim not to have done anything with a view to facilitating the poisoning" (I, 43) – that is, whether his conception of himself as poisoning the inhabitants is practical, because ordered toward the end of their poisoning.

⁴²Similarly, Müller interprets Anscombe's appeal to Aquinas as suggesting a conception of practical knowledge as a "konstitutive Handlungsbedingung", involving "die Disposition des

such an end is (at least usually) absent from the knowledge one has of things that aren't one's intentional actions, as e.g. if the man at the pump happens to notice that his movement "is casting a shadow on a rockery where at one place and from one position it produces a curious effect as if a face were looking out of the rockery" (*I*, 37): if casting such a shadow is something the man is doing non-intentionally, then if he knows about it at all he will know it only in a speculative way, detached from any aim of acting in a way that falls under this description.⁴³

So here again is my proposal: a person's knowledge of what she is intentionally doing is necessarily a form of *practical* thought, different from the way one thinks of other things, insofar as this knowledge does not idly accompany one's behavior as a mere representation of it, but is rather an integral component of its object, playing a distinctive causal role in the execution of the very action that it represents. It is insofar as the knowledge of what one is doing plays such a role that it stands as "form" to the "matter" of a person's behavior, and is something without which she would not be acting intentionally as she is. Knowledge that lacks this characteristic cannot be practical knowledge, and what it is knowledge of cannot be one's own intentional action.

3.3 A remaining question

Of course there is more to be said. Inquiring minds want to hear more about this concept of a practical "aim" or "end": Is having such an end solely a matter of the causal connection of knowledge to a person's behavior? Is this the sort of thing that could be analyzed reductively (say, in dispositional terms), so that teleological and agential concepts would drop out? They want to know more about the status of practical knowledge: What exactly is its connection to practical reasoning? Is talk of practical knowledge enough to supply an Anscombean alternative to what she called the "standard approach" of explaining intentional action as behavior that is caused by belief and desire (Anscombe 2005, 111)? Could it be developed instead in a way that is consonant with such an approach?⁴⁴ (If so, should it?) Is knowing in a practical way that one is doing something only a necessary condition on doing it intentionally, or also a sufficient one? And is it never possible to do something intentionally *without* outright knowing that one is doing this? With the exception of this last question, all these issues lie outside the scope of this paper.

What I will do, however, is return in light of the above to the point I made at

Handelnden, die 'gewusste' Handlung auszuführen" (Müller 1999, 554).

⁴³Against this sort of suggestion, Sarah Paul (2011, 17) writes that "As long as the representational relation between agent and action is held to be a cognitive, knowledge-apt representation, the foreseen side effects will not escape inclusion in the content of what is intended". But this overlooks the possibility that "cognitive, knowledge-apt" representations may play different *roles* in an agent's mental and behavioral economy depending on whether what they represent is an intended action or a foreseen side-effect. However, resolution of the intending/foreseeing distinction lies beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁴For some attempts to do this, see Velleman 2007a; Setiya 2003, 2007, 2008. I discuss their views at more length in my MS "Why We Know What We're Doing".

the start of Section 1, namely that as I read her, Anscombe's little-understood claim that agential knowledge is *practical* knowledge is much more important to her argument in *Intention* than the better-known claim that this knowledge is always knowledge "without observation". So far I have said a great deal about the former doctrine, and next to nothing about the latter. Yet when Anscombe gives what seems to be her paradigmatic illustration of a person with practical knowledge, its independence from perception is front and center:

Imagine someone directing a project, like the erection of a building which he cannot see and does not get reports on, purely by giving orders. His imagination (evidently a superhuman one) takes the place of the perception that would ordinarily be employed by the director of such a project. He is not like a man merely considering speculatively how a thing might be done; such a man can leave many points unsettled, but this man must settle everything in *a* right order. *His* knowledge of what is done is practical knowledge. (I, 82)

Clearly, Anscombe thinks the concept of practical knowledge can help her to explain why agential knowledge is always knowledge without observation. She admits later on that a case like the one just described is "very improbable", as a person in this position usually "makes use of his senses, or of reports given him, the whole time" (I, 88) – yet on her account, even when this feedback is unavailable the practical *thought* of such a person suffices on its own to be a form of practical *knowledge* of what is happening, as it is contrary to the nature of practical knowledge that it ever be grounded in sense-perception. As I will argue in the next section, I think that Anscombe is wrong about this, and that it rests on assimilating human beings' practical knowledge too closely to God's.

4 The Practical Thought of a Finite Agent

I have proposed that a person's knowledge of her intentional actions is a form of practical knowledge insofar it aims at the execution of the action that is known, and thus plays a role in the dynamic process of self-correction by which a person keeps her intentional behaviors on course. In this respect, what you know of your intentional actions makes an indispensable contribution to how you act.

But Anscombe says more than this: she holds not only that when one knows what one is intentionally doing this knowledge is distinctively practical, but also that an agent *always* has such knowledge of her intentional actions, and that this knowledge is necessarily secured "without observation", or independently of the perception of one's behavior and its consequences. Thus she writes:

... the topic of an intention may be matter on which there is knowledge or opinion based on observation, inference, hearsay, superstition or anything that knowledge or opinion are ever 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*; or in so far as one is observing, inferring etc. that *Z* is actually taking place, one's knowledge is not the knowledge that a man has of his intentional actions. By the knowledge that a man has of his intentional actions I mean the knowledge that one denies having if when asked e.g. 'Why are you ringing that bell?' one replies 'Good heavens! I didn't know *I* was ringing it!' (*I*, 50-51)

In this passage, Anscombe clearly allows that human agents are unlike God in that perception is often required for us to know various background facts – e.g. that this is an egg, that cracking an egg with such-and-such force is likely to break it, etc. – that are presupposed in the exercise of our agential powers. But once this knowledge is in place, she says, and an action is unfolding, the knowledge of what one is doing is grounded in just the same way as God's knowledge of creation, namely in the non-receptive knowledge of oneself as an active principle who is directing one's intellect to action. Perception serves as a background condition for human agency, and often figures indispensably in our bringing things about, but agent's knowledge is always grounded independently of it.

