

Knowledge Aided by Observation*

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1. According to G.E.M. Anscombe, knowledge “in intention”—“the knowledge that a man has of his intentional actions”—is not “knowledge by observation”.¹ But Anscombe does not deny that observation-knowledge can play a role in knowledge in intention. She asks, rhetorically:

isn't the role of all our observation-knowledge in knowing what we are doing like the role of our eyes in producing successful writing? That is to say, once given we have knowledge or opinion about the matter in which we perform intentional actions, our observation is merely an aid, as the eyes are an aid in writing.²

She seems to think that, even though knowledge in intention is not knowledge by observation, it can be *aided* by such knowledge. How should we understand this?

2. I think this is an important, and a difficult question. We can begin to appreciate its importance, and its difficulty, by considering a recent essay by John McDowell.³

3. According to McDowell, we must allow for the possibility of cases in which knowledge in intention is aided by observation-knowledge, because we must allow for the possibility of knowledge in intention being knowledge of “happenings in objective reality”⁴. When it is knowledge of such a “happening”, it may need to be so aided, precisely so that it can have such a “happening” as its object. McDowell hereby takes himself to oppose a different conception of knowledge in intention, which refuses to allow for the possibility of its being so aided—“intention alone ... unaided by observation or other receptive ways of acquiring knowledge”⁵ always suffices for it—and, as a result, refuses to allow for the possibility of its being knowledge of such a “happening”.

4. One puzzling feature of McDowell's essay is that no reader of Anscombe will deny that there may be cases in which knowledge in intention is aided by observation-knowledge.

* Thanks to Anton Ford and Matthias Haase for very helpful discussion.

¹ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 50.

² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³ John McDowell, “How receptive knowledge relates to practical knowledge” (MS).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

5. Another puzzling feature is the idea of “happenings in objective reality”. We are told that the idea of such a “happening” is the idea of “an instance of a kind of thing whose instances are knowable observationally”.⁶ But no reader of Anscombe will deny that—in some sense—there may be cases in which what is known in intention can also be known by observation.

We arrive at something that a reader of Anscombe might intelligibly wish to deny with the claim that a “happening” is not something repeatable, but *a particular*.⁷ The idea of a particular is the idea of something bounded. So, the idea of a happening would seem to be the idea of something temporally bounded—something completed.⁸ Consider a happening of the sort that concerns McDowell: an agent’s (intentional) opening of a window. If there is such a happening, then the agent has *opened* the window. When the agent was *opening* it, there was no such happening. (The happening was coming to be. But it was not.)

Given this, let me hazard the following suggestion: to have knowledge of a “happening” (of the sort that concerns McDowell) is to know what an agent has *done*.

This might seem wrong. As McDowell stresses, knowledge in intention is knowledge of what an agent is *doing*—something in progress, not something completed. We might think that, therefore, it cannot be knowledge of what an agent has done. But that would be a mistake. It is not incoherent to think that knowledge in intention can be, as such, knowledge of what an agent is doing *and* knowledge of what she has done. The idea would be that, in knowing in intention that she is doing something, *A*, the agent knows that she has done something—not *A*, of course, but something else, *A_I*, done in the course of doing *A*.

6. There are reasons to think that, whenever an agent is doing something, *A*, she has done something else, *A_I*. We find these reasons in a recent discussion by Sebastian Rödl.⁹

Rödl’s topic is the predication of (what he calls) *movement forms*. These are amongst the things that agents can be said to be doing, in that they sustain the contrast between being in progress and being completed. But their central mark, for present purposes, is that if an agent is doing one of them then she can be interrupted in the course of what she is doing.¹⁰ An agent who is doing *A* but is interrupted in the course of so doing has not done *A* when she is interrupted. But she must have done something, *A_I*. For if she has not done anything, then she was not doing anything. And if she was not doing anything, then she could not have been

⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

⁷ Ibid., p. 4-5, n. 2.

⁸ On this point, see Michael Thompson, “Naive Action Theory”, in his *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁹ Sebastian Rödl, *Categories of the Temporal: An Enquiry into the Forms of the Finite Intellect* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), chapter 5.

¹⁰ The pronoun carries the unwanted implication, in this context, that the agent of a movement form must be at least sentient. In fact, the point holds more generally than this. But a more restricted focus is, I hope, harmless in the present context, in which the primary concern is with agents who are not merely sentient, but rational.

interrupted. This point holds whether or not the agent is interrupted. In general, if an agent is doing something, A , then she has done something, A_I .

In this conditional, the thought that an agent has done something is merely excogitated out of the thought that she is doing something. So, it would be wrong to think of the former as a distinct thought; rather, it is contained in the latter. What we have here is a single thought, which can be articulated both by means of the present-imperfective and by means of the past-perfective—and so, by means of the past-imperfective (for if an agent is doing something, then it can be said later that she was doing it). For this reason, Rödl speaks of the thought as exhibiting “the tripolar unity of aspect”: it is, as such, about what an agent *is doing*, *was doing*, and *has done*.

