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ARTICLE

A metaphysics for practical knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Is Anscombean practical knowledge independent of what the agent actually does on an occasion? Failure to understand Anscombe's answer to this question is a major obstacle to appreciating the subtlety and plausibility of her view. I argue that Anscombe's answer is negative, and turns on the nature of mistakes in performance, and reveals a distinctive implicit metaphysics of mind and knowledge, structured by related capacities and exercises of capacities. If my interpretation is correct, then practical knowledge shares features with knowledge-how and knowledge-that, but deserves its own epistemic category.

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1. Introduction

Much of Anscombe's (2000) *Intention* is spent warming the reader up for the idea that agents have *practical knowledge* of what they do intentionally.[1] Practical knowledge is *self*-knowledge: knowledge of what *I* do intentionally, where the first-personal aspect is essential. Practical knowledge is *non-observational*: it is not based on observing myself doing something, even though I (like bystanders) can often also know what I do by observing what I do. Practical knowledge is *non-inferential*: it is not inferred from evidence, even though I (like other folks) can sometimes also know what I do by inferring that it follows from evidence. Practical knowledge also extends beyond what one merely intends to *what one actually does* when one acts intentionally. One can, for example, have practical knowledge that one is painting a wall yellow, over and above merely knowing one intends to do so.[2]

There's much to be said in favor of practical knowledge, so construed. For example, I know, here and now, that I'm writing about Anscombe. Although I observe myself in action, it is not *by* observing myself, or inferring from evidence, that I know this. (Compare the case where I gather evidence and

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infer: 'I keep seeing "Anscombe" appear on the screen when I see my fingers move, so I suppose…') Even if one disagrees with Anscombe on points of detail, there *is* a topic here.

There are many controversies about practical knowledge.[3] I focus on one main controversy: whether practical knowledge is independent of what the agent actually does on an occasion. Failure to understand Anscombe's answer to this question is a major obstacle to appreciating the subtlety and plausibility of her view. I argue that Anscombe's answer turns on the nature of mistakes in performance, and reveals a distinctive implicit metaphysics of mind and knowledge, structured by related capacities and exercises of capacities. If my interpretation is correct, then practical knowledge shares features with knowledge-how and knowledge-that, but deserves its own epistemic category.

2. An interpretive choice

My main question is: is practical knowledge independent of what one actually does on an occasion? Anscombe addresses this question directly, but her answer is obscure. Here is the 'Crucial Passage':

> I wrote 'I am a fool' on the blackboard with my eyes shut. Now when I said what I wrote, ought I to have said: this is what I am writing, if my intention is getting executed; instead of simply: this is what I am writing?
>
> Orders, however, can be disobeyed, and intentions fail to get executed. That intention for example 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 [practical] 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 was knowledge of was not the case! On the other hand Theophrastus' remark holds good: 'the mistake is in the performance, not in the judgment'. (Anscombe 2000, 82)

Anscombe borrows the distinction between kinds of mistake from the *Magna Moralia* 1189b22, attributing it to Theophrastus rather than Aristotle. A mistake in performance is something one *does mistakenly*, such as buying margarine when one meant to buy butter, or in the imagined case, failing to write what one intended to write. Mistakes in performance are opposed to *mistakes in judgment*, which are cases of *being mistaken* about something. It is clear from this passage that an appeal to mistakes in performance as opposed to mistakes in judgment is supposed to help explain why practical knowledge is not a ridiculous 'funny' sort of knowledge. I will return to this.

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Does Anscombe think her practical knowledge of writing 'I am a fool' on the board with her eyes shut is independent of what she actually does?[4] That depends on how we interpret her claim that her knowledge 'would have been the same' even in the imagined counterfactual case, where she fails to do what she intends. She might be speaking in her own voice, saying something she thinks is straightforwardly true. If so, then practical knowledge seems independent of what the agent actually does. That said, Anscombe was a Wittgenstein student, and Wittgenstein students are slippery customers. It is often tempting to assimilate the views of Wittgenstein students to the nearest *easily* digested position; nearly always, this is a mistake. Like the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Anscombe sometimes uses the voice of an interlocutor to put forward claims, questions and arguments, where the interlocutor does not represent the 'one true view', but rather an intelligible way of going wrong – sometimes very subtly – for which philosophical therapy is in order.[5] If Anscombe is speaking in the voice of an interlocutor, then perhaps practical knowledge does, in some subtle way, depend on what the agent actually does. We face an interpretive choice.

3. Thompson-style views

Let me consider a promising existing interpretation that takes the first interpretive option. Michael Thompson (2011) thinks Anscombe is speaking in her own voice when she says that her knowledge 'would have been the same' even in the case where she makes a mistake in performance. Thompson points out that most of Anscombe's examples in *Intention* are expressed in terms of things the agent *is doing* at the present moment, where things are still ongoing, unfolding, incomplete, etc. rather than in terms of things the agent *has done*, where things are finished, over and done with, complete, etc. The difference corresponds to a grammatical difference between imperfective and perfective aspect, where we use imperfective aspect to talk about the incomplete ongoing things, and perfective aspect to talk about the complete things that are over and done with. In English that contrast emerges most clearly in the past tense: in the contrast between, say, 'He was sitting down' and 'He sat down'. Having noted all this Thompson writes:

> The content of practical knowledge is progressive, imperfective … Its character as knowledge is not affected when the hydrogen bomb goes off and most of what the agent is doing never gets done … there is practical knowledge only when the thing is precisely NOT done, not PAST; there is more to come, something is missing, and the H-bomb may hit before it does. My so-called knowledge of my intentional action in truth exists only and precisely when there is no action, but only something I am doing. (Thompson 2011, 209)

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The H-bomb here is a violent reminder that most ongoing processes are essentially incomplete and interruptible.[6] 'Action' here is a term for a kind of complete particular event. The view is that practical knowledge is not *of* a complete event, and so not *of* an action. Rather, practical knowledge is *of* a present, incomplete, unfolding process – something I *am doing*, but have not yet *done*.

Importantly for our purposes, on Thompson's view the kind of process is the same and present in both the successful and unsuccessful cases of writing 'I am a fool' on the board with one's eyes shut.[7] On Thompson's view, to properly express what she knows practically as she acts, Anscombe should really say 'I *am writing* "I am a fool" on the board with my eyes shut'. She should say that in *both* cases, whether she is successful or not. What she says does not imply that she has succeeded in bringing the process to perfection and completion, and what she says is not falsified by the circumstance where she fails because of the chalk or the surface. On this view, how the chalk and surface frustrate her on an occasion matter as much to the character of her present practical knowledge as the H-bomb going off would: that is, they don't matter at all.

Thompson's reading solves a problem that arises if one takes the first interpretive option I mentioned before, and says that Anscombe thinks her practical knowledge 'would have been the same' even had she failed. It's plausible that knowledge of any kind involves non-accidental agreement of the mind of the knower with the object of knowledge. It is hard to see how there is such agreement if Anscombe's knowledge is 'the same' even when she fails. Thompson's reading secures the agreement by identifying a special *object* of knowledge that's hard to notice: namely, an incomplete process that is (allegedly) present in *both* successful and unsuccessful cases of writing 'I am a fool'.

Thompson's view of practical knowledge is part of an impressive unified account of practical reason, intention, and the explanation of action, which is partly inspired by Anscombe, and which he develops in Thompson (2008). I assume (without argument) that Thompson's action theory, construed as an interpretation of Anscombe, has much in its favor, so his view of Anscombe's thought about practical knowledge also has much in its favor. Despite this, I think we should reject Thompson's view of (Anscombe's view of) practical knowledge, for two reasons.