However, it is not clear that Aquinas' conception of the practical intellect guarantees this strong position. As we have seen, that conception develops out of an attempt to understand God's knowledge of creation, which must be wholly non-receptive if God is to be the source of everything that is. But this is not true of human agents: for us, simply "saying the word" is not enough to ensure that things will unfold according to our will; we need to intervene continually in order to keep things on course, and despite our best efforts we sometimes fail to realize our intentions.⁴⁵ For Aquinas, this difference comes out in the fact that a human agent can impose "forms" on things only in a way that presupposes the presence of a suitable material substrate, whereas God is the sufficient cause of form and matter alike: this is how God's knowledge of his own essence is sufficient for knowing created things "not merely in their universal natures, but also in their individuality" (*ST* I, q. 14, a. 11c), since on his account the individuality of created things is guaranteed by their material aspects. By contrast, he says that a human artisan could have purely non-receptive knowledge of an individual material thing only if this knowledge "produced the whole of something, not merely its form" (*ibid.*), which is not something we are ever able to do.

⁴⁵Cf. Sebastian Rödl's remark that since the human will is finite, therefore "in realizing its object, the will depends on conditions that are not its own deed. It depends on a matter in which to realize itself" (Rödl 2011, 219). Anton Ford (2013) makes a similar point, noting that a human agent necessarily confronts a world of preexisting "obstacles and opportunities" that provide the background to successful (or unsuccessful) bodily action.

In what follows, I'll argue, *contra* Anscombe and several of her recent interpreters, that the “materiality” of human action – the fact that doing something intentionally comprises not just having in mind an end or aim, and conceiving of one's action in light of this, but also moving one's body and thereby causing other things to happen in the material world – means that our knowledge of what we are doing can be partly receptive, and so grounded in our sensory perception of our movements and their effects. I will also argue, however, that this doesn't render this knowledge speculative rather than practical, since it still has action as its end. The result will be a thorough divorce of the concept of practical knowledge from the concept of knowledge that is grounded independently of perception.

4.1 False practical self-conceptions

I begin with a possibility that Anscombe herself seems to allow for, in which a person believes herself to be acting in a way that she is not. Consider again her example of the man operating a water pump:

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 house is regularly inhabited by a small group of party chiefs, with their immediate families, who are in control of a great state; they are engaged in exterminating the Jews and perhaps plan a world war.—The man who contaminated the source has calculated that if these people are destroyed some good men will get into power who will govern well, or even institute the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and secure a good life for all the people; and he has revealed the calculation, together with the fact about the poison, to the man who is pumping. The death of the inhabitants of the house will, of course, have all sorts of other effects; e.g. that a number of people unknown to these men will receive legacies, about which they know nothing. (*I*, 37)

As we have seen, Anscombe holds that the intentional “form” of such a person's intentional activity is supplied by the implicit structure of his practical reasoning, as might be brought out in his explanations of why he is acting as he is:

E.g. ‘Why are you moving your arm up and down?’—‘I'm pumping’. ‘Why are you pumping?’—‘I'm pumping the water-supply for the house’. ‘Why are you beating out that curious rhythm?’—‘Oh, I found out how to do it, as the pump does click anyway, and I do it just for fun’. ‘Why are you pumping the water?’—‘Because it's needed up at the house’ and (*sotto voce*) ‘To polish that lot off’. ‘Why are you poisoning these people?’—‘If we can get rid of them, the other lot will get in and ...’ (*ibid.*, 38)

Concerning all these things that the man describes himself as doing, Anscombe says that in each case “it is correct to say not merely: the man is X-ing, but also: ‘the man is Y-ing’—if that is, nothing falsifying the statement ‘He is Y-ing’ can be observed” (ibid.). But what if some such thing *can* be observed, such that the agent’s own conception of his behavior contains a falsehood? In fact there are at least two different ways in which this sort of thing may happen.⁴⁶

First, Anscombe considers the possibility that “unknown to the man pumping, there [is] a hole in the pipe round the corner”: because of this, she writes, “something is not the case which would have to be the case in order for his statement [that he is replenishing the water supply] to be true” (*I*, 56). Call this kind of case a *practical failure*: it is a situation where, despite selecting a means that is generally appropriate to his end, a person is not bringing about the effects that he is aiming for. Second, we might suppose that instead of the pipe being broken, the man has simply chosen the wrong pump, and is pumping water into the cistern of a different house instead: let us call this kind of case a *practical error*, a case where a person is not achieving his aim because of a mistake in practical reasoning (here, a false minor premise in his practical syllogism). And practical failures and practical errors alike have the potential to result in what I will call *false practical self-conceptions*, or cases in which one believes oneself to be doing something that one is not doing after all: e.g. in the cases I have described, if the man judges “I am pumping water into the cistern because I am poisoning the inhabitants”, then his judgment will be mistaken. In Aquinas’ terms, the reason why this is possible is that whether a person’s action has a certain form is dependent on the presence of suitable matter, and since the practical thought of a finite agent is the sufficient principle only of the form of her actions, it is possible for one’s practical self-conception to be mistaken in those cases where one unwittingly fails to bring the necessary material events about.⁴⁷

As we have seen, the proper understanding of false practical self-conceptions is an important topic in *Intention*, and Anscombe insists that they are quite different from ordinary factual errors. However, she does not seem to go so far as to deny outright that a false practical self-conception embodies any kind of factual error at all. E.g., she writes:

... is there not possible another case in which a man is *simply* not doing what he says? As when I say to myself ‘Now I press Button A’—pressing Button B—a thing which can certainly happen. This I will call the *direct* falsification of what I say. And here ... 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*

⁴⁶For a similar distinction, see Rödl 2011, 220-230.