7. Perhaps there can be a kind of knowledge in intention that is not of something that can be interrupted, and so is not of a movement form.¹¹ But even if we countenance this, we surely cannot countenance that knowledge in intention is exhausted by it. We must allow for the possibility of knowledge in intention being knowledge of something an agent is doing which is such that, in doing this thing, A , the agent has done something else, A_I .

Perhaps it is possible for an agent to know in intention that she is doing A , and thereby to know that she has done *something*, without knowing *what* she has thereby done. But even if we countenance this possibility, we equally surely cannot countenance that knowledge in intention is exhausted by it. In what it is tempting to think must be the fundamental case, the agent, in knowing in intention that she is doing A , knows that she has done A_I . For example, in knowing in intention that she is opening a window, the agent knows that she has opened it some of the way; or, if not that, at least that she has unscrewed the lock; or, if not that, at least that she has unscrewed it some of the way ... Fundamental or not, it seems that we must, at the very least, allow for the possibility of cases of this sort.

Given this, if the idea of knowledge of a “happening” is the idea of knowledge of what an agent has done, then McDowell is surely right: knowledge in intention must be capable of being knowledge of a “happening”—for it must be capable of being knowledge of a movement form, and so must be capable of being knowledge not only of what the agent is doing, but of what the agent has done, in the course of so doing. That is how I propose to understand the idea of what it is to have knowledge in intention of a “happening”.

8. Against this background, we can make a distinction between two different kinds of case of knowledge in intention, understood as knowledge of a “happening”.

¹¹ Matthias Haase gives the following example: “I can truly [and knowledgeably] say ‘I’m walking from a to z ’ while I’m still sitting on the sofa with the plans in my hand” (“Knowledge and Error in Action”, MS).

In one kind of case, when an agent is doing something, she knows, throughout the whole course of doing the thing in question, not only what she is doing, but also how much of it she has done, and (so) how much of it she has still to do.

In another kind of case, when an agent is doing something, she knows what she is doing, but does not know, throughout the whole course of doing the thing in question, how much of it she has done, and (so) how much of it she has still to do.¹²

In the first kind of case, the agent is, throughout, in a position to answer such questions as “How is it going?” and “How much do you have left to do?” This is not true of the agent in the second kind of case. But the agent in the second kind of case will know some of what she has done, precisely because her knowledge is knowledge of a “happening”.

9. To understand the distinction between these two kinds of case, we should focus on a specific type of movement form—what Anton Ford calls *transaction*.¹³ Examples include: opening a window; moving a pump handle; ringing a bell; pushing a boulder (down a hill). These are cases in which an agent acts on a patient. (The contrast is with *self-movement*, in which the agent does not act on a patient, but moves herself.¹⁴)

When we focus on transactions such as these, it is natural to appeal to the idea of observation—specifically, the idea of visual perception—in order to fill out the distinction between the two kinds of case outlined in §8 above: the reason why an agent is in the cognitively privileged position which defines the first kind of case is because the patient is in the agent’s sights throughout the course of doing the thing in question; and correlatively, it is because the patient is not in the agent’s sights throughout the course of doing the thing in question in the second kind of case that the agent in this case is in a less cognitively privileged position. It seems to be, precisely, the presence or absence of observation-knowledge (specifically, visual knowledge) that makes the difference between these cases.

It is natural to place an ordinary case of window opening, such as the one Anscombe envisages¹⁵—in which the patient is in the agent’s sights throughout the course of doing the thing in question—in the first camp, and a case such as McDowell’s boulder-rolling case—in which the patient goes out of the agent’s sights (by going over the brow of a hill) part-way through doing so—in the second. (More generally, the idea of a case of the second kind is the

¹² “Throughout” and “whole” are the important words here. The idea is that there is at least a point at which the agent has done something, but does not know she has done it. To find out that she has done it, she may have to take a look. But even in a case of this kind, there will be many points at which the agent knows full well what she has done. In inviting us to imagine a case of this second kind, I am not inviting us to imagine someone who is doing something, and gets it done, but does not know, at any point, how much she has done. As we might put it: the case still exhibits the knowing what one is doing/was doing/have done structure, but in a somewhat attenuated form.

¹³ On this distinction, see Anton Ford, “Action and Passion” (MS).

¹⁴ Although the topic of self-movement falls outside the purview of this essay, I hope that what I shall eventually say about transaction will at least say something about what it is not (if not what it is).

¹⁵ Anscombe, op. cit., p. 51.

idea of a case that exemplifies the structure of Donald Davidson's carbon copy example¹⁶; McDowell is explicit about wanting his case to exemplify this structure.)

10. If, however, a case of each sort is equally to be a case of knowledge in intention, it must be that neither is a case of knowledge by observation. And this must be so even though it is—or at least, seems to be—essential to the difference between the two sorts of case that the agent in the first has observation-based knowledge that the agent in the second lacks. What could this mean? How can a case of the first sort be understood as a case of knowledge in intention—and so, not knowledge by observation—given that it seems to be precisely observation-knowledge which makes it the kind of case that it is (namely, a case in which the agent knows in intention, not merely that she is doing something, and not merely that she has done something, but how much she has done of what she is doing, throughout the course of doing it)? This is the understanding that I am after, in this essay.

