The David Hume Series on Philosophy and Cognitive Science Reissues consists of previously published works that are important and useful to scholars and students working in the area of cognitive science. The aim of the series is to keep these indispensable works in print.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am also indebted to John Brehm for the use of his computer program PsX.

Several people have sustained me with their love and friendship during my work on this book. If I have not already made my gratitude vivid to them on other occasions, such negligence can hardly be remedied here.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DAVID HUME SERIES EDITION *

Imagine that your arm becomes temporarily paralyzed. When you wake up each morning, the first thing you do is to check whether you have regained control of your arm. What exactly are you hoping to find?

Part of what you're hoping to find, no doubt, is that your arm moves. But movement by itself wouldn't be enough. Waking up to find your arm flapping around aimlessly wouldn't lead you to think that your control over it had been restored. You'd have to conclude instead that paralysis had given way to a spasm.

What you're hoping to find, then, is that your arm not only moves but moves when and where you want it to. But would movement in response to your desires be enough? You might of course be encouraged if you found your hand scratching an itch behind your ear; but if you subsequently found it grabbing food off someone else's plate, you wouldn't necessarily be reassured by the reflection that you had indeed wanted what he was eating.

The problem in this case, we might be inclined to say, is that although you wanted the food on someone else's plate, you also wanted to obey the rules of etiquette, and so grabbing the food wasn't something that you wanted to do on balance or overall. Your having control of your arm would require that the arm do, not just something that you wanted, but rather what you wanted on balance.

Yet how do you tell what you want on balance? If you have ever cast a speculative glance at the uneaten french fries on someone else's plate, you'll know that the contest between appetite and etiquette can be close. Surely, appetite might win out before you had realized that it was the stronger; indeed, you might realize that it was the stronger only by seeing that it had won out, as evidenced by the movement of your arm. And then the thought that this movement reflected the balance of your motives would not convince you of your having regained control.

AGENCY AS A WAY OF KNOWING

My description of these cases implicitly suggests that you still lack control of your arm in each case. How have I made this suggestion? I’ve made it by repeatedly casting you in the role of a spectator, who “sees” or “finds” that his arm is moving.

Many philosophers share the intuition that being a spectator is the diametrical opposite of an agent. As one philosopher puts it, “Common to all experiences of loss of agency is the sense of becoming a spectator of one’s own actions.” In the words of another philosopher, “[I]t seems as though someone has moved into your body and pushed you off the playing field up into the grandstand to be a mere spectator of yourself.” This trope is almost universal in the philosophical literature about action and the will.

That this contrast seems so natural ought, on reflection, to seem odd. Why is doing so often contrasted with seeing? Why is the opposite of “participant” so often “observer” rather than “abstainer” or “absentee”?

This question is the starting point for one approach to the philosophy of action. If the essence of passivity with respect to an event is witnessing it, then perhaps activity with respect to an event consists in knowing about it in some other way. Maybe the distinctive relation that an agent bears to his own actions is an episodic relation—a particular way of knowing. This approach was pioneered by Elizabeth Anscombe in her book Intention, and it is the approach that I adopted in Practical Reflection.

I’ll begin this Introduction, then, by summarizing Anscombe’s view, as I now understand it. I now think that I didn’t fully understand Anscombe when I wrote Practical Reflection, and so another task for this Introduction will be to set the record straight. Along the way, I will offer some modifications to the view laid out in the book, and I’ll attempt to fill in some gaps.

According to Anscombe, the actions that one has a special way of knowing are intentional actions, because one’s knowledge of them is embodied in one’s intentions to perform them.

What one is doing intentionally is “known by being the content of [one’s] intention” (sec. 30, p. 53). The notion that knowledge can be embodied in an intention requires explanation and defense, which Anscombe provides as follows.

We need to distinguish between two kinds of indicative statements about the future: expressions of belief, such as “I’m going to be sick,” and expressions of intention, such as “I am going to take a walk” (p. 1). If someone responds to the statement “I am going to be sick” by asking, “Why would you do a thing like that?”, he has misinterpreted the speech act, by failing to recognize it as an expression of belief rather than intention. Conversely, if someone responds to “I am going to take a walk” with “How can you tell?”, he has failed to recognize it as an expression of intention rather than belief. The difference between these statements cannot lie in the former’s being informative and hence potentially knowledge-conveying, since the latter is informative and hence potentially knowledge-conveying as well.