The first reason is that Anscombe seems to have a different attitude to the truth conditions of progressive claims than Thompson does. For Thompson (2008), very little is required for progressive claims to be true. In particular, one need not *have done* anything in particular, or *achieved* any definite *results*, in the service of a relevant end, for a related progressive claim to be true. That is why Thompson can say that the claim 'I am writing [etc.]' is true in both the successful case and the case where Anscombe

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doesn't write *anything* because of a problem with the chalk or surface. Anscombe instead seems to think that the achievement of relevant results is *included* in the meaning of progressive claims:

> … 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 knowing that that is taking place? (Anscombe 2000, 51, underlines added)

If the achievement of relevant results is included in the meaning of progressive claims, then by Anscombe's book, when she makes the relevant mistake in performance, the claim 'I am writing "I am a fool" on the board with my eyes shut' is *false*, because she is not achieving, and has not achieved, any of *those* results. So Thompson's view of practical knowledge is not really Anscombe's view.

The second – and more important – reason to reject Thompson's view is that his view makes no sense of the *importance* Anscombe ascribes to the distinction between mistakes in performance and mistakes in judgment. If Anscombe had Thompson's view, it would be very strange to end the Crucial Passage by dredging up an obscure distinction from the *Magna Moralia*. If Anscombe had Thompson's view, she could just end the Passage more straightforwardly, by saying, for example, 'On the other hand, practical knowledge is only ever of an incomplete process, never a complete event, so it is of something that is the case after all, and the same in both cases, although this can be hard to notice.' No mention of mistakes in performance is required to make this point.

This conclusion generalizes. Call a 'Thompson-style view' any view that takes the first interpretive option and then identifies a special object for practical knowledge which is present in both the successful and unsuccessful cases.[8] All Thompson-style views will have trouble explaining why Anscombe invokes mistakes in performance at the end of the Crucial Passage. For Thompson-style views, mention of mistakes in performance is a clumsy distraction from the 'real' view: if Anscombe wants her reader to understand, she ought to end the Passage by naming *the special object of knowledge*, rather than dredging up an obscure (irrelevant!) distinction from the *Magna Moralia*. Anscombe is sometimes contrary in her writing style, but she's never *that* contrary.

What about 'funny readings', which take the first interpretive option but *deny* that practical knowledge requires non-accidental agreement with an object of knowledge? Funny readings are even more implausible. If Anscombe thought practical knowledge is 'funny', because it doesn't require non-accidental agreement with an object of knowledge, she would have just said so. For example, at the end of the Crucial Passage, she would have just said something like 'There is no subtle countervailing point; practical

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knowledge *is* a funny sort of knowledge. It is a modern prejudice to think knowledge must always have an object.' Anscombe wasn't scared of making unintuitive claims when she thought them justified. I won't discuss funny readings any further in this paper.

That is the main criticism I will make of Thompson-style views: they make no sense of the importance Anscombe ascribes to the distinction between mistakes in performance and mistakes in judgment. (To the extent such views follow Thompson's views about processes, they are also open to the other objection about Anscombe's attitude to the truth conditions of progressive claims.)[9] It is worth noting that this distinction between kinds of mistake is not a mere sideshow; rather, it frames the discussion in the book *Intention* as a whole. We find it in the beginning, middle and end of the book, at crucial points in the text. It first crops up near the beginning, when Anscombe hints than there are more ways of saying what is not true than lying or being mistaken (Anscombe 2000, 4–5). It crops up again towards the end of the middle, immediately before Anscombe accuses modern philosophy of blankly misunderstanding practical knowledge (Anscombe 2000, 57). It also crops up near the end in the Crucial Passage, where it is hauled in as a problem-solver, this being the last passage in which Anscombe raises difficulties about the very idea of practical knowledge, having labored such difficulties for much of the text. She obviously thinks the distinction is very important. But if she had a Thompson-style view, she would think the distinction is a sideshow.

4. A lurking objection and a pervasive presupposition

There is an objection lurking. I claim Thompson doesn't make sense of the importance of the distinction between mistakes in performance and mistakes in judgment. Now these days, it is fairly common to say that conceptually articulated knowledge is *factive*, where this means that if I know that *p*, then *p* is true. The variable *p* stands for a proposition; the idea being that a complete judgment that *p* – something that has enough conceptual structure to have a determinate truth-value – is the minimal unit of conceptually articulated knowledge.[10] Thompson might respond to my criticism by saying that Anscombe hauls in the distinction between kinds of mistake precisely in order to point us to a *special kind of judgment* that is not falsified by failure to do what one intends, thus preserving the *factivity* of practical knowledge. After all: she does say 'the mistake is in the performance, not in the judgment'. The definite article – '*the* judgment' – seems to imply there *is* a relevant judgment in the area: one that is not mistaken.

What judgment could that be? It can't be the judgment 'I wrote "I am a fool" on the board with my eyes shut' because *that* judgment is mistaken in the problematic counterfactual case. (Recall, we are working with a view on

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which the knowledge 'would have been the same' even in the case of failure.) It can't be the present tense correlate 'I write "I am a fool" on the board [etc.]' either, where this is construed in terms of a narrative (not habitual) use of the present tense. Thompson has a ready answer as to what the relevant non-mistaken judgment is, if it is not these other mistaken judgments. The non-mistaken judgment is a *progressive* judgment of the 'I am *A*-ing' form. It is the judgment that e.g. 'I *am writing* "I am a fool" [etc.]' that is not falsified by a mistake in performance, and the point of mentioning mistakes in performance, on this view, is precisely to direct us to that special judgment, which constitutes the agent's practical knowledge, in both cases.

The imagined objection turns on an extremely natural mistake; one which Anscombe herself encouraged (albeit unintentionally). The mistake is in thinking that practical knowledge is a special kind of judgment that *p*, whose primary, canonical expression is in corresponding assertions of *p*.

The presupposition that practical knowledge is a judgment that *p* is not very explicit in the literature, but I think it is pervasive. It is common, for example, to speak without qualification of practical knowledge as a special kind of knowledge *that* I am doing something, for example. Anscombe does this herself throughout *Intention*. I did it myself in the opening paragraphs of this paper. It's very difficult to avoid this kind of locution when writing about practical knowledge. Of all the contemporary authors I know who write directly about Anscombe's views about practical knowledge, only McDowell (2013) is noticeably wary of speaking of practical knowledge as a special kind of 'knowledge-*that*'.[11] Now the claims that practical knowledge is *knowledge* that *p* and that practical knowledge is *judgment* that *p* are not identical, but they are clearly closely related. I will return to this in section 6.4. For now let's assume that knowledge that *p* just is (always and everywhere) judgment that *p*.

5. Why practical knowledge is not a judgment that P

I think McDowell is right to be wary; Anscombe doesn't think practical knowledge is a judgment that *p*. To explain why, I'll start with the opposite idea that practical knowledge *is* a judgment that *p*.

What is meant by 'a judgment that *p*'? In her discussion of mistakes in judgment, Anscombe (2000, 57) informally describes judgment as saying something that is supposed to describe what is the case. Judgment need not be overt or audible, so we might say that judgment is, for Anscombe, a 'saying by the mind'. The scare quotes indicate that we shouldn't take this phrase too literally. It's not that Anscombe thinks judgment is something one only has 'occurrently' when one attentively utters a sentence, whether out loud, or to oneself. (Apart from anything else, it is obviously possible to utter a sentence, whether out loud as actors do, or to oneself as meditators

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do, without *asserting* or *judging* anything.) The point is rather that judgment has the same kind of *unity* as assertion. Just as the unity of assertion is determined by the single proposition asserted, so too the unity of judgment is determined by the single proposition judged. That is why one can *say* what one judges by publicly asserting what one judges. Given these tight connections between assertion, judgment, and public expression using sentences, I will follow Anscombe in describing judgment as 'saying' (by the mind), on the understanding that this should not be taken too literally.