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11. Our topic is the knowledgeable predication of a movement form, of a certain type (namely, a transaction), by the very agent of whom the movement form is predicated.

However, I think it will help, in the first instance, to abstract away from features specific to the predication of movement forms (such as the tripolar aspectual unity which Rödl isolates), and represent the knowledge which concerns us simply as knowledge of an object's falling under a certain concept, or determination, *F*.

12. It is a central thesis of Anscombe's that in knowledge in intention the concept, *F*, is predicated by the agent in a certain *form*, what Anscombe calls "the *form* of description of intentional actions". Knowledgeable predications bearing this form are not merely knowledge on the agent's part of something she is doing, but—typically at least—part of a *body* of knowledge of various things she is doing, the elements of which are connected

¹⁶ This might seem wrong, given that in the second kind of case the agent knows what she is doing; Davidson's example is usually thought of as a case in which the agent does not know what she is doing, even though she is (intentionally) doing it; for a recent example of such a reading, see John Gibbons, "Seeing What You're Doing", in Tamar Szabo Gendler and John Hawthorne (eds.) *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). But it seems that this is not how Davidson thinks of his example. He seems to think of it as a case in which the agent is (intentionally) doing something *right now*, but does not know that she is doing it *right now*. The knowledge which she lacks is temporally bounded in what is presumably meant to be a severe way; but the knowledge of what she is doing which she has, in both of our two kinds of case, is under no such temporal limitation. (That this is how Davidson thinks of his example is suggested by the context in which he introduces it: he considers the objection that a counterexample he has just offered to the thesis he wants to confute—an example concerning a man writing a will—fails to establish "that a man may *now* be" (intentionally) doing something without knowing that he is doing it *now* [his emphasis]; he offers his carbon-copy counterexample precisely in order to establish *this* claim, and thereby to undermine what we can, on this basis, take to be the thesis he wants to confute; see his "Intending" (1978), in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 92.)

together by that special “because” which is to be understood in terms of the rationalising connective “in order to”. These elements exemplify the so-called “A-D” order—the order of practical reasoning—that the application of the sense of the question “Why?” which Anscombe describes serves to display. As Anscombe puts it:

What is essential to this form is what is displayed by the results of our enquiries into the question “Why?” Events are typically described in this form when “in order to” or “because” (in one sense) is attached to their descriptions.¹⁷

To illustrate: the agent knows that she is pushing the window upwards *because* she is opening the window¹⁸ (for she knows that she is pushing it upwards *in order to* open it)—and this is only a partial specification of the body of knowledge in intention which she has. We might put the point by saying that knowledge bearing this form is knowledge had by an agent which is not merely of what she is doing but of why she is doing it, where the latter consists (typically, and integrally, but not I think exclusively) of knowledge of other things she is doing (namely, those things in order to do which she is doing the first thing).¹⁹

13. Moreover, the knowledge in question is *self-knowledge*: knowledgeable self-predication. It is knowledge that the agent *herself* is doing the relevant things—where “herself” is the so-called “indirect reflexive” which can only be explained in terms of the first person; it is knowledge which the agent could express by saying (for instance) “I am opening the window”; or, as we might put it, modifying Hector-Neri Castañeda’s notation, it is an agent’s knowledge of what she* is doing.²⁰ It is her knowledge that she* is *F*.

14. It is because knowledge in intention is self-knowledge that it cannot be knowledge by observation. Restricting ourselves to knowledge of the subject-predicate form which is our concern here, we can say that the mark of observation-knowledge is that, in it, the object (of the predication) is known by the predicating subject “from the outside”, or *as other*, whereas the mark of self-knowledge is that, in it, the object is known by the subject “from the inside”, or *as self*. These are two fundamentally different sorts of knowledge.²¹

¹⁷ *Intention*, pp. 84-5.

¹⁸ I am imagining that the window is a sash window, rather than (say) a casement window.

¹⁹ Here the things she is doing are movement forms—denizens of the category of movement, or *kinesis*. And it is at the very least arguable that the chain of “Why” questions which constitute the “A-D” order must terminate in something which does not belong to this category, but rather to the distinct category of activity, or *energeia*. On this point, see Sebastian Rödl, “The Form of the Will”, in Sergio Tenenbaum (ed.) *Desire, Practical Reason, and The Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). With this issue, we come up against the considerable topic of the relation between philosophy of action and ethics—a topic that lies outside the scope of this essay.

²⁰ Hector-Neri Castañeda, “‘He’: A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness”, *Ratio*, vol. 8 (1966): 130-57.