I do not share Anscombe’s view that all intentional actions are intended in the way that yields distinctively agential knowledge. See notes 7, 16, and 18, below.
As Anscombe puts it, "the indicative (descriptive, infor-\textit{matory}) character is not the distinctive mark of 'predictions' as opposed to 'expressions of intention', as we might at first sight have been tempted to think" (p. 3).

The "indicative (descriptive, infor-\textit{matory}) character" of a statement expressing an intention indicates that the statement expresses knowledge on the part of the speaker. When one says "I am going to take a walk", one lets the hearer know what one is going to do. One's assertion is meant to provide grounds on which the hearer will subsequently know that one is going to take a walk, and those grounds depend for their validity on the assertion's expressing one's own knowledge to the same effect. Hence an expression of intention must at the same time be an expression of knowledge—of something known, in other words, by being the content of the intention expressed.

In Anscombe's view, the underlying difference between "I am going to take a walk" and "I am going to be sick", given that both express knowledge on the part of the speaker, is that the latter expresses speculative knowledge, whereas the former expresses knowledge that is practical, in the sense that it causes the facts that make it true (p. 87). "I am going to be sick" expresses knowledge embodied in a belief that is caused by evidence of the speaker's becoming sick, whereas "I am going to take a walk" expresses knowledge embodied in an intention that causes the speaker to take a walk. Both the belief and the intention embody knowledge because they are true and appropriately connected to the facts that make them true. The difference lies in the causal order of the connection. A belief amounts to knowledge if it is appropriately \textit{caused by} facts, or evidence of facts, that make it true; an intention amounts to knowledge if it appropriately \textit{causes such facts}.

Anscombe calls knowledge of the latter sort \textit{(practical knowledge)}, credited to Aquinas, for whom it described God's knowledge of His creation. God knows what the world is like, but not by dint of having found out; He knows what the world is like because it is just as He meant it to be. And His meaning it to be in a way already constituted knowledge on His part of how it would be, or rather how it already was. What's more, this epistemic relation that God bears to the world—knowing how it is just by meaning it to be that way—is constitutive of his role as the world's inventor or designer. The designer of something is the one whose conception of the thing determines how it is, rather than vice versa, and determines this

\footnote{Here I am using the purposely vague term 'appropriately' to encompass whatever additional conditions are necessary to rule out various things that might defeat an attribution of knowledge. I am not trying to develop a precise epistemology for the knowledge embodied in intention, since the details of such an epistemology are not relevant to my purposes. All that's relevant is that the order of causation between facts and knowledge of those facts is reversed from that which is characteristic of speculative knowledge.}

not by chance but by a mechanism reliable enough to justify his confidence in that conception as an accurate representation of the thing. To be the designer of something is to be the one whose conception of it has epistemic authority by virtue of being its cause rather than its concomitant or effect.

Anscombe's nod to medieval theology as her source for the term 'practical knowledge' suggests that she conceived of intentional action as a realm in which human beings exercise a moral share of divinity. We invent our intentional actions, just as God invented the world, and our inventing them consists in our framing a conception of them that has epistemic authority by virtue of being determinative of them. Hence intentional action is behavior that realizes the agent's knowledge of it, just as the creation realizes God's omniscience.\footnote{Here 'intentional action' is Anscombe's term. My own view is that the category of intentional action is not a natural kind of behavior, because its boundaries are determined in part by norms of moral responsibility. See note 20, below.}

EXPLAINING PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

But how can an agent's doing something be caused by his knowledge that he is going to do it? In the first two chapters of Practical Reflection, I offered a naturalistic account of this phenomenon, explaining how an agent's knowledge of his forthcoming action can be its cause. My explanation was based on some presuppositions about the structure of human self-awareness, but I didn't articulate them clearly. Let me articulate them now, by contrasting human self-awareness with that of a lesser creature—let's say, a cat.\footnote{This section draws heavily on the work of John Perry, I discuss this work at length in an Appendix to "The Centered Self", pp. 775–80. See John Perry, "Self-Notions", Logos, 1990: 17–31; and "Myself and T", in Philosophie in Synthese 110: 719–102. See also "The Problem of the Essential Indexical", Nous 13 (1979): 5–21.}

Now, a cat is conscious, I assume, and it has the sort of consciousness whose content can be put into words only with the help of the first person pronoun. A cat could never catch a mouse if it didn't have thoughts representing the world from its own egocentric perspective, thoughts with English-language equivalents such as "I'm gaining on it" or "I've got it." There is a sense, then, in which a cat has first-person awareness. A cat can even have a reflexive awareness of a sort, as when it realizes that the tail it has been chasing is its own.

