

Anscombe 1957, *Intention*

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1) Anscombe distinguishes three notions of intention. What are they? How does she ultimately want to explain them? How independent are they of one another?

(1) Expressions of future intentions.

"I will go for a walk."

(2) Intentional actions.

"Did he mean to step on my toe?"

(3) The intention with which an action is done.

"Why did you go for a walk?"

We have to keep all three in mind, otherwise we'll focus in on the wrong characteristics of the phenomena (e.g. thinking intention always concerns the future, as in (1)).

(1) Expressions of intentions:

Compare to predictions. Expressions of future intentions, as well as commands and pure estimates, are all species of predictions.

"I am going to be sick" vs. "I am going to take a walk."

– Evidence: "I intend to go for a walk but I shall not do so" sounds "in some way contradictory" (5)

First-pass at distinction between prediction and intention:

"An expression of intention is a description of something future in which the speaker is some sort of agent, which description he justifies (if he does justify it) by reasons for acting... not by evidence that it is true." (6)

But in order for this to be helpful we'll have to do a lot more with cashing out "reasons for acting."

Anscombe thinks that we shouldn't focus on (1) *expressions* of intentions, since animals have intentions despite being unable to express them in any straightforward way.

(2) Intentional action.

As well as some on (3)...

One might think that intentions are in the head, but this runs us into trouble. So Anscombe thinks we should focus on **intentional actions**.

Rule-following paradox?

Roughly, intention actions are "actions to which a certain sense of the question 'Why?' is given application; the sense is of course that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting" (9).

But we need to do more to characterize this notion of a "reason for acting"; contrasting it with epistemic reasons is insufficient.

Case where one knocks a cup off the table when one is startled; in response to 'Why?' one gives a response that is not epistemic, but is not a reason for acting either.

Characterizing the sense of 'Why?' that is appropriate by characterizing the answers: (i) what counts as an answer? And (ii) how do we know the answers?

(i) Rejections of 'Why?':

- "I was not aware I was doing that."
- "It was involuntary."
- "I knew I was doing that, but only because I observed it."
- "Hmm, I'm not sure; perhaps I did it because..."
- Note: "No reason in particular" does not count as a rejection of the question.

Speculation (25).

Compare: "How much money is in your wallet?" "None."

(ii) Class of things known without observation.

E.g. the position of one's limbs

These are the sorts of things that can serve as answers to the 'Why?' question.

"Now the class of things known without observation is of general interest to our enquiry because the class of intentional actions is a sub-class of it." (14)

Motives, intentions, and mental causes are all in this class (16, 21). Motives are things that say "interpret the action in this light" – they are often what one provides in response to a 'Why?'.
 Mental causes, like citing the cause of one's being startled, are not very common/interesting.

Intentions are a sub-class of motives:

"I call a motive forward-looking if it is an intention. For example to say that someone did something for fear of... often comes to the same thing as saying he do so lest... or in order that... should happen." (21)

Backward-looking motives are also important. What distinguishes these from mere mental causes is their use of evaluative concepts:

E.g. revenge and gratitude.

"If an action has to be thought of by the agent as doing good or harm of some sort, and the thing in the past as good or bad, in order for the thing in the past to be the reason for the action, then this reason shows not a mental cause but a motive." (22)

Final specification of the appropriate form of 'Why?': for some actions, e.g. laying books out on the roof, "No particular reason" is an unintelligible answer.

"The answers to the question 'Why?' which give it an application are, then, more extensive in range than the answers which give reasons for acting. This question 'Why?' can now be defined as the question expected an answer in this range. And with this we have roughly outlined the area of intentional actions." (28)

Maybe (?): intentional actions include those that (a) cite some motive, either past or future, that makes interpretative sense of the action, *or* (b) are done for no reason at all.

Another (perhaps equivalent?) formulation: intentional actions are the ones to which we do *not* sincerely respond with things like "I was not aware I was doing that."

Could (2) intentional action be independent of (1) expressions of intention or (3) further intentions with which e performed actions? No.

Suppose (a) 'intention' only occurred as it does in 'intentional action'. Then "an action's being intentional is rather like a facial expression's being sad" (30). It becomes something that attaches to the physical action. But this can't be right, because an action can be intentional under one guise and not intentional under another.

Suppose (b) the only answer to the question 'Why are you X-ing?' (when it is not refused) is "I just am, that's all." Then, basically, talk of intentional actions ceases to have any point.

"I knew I was sawing an oak box; but I didn't realize I was sawing grandma's old chest!"

So (1)-(3) are not independent of each other:

"To a certain extent the three divisions of the subject made in §1, are simply equivalent. That is to say, where the answer 'I am going to fetch my camera', 'I am fetching my camera', and 'in order to fetch my camera' are interchangeable as answers to the question 'Why?' asked when I go upstairs." (40)

(3) "Intention *with which*"

The "in order to" relation tends to form a series out of actions (45-6).

I think that Anscombe thinks (3) is not especially fundamental: "Roughly speaking, a man intends to do what he does" (45). She admits this is too blunt, but it is a good antidote to the "absurd thesis which is sometimes maintained: that a man's intended action is only described by describing his *objective* (45).

He is moving his arm up and down which (in this circumstance) *is* pumping water, which (in this further specified circumstance) *is* poisoning the people.

She resists the idea that we should search for the intention at something mental; and this search is aided by focusing too strenuously on (3).

II) How do we know what we are doing? Can this knowledge be described as (i) empirical but (ii) not based in observation? What does the non-observationality tell us about the nature of action and its relation to mere happenings? Is it true that "if there are two

ways of knowing, then there must be two different things known"

Paradigm case of empirical knowledge w/o observation: knowing how one's limbs are positioned. Anscombe says that when you act intentionally, you know what you are doing in a similar way.

Not mediated by any "inner kinaesthetic appearance" (49-50).

Objection: can we really say that you can know without observation that you are painting a wall yellow? Don't you need to see the wall and what you're doing to it?

Pressure to push the intentional action inside the head.

Answer: Background knowledge (50). If one knows that one can do Z by doing ABC, then it is possible to have the intention of doing Z in doing ABX, and then one is doing Z intentionally, and knows as much, without inferring/observing it.

E.g. opening a window vs. moving a light across the wall in doing so.

Difficulty:

"What can opening the window be except making such-and-such movements with such-and-such a result? And in that case what can *knowing* one is opening the window be except know that that is taking place? Now if there are two *ways* of knowing here, one of which I call knowledge of one's intentional action and the other of which I call knowledge by observation of what takes place [since one can observe the window opening], then must there not be two *objects* of knowledge?"

This reinforces the drive to push the intention inside the head. But Anscombe thinks this can't be right, for sometimes "the only description that I clearly know of what I am doing may be of something that is at a distance from me" (53)

E.g. Typing on a computer vs. the muscle-movements.

Anscombe's diagnosis: We have been run into this problem by thinking there is only one way of knowing.

"Intellectual knowledge."

"And this is the explanation of the utter darkness in which we found ourselves. For if there are two knowledges – one by observation, the other in intention – then it looks as if there were two objects of knowledge; but if one says the objects are the same, one looks hopelessly for the different *mode of contemplative knowledge* in acting, as if there were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of the acting." (57)

We have forgotten about **practical knowledge**. Daniel will now remind us...