²¹ On the distinction between “from the inside” and “from the outside”, see Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); on the related distinction between knowledge as self and

The fundamental case of observation-knowledge is knowledge which rests directly on sensory affection; what is usually called perceptual knowledge: knowledge, had by a subject, to the effect that the object which she* is affected by is *F*. For a subject to be affected, in a certain sensory mode (the visual mode, for instance), by something which is *F* is for this subject to perceive that thing, in the relevant mode; so, we might equally say of perceptual knowledge that it is knowledge that the object which she* perceives is *F*. That is to give the general form of perceptual knowledge, whose verbal expression is typically via demonstratives (“This is *F*”). When a subject knows something in this form, she can draw inferences about that which she perceives, depending on what else she knows about what it is to be *F*; as I am using the term “perceptual knowledge”, this inference-involving knowledge is not perceptual knowledge, for it rests on sensory affection *indirectly* (in that it involves inference). But it is still observation-knowledge, precisely because the way the object figures in it is the way in which it figures in perceptual knowledge, namely, as other.

The reason why the object figures in observation-knowledge in *this* way is precisely because it is possible for the subject to know that that which she* is affected by is *F*, but not know that she* is *F*—even if that which she is affected by is herself (direct reflexive)—for it is not part of the very idea of affection that the one which affects is the same as the one which is affected. So, she can have observation-knowledge of an object’s falling under *F*, where she is the object in question, and yet still wonder: “Am *I F*?” But part of what it is for her to have self-knowledge of an object’s falling under *F*—knowledge that she* is *F*—is for that question to be foreclosed. For this reason, her knowledge that she* is *F* cannot be knowledge by observation.

15. However, it is not the case that every piece of knowledge which an agent could enjoy to the effect that she* is “doing” something—ringing a bell, say—is knowledge in intention. The following example of Anscombe’s helps to bring this out:

By the knowledge that a man has of his intentional actions, I mean the knowledge one denies having if when asked e.g. “Why are you ringing that bell?” one replies “Good heavens! I didn’t know *I* was ringing it!”²²

Here an agent comes to know (by being told) that she* is ringing a certain bell; but she does not thereby come to enjoy knowledge which bears the relevant form.

knowledge as other, see Sebastian Rödl, *Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), chapter 1.

²² *Intention*, pp. 50-1.

We can further bring out why not by considering a slightly modified version of this example, in which the agent comes to know that she* is ringing the bell, not by being told that she* is ringing it, but by coming to know by observation that she is.²³

In this example, the agent knows by observation that a bell is ringing. She then comes to know, also by observation:

(1) She is ringing the bell.

She knows:

(2) She* is she.

So, she can conclude from (1) and (2), and thereby know:

(3) She* is ringing the bell.

Here the agent has a piece of *mediated* self-knowledge. It is mediated in that it rests on an inference that involves what appears to be an identity-judgment, namely (2).²⁴ This inference comprises observation-knowledge. But it cannot be composed simply of knowledge by observation, precisely because its result is a piece of self-knowledge. The crucial judgment for ensuring this result is premise (2). It is knowledge that the agent might express by saying “I am this (living human) body”. And this knowledge cannot be by observation (as Anscombe says, “Nothing shows me that”²⁵). For our agent to have this knowledge is for her to know that things which are true of her—or as she might say: of “this body”—are things which she can predicate of herself (indirect reflexive).

16. Anscombe takes it for granted that an agent’s knowledge in intention that she* is *F* cannot be mediated self-knowledge. The agent must *directly* apprehend herself (indirect reflexive) falling under *F*—not through an inference comprising observational apprehension

²³ The specifically testimonial way of coming to know that she* is ringing the bell which Anscombe exploits introduces further complexities of its own, which it will be best to abstract away from for present purposes. These complexities turn, I think, on the possibility of a form of knowledge which is of an object other than oneself but is not a form of observation-knowledge—because in it the object figures not *as other*, but *as another*, that is, as a fellow subject—as “you”, as we might put it; this is knowledge which, I think, rests not on *being affected*, but on *being addressed*, a distinctive kind of nexus which one may bear to an other. I discuss this neglected (and, I think, fundamental) form of knowledge in my “On Address”, *Philosophical Topics* (forthcoming).

²⁴ That it is an identity judgment has been denied, most notably by Castañeda (in Hector-Neri Castañeda, “On the Phenomeno-Logic of the I”, *Proceedings of the 14th International Congress of Philosophy*, vol. 3 (1969): 260-6), and of course by Anscombe (in G. E. M. Anscombe, “The First Person” (1974), in her *Collected Papers*, vol. II: *Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982)).

²⁵ Anscombe, op. cit., p. 34.

of herself (direct reflexive) falling under it, together with a mediating apparent identity-judgment (premise (2)). And she thinks that, because the knowledge must be unmediated, there cannot be the kind of gap between the agent's falling under *F* and her knowing that she* falls under *F* which an inference—mediated by an apparent identity-judgment—is required to bridge. She thinks it is natural for “modern” philosophers to assume that there must be such a gap. But she insists that, on the contrary, if *F* is a concept that is fit to figure in unmediated self-knowledge—and so, in knowledge in intention—then the agent's falling under *F* is her bringing herself (indirect reflexive) under it.²⁶ There cannot be such a gap.

Once the claim that self-knowledge “in intention” must be unmediated is granted, it is at the very least *prima facie* plausible that there cannot be the gap she denies. For imagine there was such a gap. How then could the agent know, without mediation, that she* falls under *F*? It cannot be by falling under *F*; that is what it is for there to be the gap. And it seems that the only other candidate for unmediated knowledge is perceptual knowledge. But, as we saw in §14, that can only be knowledge that she falls under *F*, not that she* does—precisely because in it she knows its object as what she* is affected by, not as what she* is.