What a cat lacks, however, is a conception of a creature that it is. A cat is aware of the mouse that it is chasing, but it is not aware of there being a creature by whom the mouse is hereby being chased. When a cat...
recognizes its own tail, it merely forges a mental association between an object seen to its rear and a locus of sensation or motion at its rear end. It has no conception of being a creature chasing its own tail.

By contrast, when a person realizes that he's stepping on his own shoelaces, he attains more than a mental association between the sensation of treading on something with one foot and the sensation of being tripped up in the other. He has the concept of a particular person bearing the name to which he answers, sporting the face that looks back at him from the mirror, and doing the things that he is aware of doing—including, at the moment, stepping on his own shoelaces.

Of course, a cat is also aware of doing things, such as hissing at someone by whom it feels threatened. But a cat's awareness of its own doings never extends to the knowledge that they are being done by a creature in the world. It represents them from the perspective of the one doing them, without representing the creature occupying that perspective. Thus, even when a cat is aware of hissing at you, and even if it is hissing with the thought of scaring you away, it cannot be thinking that you will be scared of this hissing creature—scared, that is, of its hissing self—because it has no conception of being one of the world's creatures, and hence no sense of self. By contrast, if I tried to scare you away, I would be aware of confronting you with a person saying "Scram!", as would be manifest in that very utterance, since a person saying "Scram!" is intimidating precisely by virtue of manifesting the intention to be an intimidating person. I must therefore be able to understand what I'm doing as being done by the creature who I am.

Along with the ability to understand what I'm doing as done by that creature comes the possibility of finding it unintelligible in those terms. A cat can round on its own tail and wonder, "What is that thing up to?" But I can round on my entire self and wonder, "What is this creature up to?" As soon as the cat associates the waving motion that it sees to its rear with the motion that it is aware of making from its rear end, its puzzlement is over.

It knows why the tail is waving, since it is now aware of waving it. It cannot go on with "Yes, but why am I waving my tail?" That question would be about the behavior of a tail-waving creature, which it has no cognizance of being. Self-puzzlement of this latter kind is possible only for a creature whose awareness of doing things results in an awareness of their being done by the creature who he is.

Now, perplexity is aversive: we try to avoid it, and when we have gotten into it, we try to get out. The aversiveness of this state is a reminder that we have intellectual drives. We do not passively receive knowledge; we gain it through cognitive activity, driven by intellectual motives. And the frustra

tration of these motives is aversive, like the frustration of any fundamental drive.

A human being's intellectual motives are sometimes directed at the person who he is. The creature with whom he is aware of being identical naturally has a special salience for him—as the creature walking in his shoes, sleeping in his bed, eating his meals—and the doings of that creature therefore become the object of his intellectual drives. But the person's awareness of being identical with that creature opens up an obvious shortcut to knowledge about its doings. He must realize that doing things—that is, behaviors conceived from his perspective as the unrepresented agent—constitutes their being done by that creature, the same behaviors conceived objectively. And he must realize that seeking to know what it is doing—an intellectual activity conceived from his perspective as the unrepresented inquirer—constitutes the creature's striving for self-knowledge. Finally, then, he must realize that he can know what that creature is doing simply by doing what he conceives of it as doing, or as being about to do, since his conception will then turn out to be not only true but also justified, on the grounds of the creature's having this very intellectual incentive to bear it out. He tends to behave as he conceives of that creature as behaving, or as being about to behave, because he will then have embodied in that conception, a knowledge of what that creature is doing; and that conception will have the reliability of knowledge because it is about a creature for whom the prospect of having knowledge embodied in it is an incentive to behave accordingly.