⁴⁷Anscombe writes that “the failure to execute intentions is necessarily the rare exception” (*I*, 87), but then qualifies this significantly by saying that “What is necessarily the rare exception is for a man’s performance *in its more immediate descriptions* not to be what he supposes” (ibid.; emphasis added). Yet clearly it is not just these descriptions that the theory of action needs to be concerned with.

was a mistake, because it was not in accordance with what you said.
(*I*, 57)

What Anscombe says here is clearly an articulation of Aquinas' claim that practical knowledge "measures" its object and provides the standard for its truth, instead of being measured *by* how things are: the idea is that the role of practical thought is to say how things *are to be*, whereas speculative thought says just how things will be or are. Thus if one says "I am X-ing" when in fact one is not, this reveals a kind of error in *what one is doing*, and so "the facts are, so to speak, impugned for not being in accordance with the words, rather than *vice versa*" (*I*, 4-5). I have argued that this feature of practical knowledge is manifested in what one will do if one realizes one's mistake: unless one alters one's intention or chooses to act deceptively the response to such a realization will be to change one's behavior so that it conforms to one's practical self-conception, instead of updating this self-conception so that it conforms to what one is anyway doing. This is what it is for practical thought to have as its end not "truth alone", but "truth for action's sake".

But while this much seems right, it should not be taken to show that there can be no such thing as a *false* practical self-conception after all. At certain places in *Intention*, Anscombe seems to flirt with this idea, suggesting that judgments of the form "I am X-ing" may have the same representational structure (or "direction of fit", in the contemporary parlance) as commands or shopping lists: such an utterance represents something as to be done, and so is not shown to have been in error if things do not turn out the way it says.⁴⁸ As she writes, echoing the lines quoted just above:

Orders . . . can be disobeyed, and intentions fail to get executed. That intention [to write 'I am a fool' on the blackboard] would not have been executed if something had gone wrong with the chalk or the surface, so that the words did not appear. And my knowledge would have been the same even if this had happened. If then my knowledge is independent of what actually happens, how can it be knowledge of what does happen? Someone might say that it was a funny sort of knowledge that was still knowledge even though what it is knowledge of was not the case! On the other hand Theophrastus' remark holds good: 'the mistake is in the performance, not in the judgment'. (*I*, 82)

⁴⁸Something like this seems to be the position of Eric Marcus in *Rational Causation*: he writes that when a person makes a judgment of the form "I am φ -ing", this judgment "is *simply* an expression of his representing φ -ing as to be done", and not at all the agent's "estimation of whether a certain proposition is to be believed or not", since it "is not the agent's attempt to describe the world" (Marcus 2012, 79, 71; emphasis added). But this view seems incapable of explaining why "I am φ -ing", said as an expression of what one is intentionally doing, entails that *someone* is φ -ing – which it clearly does, since it might be used to answer the question "Is anyone around here φ -ing?" Moreover, taking this line requires Marcus to reject Anscombe's talk of practical knowledge of one's actions, since it "tends to be interpreted . . . as the thesis that we have a belief about what we are doing that we are justified in holding" (*ibid.*, 66n). By contrast, my concern here is precisely with this idea, which to me seems incontrovertible.

According to the position that appears to be suggested by the last few sentences of this quotation, the fact that a person fails to do what she takes herself to be doing does not show that this person lacks practical knowledge of her actions: for such knowledge is “independent of what actually happens”. And Anscombe draws out for us the evident consequence of such a position, namely that in such a case this practical knowledge cannot then be knowledge of what *is happening* – which is exactly the sort of thing that agent’s knowledge was supposed to be, namely “knowledge of what is done”. If practical knowledge were only supposed to be knowledge of what one *ought* to do, then this would be no problem: in that case its soundness would be based in reasons “suggesting what it would be good to make happen with a view to an objective, or with a view to a sound objective” (*I*, 4),⁴⁹ rather than ones pertaining to what is actually taking place. Yet Anscombe holds that practical knowledge is the knowledge of *what one is doing*, so this interpretation of her position is intolerable.⁵⁰

However, there is a great deal of textual evidence for believing that Anscombe did not hold a position along these lines, and thought instead that sincere judgments of the form “I am X-ing” are not always expressive of knowledge. For example, in the case described above she says that if the water is not going through the pipe then the man’s claim that he is replenishing the water supply “is not true” (*I*, 56); and when she first introduces the idea of a “mistake of performance” in discussing the expression of intention, it is to explain how “there are other ways of *saying what is not true*, besides lying and being mistaken” (*ibid.*, 4; emphasis added).⁵¹ Surely, though, if what one says is not true then

⁴⁹This is essentially the Aristotelian concept of “practical truth”: see e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2, where the good of the practical intellect is defined as “truth in agreement with right desire” (1139a30-31). On the importance of distinguishing the concept of practical knowledge as the knowledge of what one is doing from the knowledge of what to do, see Müller 1999, 555 and Engström 2009, 54-56. For accounts of how these concepts might be related, see Rödl 2011 and Tenenbaum 2011.

⁵⁰Another troubling passage is Anscombe’s summary of the “incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge” that she takes to be characteristic of modern philosophy: “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” (*I*, 57). Clearly there are two distinct ideas here: (1) in knowledge, what is judged must be in accordance with the facts; (2) in knowledge, the reality is wholly prior to the knowledge of it. I take the concept of practical knowledge to be a concept of knowledge for which condition (2) does not hold; but still it must be bound by condition (1), or else it is not knowledge at all. In the same vein, Aquinas writes at *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 1c that whereas “speculative reason only apprehends things, . . . practical reason *not only apprehends but also causes them*” (emphasis added) – the talk of “apprehension” in this context seems to imply that practical knowledge must be “factive”. For related objections to reading Anscombe as holding that practical knowledge can be non-factive, see McDowell 2010, 2013.