17. Given, then, that knowledge in intention is unmediated self-knowledge, Anscombe is right to think that the agent's falling under *F* is her knowing that she* does.

18. Knowledge in intention is, then, unmediated self-knowledge. That tells us that it is not observation-knowledge—for observation-knowledge is not self-knowledge. But that is not all. It also tells us one thing that its being “aided” by observation-knowledge *cannot* amount to: its resting on observation-knowledge in the inferential manner of the mediated self-knowledge of §15 above. Whatever it is for it to be aided by observation-knowledge, it must be consistent with the fact that knowledge in intention is unmediated self-knowledge.

19. So, we know one thing which “aiding” is not. We still do not know what it is.

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20. We might think that, in contrast to knowledge in intention, perceptual knowledge is, not unmediated self-predication, but unmediated *other*-predication. For in it the subject knows, without the mediation of even an apparent identity-judgment, that the object which she* is affected by is *F*; and, in knowing the object of predication in this way, she knows it as other.

²⁶ This is how to understand her remarks against “the contemplative conception of knowledge” (in *Intention*, p. 51), and her description of non-contemplative knowledge as not “derived from the objects known” (ibid., p.87).

In the case of unmediated self-knowledge, by contrast, the subject knows that she* is *F*; and, in knowing the object of predication in this way, knows it as self.

For her to have the first sort of knowledge is for her to know that she* bears a certain relation—the external relation of *being affected* (in a certain sensory mode)—to something which is *F*; that is to know the relation upon which other-knowledge rests, without mediation. By contrast, for her to have the second sort of knowledge is for her to know that she* bears a relation of a different sort—the internal relation of *being*—to something which is *F*; that is to know the relation upon which self-knowledge rests, without mediation.

It looks, then, as if perceptual knowledge and (unmediated) self-knowledge are two fundamentally different, and fundamentally irreconcilable, forms of cognition.

21. However, it is not the case that perceptual knowledge is, not unmediated self-predication, but unmediated other-predication. It is unmediated other-predication. But it is also, and equally, unmediated self-predication. A subject has perceptual knowledge just in case she knows that the object which *she** is affected by is *F*. And that is self-knowledge.

Moreover, it must be unmediated self-knowledge. For if it was mediated, it would need to rest on other-knowledge that she is affected by *F*. And this other-knowledge—“That this body is so affected”, as she might say—precisely because it is other-knowledge, must itself be, or at least inferentially rest on, perceptual knowledge which itself amounts to knowledge that she* is affected by something. It is because her mediated self-knowledge must rest on perceptual knowledge which itself amounts to knowledge that she* is affected by something that at least some self-knowledge of the subject’s affection by an object must be unmediated. No matter how much of this self-knowledge we attempt to squeeze into the category labelled “mediated”, some such self-knowledge must always remain outside.²⁷

22. We can say then that, in the fundamental case, perceptual knowledge is an act that is, as such, an act of unmediated self-knowledge *and* an act of unmediated other-knowledge.

At the risk of labouring the point: in bringing herself as self under the concept *being affected by an F*, the subject, equally, in this very act, brings an object under this very concept as other. This object might *be* the subject; the point does not concern numerical identity; the point is that, in this act of unmediated self-predication, the subject equally brings under the concept an object as other: as what she* is affected by, not as what she* is.

²⁷ It is for this reason, I think, that McDowell must be right to insist that sensory affection by an object is, itself, an actualisation of conceptual capacities. For if the subject has unmediated self-knowledge that she* is affected by an *F*, then—for the reasons given in §16—there cannot be a distinction between her falling under the concept *being affected by an F* and her bringing herself (indirect reflexive) under this concept. Her being affected by an *F* is her knowing that she* is. So, it must be an actualisation of her conceptual capacities—the very ones actualised in such knowledge. Those who oppose McDowell’s position on this, are, I think, confused about the kind of knowledge—the kind of self-knowledge—that perceptual knowledge is.

As what we have here is a case of relational predication, it might help to have a representation that brings this out: not “*Fa*”, but “*aRb*”. Or, better: “*she*Rb*” because this is an act which is, as such, an act of self-predication and an act of other-predication. As we might put it: it is an act of unmediated *self-and-other-predication*.

23. Perceptual knowledge is, then, as such, an act of unmediated self-and-other-knowledge: it is knowledge by observation—knowledge of an object as other; and, equally, it is self-knowledge—knowledge of an object as self. And what goes for perceptual knowledge goes for observation-knowledge (other-knowledge) in general, for observation-knowledge just is knowledge that either is, or inferentially rests upon, perceptual knowledge.

As we might put it: the phrases “observation-knowledge” and “self-knowledge” signify, not two distinct acts of knowledge, but two distinct aspects of a single act.