Strange as this psychological mechanism may sound, it has been copiously documented by social psychologists working in the area that is sometimes labeled self-consistency. In research in this area has shown that people have a broad tendency to behave in ways that cohere with their own conceptions of themselves—of how they behave in general and of their motives on particular occasions. Potential voters are more likely to vote in an election if they have antecedently predicted that they are going to. Children are more likely to be tidy if told that they are tidy than if told that they ought to be. People behave angrily if they are led to believe that they are
intention will embody my knowledge of what I am doing, just as Anscombe contends.

This explanation of practical knowledge is the one that I laid out in Chapters One and Two of *Practical Reflection*. In presenting it here, I have filled in several gaps; but I haven’t made any significant revisions. Let me turn now to a topic on which I think revision is needed.

**INTENTION AND BELIEF**

As we have seen, Anscombe contrasts intention with belief, and her claim that things can be “known by being the content of intention” seems to imply that they can be known without being believed. In *Practical Reflection* I chose instead to argue that intention is a kind of belief, and hence that practical knowledge, though embodied in intention, is also thereby embodied in belief. But the identification of intention with a kind of belief offends the intuitions of many philosophers, who think of cases such as “I am going to be sick” and “I am going to take a walk” as demonstrating that intention and belief are distinct.

In papers written after *Practical Reflection* I began to delve into the nature of these propositional attitudes, eventually figuring out how to describe the respects in which intention is like belief. Like a belief that I am going to take a walk, the intention expressed by “I am going to take a walk” represents that proposition as true, and in doing so it aims get the proposition’s truth-value right, by aiming to represent it as true only if it is true in fact. Like a belief, then, the intention to take a walk must be revised or withdrawn in the face of convincing evidence that one is not in fact going to take a walk. And one’s actually taking a walk makes the intention a success at representing the truth, which can be awarded the title of knowledge if it was appropriately non-accidental.

This characterization of intention—as representing its content as true with the aim of doing so only if its content really is true—is all that I meant to convey in *Practical Reflection* by classifying intention as a kind of belief. In light of others’ linguistic qualms about my use of ‘belief’, I would now be inclined to replace it with this explicit characterization.16


16 Note that, although I adopt Anscombe’s view of intention as embodying practical knowledge, I do not agree with several other claims that she makes about intention. In particular, I do not believe that the mental state embodying practical knowledge is the state to which we refer when speaking of the intention with which someone acts: intending to take a walk and
DESIRE VS. DRIVE

Just as I now think that, in writing *Practical Reflection*, I was ill-advised to identify intention with a belief, I also think I was ill-advised to describe the intellectual motive behind practical knowledge as a desire. The term ‘desire’ is too suggestive of an attitude that has a well-defined object and is readily accessible to consciousness—an attitude that gives the subject a goal-in-view. When introducing this motive here, I described it instead as a drive, which is the description that I am now inclined to prefer.27

Here I am using ‘drive’ in something like the sense in which it is used in psychoanalytic theory. In this sense, ‘drive’ denotes a fund of labile psychic energy, often unconscious, which has a vague direction in itself but can be invested in various activities.28 Consider, for example, the drive commonly known as aggression. A person can be full of aggression without there being anything in particular that he wants to do, not even something described as vaguely as “picking a fight” or “hitting something”. He simply has a considerable fund of energy that can motivate bellicose behavior of many different kinds, toward many different objects, and whose constant presence in him may not be accessible to his awareness.

The motive behind practical knowledge might be described as an intellectual drive, or a drive to synthesize. It is a fund of energy that motivates various efforts to get the experienced world to hang together—to get the “blooming, buzzing confusion” that confronts one from birth to coalesce into an intelligible world. As one matures, this drive takes on progressively more determinate objects, motivating progressively more focused efforts to know and to understand. Some of these efforts, I believe, are aimed at knowing and understanding oneself, partly by getting oneself to coalesce into an intelligible piece of the world. But the drive behind this effort rarely obtrudes itself on one’s consciousness and must therefore be inferred from its manifestations in one’s cognitive activities.

Because I am no longer inclined to identify intention with a belief, and getting up with the intention of taking a walk may involve two different kinds of intention.

