

1 Preliminaries

Anscombe begins her book by introducing three different ways we “employ a concept of ‘intention’” (*I*, §1, 1:1): we treat certain statements describing what a person will do as the *expression* of the speaker’s intention to do that thing; we describe *actions* as intentional and distinguish them from things that people do without intending to do them; and we characterize people’s intentions *in* acting, or the *further* intentions *with which* they act as they do. Having introduced her topic in this way, in Sections 2-3 she briefly considers the nature of expressions of intention, emphasizing how intention is expressed through a description of *what one will do*, and not of one’s present state of mind. Following this, she proposes in Section 4 that the concept of intentional action—that is, of “what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does” in acting intentionally (§4, 9:2)—is the most promising starting-point for a philosophical inquiry into the concept of intention.

This methodological priority is not that of a philosophical behaviorist.¹⁴ For Anscombe explicitly allows that there is such a thing as “purely interior” intention that a person never even attempts to execute (see §4, 9:2), and later on she will argue that there could not be a robust concept of intentional action without a way of describing a person’s further aims and future ends.¹⁵ But she recommends her *action-first* approach as a way to avoid what she calls “dead-ends” (§3, 6:2) that we can be led into by construing intention as “something whose existence is purely in the sphere of the mind” (§4, 9:2). On this latter approach, the task of the philosopher is first to characterize this interior state and only then to consider “what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actu-

¹⁴This accusation comes up in conversation more often than it appears in print—but for an example of the latter see Michael Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason*, pp. 5-7. Also, in “Davidson’s Theory of Intention”, Bratman describes Anscombe’s discussion of reasons and causes as “rooted in strong behaviouristic assumptions” (p. 210).

¹⁵This is the thesis of Sections 20-21, as discussed in section 3.2 below.

ally does" (ibid.) in doing something intentionally. Anscombe's recommended starting-point is precisely the opposite of this.

1.1 The three headings (§1)

Consider three different ways that we use a concept of "intention" in everyday life (see *I*, §1, 1:1):

1. We treat intention as something that can be *expressed*, paradigmatically by saying what one is going to do;
2. We characterize *actions* as intentional, distinguishing intentional activity from things that people do non-intentionally; and
3. We describe people as acting *with* intentions, e.g. boiling water for tea or studying for the bar exam because one plans to become a lawyer.

The first thing to notice is the sheer variety of the list: heading (1) describes an instance of *linguistic* behavior as an expression of the speaker's intention; (2) describes an instance of *overt* behavior as itself intentional or not; and (3) describes—well, how should we put it?—the *aim* of an action or of an agent, i.e. something that a person acts in pursuit of, such that her action can be understood in relation to this further thing. On the other hand there seems to be a *unity* within this variety, insofar as talk of "intention" isn't just equivocal between (1), (2), and (3)—as it is with talk of "bank" in statements like "My money is in the bank", "She hit a bank shot", and "The flow of water is eroding the bank". An adequate philosophical account of intention needs to reveal the connections among these three forms of understanding.

An essential thing to observe here, which Anscombe's initial presentation tends to obscure, is that very often we "employ a concept of 'intention'" (§1, 1:1) in some of the ways she describes without using the *language* of "intention" in doing so. This is easiest to see in connection with heading (1), as outside of philosophical contexts a person will not usually (or ever!) use the *phrase* "expression of intention" to characterize the meaning of a statement. Consider Anscombe's example from the start of Section 2:

... if I say 'I am going to fail in this exam.' and someone says 'Surely you aren't as bad at the subject as that', I may make my meaning clear by explaining that I was expressing an intention, not giving an estimate of my chances. (§2, 1:3-2:1)

Faced with a confusion like this, what a person would most likely *say* to explain her meaning is not “Oh, I was expressing an intention”, but rather something like “Oh no, it’s not that—I am just so tired of all the pressure that my parents have been putting on me, and I need to show them ...”. This clarification *is* a way of saying that one was expressing an intention, and anyone who can offer or appreciate such a clarification will have to draw on her grasp of that concept, but all this can be done even if the phrase “expression of intention” never occurs in the exchange. In a similar way, as we will see below, Anscombe’s route to discovering our ordinary concept of intentional action is not to explore the circumstances in which we *call* actions “intentional”, but rather to investigate the conditions under which we regard an action as suited to a request for reason-giving explanation. In each case our pre-theoretical grasp of these intention-concepts is put to use in ordinary practices where words like “intention”, “intentional”, etc. will occur only rarely.

So now we are to ask: *What do we mean* when we speak, implicitly or explicitly, of the expression of intention, of doing things intentionally, of the intentions with which people act? How are these ways of speaking, and the other human practices that are bound up with them, interrelated? And which of the three should be the starting-point of our philosophical investigation?

1.2 Predictions and expressions of intention (§§2-3)

Sections 2 and 3 take up the first of Anscombe’s three headings—the expression of intention—and consider how these relate to *predictions* of what will happen in the future. It is worth reading this discussion alongside §§629-632 of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, where there are several distinctions, examples, and argumentative turns that are mirrored by Anscombe’s arguments in Section 2 especially. In particular, we should notice that according to both Anscombe and Wittgenstein the expression of an intention to do something *is* a kind of prediction (*Voraussage*) of what will happen, albeit of a kind that is somehow different from the kind of prediction given in what Anscombe calls “estimates” of the future. Why are we supposed to think this?