One reason it is natural to assume that practical knowledge is a judgment that *p* is that when Anscombe gives her most direct example of practical knowledge, she heavily emphasizes how this knowledge is tightly connected to *linguistic expression*. Her most direct example is a builder directing the project of building a house. The builder has settled everything about the project in a correct order of practical reasoning; no detail has been left out. Anscombe says the builder's knowledge of what is done (in this building project) is practical knowledge. When explaining what this knowledge amounts to, she says 'first and foremost, he can say what the house is like.' (Anscombe 2000, 82).

If *saying* is 'first and foremost' here, then it seems very natural to suppose that practical knowledge just is a judgment that *p*, where that is something 'said by the mind'. In this example, the judgment would presumably be about what the house is like: its structural features and so on.

Another reason to assume that practical knowledge is a judgment that *p* is that Anscombe (2000, 87) says one's practical knowledge gives the descriptions under which what one does is intentional. These descriptions are essential to one's ability to answer questions about one's reasons for action. If you see me writing something, and ask me 'Why are you writing?' I can answer, without prompting, 'I'm replying to my friend', thereby giving a reason and providing another description under which what I do is intentional. If practical knowledge sustains this capacity, it is very natural to assume that it is a judgment that *p* concerning what one is doing and why.

The ability to say what one knows, where what one says is true, is also presented by Anscombe as an explanation of *why* something counts as genuine knowledge:

> 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… (Anscombe 2000, 51, underlines added).

Presumably Anscombe means there is a non-accidental connection to the truth here, otherwise flippant lucky guesses might count as knowledge, just by virtue of being true. Regardless, any adequate

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interpretation must respect the connection to linguistic expression that Anscombe endorses here. For creatures like us, knowledge is linguistically expressible in (non-accidentally) true claims, so practical knowledge must be like that too.

The simplest interpretive hypothesis that respects this connection to linguistic expression is that one's practical knowledge is, for example, a judgment *that* I am opening the window. Or, if one wants to add a slight complication to do justice to the importance of reasons for action in Anscombe's view, perhaps one's practical knowledge is, for example, a judgment *that* I am opening the window *because* I am (say) making the room more comfortable.[12] This idea fits very well with Thompson's view. It is less clear how to accommodate practical (non-inferential!) knowledge of features of a *product* – e.g. the builder's house – with this kind of judgment, but let us pass that by.

So: the assumption that practical knowledge is a judgment that *p*, where *p* is something 'said by the mind', is quite understandable, because of what Anscombe says about knowledge and its linguistic expression. But the assumption is incorrect. Why?

Just after she accuses modern philosophy of being blind to practical knowledge, Anscombe (2000, 57) abruptly claims that we cannot understand practical knowledge unless we first understand *practical reasoning*.[13] I presume she says this because she thinks practical knowledge is either the *outcome* of practical reasoning, or *based* in it, or *constituted* by it, or perhaps even *identical* to it.[14] If one of these options is right, then if practical reasoning consists in related judgments, or at least concludes in judgment, we might well expect practical knowledge to be a kind of judgment. But when Anscombe actually describes practical reasoning, she is very clear that its conclusion is *not a judgment*, at least if judgment is a kind of 'internal assertion':

> There is a difference of form between reasoning leading to action and reasoning for the truth of a conclusion… [There are] three types of case. There is the theoretical syllogism and also the idle practical syllogism which is just a classroom example. In both of these the conclusion is 'said' by the mind which infers it. And there is the practical syllogism proper. Here the conclusion is an action whose point is shewn by the premises, which are now, so to speak, on active duty. (Anscombe 2000, 60, underlines added).

There is an implied contrast here. When we have a *real* case of practical reasoning, the conclusion is not *said* by the mind, it is *done*. If we thought that practical knowledge is a judgment that *p* – a kind of 'saying by the mind' – we would risk mistaking real practical reasoning for the kind of 'classroom example' of idle practical reasoning that Anscombe mentions in

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this passage. So this is one good reason to deny that Anscombe thinks practical knowledge is a judgment that *p*.

One might object that Anscombe is here interpreting Aristotle, and not clearly endorsing Aristotle's view. The scare quotes around 'said' might express reluctance to endorse this part of Aristotle's view. But earlier Anscombe (2000, 58) introduces practical reasoning as 'one of Aristotle's best discoveries', which strongly suggests she endorses most of what she then goes on to interpret. If she rejected Aristotle's contrast between 'said' conclusions and other kinds, we would expect a qualification, but there is none.[15] It's much more likely that the scare quotes warn us not to treat talk of 'saying' too literally, as explained above. (They might also express reticence about direct translation of a troublesome semi-technical Greek term into ordinary English.)

One might object that I am assuming that 'saying' and doing exclude each other. Couldn't Anscombe say that the conclusion of practical reasoning is *both* an action *and* a judgment that *p*?[16]

I think not. Earlier I pointed out that the unity of judgment that *p* is determined by the single proposition judged. If the conclusion of practical reasoning were a judgment that *p* that *is* an action, then the unity of that *action* would be determined by a single proposition. But Anscombe never says this.[17] Moreover, there are good reasons to deny this is her view. Much of *Intention* labors the point that intentional actions are unified, concrete wholes that are susceptible to *indefinitely many* apt descriptions under which what is done is intentional. At one stage Anscombe (2000, 29) argues explicitly that it is a mistake to seek a single privileged description that is supposed to be '*the* description' of intentional action. But if she thought the conclusion of practical reasoning were a judgment that *p* that is an action, she should have no complaint about seeking *the* description of intentional action, for *the* description would be straightforwardly given in *p*. Actions would then be pretty abstract: as abstract as the proposition *p*, which abstracts away from most features of the concrete action it describes, including the *other* descriptions under which the action is intentional.

Anscombe (2000, 60–61) does speak of conclusions of practical reasoning 'in a verbalised form'. Such conclusions are linguistically expressible, which might suggest they are something judged. But in fact this point cuts the other way. One uses circumlocutions when straightforward locutions falsify or mislead. If Anscombe thought that the conclusion of practical reasoning were a judgment that *p*, she would have just said so; there would be no need for cumbersome circumlocutions like 'conclusion in a verbalised form'. Even if some philosophers are happy to say, straightforwardly, that actions just *are* judgments that *p*, Anscombe herself refuses. I explain why she is right to refuse, and how one can relax one's guard on this refusal without giving it up, in section 6.4.