More importantly, I do not believe that every intentional action involves an intention of the practical-knowledge-bearing kind. Hence I do not accept Anscombe’s thesis that every intentional action is an object of practical knowledge on the part of the agent. See also notes 7 and 29.


28 Let me emphasize that I am borrowing only some elements of Freudian drive theory. I am not borrowing the model of stimulus reduction, for example, but only the notion of indeterminate motivational forces. Indeed, my conception of their indeterminacy is different from Freud’s. Freud described drives having determinate aims but being readily redirected toward other aims instead. I prefer to think of drives as having only inchoate aims.

the motive behind practical knowledge with a desire, I no longer endorse the specific form of reductionism that I advocated in *Practical Reflection*. The book attempts to reduce agency to psychological mechanisms constructed from the materials of belief-desire motivation. Were I writing the book today, it would still attempt to construct agency from more rudimentary materials, but those materials would not be belief and desire.

INTERPRETING ANSCOMBE

A fair amount of *Practical Reflection* was devoted to working out epistemological problems raised by practical knowledge. In working out those problems, I often used Anscombe as a foil, contrasting my solutions with hers. I now think that I misinterpreted her epistemology, and I’d like to take this opportunity to correct my interpretation.

Anscombe describes an agent’s knowledge of intentional actions as “knowledge without observation”, adding that it is not “founded on evidence”. In this respect, she compares knowledge of intentional actions to knowledge of bodily posture:

[A] man usually knows the position of his limbs without observation. It is without observation, because nothing shows him the position of his limbs; it is not as if he were going by a tingle in his knee, which is the sign that it is bent and not straight. Where we can speak of separately describable sensations, having which is in some sense our criterion for saying something, then we can speak of observing that thing; but that is not generally so when we know the position of our limbs. Yet, without prompting, we can say it. [pp. 13–14]

It is not ordinarily possible to find anything that shows one that one’s leg is bent. It may indeed be that it is because one has sensations that one knows this; but that does not mean that one knows it by identifying the sensations one has. [p. 49]

If a man says that his leg is bent when it is lying straight out, it would be incorrect to say that he had misjudged an inner kinaesthetic appearance as an appearance of his leg bent, when in fact what was appearing to him was his leg stretched out. [p. 50]

These passages are best understood, in my view, as imprecise descriptions of the fact that, when it comes to the position of one’s limbs, one is subject to perceptual appearances that involve no sensory qualities. The proprioceptive appearance that one’s leg is bent is an appearance that doesn’t feel like anything—like anything other than one’s leg’s being bent, that is. The appearance is empty of any sensations, such as pressure, tin-
gling, and the like. Appearances without sensations are simply perceptual beliefs—proprioceptive beliefs, in the present case.19

Ansscombe’s claim is that one is infallible about the position of one’s limbs: she not only acknowledges but emphasizes the possibility of being wrong. Her claim is rather that when one’s proprioceptive beliefs are true, they usually constitute knowledge, because they are connected in the right way with the facts that make them true. Anscombe is thus a reliabilist about proprioceptive knowledge. Her view is that one needs no sensory evidence on which to judge the position of one’s limbs because the position of one’s limbs generates proprioceptive beliefs via a mechanism that is generally reliable: the belief that one’s leg is bent serves as a reliable indicator of the leg’s being bent.

When I wrote Practical Reflection, I didn’t read Anscombe as a reliabilist, and so my interpretation of her view about knowledge without observation was mistaken. In particular, I misinterpreted her reason for denying that knowledge of one’s own intentional actions is “founded on evidence”, as I shall now explain.

A mystifying part of Anscombe’s view is her claim that what is known without observation can include, not just how one is moving one’s limbs, or what one is thereby attempting to accomplish, but the fact that one is actually accomplishing it:

I think that it is the difficulty of the question that has led some people to say that what one knows as intentional action is only the intention, or possibly also the bodily movement; and that the rest is known by observation to be the result, which was also willed in the intention.

But this is a mad account.

Another false avenue of escape is to say 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. The essential thing is just what has gone on in me, and if what happens coincides with what I ‘do’ in the sphere of intentions, that is just a grace of fate.