We said in §14 above that knowledge in intention cannot be knowledge by observation, precisely because it is self-knowledge. We are not now taking this back, but clarifying its meaning, by removing the appearance of one-sidedness which that formulation may invite. (There’s the bit where you say it, and the bit where you say it from the other side.) Knowledge in intention, considered simply as the act of self-knowledge it is, cannot be knowledge by observation. Just so, perceptual knowledge, considered simply as the act of self-knowledge *it* is, cannot be knowledge by observation. But that is only to consider perceptual knowledge under one of its aspects. For it is internal to perceptual knowledge that it has another aspect—and under this aspect, it is observation-knowledge.²⁸

Perhaps there is a species of knowledge in intention that is *merely* unmediated self-knowledge; which is not, as such, an act of other-knowledge.²⁹ But I want to suggest that there is at least a species of knowledge in intention that has the two aspects. Just as it is what it is for an act to be knowledge by observation that it is unmediated self-knowledge (under one of its aspects), so it is what it is for an act to belong to this species of knowledge in intention that it is knowledge by observation (under one of its aspects). This knowledge is not *merely* knowledge by observation; to think that would be to fall prey to one-sidedness. Rather, it is, as such, knowledge by observation and unmediated self-knowledge—in a way akin to that in which perceptual knowledge is knowledge with these two opposing aspects.

²⁸ We might say that knowledge by observation, considered simply as the act of self-knowledge it is, cannot be knowledge by observation. That paradoxical-sounding formulation is a way of bringing out that other-knowledge has another side to it, and that, considered simply from this side, it is not other- but self-knowledge.

²⁹ Perhaps this is how to understand McDowell’s idea of “pure practical knowledge” (McDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 18).

24. That, I want to suggest, is what it is for knowledge in intention to be *aided* by observation. It is for it to *be* knowledge by observation, under one of its aspects.³⁰

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25. Our topic is a species of knowledge in intention: a form of knowledge bearing the special formal features outlined in §12 above, in which a certain kind of movement form—a transaction—is self-predicated, without mediation, by an agent. I think this species of knowledge in intention is a species of self-and-other-knowledge. And I think this can be seen by reflecting on the formal character of its predicated concept, *transaction*.

The idea of transaction is not as such the idea of something known in intention. The sun's warming a stone is a transaction—a mere transaction; here the agent is the sun, and the patient is something numerically distinct from it, the stone. But this transaction is not known in intention (it is not the object of unmediated self-knowledge on *its* agent's part).

We noted in §14 above that it is not part of the idea of affection that that which is affected is the same as that which affects (it might be, but it is not part of the very idea of affection that it is). And that is why a subject's knowing that that which she* is affected by is *F* cannot be her knowing that she* is *F*—it is why it is knowledge of an object as other. In the same way, it is not part of the idea of acting on something that that which acts on is the same as that which is acted on (it might be, but in the same way it is not part of the very idea of transaction that it is). As a result, an agent's knowing that that which she* acts on is *F* cannot be her knowing that she* is *F*—it too must be knowledge of an object as other.³¹

When the agent has unmediated self-knowledge that she* is affected by an object, an *F*, we can say that she* is affected by the object as other—precisely because, in this case, the object by which she affected figures for her as other, in that she knows it (in an act of unmediated self-knowledge) as that by which she* is affected. In the same way, when she has unmediated self-knowledge in intention that she* is acting on an object, an *F* (a window which she is opening, say) we can say that she* is acting on that object as other³²—precisely because, in this case, the object she is acting on figures for her as other, not in that it is known

³⁰ To put the point by means of another paradoxical-sounding formulation: there is an important sense in which this species of knowledge in intention is not observation-knowledge; but in the very same sense, perceptual knowledge is not observation-knowledge—and indeed, observation-knowledge is not observation-knowledge.

³¹ I owe the idea that knowledge whose form is affection by an object cannot be knowledge of this object as self to Rödl, op. cit., p. 8. I also note that Rödl traces this idea to Aristotle's thought that the art of healing is a principle of change in an other, or in oneself, as other. Healing is, of course, a transaction.

³² This is how Ford op. cit. understands intentional transaction, and it is central to the distinction between this and self-movement. For it is central to the knowledge in intention internal to the latter that, in it, the agent knows herself as self—and so, not as that on which she* acts. This distinction is sometimes neglected; for a recent example, see Ursula Coope, "Aristotle on Action", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. 81 (2007): 109-138. I suspect that one source of the tendency to neglect this distinction is a failure to attend not merely to the fact that intentional action is constituted by self-knowledge, but to the fact that this self-knowledge can, in one of its aspects, be knowledge of an object as other.

by her merely as that by which she* is affected, but rather in that it is known by her (in an act of unmediated self-knowledge in intention) as that on which she* acts.

26. Whereas, then, in perceptual knowledge, the subject self-and-other predicates the concept *being affected by an F*, in the present species of knowledge in intention, the concept which the agent self-and-other predicates is the distinct concept *acting on an F*. That is to give the general form of the self-predicated concepts. And it is because they bear this form that the knowledge in which they figure has the self-and-other character that it does.