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Earlier I said that saying is 'first and foremost' when explaining what practical knowledge amounts to. But elsewhere, Anscombe seems to implicitly deny this. In another passage, she says practical knowledge can be construed, without much distortion, as a kind of *capacity*. Here the exercise of the capacity is not 'first and foremost' in *saying*, but rather in *doing*:

> 'Practical knowledge' is of course a common term of ordinary language, no doubt by inheritance from the Aristotelian philosophy. For that philosophy has conferred more terms on ordinary language than any other, in senses more, or less, approximating to those of Aristotle himself: 'matter', 'substance', 'principle', 'essence' come readily to mind; and 'practical knowledge' is one of them. A man has practical knowledge who knows how to do things; but that is an insufficient description, for he *might* be said to know how to do things if he could give a lecture on it, though he was helpless when confronted with the task of doing them. When we ordinarily speak of practical knowledge we have in mind a certain sort of general capacity in a particular field … In the case of practical knowledge the exercise of this capacity is nothing but the doing or supervising of the operations of which a man has practical knowledge. (Anscombe 2000, 88, underlines added)

There is no indication in the surrounding passages that Anscombe thinks the ordinary use of the term 'practical knowledge' is much different from hers. This is another reason to deny that Anscombe thinks practical knowledge is a judgment that *p*. Judgments that *p*, construed as 'internal sayings' of the kind the lecturer mentioned in this passage might make, presumably do have canonical exercise or expression in assertions, whereas practical knowledge has canonical exercise or expression in *doing*, rather than mere talking about doing.[18]

One final reason to deny that Anscombe thinks practical knowledge is a judgment that *p* comes from considering 'contemplative knowledge':

> Can it be that there is something that modern philosophy has blankly misunderstood: namely what ancient and medieval philosophers meant by *practical knowledge*? Certainly in modern philosophy we have an incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge. 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. 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 must be 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. (Anscombe 2000, 57)

There is an implied contrast here. In the background to this passage is a conception of judgment that *p* as 'answerable to the facts', where the facts are prior and determine whether the judgment is knowledge. *Anscombean* practical knowledge is not a (true) judgment that *p* whose epistemic status is

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fixed by prior facts; if it were, it would be a queer sort of contemplative knowledge.

These points together give good reasons to deny that Anscombe thinks practical knowledge is a judgment that *p* (i.e. a kind of 'saying' that *p*, whether by the mind or out loud), *especially* if the facts are supposed to be 'prior' and settle whether the judgment is knowledge.

This does not imply practical knowledge cannot have linguistic *expression*. Practical knowledge does have linguistic expression, when one says what one is doing, or what one did, or what one will do, or when one gives one's reasons for action, or when one describes the product one is making, or has made, or will make. Given Anscombe's explanation of precisely why she calls statements like '[I'm] opening the window' knowledge, quoted above, practical knowledge probably *must* have linguistic expression in true claims, if it is to count as genuine knowledge, for talkative creatures like us.

Let me draw an analogy to make sense of this. Acquaintance has linguistic expression. Suppose I know you, and this acquaintance involves non-accidental agreement of my mind with you. This acquaintance has apt expression in non-accidentally true claims like 'Yes, I know you; I met you last year in XYZ'. Perhaps acquaintance must have linguistic expression, for talkative creatures like us, because we can't stop blabbing about the things we know. But we need not *therefore* reduce acquaintance to a judgment that *p*, or a set of judgments that *p, q, r*, etc. There are respectable views on which it is a mistake to try and reduce acquaintance to some kind of judgmental knowledge (e.g. Russell 1910–11). I am suggesting something similar for practical knowledge. Like acquaintance, practical knowledge is not *itself* a judgment that *p*, even though it does (perhaps *must*) have linguistic expression in (non-accidentally) true claims.

Let me summarize. I have argued that Thompson-style views are wrong, because they don't make sense of the importance Anscombe ascribes to the distinction between mistakes in performance and mistakes in judgment. Thompson-style views can't be saved by appeal to a special kind of judgment that *p* which constitutes one's practical knowledge, because Anscombe doesn't think practical knowledge is a judgment that *p*.[19] This is so, even though practical knowledge has linguistic expression, and perhaps *must* have expression in (non-accidentally) true claims, if it is to count as genuine knowledge for talkative creatures like you and me.

6. An alternative interpretation

Let me try for a positive alternative interpretation. My aim is to show that this interpretation is plausible, not that it defeats all imaginable objections.

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6.1. *Practical knowledge as capacity and as exercise of capacity*

If my argument in section 3 is sound, Anscombe must be speaking in the voice of an interlocutor when she says her knowledge 'would have been the same' even in the case where she doesn't do what she intends. Eylem Özaltun (2016) notes that Wittgensteinian interlocutors are typically not idiots; they usually get *something* right, but in a more or less distorted way. My reading preserves this thought: the interlocutor gets something right and something wrong.

What does the interlocutor get right? Anscombe's practical knowledge 'would have been the same' in one sense, because, as I mentioned before, practical knowledge can be construed, without much distortion, as a *capacity*. Like capacities generally, the capacity that is practical knowledge is independent of any particular exercise of the capacity. Consider salt's capacity to dissolve in water. This capacity is independent of whether a given sample of salt ever exercises the capacity in question. Similarly for practical knowledge. The capacity to write 'I am a fool' etc. such that the action exhibits an order of practical reasoning is independent of whether that capacity is exercised (perfectly or imperfectly) on some occasion.

What does the interlocutor get wrong? The interlocutor implies Anscombe's practical knowledge would have been *exactly* the same even if Anscombe had failed to do what she intended. But that thought seems compelling only when we bracket one of the job descriptions of practical knowledge. Practical knowledge is not simply a capacity to do a special kind of thing. It is also supposed to be a special kind of knowledge *of* what I do on a particular occasion. That is to say: practical knowledge is at once a *capacity* to do something rational (i.e. something that exhibits a particular order of practical reasoning) and also an *exercise* of a capacity to know particular actions.

Crucially, an exercise of such a capacity to know particular actions might be *perfect* or *imperfect*. In the good cases, where she succeeds, Anscombe's practical knowledge is *both* a *capacity* to do something rational and a *perfect exercise* of a generic capacity to know what she does on an occasion in a special way. But in the bad cases, where she makes a mistake in performance, these things come apart. The same capacity to write 'I am a fool' on the board with one's eyes shut might be present, but that *capacity* would not, on those occasions, be a *perfect exercise* of a generic capacity to know what she does, because there is no relevant particular action to be known. If we said, in the bad cases, 'Anscombe has practical knowledge *of* writing "I am a fool" on the board with her eyes shut', where it is clear that it is a particular *one-off action* that is the purported object of such knowledge, we would say something false, because there is no such object.[20] On the unsuccessful occasions, the relevant capacity that is her practical knowledge would at best be an

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imperfect exercise of her capacity to know particular actions (in a special, first-personal, non-observational, non-inferential way).[21]

The idea that a *capacity* could itself be the *exercise* of another capacity is not new. The first use of this general idea that I know of is in Aristotle (1993) *De Anima* 417a22ff, in his discussion of first and second potentiality and actuality. There Aristotle suggests, for example, that a first actuality of knowing grammar *just is* a second potentiality to think of particular grammatical things on occasions. Aristotle's distinction is not the same as mine. But given Anscombe's debt to Aquinas and Aristotle, the general idea that a capacity could, in some case, simply *be* the exercise of another capacity would not, I think, be metaphysically alarming to Anscombe. She might even take it for granted, on the assumption that any philosopher of mind worth her salt would have carefully read *De Anima*.

Why say that there are *two* capacities in play: that is, why say that the relevant capacity to do something rational is the (perfect or imperfect) exercise of a *distinct* capacity to know particular actions? Couldn't Anscombe think these supposedly distinct capacities are, in some sense, the same? Rödl (2007), for example, thinks that practical knowledge of writing 'I am a fool' (etc.) is the act of a *single* power to do something rational *self-consciously* (i.e. in *the knowledge* that I do so). The two capacities I keep separate (although one is, supposedly, the *exercise* of the other) seem to be one capacity for Rödl (2007). Couldn't Anscombe's view be similar?