⁵¹Similarly, she writes: “Sometimes, jokingly, we are pleased to say of a man ‘He is doing such-and-such’ when he manifestly is not. E.g. ‘He is replenishing the water-supply’, when *this is not happening* because, as we can see but he cannot, the water is pouring out of a hole in the pipe on the way to the cistern” (*I*, 39; emphasis added). And again: “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 a case 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” (*ibid.*, 51; emphasis added). It is important to notice how

it cannot express knowledge of what one says to be the case, even if the cause of this falsehood is a practical mistake – a failure to act as one intends to – instead of a simply theoretical one. As Adrian Haddock writes, the best way to interpret Anscombe is as saying that while in a case like this “*the* mistake is in the performance, not in the judgement”, still “*a* mistake was in the judgement” (Haddock 2010, 257): for one judged falsely that one was doing something which in fact one was not.⁵²

Understanding that Anscombe allows for this sort of falsity in a person’s practical self-conception helps us to see what is mistaken in another way some philosophers have tried to defend her view of agential knowledge, by appeal to the openness and broadness of the progressive verb-form “is X-ing”. As Anscombe writes:

A man can *be doing* something which he nevertheless does not *do*, if it is some process or enterprise which it takes time to complete and of which therefore, if it is cut short at any time, we may say that he *was doing it*, but *did not do it*. (*I*, 39)

For this reason, we might suppose, just as Vashti can be making a soufflé even if the ingredients she is combining are appropriate to a cake instead, so the man at the pump may be replenishing the water supply even if the pipe that runs there is broken.⁵³ But while it is certainly true that not *every* mistake in what a person is doing will constitute a gap in that person’s practical knowledge, the claim that such a thing can *never* happen is not endorsed by Anscombe, and it is also quite problematic philosophically. It is not Anscombe’s view, because as we have just seen she explicitly allows the possibility of cases where “a man is *simply* not doing what he says” – and she needs to allow for this, not only because it is evidently possible, but also because of her conviction that

“material” this very last clause is. However, as Eric Marcus points out to me, in all these passages Anscombe is speaking only of falsehood in what a person *says*; she does not (as far as I know) say explicitly that there can be such falsehood in an agent’s *judgments* about what she is doing. So the text may not settle the issue.

⁵²Compare Müller, who writes that in such a case “*Falsifiziert wird, was man sagt, während gleichzeitig der Fehler in dem liegt, was man tut*” (Müller 1999, 548n). For a similar point, see Moran 2004, 61 and McDowell 2010, 429-430. In a more recent paper, McDowell writes of the “I am a fool” passage that there is *a* sense in which the state of the agent’s practical intellect will be the same regardless of whether she is writing what she means to: “Der Unterschied zwischen beiden Situationen liegt nicht im Zustand ihres praktischen Intellekts, sondern in dem Umstand, dass die Worte in der einen Situation geschrieben werden und in der anderen nicht” (McDowell 2013, 397). But the idea that the state of an agent’s practical intellect can be entirely the same regardless of whether she is doing what she intends seems to me to rest on the sort of “common factor” analysis of cognition that McDowell has argued against so forcefully in the realm of speculative thought, and that he (rightly, in my view) sees Anscombe as trying to develop in the realm of practice. Saying that there is *a* respect in which an agent’s cognitive state will be the same in good cases as in bad ones should not require denying that there are some very important respects in which they will differ, lest the falsity of a practical judgment should seem to be the sort of thing that lies outside an agent’s ken. I explore this point further in my MS “Self-Consciousness in Thought and Action”.

⁵³This idea is explored in Falvey 2000; Paul 2009a; Haddock 2011; Thompson 2011; Marcus 2012; Small 2012; Wolfson 2012; Lavin 2013b. I discuss it at greater length in my MS “Perception and Self-Consciousness”.

“there is point in speaking of knowledge only where a contrast exists between ‘he *knows*’ and ‘he (merely) *thinks* he knows’” (ibid., 14): if then there is going to be a point in speaking of the knowledge of what one is intentionally doing, there had better be such a thing as getting such matters wrong.⁵⁴ Moreover, to deny this possibility would be to try to take what Anscombe calls the “false avenue of escape” of saying “that I really ‘do’ in the intentional sense whatever I think I am doing. 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” (ibid., 52). Against this idea, Anscombe says that when I act intentionally “I do what happens” (ibid.): identifying my action with whatever I think I am doing would make it mysterious how intentional activity could ever be part of the publicly observable world.⁵⁵ Though we are usually right in our judgments about what we are intentionally doing, still it is possible for us to get such matters wrong.

4.2 Doing (intentionally) without knowing

So Anscombe allows that there can be such a thing as a false practical self-conception, a circumstance in which one takes oneself to be doing something that one is not doing after all. But once we grant this, we appear forced to concede that there may also be cases in which a person *is* doing what he or she intends to, and yet the possibility of a practical failure or practical error is too “nearby” for that person to have knowledge of this fact.

For example, suppose first that unbeknownst to the man at the pump, the pipe that leads to the water supply is generally quite unreliable, though today the water happens to be flowing through it just fine. Or again, suppose that there are two indistinguishable pumps, one running to the house where the party chiefs live and the other running to a different house, and that the man happens to have noticed only the correct one, and set to work at it. In the first case the man has barely avoided what I have termed a practical failure; in the second he has come similarly close to making a practical error. Now suppose that in each case the man is working the pump, and believes that by pumping the water, he is replenishing the water supply of the party chiefs’ house: this aspect of his self-conception may be practical in the sense defined above, since the man would adjust his behavior if he knew he were wrong. Moreover, on the account given here the man needs to have this practical self-conception if he is to count as replenishing the water supply intentionally by means of his pumping: in order for his action to have this means-end structure it must be the case that he conceives of it in these terms, and has the appropriate dispositions to adjust his behavior in light of what he knows of it. Yet the man’s practical *thought* about his action will not amount to *knowledge* that he is doing this unless he knows that his pumping is bringing it about, in the appropriate way,⁵⁶ that the party

⁵⁴I am not saying that this consideration is in fact definitive, but only noting that Anscombe seems to have thought so.

⁵⁵For a similar point, see McDowell 2013, 392-394.