The concepts are different, however, in spite of this important similarity. In being (knowingly) affected by something, the subject is merely passive: she is merely acted on by the other. But in (knowingly) acting on something, the subject is active: she is an agent, who acts on the other. The nexus to the other—the nexus which characterises the form of each mode of knowledge, and through which the subject has knowledge of the other as other—differs in just this way: in the first case, it is mere passive affection; in the second, it is active transaction. And the way in which the other figures as other differs in consequence.

27. I suggested (in §14 above) that knowledge by observation is knowledge in which an object figures as other: observation-knowledge is other-knowledge. I want to suggest that the present species of knowledge in intention is equally observation-knowledge, precisely because in it the agent knows an object as other—as that upon which she* acts.

We should understand the idea of knowledge by observation as the idea of knowledge which rests on a certain kind of nexus between a subject and an object—a nexus through which the former has unmediated knowledge of the latter as other: mere affection is one such nexus; and transaction is another. I think we need to understand things in this way in order to avoid a tempting but—in the present context—disastrous thought.

28. The temptation is to think (or, to think one can think) of the observation-knowledge of an object which is integral to an agent's knowledge in intention to the effect that she* is acting on that object as being of exactly the same formal character as the observation-knowledge which the agent might have of this object in a case in which she is not acting on it.

There are various ways in which this thought can insinuate itself, of which perhaps the most tempting is the following. A subject's observation-knowledge of an object, an *F*, rests on the subject's perceiving that object. And a subject's perceiving an object is, not her acting on the object, but merely her being affected by it. So, her observation-knowledge rests, not on her acting on an *F*, but merely on her being affected by an *F*. That determines the formal character of her knowledge: it is knowledge that she* is affected by an *F*. It is no part of knowledge with this character that she* is acting on an *F*. She might be doing so; but if

she is, that she* is doing so is not something contained in knowledge with the form of observation-knowledge. Observation-knowledge of an object has its formal character whether or not its subject is acting on the object. So, it cannot be knowledge that she* is doing so. At best, it can be knowledge that something she* is affected by—“this body”—is having a certain effect upon something she* is affected by—“this window”, for example. We can call this “knowledge that she is acting on an *F*”, if we like. We can call it knowledge that she is opening a window. But it cannot be knowledge that she* is acting on an *F*.

29. This is disastrous because, as McDowell recognises, and as Anscombe seemed to recognise too (precisely in her talk of “aiding”), the agent’s knowledge in intention may need to draw on her observational powers in order to be knowledge that she* is acting on an object. But it now seems that the best these powers can deliver is knowledge that she is acting on an object—that “this body is opening this window”, for example. Considered independently of these powers, knowledge in intention cannot be knowledge that she* is doing so. But when we allows these powers back into the picture, we do not find one unified act of self-and-other knowledge of the sort that I am suggesting knowledge in intention can be—an act which is, as such, in intention and by observation. We rather find, at best, two formally distinct acts, both of which fall short of being knowledge that she* is so acting.

One might think that the agent can, somehow, combine these two acts into an act of knowing that she* is acting on an *F*. But even if this combination can be effected, it will require mediation by the apparent identity-judgment that the object which she* is affected by is herself (indirect reflexive). And that will ensure that the knowledge that results from the combination is not what we are looking for, because it will not be unmediated self-knowledge, and so cannot bear “the *form* of description of intentional actions”.

30. To avoid this disastrous consequence, we must reject the argument that generates it. And to do that, we must deny that observation-knowledge rests, not on her acting on an *F*, but merely on her being affected by an *F*. For it is that claim which ensures that its formal character can only be that she* is so affected. And it is *that* which creates the disaster, once it is recognised that knowledge in intention may need the “aid” of observation-knowledge.

In the alternative that I recommend, there is a species of knowledge in intention which is, as such, knowledge by observation. And its form is: that she* is acting on an *F*. Such knowledge cannot rest on affection rather than transaction. It must rest on transaction.

31. The idea of sensory character is, I think, apt to lead us astray here.

The nexus on which the knowledge we are calling “perceptual knowledge” rests is, specifically, *sensory* affection. That means that it is knowledge with a sensory character, in

the following sense: for a subject to know an object as what she* is affected by is for her to know it as something she* senses, in a certain mode (as something she* sees, for example.)

This surely cannot be denied. But it is tempting to think that the following is also true: for a subject to know an object as something she* senses, in a certain mode, is for her to know it, not as something she* is acting upon, but merely as something she* is affected by. And I think this must be denied. For I do not think we can deny that for a subject to have unmediated knowledge by observation of an object as other is for her to know that object as something which she* senses, in a certain mode. Given that, and given the thought which I think we must deny, it follows that for a subject to have unmediated observation-knowledge of an object as other just is for her to know the object merely as something she* is affected by. And it is precisely *that* which leads to the disastrous consequence.

In place of the thought that I think we must deny, we should say the following. For a subject to know an object through observation, and without mediation, as other, just is for her to know the object as something she* senses. But the latter can take more than one form: it could be knowing the object merely as something she* is affected by, or, it could be knowing it as something she* acts upon. The idea that a subject's knowing an object as something she* senses can *only* take the first form is, I think, no more than a prejudice.