Let's compare the 'two capacity' and 'one capacity' views. Both views can acknowledge that in different cases, the same capacity to do something rational might be a perfect or imperfect exercise of a capacity to know something. In that way, they can both preserve the idea that Anscombe's interlocutor gets something right and something wrong.[22] Both views can acknowledge that one cannot have practical knowledge *of* writing 'I am a fool' (etc.) if one does no such thing, even if one can have practical knowledge in the 'capacity to do [etc.]' sense. The main difference seems to be just that the 'one capacity' view maintains that terms like 'capacity to do [etc.]' and 'capacity to know [etc.]' are merely different labels for *one and the same capacity*, while the 'two capacity' view denies this.

Despite their similarities, I do not think it plausible to attribute a 'one capacity' view to Anscombe. The 'one capacity' view presupposes a surprising metaphysics of powers that is not plausibly present in Anscombe's sparse remarks about powers. (In what follows I use 'power' and 'capacity' interchangeably, and 'act' and 'exercise' interchangeably.)

Most philosophers who write about powers think that they are partly individuated by what they are powers to do. Anscombe (2000, 88) seems to agree: 'if we hear of a capacity it is reasonable to ask what constitutes an exercise of it'. Call this a *pedestrian* view of powers. On a pedestrian view, powers are *distinct* from their exercises: there is no such thing as a

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'self-determining' power to do *itself*. As Rödl (2007, 152–3) puts it, if we are tempted to collapse the distinction between power and act, which is proper to the powers of finite subjects like you and me, we should instead move to different categories and speak of *pure act* (as one might if one were trying to characterize divine acts).

The 'two capacities' view is pedestrian in spirit. It doesn't say that sometimes a capacity is an exercise *of itself*. But the 'one capacity' view *must* say this.[23] Consider the relevant capacity to write 'I am a fool' (etc.) It is also an exercise (perfect or imperfect) of a capacity to know action. But the two labels are of the same thing. Substituting in, the capacity to write 'I am a fool' (etc.) is an *exercise of itself*.

The language of such 'self-determining' powers is distinctively Hegelian. Rödl is clearly inspired by Hegel, and in his later work, Rödl (2018) explicitly disavows an exclusively pedestrian view of powers.[24] Rödl thinks that the power of knowledge, which presumably includes practical knowledge, is not one power amongst many, distinguished from other particular powers by a specification of what it is a power to do. The power of knowledge is of a quite different order: it is not *a* power, but rather '*the* power *überhaupt*'. I think this exciting (puzzling!) conclusion is quite natural when systematically thinking through what it could possibly mean to say that something *is* its own exercise. But we simply don't find this kind of claim about powers in Anscombe's work, so we should not confuse Anscombe (2000) with Rödl (2018). Anscombe (2000, 87) does say that, under certain strict conditions, practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands. But she never says, or even suggests, that practical knowledge is the cause, effect, or exercise of *itself*. If she thought something so puzzling and exciting I don't think she would have held back from saying so. So the 'two capacities' view seems more plausible overall, in part because it is less adventurous.[25]

6.2. *Why invoke Theophrastus's distinction?*

Why does Anscombe say 'On the other hand, the mistake is in the performance, not in the judgment' at the end of the Crucial Passage?

First, the sentence reminds us that practical knowledge is *no kind of judgment*, so failure to practically know what I do is similarly *no kind of mistaken judgment*.[26] This interpretation is confirmed by the second mention of the distinction between kinds of mistake in the book, where Anscombe says that mistaken judgments are cases where what one says is supposed to describe what is the case, but does not do so (Anscombe 2000, 57). Here we see Anscombe's informal definition of judgment at work: judgment is a saying that *p* (whether internal or external) that is supposed to describe what is the case. Practical knowledge is not like *that*, even though it *is* linguistically expressible.

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Second, the sentence *accommodates* the natural complaint about a 'funny sort of knowledge' without conceding that practical knowledge is a kind of judgment. The reason Anscombe begins with 'On the other hand…' rather than something more dismissive is that she admits *something* has gone wrong with one's knowledge when one fails to do what one intends. It is just that *what* has gone wrong is not well explained in terms of a mistaken judgment (at least in this case).

Third, the sentence alludes to an interesting form of *intelligible error*. Earlier in the book, Anscombe says there is point in speaking of knowledge only when there is room for intelligible error, registered in the gap between 'He knows' and 'He merely *thinks* he knows' (Anscombe 2000, 14). Mistakes in performance show there is another way to 'merely think' one knows – a kind of failure in practice or production – that is *quite distinct* from *all* the usual ways that judgments are mistaken. If so, then some cases of merely thinking one knows are *not* (as such) cases of having a mistaken judgment. This conclusion is confirmed by the first mention of the distinction between kinds of mistake in the book, where Anscombe uses the distinction to suggest there are more ways of saying what's false than *lying* or *being mistaken* (Anscombe 2000, 4–5). The analogous claim would be that there are more ways of *merely thinking* one knows than having a mistaken judgment. I return to the air of paradox in this in section 6.4.

The definite article in 'not in the judgment' suggests that when she fails to write 'I am a fool' (etc.) there is some non-mistaken judgment in the area. Thompson at least had a story about that judgment. What's my story?

I don't need a story. 'The judgment' primarily refers to where you might *think* the mistake must lie, *if* you have the mistaken view that knowledge of any kind is a judgment that *p*. But practical knowledge is not a judgment that *p*.

Beyond that, 'the judgment' is also an indirect reference to the idea that there can be mistakes in performance even when the agent's relevant judgments are all true, and their practical reasoning 'valid'.[27] Very often a mistake in performance is explained by a false judgment. For example, I might judge that a package contains butter, when it contains margarine. My false judgment explains my mistake in my performance of shopping for butter. But not every mistake in performance is explained by a false judgment. Anscombe (2000, 57) gives an example of an agent who says 'Now I press Button A' as an expression of intention, but who instead presses Button B, where this is the 'direct falsification' of what is said. This is plausibly an example of a mistake in performance that turns on no mistake in judgment: one might just be *clumsy*, having no illusions about where the buttons are, which button is which, and so on. (That is what is 'direct' about this falsification; it is not mediated by a false judgment.) The original case from the *Magna Moralia* involves a true judgment about how to spell a word. The point of mentioning mistakes in performance there is to remind us that even when all the intellectual details

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are in fine order, it is still possible to do something wrong (i.e. to make a mistake in performance). After all, we are intellectual creatures, but also clumsy, careless, forgetful, distractible creatures, and when these latter conditions are present there need not be any specifically *intellectual* (i.e. *judgmental*) failing. (This is not to deny that sometimes we do something wrong because of specifically intellectual failing.)

6.3. *The contents of practical knowledge*

What is the content of practical knowledge? Answering this question requires attending to points of detail I have systematically suppressed, in the name of ease of exposition.