⁵⁶That is to say, his pumping must not be bringing about the replenishing of the water

chiefs' water supply is being replenished – and in these circumstances, he seems to lack the background knowledge necessary to know that this is happening. In a case like this one, the practical thought that renders a person's action intentional under a given description will not amount to the practical *knowledge* that she is doing what she intends: which is just what we should expect, given human agents' finitude.⁵⁷

Against the claim that this sort of thing is possible, Sebastian Rödl has argued that it rests on an illicit division between practical thought and the power to act in the way one judges to be best:

The power to reason about what to do *is* a power to do things. For, in the fundamental case, thinking that such-and-such is to be done because _____ is the causality of an action explanation that one *is doing it* because _____. Since practical thinking is, fundamentally, acting, the power of practical thought is a power to act. (Rödl 2007, 59-60)

Rödl's idea seems to be that since, as Anscombe writes, the conclusion of a practical syllogism is not just an idle decision but rather “an action whose point is shewn by the premises” (*I*, 60), so the *knowledge* that is the result of such a piece of practical reasoning is not only the knowledge of what is good to do, but rather the knowledge that one is doing that very thing. And this is supposed to be explained by the fact that one can reason practically in a way that issues in a certain action only if one has the power so to act: this relationship between practical reason and the power to act means that there is no “gap” between thinking that something is good to do, and doing it.⁵⁸

Similarly, in a striking passage in *Authority and Estrangement*, Richard Moran argues that there is a close parallel between the way we know our intentional actions and the way we know our beliefs and intentions. According to Moran, any agent who can “conceive of himself as capable of forming an intention and implementing it . . . must take his intentional action to be determined

supply in the way it would be if, say, the man were moving the pump according to a certain rhythm and someone else heard this rhythm and took it as his sign to replenish the water supply. Compare Anscombe's remark that “an intended effect just occasionally comes about by accident” (*I*, 39).

⁵⁷ Importantly, this argument does not require an infallibilist conception of knowledge (*contra* Velleman 2007b, 19-20 and Newstead 2006, 15-18). For example, if the man is faced with nine pumps connected to the house and one running elsewhere, then if he has chosen the right one his belief that he is replenishing the water supply might count as knowledge. The point is not that we must be certain or absolutely infallible about what we are doing in order to have knowledge of it, but only that we need to have at least decent grounds for our belief. Kenny seems to deny this requirement, writing that “For speculative knowledge, in general, at least three things need to be the case for it to be true that X knows that p: first, that X believes that p, second, that p be true, and third, that X has grounds, i.e. good reason, for believing that p. In the case of practical knowledge only the first two are necessary” (Kenny 1979, 35). But he never explains why the justification-condition should be thought not to apply to practical knowledge, and this seems no less strange than thinking that such knowledge can be non-factive.

⁵⁸ Of course we need to account for cases of *akrasia* and weakness of will. For a promising attempt to do this within a framework similar to Rödl's, see Marcus 2012, 79-86.

by his reasons, and thus he is in a position to know a true description of his action in knowing his reasons" (Moran 2001, 127). He continues:

The stance from which a person speaks with any authority about his belief or his action is not a stance of causal explanation but the stance of rational agency. In belief as in intentional action, the stance of the rational agent is the stance where reasons that justify are at issue, and hence the stance from which one declares the authority of reason over one's belief and action. Anscombe's question "why" is asking not for what might best explain the movement that constitutes the agent's action, but instead is asking for the reasons he takes to justify his action, what he is aiming at. It is as an expression of the authority of reason here that [a person] can and must answer the question of his belief or action by reflection on the reasons in favor of his belief or action. To do otherwise would be for him to take the course of his belief or his intentional action to be up to something other than his sense of the best reasons, and if he thinks *that*, then there's no point in his deliberating about what to do. Indeed, there is no point in calling it "deliberation" any more, if he takes it to be an open question whether this activity will determine what he actually does or believes. (ibid.)

Moran's claim is that just as the question "Do I believe that *p*?" is normally transparent to the question *whether p*, so the question "Am I X-ing?" is normally transparent to the question whether X-ing is the thing to do. In each case he allows that "this authority can be partial or hedged in various ways" (ibid.): for example, I may find myself compulsively unable to believe something that seems obviously to be true, or unable to bring myself to do something despite my judgment that I should. Such a condition, however, necessarily "compromises the extent to which I can think of my behavior as intentional action, or think of my state of mind as involving a belief rather than an obsessional thought or a compulsion": in the psychologically normal situation, the stance from which a person relates "to his attitudes and his intentional actions must express the priority of justifying reasons over purely explanatory ones" (ibid., 128).

But even if Rödl and Moran are right to identify the power of practical reason with the power to act in the way one judges best, still we have seen that in the case of human agency this power is not infallible: a person may start with an end that is actually quite bad, select a means that does not conduce to that end at all, or fail for one reason or another to actualize that means in the way she acts. Mistakes of the latter two sorts open up the possibility that a person may judge that something is the thing to do without thereby doing it, though not through any weakness of will; and by the same token it seems possible, as in the case above where the man luckily selects the correct pump, that a person's judgment that he or she is doing a certain thing may happen to be a true judgment even though it lacks the justification necessary to count as knowledge.⁵⁹ Importantly, in a case like this there is no alienation,

⁵⁹One objection to this argument would hold that to the extent that a person's justification

nothing that compromises the extent to which one can think of one's behavior as intentional: practical failures and practical errors are mistakes in the *execution* of an action, which is something entirely different from the inability to *commit* oneself to an action or state of mind that one judges to be best. In certain cases a person's background knowledge may make it possible for her to know that she is executing her chosen action simply in virtue of having chosen to do it, but focusing just on cases like these obscures those where merely choosing to do something is not enough to know that one is doing it. Within that range, it is possible for a person who is doing something intentionally to have a practical conception of what she is doing that does not amount to practical knowledge.⁶⁰

4.3 Perceptual practical knowledge

Once we see the possibility that a person may believe falsely that she is doing something that she is not, or be doing something intentionally without knowing that she is doing it, we are in a position to see a final sort of possibility, in which a person's knowledge that she is intentionally doing something is grounded in the perception of this very action.

For instance, imagine now that the man at the pump has been informed that the pipe running from it to the cistern is frequently broken, or that the cistern is supplied by one of two pumps that are visually indistinguishable from one another, but then is given a device that will tell him the quantity of poison in the party chiefs' water supply. And suppose that as he operates the pump, he sees on the device that the levels of poison are rising, and thereby knows that his pumping is replenishing the water supply of the party chiefs' house – that is, it is in virtue of what he sees on the display of the device that he knows that the event that his pumping is aimed at “is actually taking place”. In this case, the man's knowledge that he is replenishing the water supply is clearly a form of agent's knowledge: for it is, once again, a practical way of knowing insofar as he utilizes this knowledge in keeping his action on course. Nevertheless, the man will rely on perception not just for background information “concerning what is the case, and what can happen . . . if one does certain things”, but also in order to know *what is happening*: namely, that he is poisoning the water supply as he intends to. Here again, the epistemic situation of a finite human

for believing that she is X-ing is compromised in this way, so also is the extent to which her X-ing is intentional, as opposed to merely a matter of luck. (Thanks here to Randy Clarke, Eric Marcus, and Will Small.) I cannot consider this point at length here, but will simply say that it seems very unintuitive: on our ordinary conception, the level of agential reliability required for an action to be intentional is lower than the level of cognitive reliability required for a belief to be knowledge. I would be interested to see an alternative view worked out and motivated.