But this is nonsense too. [pp. 51–52]

Thus, Anscombe believes that if you are trying to shoot a bull’s-eye, intend
to shoot one, and will consequently end up having shot one unintentionally, then you already know without observation that you are shooting a bull’s-eye, not just that you are intending or trying to do so or moving your limbs with that aim. But how can the content of your intention embody knowledge of whether the bull’s-eye is going to be hit? How can you have knowledge of the intended outcome without observing it?

The answer that I attributed to Anscombe in Practical Reflection was drawn from her remarks about the distinction generally known as “direction of fit”. Anscombe draws this distinction by saying, among other things, that if there is a discrepancy between one’s intention and one’s performance, then “the mistake is in the performance” rather than the intention (p. 5; p. 82): one’s performance bears the responsibility of corresponding to one’s intention, which consequently cannot be blamed for any lack of correspondence. Somehow, I imagined, relieving intention of responsibility for corresponding to the resulting action is thought by Anscombe to relieve the knowledge embodied in that intention of any need for evidential support.

I now think that Anscombe offers a very different reason, based on her reliabilism, for believing that knowledge of intended outcomes requires no evidence. Her reason is suggested by the following passage:

‘Why are you pumping?’—‘To replenish the water supply’. If this was the answer, then we can say ‘He is replenishing the water supply’; unless indeed, he is not. This will appear a tautologous pronouncement: but there is more to it. For if after his saying ‘To replenish the water-supply’ we can say ‘He is replenishing the water-supply’, then this would, in ordinary circumstances, of itself be enough to characterise that as an intentional action. (The qualification is necessary because an intended effect just occasionally comes about by accident.) [pp. 38–39]

The parenthetical remark at the end of this quotation indicates that, in Anscombe’s view, one can bring about an intended result without doing so intentionally if the result comes about accidentally. Hitting the bull’s-eye by luck doesn’t count as hitting it intentionally, even if one intended to hit it.

Now compare the two passages just quoted, and notice that the concept of accidental figures in the former passage as well. In that passage, Anscombe ridicules the view that what I do and know that I’m doing when I intentionally move my toe does not include my toe’s actually moving. What’s ridiculous about that view, according to Anscombe, is the implication that my toe’s moving is accidental, “a grace of fate”. Anscombe suggests that my toe’s moving is part of my intentional action, and hence part of what I know without observation, because it is a reliable result of my intending to
move my toe.

The lesson to be drawn from these passages is that the reliability of the connection between intention and movement is implicated in both the movement's being intentional and the intention's being knowledge, according to Anscombe's reliabilist epistemology. Speculative knowledge, which is caused by the facts, must be caused by them via some reliable mechanism; if knowledge can also be practical, by virtue of causing the facts, then it must cause them via a reliable mechanism as well. Unless an intention with the content "I'm going to move my toe" reliably causes my toe to move, it won't amount to practical knowledge. And this same reliable connection is necessary to the movement's being intentional; for if my toe moves accidentally, I will not have moved it intentionally, despite intending to move it. By contrast, if the intention "I'm going to move my toe" does reliably cause my toe to move, then the movement resulting from this reliable mechanism will be intentional, and the intention causing the movement will constitute knowledge—in both cases, because of the reliable connection between the intention and the outcome that fulfills it.

Anscombe's view, then, is that the action's status as intentional and the intention's status as knowledge will tend to coincide, because they are constituted by the same reliable connection and undermined by the same failures of reliability. If your intention to hit the bull's-eye doesn't amount to knowledge of the fact that you're hitting it, the reason is probably that you can't reliably hit the bull's-eye; and in that case, your hitting it won't qualify as intentional, either. If your hitting the bull's-eye does qualify as intentional, then you must have a reliable way of hitting the bull's-eye, in which case your intention to hit it is reliably connected to that result and will probably amount to knowledge. What you do intentionally, you also tend to do knowingly, because intentional action and knowledge are generally two ends of the same chain of reliable causation.