I said that when Anscombe fails to write 'I am a fool' etc. there is no relevant particular action to be known. That was an oversimplification. Anscombe says 'What is necessarily the rare exception is for a man's performance in its more immediate descriptions not to be what he supposes.' (Anscombe 2000, 87). Action, for Anscombe, is a unified whole, susceptible to many apt descriptions, many of which might express the agent's practical knowledge (at least, when things go well, and the descriptions are *true*). So often the agent still has *some* practical knowledge of what she does even when she makes a mistake in performance, although she won't have *as much* practical knowledge of what she does as she would if all went well. Setiya (2008, 24–25) makes this kind of point in terms of more basic descriptions. Perhaps Anscombe does not know, in the case where there is a problem with the chalk or the surface, that she writes 'I am a fool' on the board with her eyes shut, because she does no such thing. Still, she probably knows (practically) something *more instrumentally basic*, such as that she presses hard with chalk (in order to write 'I am a fool' etc.).[28]

I concede the general point. This means that the question 'What is *the* content of practical knowledge?' is a bad question, because this question presupposes that practical knowledge has one (unique) content in every case of intentional action. If it has one content then presumably it would be a long, conjunctive *false* content in cases where one makes a mistake in performance. We cannot easily make sense of having *more* or *less* practical knowledge this way; if *p* is false, and that is the content of my purported knowledge, then I don't know that *p* (period). A better question would be 'Which *contents* are (contents of) apt expressions of practical knowledge in various cases?' In the case imagined, where Anscombe fails to write what she intends, contents like '[I'm] pressing hard with the chalk' may be on the list, because Anscombe does just that; contents like '[I'm] writing "I am a fool" on the board with my eyes shut' will not, because Anscombe does no such thing.

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What about progressive claims, of the 'I am *A*-ing' form? If there are progressive claims that are *always* apt expressions of practical knowledge, no matter how much one fails, we might then be justified in ignoring the non-progressive expressions of practical knowledge as somehow secondary, because they do not reach to the fundamental *exceptionless* phenomenon Anscombe is trying to describe. But we have already seen that Anscombe has a different attitude to the truth conditions of progressive claims than Thompson does. When Anscombe makes the relevant mistake in performance, the claim 'I am writing "I am a fool" on the board with my eyes shut' is *false*, because she is not achieving, and has not achieved, any of the relevant results. So that description will not be on the list of apt expressions of practical knowledge on that occasion.

6.4. *Practical knowledge and other kinds*

Practical knowledge is a capacity to do something that exhibits intelligence and rationality in action, so it seems similar to knowledge-how. Practical knowledge is also linguistically expressible in (non-accidentally) true claims, so it seems similar to knowledge-that. So which is it?

Practical knowledge is not knowledge-how. Ordinary knowledge-how is a generic capacity that is not occasion-specific, and is not well described as knowledge *of* a particular action. The builder knows how to build buildings (and not merely in the lecturing way). But this knowledge is not tied down to any specific project or occasion of building, nor does it purport to be knowledge of a particular action. Sometimes one expresses such knowledge by saying, for example, 'I know how to build *this*.' But usually this really means 'I know how to build *this kind of thing* (though I may not have settled all the details yet, and may never do so.)' Practical knowledge, by contrast, depends on the *particular* order of practical reasoning that the agent has settled on a *particular occasion*. That is why practical knowledge *can be* knowledge of what I do on an occasion. Relatedly, I can have knowledge-how to do something regardless of what I intend, but I can only have practical knowledge of doing something if I intend to do so.

So: practical knowledge is not knowledge-how, if knowledge-how is generic and independent of intention in the sense explained. That said, philosophers redefine terms to suit theory building as easily as professional models change clothes. If we redefine knowledge-how as *any* capacity to do something that exhibits intelligence and rationality, whether independent of intention or not, then practical knowledge is a species of knowledge-how. But we should resist this urge towards unifying abstraction. On the proposed redefinition, 'knowledge-how' is roughly synonymous with 'intelligent capacity', of which skill, *ordinary* knowledge how, and practical knowledge, are all species. We'd do better to use 'intelligent capacity' for the abstract

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genus that captures what these things have in common, and retain the ordinary sense of 'knowledge-how', *because* it makes sense of the substantive differences between skill, *ordinary* knowledge-how, and practical knowledge. Redefining 'knowledge-how' as too abstract robs the term of substantive metaphysical content, and risks losing sight of genuine disagreements about the nature and kinds of knowledge there can be.

Practical knowledge is not knowledge-that. The unity of ordinary knowledge-that *p* is determined by the proposition known. Although there may be many natural language expressions of *p*, they all co-vary in their truth conditions. That is why ordinary knowledge-that is closely associated with *testimony*: it is usually the kind of thing one can easily *wholly* communicate to another by *telling* them in a single, complete, true claim. Practical knowledge is different, because its unity is not determined by a single proposition, but by a single particular order of practical reasoning (i.e. a practical syllogism).[29] That is the main reason why there are many different apt linguistic expressions of practical knowledge, as I argued in section 6.3 above, and why one often has to ask someone *why* they are doing what they are doing in order to more fully appreciate what they practically know. The different expressions of practical knowledge often differ in their truth-conditions. So we cannot think of practical knowledge as a relation to *a* proposition.

One might object that we can think of practical knowledge as a relation to a proposition, so long as that proposition is very long and conjunctive in form. But we have already dealt with this proposal in section 6.3; it will fail to be extensionally adequate, because it cannot make sense of the idea of having more or less practical knowledge depending on the occasion and what one actually does.

So: practical knowledge is not knowledge-that, if knowledge-that is a relation to *a* true proposition (whether simple or long and conjunctive).

One might object that we could easily redefine knowledge-that as any act (state, event, etc.) of mind whereby the mind non-accidentally agrees with some object, and which involves (consists in; etc.) a relation to a *set* of propositions, all of which correspond to apt expressions of that knowledge in a natural language. One might then let the set expand or contract, depending on what the agent actually does, in order to accommodate the idea of having more or less practical knowledge on an occasion. But here again we see the same kind of urge to unifying abstraction that we saw in the case of assimilating practical knowledge to knowledge-how. We should resist that urge.

If we redefine knowledge-that as *any* act (state, etc.) of mind whereby the mind non-accidentally agrees with an object, and that agreement is aptly expressed in one or more complete claims, then practical knowledge would be knowledge-that, but so too would acquaintance, or indeed *any* knowledge

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that is manifest in linguistic behavior. On this redefinition, 'knowledge-that' is roughly synonymous with 'linguistically expressible knowledge', of which acquaintance, testimonial knowledge, practical knowledge, perception, etc., are *all* species. Reasonable philosophers have reasonable disagreements about whether these are all species of propositional knowledge. We'd do better to use 'linguistically expressible knowledge' for the abstract genus that captures what these things have in common, and retain the ordinary sense of 'knowledge-that', *because* it makes sense of the substantive differences between acquaintance, *ordinary* knowledge-that (which is usually fit fodder for *complete* transmission in testimony), practical knowledge, and the rest. Redefining 'knowledge-that' as too abstract robs the term of substantive metaphysical content, and risks losing sight of genuine disagreements about the nature and kinds of knowledge there can be.

If these arguments are sound, then practical knowledge shares features with knowledge-how and knowledge-that, but is distinct from both, so it deserves its own epistemic category.

We can now see why it was legitimate to identify knowledge that *p* with judgment that *p*, as I did at the end of section 4. *Ordinary* knowledge that *p* is plausibly a judgment that *p*, even though linguistically expressible knowledge need not be.

We can also see why it is not really paradoxical for Anscombe to imply there are more ways of thinking what's not true than having a mistaken judgment. If there are linguistically expressible forms of *knowledge* that are not judgments that *p*, then presumably there are also linguistically expressible forms of *thought* that are not judgments that *p*. We may still refer to these forms of thought via their linguistic expressions, but we should not conclude that this points to a deep metaphysical fact. For example: in the unsuccessful case, Anscombe merely thinks that she knows she writes 'I am a fool' etc. But this 'that-clause' does not reach to something metaphysically deep.