⁶⁰What is the form of a non-knowledgeable background self-conception? For reasons identified by Sarah Paul (2009b), it will not always be a full or partial belief of the form “I am X-ing”, since sometimes a person may be doing something intentionally without having any confidence at all that he or she is succeeding. However, even in these cases the person must believe that he or she *is or may be* doing what he or she intends to: that is, in order to be doing something intentionally a person must at least think there is a chance of success. I explore these points in more detail in my MS “Why We Know What We're Doing”.

agent may be different from that of a divine one: it is possible for our practical self-conceptions to be knowledgeable only because we can perceive that we are doing the things we intend to do.

In *Intention*, Anscombe tries to head off this sort of argument by distinguishing the knowledge that perception can play in helping human agents *do* the things we mean to be doing, from any role it could be supposed to have in helping us *know whether* we are doing those things. Thus she writes:

Normally someone doing or directing anything makes use of his senses, or of reports given him, the whole time: he will not go on to the next order, for example, until he knows that the preceding one has been executed, or, if he is the operator, his senses inform him of what is going on. This knowledge is of course always ‘speculative’ as opposed to ‘practical’. Thus in any operation we really can speak of two knowledges—the account that one could give of what one was doing, without adverting to observation; and the account of exactly what is happening at a given moment (say) to the material one is working on. The one is practical, the other speculative. (*I*, 88-89)

As I noted above, Anscombe’s idea is that while human finitude means that, unlike God, we sometimes have to draw on perceptual knowledge that is “taken from things” in order successfully to exercise our agential powers, still the knowledge of what one is doing is always grounded independently of our senses.⁶¹ But there are several problems with what Anscombe says in this passage. One is that if we follow the Thomistic conception of practical cognition developed above, it is not clear that an agent’s knowledge of what is happening to the material she is working on is a form of speculative knowledge at all: for this knowledge concerns something the agent is capable of producing (or otherwise she would not be working on it); it considers this material as something that is to be made into a certain form; and it does all this with the aim of bringing a certain thing

⁶¹In a similar way, Kevin Falvey suggests that even though perception is sometimes a necessary condition for agent’s knowledge, it does not follow that it is ever the *ground* of this knowledge, as its bearing on what an agent knows may be restricted to the kind of role that perception plays in mathematical proof (see Burge 1993), where even if I make use of my senses in proving a theorem “I do not have to cite these observational judgments as additional premises on which the conclusion of the proof depends” (Falvey 2000, 33). However, while it is certainly true that perception often plays this kind of role in action, still there seem to be cases where the role of perception in agent’s knowledge is plainly justificatory, as evidenced by the way perception would be cited in answer to a question of the form “How do you know that you are X-ing (say, replenishing the water supply of the house)?” – “Because I can see that I am”, the agent might reply, thereby identifying perception as the justificatory ground of his or her knowledge, and not just something that enables him or her to know this thing non-empirically. (This is not the place to offer a theory of the epistemological “basing relation”, but it seems incontestable that in ordinary circumstances one answers the question “How do you know?” by citing (at least part of) what one takes to be one’s ground of this knowledge.) And Falvey himself allows that this is sometimes the case, claiming that when an agent is operating in a difficult or unfamiliar situation, or has reason to question whether various background circumstances are cooperating with his intended course of action, “a self-ascription of an intentional doing may stand in need of support from information acquired through observation” (ibid., 36) – which is just to concede the point I am making here.

about. Second, and to return to a point I made in Section 4.2, in the sort of case we are considering it does not seem possible to enforce a division between the knowledge of what one is doing and the knowledge that certain things are happening in the material world: the agent must know whether those things are happening not just to *do* what she means to, but also to *know that she is* doing this. (It is only if he knows that water is traveling through the pipe, that the man at the pump can know that he is replenishing the water supply of the house.) For this reason, in a case like this perception may serve as an “aid” to action just by informing the agent of whether she is or is not acting as he means to: its guiding role in action is inseparable from its grounding role as a source of agential knowledge. Yet once again, this sort of perception-based knowledge of what one is doing can still be a *practical* way of knowing, since it is ordered to the end of bringing its object into being.⁶²

Another way some have objected to this position is by arguing that while perception may be required in order to know what one *has achieved*, the knowledge of what one *is doing* does not require this.⁶³ Such is the position of Michael Thompson, who develops it by revisiting Davidson’s carbon-copier case:

... the more ordinary case is like this: you write on the top sheet, trying to make a good impression to get through all the carbon, then look to see if your impression made it through to all of them. If it did, you stop. If it didn’t, you remove the last properly impressed sheet and begin again. If necessary, you repeat. Even the man who has to go through five stages is all along, from the first feeble impression, making ten copies of the document, and he knows it, all along. (Thompson 2011, 210)

In Thompson’s example, as you make the carbon copies you appeal to perception in order to know whether you *have made* them all; and if you see that you have not, you resume your course of action appropriately. Your knowledge that you *are making* ten copies, however, is independent of this. But not all cases fit this model. For example, the man operating the pump who checks on the levels of poison in the house water supply may be interested not just in whether he *was replenishing* (or *has replenished*) the supply, but rather in whether he *is presently* doing so: if the man finds that the levels of poison are not changing, then this will be evidence that he is not doing one of the things he means to be

⁶² Compare McDowell’s claim that when practical knowledge has objective happenings as its object, “dann ist es das Wissen, dass Geschehnisse, die man vielleicht spekulativ wissen muss, um überhaupt etwas von ihnen zu wissen, die Ausführung der eigenen Absicht ist. Von einem Geschehen zu wissen, dass es die Ausführung der eigenen Absicht ist, ist kein spekulatives Wissen, selbst dann, wenn man spekulativen Wissens bedarf, um zu wissen, dass das relevant Geschehen tatsächlich stattfindet” (McDowell 2013, 401). However, I don’t see the need to restrict the content of practical knowledge to facts of the form: *that such-and-such happenings are an execution of my intention*, where the fact of the happenings is known only speculatively. Instead, the paradigmatic form of agential knowledge is: *that I am doing such-and-such* – and thus there should be no problem in saying that practical knowledge is ever a special “Form von Wissen, dass bestimmte Dinge in der objektiven Wirklichkeit geschehen” (ibid.). For what is intentional bodily activity, if not something that happens in objective reality?