Although I now think that I misunderstood Anscombe when I wrote Practical Reflection, I still think that I was right to argue against her view that knowledge of intentional actions does not rely on evidence. As I argue

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20 What is done intentionally is not perfectly coextensive with what is known without observation. Whether something is done intentionally depends on the reasons for and against doing it—especially against. An unreliable but lucky marksman may not be credited with hitting the bull's-eye intentionally, but he may be blamed for hitting the President intentionally, simply by virtue of trying to hit the President and despite his lack of a reliable method for doing so. (This example is due to Gilbert Harman. Thanks to Gideon Rosen for reminding me of it.) In neither case does he know without observation that he is hitting his target. If his target is the President, then, what he does intentionally exceeds what he knows without observation. As I understand Anscombe, she believes that intentional action is invariably known without observation. On this point, among others, I believe that Anscombe is mistaken. See also notes 7 and 26, above.


be, not merely to register rudimentary, observable facts, but also to formulate them in “integrative and general” terms of the sort that convey understanding by answering the question “Why?”. When directed at our own behavior, these processes must be oriented toward the goal of knowing what we are doing in the sort of comprehensive terms that indicate why we are doing it, by alluding to the relevant dispositions and circumstances. And the previously described shortcut to self-knowledge—the shortcut of doing what we think we are doing, or are about to do—is also a route to this “high level” self-knowledge. We can attain integrative knowledge of what we are doing simply by framing and fulfilling integrative conceptions of our own behavior, conceptions formulated in terms of the dispositions and circumstances that help to explain it.

In order to frame and fulfill integrative conceptions of our behavior, of course, we must be aware of a context with which to integrate it—projects and motives that we have (such as the project of poisoning enemy agents), emotions that we feel (such as hatred of the enemy), customs and policies that we follow (such as a policy of obeying orders), traits of character that we display (such as courage in the face of the enemy), all of which afford terms for understanding our behavior as more than mere bodily movement. These other aspects of our self-conception—projects, motives, emotions, customs, policies, traits of character—will provide the materials for integrative knowledge of what we are doing, provided that we do things appropriately integrated with them. The goal of a more comprehensive knowledge of what we are doing therefore militates in favor of doing things that can be understood as motivated by our desires, expressive of our emotions, implementing our policies, manifesting our characters, and so on.

Those aspects of ourselves and our circumstances which we could incorporate into an integrative conception of doing something turn out to coincide with what we ordinarily count as reasons for doing it. When giving our reason for doing something, we often cite a desire that motivated it, an intention or policy that guided it, an emotion or opinion that animated it, a habit or trait that was manifested in it, and so on. Examples of desire-based reasons are well known; here are some examples of reasons based on other considerations that provide an explanatory context for an action:

**Why are you whistling?**
Because I’m happy.

**Why aren’t you having any wine?**
Because I don’t drink.

**Why worry about his problems?**
Because I’m his friend.

**Why are you shaking your head?**
Because I think you’re wrong.

**Why do you have her picture on your wall?**
Because I admire her.

**Here already?**
I’m punctual.

Reasons for doing something are facts that would provide an integrative knowledge of what we were doing, if we did that thing. Our cognitive processes favor framing and fulfilling a conception of ourselves as doing that thing, understood in the context of those facts, rather than other things for which we lack the elements of an equally integrative conception. Reasons for doing something provide a *rationale*, an account in which our doing it is seen to cohere with our psyches and our circumstances. Whereas acting on an intention is a matter of realizing practical knowledge of what we are doing, acting for a reason is matter of realizing more integrative practical knowledge, incorporating relevant facts that constitute reasons for acting.

**NAVEL GAZING?**

This conception of practical reasoning often strikes other philosophers as requiring a rational agent to devote too much attention to himself, when he should be attending to the world around him. I answered this criticism in *Practical Reflection*, but since it continues to arise, I want to repeat my answer here.

Consider a case in which your attention is properly focused on something outside yourself. If you look up from reading *Felix Holt* and say to yourself, “What a genius she was!”, your thought is explicitly about the author George Eliot; but in articulating this thought, you express an attitude that lends intelligibility to various further thoughts and actions on your part. Suppose that your next thought is “I wonder what else she wrote?” (or perhaps just “What else did she write?”). The rational connection between your thoughts is that admiration of the sort expressed in the first thought naturally leads to curiosity about its object, as reported (or expressed) in the second. This connection cannot be discerned in the explicit content of your thoughts. There is no rule of inference leading from the premise that George Eliot was a genius to the conclusion that you wonder what she wrote in addition to *Felix Holt*. Unless the first of these thoughts is understood as expressing an attitude held by the thinker of the second, they amount to a *non sequitur*.