Once we have the distinction between linguistically expressible knowledge and ordinary knowledge-that in view, we can relax our guard about associating practical knowledge with 'knowledge-that'. As noted above, it is very difficult to avoid speaking of practical knowledge as a special kind of knowledge-that. But that is to be expected, and those locutions are quite legitimate, because to say this is merely to say practical knowledge is *linguistically expressible*, and to say *this* need not be to say practical knowledge is *ordinary* 'knowledge-that'.

Similarly, there is nothing wrong in speaking of an agent having many *pieces* of practical knowledge on an occasion, which they express in claims with different contents, so long as it is realized that to say this is to approach practical knowledge from the side of its varied linguistic expression, and *not* from the side of the unity and metaphysics of practical knowledge.

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7. Further directions

My focus has been on Anscombe's *Intention*. By way of concluding, let me list a few points of contact with secondary literature. My aim is to indicate promising avenues of further inquiry and debate.

Özaltun's (2016) reading of the Crucial Passage agrees with mine on many points. Mine differs in offering an explicit metaphysics that makes sense of 'what is the same' in one's practical knowledge in cases where one makes a mistake in performance. I also disagree with Özaltun's concluding remark that truth (*simpliciter*) is the aim of practical thinking, because this claim may mislead one into thinking that practical knowledge is a kind of judgment, although I will not pursue that matter here.

Campbell (2017) argues (against Velleman 1989; Setiya 2008) that the metaphysics of practical knowledge is distinct from that of belief; it rather depends on the mental state of intention. On my interpretation, only Campbell's first claim is correct. Belief is metaphysically closer to ordinary knowledge-that than to practical knowledge. But we need not force a contemporary conception of 'grounding mental states' on Anscombe to explain the difference in question, as Campbell does. Above I said that practical knowledge depends on a particular order of practical reason *and* on intention. For Anscombe, these dependence claims are not markedly different. Anscombe argues that intentions are not 'extra features' that make an event intentional, for example, by causing it in a special way (Anscombe 2000, 28–30). Instead, she says 'intentional' has reference to a form of description of events (Anscombe 2000, 84), where this form corresponds to the order of a particular piece of practical reasoning one finds when things are done with intentions (Anscombe 2000, 80). So Anscombe is not thinking of 'intention' as a term for a distinctive kind of mental state with a distinctive causal or grounding role, as Campbell suggests. For Anscombe, individual intentions are more like the *contents* that articulate the structure of the agent's practical reasoning; they characterize (the exercise of) a practical rational capacity in terms of content, not in terms of substantive metaphysical or ontological 'ground'.[30]

The idea that we could sometimes get by in metaphysics of mind and knowledge without a substantive conception of mental states that underwrites our claims is not often taken seriously, and leads to explanatory demands that Anscombe did not recognize. Schwenkler (2015), for example, argues that it is unsatisfying to say practical knowledge is the formal cause of what it understands without explaining how it is the cause of action in other (non-formal) ways. On my interpretation, the 'other ways' are captured by the fact that practical knowledge is a *capacity* to do something that exhibits rationality. But this does not require that we speak of practical knowledge 'guiding' action, as Schwenkler wants to do. 'Guidance' here is most naturally

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interpreted as 'guidance *by a mental state*' of the kind that Campbell also thinks one must posit. The claim that this kind of concern is foreign to Anscombe is confirmed by the absence of discussion in her work of how to account for the 'mechanics of mind' in terms of mental states and their causal ('guiding') role. The claim that such lack of concern is *defensible* is a topic for another occasion, but it is worth reflecting on what mental states can *do* (theoretically) that capacities and exercises of capacities cannot.

Turning from causation to content, Thompson (2011) is right that most of Anscombe's relevant examples are expressed in the present progressive. But not all of them are. Setiya (2016) notes that Anscombe also uses descriptions of past actions, and future actions, without blushing. She also uses simple present tense narrative (not habitual) descriptions of action, such as 'Now I press Button A', as descriptions that purport to be expressions of the agent's special knowledge of what she does on an occasion (Anscombe 2000, 57). We have already seen that even descriptions of features of a *product* (e.g. the builder's building) can be apt expressions of practical knowledge, if the agent has that knowledge.[31] This all makes sense on the suggested pluralistic way of conceiving of the *contents* of practical knowledge. We can be as blasé as Anscombe is about the *variety* of apt linguistic expressions of practical knowledge, because we do not expect the metaphysics to directly correspond (one-to-one) to that variety.

We can also see why it is tempting, but wrong, to say with Setiya that '[when] one has practical knowledge, what one knows in the first instance is a description of what one is doing' (Setiya 2016, 163). Practical knowledge is not primarily *of* a description; it is primarily *of* an action, *under* various descriptions. But because it is linguistically expressible, it is very natural to think of it primarily in terms of the descriptions through which we express it. (Similarly, Moran (2004) almost says what Setiya says, but refrains; on the current interpretation, we can also see why Moran should refrain.)

There are two important controversies about which I have said nothing. The first is the sense in which practical knowledge is the *formal cause* of what it understands (see especially Setiya 2016). The second is the sense in which practical knowledge is knowledge *of what is good* (see especially Rödl 2011). Connecting the current interpretation to these issues would require a detailed account of Anscombe's view of practical reasoning, which I defer to another occasion.

Notes

1. Unless noted otherwise, by 'practical knowledge' I mean *Anscombean* practical knowledge.
2. For textual support for these interpretive claims see Anscombe (2000, 50–51).

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3. It is controversial whether practical knowledge is *independent of what the agent actually does* (McDowell 2013; Özaltun 2016); whether one has it *whenever* one acts intentionally (Davidson [1978] 2000; Setiya 2007); whether it is only of *something present* or could be of something *past* or *future* (Setiya 2016; Thompson 2011); whether it is knowledge of *what is good* as well as being knowledge of *what I do* (2018; Rödl 2011; Tenenbaum 2009); whether it is the *cause* of what it understands (Paul 2011; Schwenkler 2015; Setiya 2016); how it is *related to observational or inferential knowledge* of what one is doing or what is happening (McDowell 2013; Moran 2004; Schwenkler 2015); how it is related to *other forms of self-knowledge*, such as knowledge of one's bodily movements and position (McDowell 2011; Moran 2004); how it is related to *know how* (Rödl 2011; Setiya 2016); how it is related to *belief* (Campbell 2017; Setiya 2008; Velleman 1989); etc.
4. For ease of exposition, I will sometimes speak of actions as if they were as numerous as their true descriptions. I return to actions and their descriptions in section 6.3.
5. For more on the role of such interlocutors in Anscombe's work see Özaltun (2016) and Wiseman (2016, 69–70).
6. Some processes don't seem to be essentially incomplete. If one is walking to the store, the process is incomplete until one has reached the store, but then the process is over. If one is walking as such, with no goal or time period in mind, then the process doesn't seem incomplete, as there is no finite measure for its completion. To the extent that the central cases relevant to agency all involve *determinate* change, Thompson is justified in focusing on incomplete processes.
7. Thompson (2011, 210) says that one-off actions, like Davidson's carbon copier case, may not illustrate cases where practical knowledge is in view, depending on how unlikely success is, whether there is opportunity to go back and try again, and so on. He might object that writing 'I am a fool' on the board with one's eyes shut is like that. It is hard to reconcile this claim with Anscombe's text, when the point of the surrounding paragraphs is to discuss practical knowledge, so I will assume Thompson thinks that practical knowledge *is* in view in this case.
8. Thompson (2011) is the best representative of Thompson-style views. For Thompson, the object of practical knowledge is something going on in the world: a material process. Other Thompson-style views settle for something less than this, such as what the agent intends, or what the agent is trying to do (whether or not anything relevant is actually going on). Anscombe clearly doesn't want to settle for something short of what the agent *does* (Anscombe 2000, 52).
9. Some readers of earlier versions of this paper were concerned that I may have slightly mischaracterized Thompson's position. I have certainly simplified it a little. The view I outline here is supposed to be representative of a promising, but ultimately mistaken, reading of Anscombe. I have no *deep* concern with Thompson interpretation in this paper.
10. This way of putting things is not supposed to rule out 'knowledge-first' views about knowledge, such as Williamson (2000). 'Judgment' need not be synonymous with '(mere) belief'.