⁶³ Thanks to Anselm Müller for pressing me to consider this objection.

doing, namely replenishing the supply; and by the same token, if he finds that they are going up, then this will be evidence that he is doing this. Because of this, it is a mistake to think that perception can inform a person only of her past intentional behaviors, and never any present ones.⁶⁴

Again, however, we also should not think that allowing the possibility that agent's knowledge may be grounded in perception means giving up on the idea that it constitutes a distinctively agential form of self-knowledge. Based on what I have learned from presenting this argument in the past, this is the most common reason people have for resisting my conclusion: they insist that the knowledge of what one is doing must be a *constituent* of intentional activity, and that the perception of an object or event is always something "extra" to it, a way of representing it "from the outside".⁶⁵ But while the first of these claims seems true, the second rests on a conflation of knowledge that is *perceptual* with knowledge that is *speculative* – and it is exactly this conflation that I am out to resist.⁶⁶ As I have emphasized, agential knowledge distinctively practical because of its distinctive *scope* and *aim*, and the role this knowledge plays in agential self-guidance: this knowledge is not a mere "monitoring" of an independent event, but an integral part of the process by which a person

⁶⁴ Another question is whether one needs already to have *known* that one was in the process of X-ing in order for the information that one is X-ing to have practical significance. (Thanks to Will Small and Anselm Müller for pressing this sort of objection.) This is implausible, though: the only requirement in the vicinity is that one knows what she *means* to be doing, so that then she can alter her behavior to bring it in line with her intention.

⁶⁵ One route to this latter conclusion is through Sebastian Rödl's argument that since agential knowledge is a form of self-consciousness, it must therefore be *unmediated*, i.e. not resting on any judgment identifying oneself with the object one knows. And since, the argument continues, it's in the nature of perception that its object may be something other than oneself, therefore any perceptually-grounded self-ascription must be mediated by an identifying judgment, and so not an instance of self-consciousness. (For versions of this argument, see see Rödl 2007, 7-10, 58-62 and Haddock 2011, 150-152. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to address it more explicitly.) This is an important argument that raises too many complex issues for me to address them all here, but I think the conclusion can be resisted, by challenging either the premise that all self-conscious knowledge must be identification-free (see Howell 2007; Lane 2011; Schwenkler 2013), or the assumption that since perception *sometimes* takes as its objects things other than oneself, therefore *all* perceptual knowledge of oneself must be based on an identifying judgment (see de Vignemont 2012). In addition, it's important to emphasize that on my account, perceptually grounded agential knowledge is not *wholly* receptive, as it would be if it were entirely divorced from one's practical thinking or from the process of agential self-guidance. In such a case (for an illustration, see Velleman's example of the absent-minded walker (Velleman 2007a, 15)), a person would have *no idea* that she was X-ing, except for the fact that she perceived herself to be – and I agree that there is an important sense in which this could not be an instance of self-knowledge. But the position of the finite agent is different from this: her knowledge that she is X-ing is part of her conception of the means-end order of her activity, and functions as a cause and measure of its object. Even when it is grounded partly in perception, such knowledge will not be a knowledge of oneself "as other", or of something whose reality is independent of one's knowledge of it. Again, I admit that there is much more that must be said about these matters, and I take them up in other work.

⁶⁶ Compare Anton Ford's complaint, that "Desinteressierte Wahrnehmung ist die einzige Art von Wahrnehmung, über die normalerweise in der Philosophie nachgedacht wird" (Ford 2013, 412). I say a bit more about the contrast between "interested" and "disinterested" perception in Section 5.

brings about the very action that it is a representation of. Sometimes, the best way to do this is by keeping perceptual track of one's actions and their consequences: and in these cases, what one perceives is not wholly independent of one's perceptual knowledge of it, since what one perceives *is an action*, and perceptual attentiveness to one's actions is among the mechanisms of agency itself. Because of this, it is true in a sense that a person will usually know what she is intentionally doing simply insofar as she is doing it at all, but this is only because in ordinary circumstances the knowledgeable awareness of what one is doing is a component of human agency – and it does not follow that this knowledge is always independent of perception, since perception is often among the components of agency, too.⁶⁷ What makes agent's knowledge distinctive is not its source, but the fact that it relates to its objects differently than would the “speculative” or “theoretical” cognition of an outside observer: it is a *practical* way of knowing, a kind of thought that is drawn on in bringing its object into existence.⁶⁸

5 Conclusion

I have argued that the representation of what one is intentionally doing is necessarily distinctive, not because it is always a form of non-perceptual knowledge, but because of the role it plays in guiding one's behavior: this practical self-understanding is an integral component of intentional action; it is a representation that causes what it represents. Yet a person's conception of what she is intentionally doing is not infallible (§4.1), and not all true practical self-conceptions are instances of practical knowledge (§4.2), nor is the practical knowledge of what one is doing always grounded independently of perception (§4.3). In the remainder of this section I will briefly propose a sense in which – paradoxically as this sounds – the knowledge of what one is intentionally doing might always be a form of *non-observational* knowledge, even when it is grounded in perception.

As we have seen, Anscombe appears to assume that all empirical knowledge is speculative rather than practical, since knowledge that is based in perception

⁶⁷ For a clear statement of this point, see Gibbons 2010. Similarly, Rödl writes that what makes the knowledge of one's action a form of “first person knowledge” is that one's action “*is not an independent reality of the first person knowledge of it*” (Rödl 2007, 62). I agree with this, but would reject Rödl's implication that this knowledge therefore cannot be “sensory knowledge”, for the reasons just explained. I discuss this argument further in “Perception and Self-Consciousness”.