Once we have abandoned this prejudice, we can say the following. Knowledge in intention, of the present species, is, under one of its aspects, knowledge by observation. And, as knowledge by observation, it has a sensory character: it is knowledge of an object as that which she* acts on and, as such, knowledge of it as something she* senses.

32. We can now, finally, consider the two kinds of case of intentional transaction that we began by distinguishing (in §§8-9 above). As we did then, let us take, as an example of the first kind, an agent opening a window that remains in her sights throughout.

In this example, the agent's knowledge in intention is, as such, under one of its aspects, knowledge by observation with a specifically visual sensory character: it is knowledge of the object as something she* acts on and, as such, as something she* sees. This surely will not exhaust the sensory character of her knowledge: it is hard to see how the agent could open the window without touching it; so, in figuring for her as something she* acts on, the window will also surely figure for her as something she* touches. But it is precisely because of its visual character that it is the specific kind of knowledge in intention that it is, namely, knowledge not only that she* is opening the window, but also—throughout the course of her opening it—of how much she* has done, and (so) of how much she* has to do.

If the agent's vision were to be occluded, as she is opening the window—if someone were to creep up behind her and put their hands over her eyes, for example—then her knowledge would lose its visual (but not its tactual) sensory character. In such circumstances,

it is possible that the agent's action would simply come to a halt. But it also conceivable that the agent would be unfazed, and continue to know that she* is opening the window—and yet, precisely because of the change in the sensory character of her knowledge in intention, no longer know how much she* has done, and (so) no longer know how much she* has still to do. Then we would have an example of a case of the second of our two kinds.³³

We could put the point by saying that the agent, in the first example, is in the privileged epistemic position which distinguishes the first kind of case from the second, precisely because she can *see* how much she* has done of what she* is doing. Someone might think that this is the very thing that Anscombe insists we must *not* say—because it construes the knowledge as by (visual) observation, and so not as knowledge in intention.³⁴ But I think we are in a position to see that this is a mistake. It all depends on how we understand the claim. And it should now be clear that we can understand it simply as a way of saying that the agent has knowledge in intention which is, as such, knowledge by observation with a specifically visual sensory character; and it is precisely because it has this, rather than a merely tactual character, that it is the kind of knowledge in intention it is.

I do not think that conflicts with anything in Anscombe. It merely applies, to the kind of case we are considering, the understanding of her doctrine that knowledge in intention can be *aided* by observation-knowledge that I have attempted to articulate, in this essay.

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33. In his essay, McDowell recommends that we “give up the idea that it is in general within the powers of practical knowledge [sc. knowledge in intention], unaided by knowledge that is receptive, for instance perceptual” to know “happenings in objective reality”. In this essay, I have tried to offer an account of what it is for knowledge in intention to be aided by observation that allows us to understand McDowell's point, and, in understanding it, to see that it is right. Knowledge in intention can be knowledge of “happenings in objective reality”, for it can be knowledge of transactions that may be interrupted. But in being knowledge of this species, it is, as such, knowledge by observation—or, as we might put it, knowledge by transaction: it is an agent's knowledge that she* is acting on an other, in which the agent figures as self, and the patient figures as other—that is to say, as what she* acts upon. That, I suggest, is what its being aided by “knowledge that is receptive” comes to.

I do not think McDowell says anything in his essay which is in tension with this account—which I advance here both as a reconstruction of Anscombe, and as an account of

³³ It is also conceivable that the agent would stay in a case of the first kind, of course.

³⁴ This is exactly how Gibbons, *op. cit.*, thinks of this claim.

how the relation between knowledge in intention (of this species) and knowledge by observation should be understood (I agree with McDowell that these come to the same thing).

34. At the heart of this account is the idea that these two modes of knowledge form a seamless unity: they are not two opposed acts, but two opposing aspects of one. It rejects a one-sided account of the topic, which seeks to understand these two modes as simply other. To avoid this error, we need to do two things: first, to see that even the paradigm case of “knowledge that is receptive”—knowledge which directly depends on sensory affection—itself exhibits two-sidedness; and second, to realise that “knowledge that is receptive” can rest, not merely on being affected by an object, but on transacting with it. Failure to acknowledge this last point will allow another form of one-sidedness to emerge—this time, in the guise of the tempting but disastrous thought outlined and rejected in §§29-31 above.

35. At the heart of the account, then, is the idea of the *unity* of knowledge in intention, and knowledge by observation. The former is practical knowledge, the latter is theoretical knowledge. I do not think that, in understanding this unity, one thereby understands the unity of practical and theoretical knowledge—although I think understanding the former is a condition for understanding the latter. In this essay, I have merely been concerned with practical knowledge in its guise as knowledge of what the agent is doing. To understand it fully would require attending to its other guises: its character as “knowing one’s way about” or “knowing how”, and, *a fortiori*, its character as defined by the A-D order, the order of practical reasoning.³⁵ But both of these topics lie outside the scope of the present essay.

³⁵ On the idea of practical knowledge as having these guises, see Stephen Engstrom, “Kant’s Distinction Between Practical and Theoretical Knowledge”, *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2002): 49-63; esp. p. 61.