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11. Rödl (2018) denies that knowledge is a propositional attitude, so would probably also deny that practical knowledge is 'knowledge-that'. He does not present this view of practical knowledge as a reading of Anscombe.
12. This threatens to make knowledge of opening the window (*simpliciter*) inferential, because it is inferred by simplification from the conjunctive fact that I am opening the window *because* I am making the room more comfortable, where only the latter is what is *really* non-inferentially, practically known. I pass over this difficulty.
13. Anscombe (2000, 80) says practical reasoning 'describes an order which is there whenever actions are done with intentions'. So she is not thinking of practical reasoning primarily as a *process*, such as a process of explicit deliberation, as many philosophers do these days: practical reasoning describes an *order* that makes sense of action in a distinctive way. That order *can* be present in explicit prior processes of deliberation, but it need not, and it is primarily present in actions rather than prior deliberations.
14. 'Outcome' suggests the results of a process, but Anscombe doesn't think of practical reasoning primarily in terms of a process (see previous note). By 'based' I mean 'explained by a set of reasons', on the assumption that there are both *reasons to think true* and *reasons for action* (so 'based' does *not* mean '*epistemically* based' as that term is commonly used).
15. Anscombe's (2000, 59–60) main qualification instead concerns whether Aristotle is right to suggest that theoretical reasoning is only about things that are invariable.
16. Cf. Rödl (2007), who says action is thought that *is* a movement, and Frost (2014), who says intentional action *is* a particular thought that *p* in the form of an event. Both views are partly inspired by Anscombe in different ways.
17. Anscombe (2000, 3) does suggest that it is merely due to convention that we do not say commands are true when executed. So perhaps imperatives have the same unity as judgments that *p*. But she never claims imperatives are *actions*.
18. Of course some doings *are* sayings, but these are special cases. See Anscombe (2000, 82–83).
19. What if one defined judgment as a 'conclusive' exercise of a rational capacity, and explicitly noted that *some* such exercises (i.e. the practical ones) don't have propositional objects? Marcus (2012; 66 fn 1), for example, seems to implicitly lean towards this kind of view. Apart from the fact that Anscombe nowhere clearly uses 'judgment' this way, the suggestion is irrelevant to the objection from section 4, which presumes practical knowledge is a judgment that *p*.
20. By 'one-off action' I mean a stunt where repeated attempts are impossible given one's end. (Many stunts wouldn't really be *stunts* if one could just try again until one succeeds). There need not be significant risk of failure; if the stunt were too risky, one might doubt whether success counts as intentional action rather than a lucky accident.
21. Is practical knowledge a capacity that gives knowledge of its own exercise? If one means 'always gives knowledge', then no. If one means 'in the good cases, gives knowledge', then yes, except that this form of words may mislead, because it suggests giving something *else* distinct from the capacity itself. A better slogan would be: practical knowledge is a capacity that, in the good

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cases, *is* knowledge of its own exercise. Thanks to Julia Peters for pressing me to address this issue.

22. If the 'one capacity' view could not do this, it would not work as a reading of Anscombe, and we could dismiss it.
23. I am very grateful to two anonymous referees for bringing this to my attention in quite different ways. Both raised subtle suggestions about alternative interpretations that reject the claim that the relevant capacities are distinct. I hope they will forgive me for 'cutting to the chase' as I see it (i.e. abstracting away from the subtleties), and identifying what I think is the unifying *metaphysical* problem with such interpretations of Anscombe.
24. I think this marks an important break between Rödl (2018) and Rödl (2007). Rödl (2007) does not say much that conflicts with an exclusively pedestrian account of powers, and seems to insist on a relatively clear distinction between power and act. But one cannot preserve such an exclusively pedestrian account if one thinks through the idea of what Rödl (2007) described as a *self-conscious* power of *knowledge*. That is why Rödl (2018, 111–127) devotes a whole chapter to explaining what he means by 'power' in 'the power of knowledge'; it is something *new, non-pedestrian* and *deeply important*.
25. As a rule of thumb, I think it's usually best to treat Anscombe's work as a relatively conservative extension of the work of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Wittgenstein, rather than as, say, revolutionary work in a Hegelian Spirit. That said, it's worth noting that the 'two capacities' view can accept the Rödlian slogan that practical knowledge is a capacity to do something rational that is exercised *self-consciously*. It is only when we dig down into what that slogan *means*, and consider the puzzling idea of a 'self-determining' power that is its own exercise, that we might encounter trouble.
26. There are of course *non*-practical ways to fail to know what I do that consist in mistaken judgments, as when I jump to a conclusion that does not really follow from my evidence.
27. See Anscombe ([1989] 2005) on 'practical validity'.
28. Even when she does not know that she is writing 'I am a fool', because she does no such thing, Anscombe probably knows, in a very weak sense, that she is *trying* to write 'I am a fool'. There are reasons to deny that 'I'm trying to *A*' is an apt form of expression of practical knowledge. Apt expressions of practical knowledge correlate with elements of an order of practical reason. Elements of an order of practical reason are things that the agent thinks are (plausibly) sufficient means to ends in the circumstances. Descriptions of the form 'I'm trying to *A*' are usually too abstract to be apt descriptions of *sufficient* means to ends. After all, it is of the nature of such 'trying' to leave open whether or not trying to *A* is sufficient for *A*-ing; it would be a peculiarly stupid agent who would think of things that are not (plausibly) sufficient means to ends as if they were. That said, it's clear such 'trying' descriptions directly mirror the structure of practical reasoning, which is why they are always (easily!) available. To reflect this, one might call assertions of the form 'I'm trying to *A*' expressions of the *form* of potential practical knowledge on an occasion, rather than expressions of practical knowledge as such, because the crucial substantive content (i.e. actually *doing* the thing that is one's end or means) is left out or left open. It's only when one's *end* is similarly formal (e.g. one aims not to *A* as such, but to *merely try to A*) that such assertions would be apt

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expressions of practical knowledge as such; but these would be rare special cases.

29. A qualification: the unity of *potential* practical knowledge of what one does is determined by a practical syllogism; the extent to which that potential is *actual* depends on what the agent actually does.
30. Cf. Hyman's (2015, 129) definition of intention as an abstract *content* of desire (rather than a mental state).
31. This makes sense given my reading of Anscombe's attitude to the truth-conditions of progressive claims. The builder practically knows what the house is like because practical knowledge of what one is doing *includes* knowledge of relevant achieved results. On Thompson's view, such knowledge must be inferential; a combination of thought of something progressive and some other thoughts about what *has been achieved*. Thompson must say that Anscombe makes a clumsy mistake in saying that the builder expresses (purely present, non-inferential) practical knowledge when he says what the house is like. The sting of saying one can have spontaneous, non-observational, non-inferential knowledge of achieved results is much reduced if one also notes that one can *only* have such knowledge if one does in fact achieve those results.

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