⁶⁸ Compare Moran, who writes that “we will all agree that a person will need to *know* what he is doing if we are to ask him for his reasons in doing it [and thus regard it as intentional], but why should the particular *manner* in which he acquires this knowledge matter to its status as intentional? Why isn't the knowledge itself enough, however it may be arrived at? And why should the action's status as intentional (under this description) depend on the agent's awareness of it having this very special basis in particular, viz., a basis that is independent of observation, evidence, or inference?” (Moran 2001, 125-126). He asks these questions rhetorically, of course: Moran's assumption is that the basis of this knowledge matters quite a lot. If my argument here has done its work, this assumption will have been revealed as insufficiently motivated.

can never be the cause of what it understands. I have argued here that this assumption is unwarranted: it is possible for the knowledge of what one is doing to be *both* grounded in the perception of its object *and* causally implicated in bringing that object into being, since the perception of what one is doing is sometimes the ground of the knowledge that is drawn on in keeping one's intentional behaviors on course. Yet at the same time, our intuitions balk at any attempt to characterize this agential self-attentiveness as a way of *observing* one's actions. What is there to keep the account of practical knowledge that I offered here from collapsing into this problematic idea?

In order to see a way out, consider Brian O'Shaughnessy's discussion, in *The Will*, of what he describes as the inability to "stand to [one's own] actions in the relation of observer" (O'Shaughnessy 2008, 318).⁶⁹ According to O'Shaughnessy, "As I attempt to relate observationally to my own actions, either observation seems merely to skid over the surface of the act or else the act begins to come to a standstill" (ibid., 332). In saying this, O'Shaughnessy is clearly not denying the possibility of *perceiving* what one is doing, as if intentional activities were invisible to their agents; rather, he claims that to relate "as observer" to what one is doing would be not just to perceive it, but for one's observation to "fall *outside*" what one was doing: "the act of observation would neither be subordinated to the act under observation, nor would the act under observation be subordinated to the act of observation itself" (ibid., 338; italics modified). For O'Shaughnessy, the "subordination" of action to perception is what distinguishes the "dynamic-perceptual" standpoint of the agent from the "receptive-perceptual" standpoint of one who observes an agent from the outside (ibid., 337): perceiving what one is doing is essentially part of the process of bringing something into being rather than taking in how the world anyway is.

In contrast to the standpoint of the agent, O'Shaughnessy describes the role of the observer as one of "attendant questioner", or one who regards the object of her perception as something "that is going its own way, that is taking its own course, and that may or may not shed a certain requisite item for which we are busy scrounging, viz., facts of a particular kind" (ibid., 330). In Aquinas' terminology, this "scrounging" is a form of speculative intellectual activity; the knowledge it produces will be a knowledge of things that one does not regard as the intended products of one's agential powers.⁷⁰ In contrast to the practical cognition of the agent, this sort of receptive attitude is aimed simply at securing a knowledgeable representation of its objects, and plays no direct role in determining what they are. But the essential point to see is that more is required to make one an "observer" of an event in this sense than simply the fact that one perceives that it is taking place: just as having non-perceptual

⁶⁹For another discussion of O'Shaughnessy's text, whose conclusion is (I think) consistent with my own, see Gibbons 2010.

⁷⁰On the incompatibility of agency with a spectatorial attitude, see the many suggestive passages cited in Velleman 2007a, xii n.3; and cf. Gibbons 2010; Ford 2013. Richard Creek has pointed out to me that Wittgenstein also has several things to say in this connection, e.g. in section 13 of the *Brown Book* and in *Zettel*, §§583, 586, and 591-592. For some discussion of these passages, see Scott 1996, 150-151.

knowledge that one is doing something does not suffice for knowing it in a practical way, so O'Shaughnessy's suggestion seems to be that there is a sense in which being a perceiver of something does not always make one an observer of it, either.

If this is what we take to be at the core of the distinction between observational and non-observational knowledge, then denying that agent's knowledge is ever knowledge through observation does not require saying that it can never be perceptually grounded. For the difference between the observational and non-observational varieties of knowledge is not that the former variety is perceptually-based while the latter is not, but rather that the standpoint of the observer is *passive* and *theoretically-oriented*, while from the agent's perspective the world is not simply given as a thing to be known, but rather is something that she is in the midst of changing.⁷¹ Anscombe herself did not consider this possibility; she never abandons the idea that the non-observational knowledge of one's actions must be secured independently of sense perception.⁷² Nor does she develop as explicitly as I have here the idea that it is in virtue of its role in agential self-guidance that the knowledge of what one is intentionally doing is the cause of what it understands. As is so often the case, working out a philosopher's best insights requires us to reject some of her own views, and develop others in a way that she did not. But it is by following Anscombe in taking seriously the idea that the knowledge of action is distinctive *primarily* insofar as it is practical rather than speculative, that we can see our way out of the darkness that envelops us when this distinction is kept out of view.

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⁷¹For more on this idea, see Schwenkler 2011, 146–151; and for a similar analysis see Roessler 2003. (However, Roessler no longer accepts this account.) I discuss the differences between Roessler's view and mine in Schwenkler 2011, 151 n.7.

⁷²Thus in *Intention*, she first introduces the concept of non-observational knowledge by comparing it to the knowledge one has of the position and movements of one's limbs, which things you can know “even with your eyes shut” (*I*, 15), and without there being any “separately describable sensations” (*ibid.*, 13) that give rise to your knowledge. Later on, she compares the knowledge one has of one's actions to the knowledge of a project supervisor who directs the construction of a building from afar, without seeing or hearing any reports on its progress (*ibid.*, 82); to one's ability to know what one is writing even if one's eyes are closed (*ibid.*, 53, 82); to God's knowledge of creation (*ibid.*, 87); and to a list that a shopper carries with him that directs his purchases, in contrast to a list made by a detective who follows the shopper around (*ibid.*, 56). Each of these cases is one of knowledge, or at least the representation of some facts, that is not grounded in any perceptual awareness of the states of affairs in question: as she puts it, it is not a belief that is “verified by the senses, i.e., [that] is a matter of observation” (*ibid.*, 54).

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