The only way to make the logic of these thoughts explicit would be with
further, reflective information—"I admire the author of Felix Holt as a genius, and so I am moved to wonder what else she wrote"—which describes a psychologically intelligible transition of thought. Yet to articulate this reflective information to yourself would be to shift the focus of your attention, from the author whom you admire to your own attitude of admiration. And this shift would make your admiration less rather than more evident, because admiring someone entails attending to her rather than yourself. "I admire the author of Felix Holt!" would be a less admiring thought, a thought less expressive of your attitude, than "She was a genius." Articulating your awareness of admiring Eliot would therefore leave you less vividly aware of admiring her than articulating thoughts expressive of that admiration, which would be thoughts about Eliot.

Thus, explicit reflection is often self-defeating. Reflective reasoning is best left implicit, in the background, so that the attitudes that are its objects can be revealed more clearly in explicit thoughts about other things. Hence the fact that your thoughts prior to acting are not explicitly about yourself is no evidence that their logic is not reflective. Thoughts that are explicitly about other things may yet be structured by what they reveal about yourself—as in "What a genius she was! I wonder what else she wrote."

Note that this response to the present objection points to a flaw in the traditional philosophical method of studying practical reason. The traditional method is to construct an argument-schema that will both represent the explicit content of, and illustrate the rational connections among, the thoughts leading up to an action performed for reasons. Aristotle's practical syllogism was the first attempt to construct such an argument-schema, and many other attempts have followed. In my view, however, the rational connections in an agent's deliberations are connections of reflective intelligibility, and such connections tend to hold, not between the contents of the agent's explicit thoughts (e.g., "What a genius she was!"), but rather between the self-attributions that remain in the background, implicitly registering the attitudes that his explicit thoughts express (e.g., "I admire the author of Felix Holt"). Because these unarticulated self-attributions provide the logical structure of the agent's thinking, they contain the agent's reasons for acting, in my view; but because they remain unarticulated, they cannot be represented by the same argument-schema that represents the agent's explicit thoughts.

In sum, an agent's reasons for acting are not the things that he says to himself before acting. That he doesn't saying anything about himself to himself before acting doesn't prove that his reasons for acting are not considerations conducive to self-understanding.
or values to be frustrated by his laziness; but such an agent is more likely to describe himself, and to be described by others, as laid-back or easy-going. And the rational course for an easy-going agent may well be to go easy.

Remember, too, that the intelligibility of an action is not the reason for recommending it, much less a reason for doing it, according to my view. Reasons for recommending or taking the action are to be found in the concerns and commitments in light of which it makes sense, which jointly make up the agent’s entire evaluative and motivational point-of-view. And no action that makes sense in light of all the agent’s values and motives surely has some claim to count, from his perspective, as a good thing to do.

INTRODUCTIONS

Let me close by noting the main difference between this Introduction and the Introduction that appears as Chapter 1 of Practical Reflection. In that original Introduction, I argued that questions in the philosophy of action should ask how the phenomena of agency are possible, and that answers should describe ways in which those phenomena might possibly be realized, irrespective of whether they are so realized in fact. The philosophy of action should therefore set about describing possible agents, without concern for whether they are real. I still favor that approach to the subject in principle, but I have given it up in practice, as is evident from my appeal to empirical psychology in this new Introduction. On that empirical basis, I now believe that Practical Reflection describes not just possible agents but actual human agents—in other words, us.

I gave up my earlier approach for reasons both strategic and philosophical. The strategic reason was that other philosophers simply weren’t interested in merely possible agents—or, at least, not possible agents of the kind I described. If I wanted anyone to take an interest in my account of agency, I found, I would have to show that it was plausible as an account of human agency. The philosophical reason for giving up the approach of describing merely possible agents is that I now think it to be incompatible with the aspirations of the project that occupies the last two chapters of the book. Those chapters seek to explain the rationality of being moral, and there really is no point in explaining why morality would be rational for merely possible agents, without explaining why it really is rational for us. I am no longer satisfied with the explanation given in those chapters, but I have left them unchanged, since they still provide a rough approximation of the explanation that I would give today.23

23 For a recent attempt at that explanation, see my How We Get Along (MS).