To begin, consider again the example from the start of Section 2. I say I am going to fail an exam, and then when told that I’m not so bad at the subject, I “make my meaning clear by explaining that I was expressing an intention, not

giving an estimate of my chances" (§2, 2:1). Such an explanation usually *will* clarify my meaning, which shows that we have an "intuitively clear" (§2, 1:3) understanding of the difference between expressing an intention and estimating what is going to happen. In everyday life we rarely have trouble employing this distinction to understand what people say. But *what* do we understand, when we understand this? What sort of distinction are we drawing?

A natural answer, which Anscombe wants us to resist, is that expressions of intention are distinguished from estimates of the future by the different ways that they relate to the *mental state* of the speaker. She suggests two ways to develop this idea:

Suppose it is said 'A prediction is a statement about the future'. This suggests that an expression of intention is not. It is perhaps the description—or expression—of a present state of mind, a state which has the properties that characterise it as an intention. (§2, 2:2)

The first suggestion here is that expressions of intention differ from predictions in what they *describe*: whereas a prediction describes what will happen in the future, the expression of intention describes the "present state of mind" of the one who speaks. And the second is that these things differ in what they *express*—that is, in the state of mind *from which* one speaks, and which is manifested or given voice in one's verbal behavior.¹⁶ Implicit in both suggestions is the assumption that we already have a working concept of intention as a mental state, and can appeal to this concept in explaining the distinction in question. The aim of Sections 2 and 3 is to undermine our confidence in taking such a concept for granted.

So let us ask: under what conditions is a statement like

(1) I am going to fail this test

the *expression of an intention* to fail, rather than an estimate of one's chances? According to the first *mentalistic* analysis suggested at the start of Section 2,

¹⁶A further possibility which Anscombe does not mention here, but which would also be called into question by her arguments in these sections, would be to say that an expression of intention is a *prescriptive* claim about how the world *should* be. The discussion of commands in Section 2 (see 2:4-3:1) reveals the inadequacy of this analysis, by arguing that descriptions of the future can also function as orders (e.g. "Nurse will take you to the operating theatre", said by a doctor in the presence of the nurse: §2, 3:1), and thus that "the indicative (descriptive, informative) character is not the distinctive mark of 'predictions' *as opposed to* 'expressions of intention', as we might at first sight have been tempted to think" (ibid.).

this will be the case whenever such a statement *describes the speaker's state of mind*:

- (M) An estimate is a description of what will happen in the future, while an expression of intention is rather a description of the speaker's state of mind.

The first and most obvious reason to resist this proposal is simply that it seems wrong on its face. For a statement like (1), where this expresses the intention to fail, at least *appears* to have the same sort of descriptive content as any other indicative statement about the future state of the world, such as

- (2) It is going to rain tomorrow.

A statement like (2) might be justified by, or true in virtue of, an aspect of how the world presently is: for example, it might be because of a front that is presently over the Gulf of Mexico that, tomorrow, Florida is going to get some rain. Nevertheless this statement does not *describe* the present at all—it is, rather, simply a description of what is going to happen in the future. And the same seems to be true of (1): even if this statement is justified by, or true in virtue of, the speaker's present mental state, it does not *describe* such a state, but only describes what the speaker will do. At least on the face of things, *what one describes* in expressing an intention with a statement like (1) is the very same thing one describes in predicting or "estimating" a future happening that one does not intend: in each case, one's statement is simply a description of what is going to happen.

Anscombe notes, however, that there is a further and "deeper rooted" (§2, 4:2) objection to saying that intention is expressed in a prediction. Here is how she puts it:

If I do not do what I said I would, I am not supposed to have lied;
so it seems that the truth of a statement of intention is not a matter
of doing what I said. (§2, 4:3)

If this conclusion of this little argument were correct, then the expression of intention would have to be something other than a description of a future happening—for any statement *describing* what will happen can be *true* only if things happen as it says they will. But Anscombe goes on to argue that the line of reasoning here is fallacious (for this rebuttal see §2, 4:4-5:1). It is true that someone who says she will do something that she then does not do has not

necessarily *lied* in what she said—for her statement may have been *sincere* as long as she really had the intention to act in this way. But this does not show that her statement was really a *description* of her intention, any more than the possibility of offering a sincere but mistaken forecast of the weather shows that an estimate of the future is really a description of one's belief. (If I utter (2) and tomorrow it is dry, this does not mean that I have lied—for I may really have believed that it would rain. Nevertheless my statement was a *description* of tomorrow's weather, and not of my belief about it.) In both cases, while the speaker's state of mind determines the *sincerity* of what she says, the *truth* of her statement turns on what happens in the world—and this would not be true if these statements merely described the speaker's intention or belief.

Through these arguments, Section 2 thus opposes the mentalistic analysis (M) and supports instead what I will call a *factualist* analysis of the expression of intention:

(F) Like a prediction or estimate of the future, an expression of intention is a description of what is going to happen.

The factualist analysis holds that in expressing the intention to do something, *what* a person says is simply that something *will happen*—namely, that she will do what she says she will. This, I suggest, is what Anscombe has in mind when she follows Wittgenstein in saying that the expression of intention is a species of prediction. And it helps her to mark an important difference between intention and mere appetite or desire: if a person expresses the intention to do something by saying that she is going to do it, she says something quite different than if she just said that she wanted or desired to do it—for she has described what she is going to *do* and not merely the internal state that she is in. It is thus that the analysis of the content of expressions of intention is supposed to keep us out of the “dead ends” that we can get into by thinking of intention first as a psychological state (see §3, 7:3-8:1): we find a clue that intentions are different from emotions or “drives” in the fact that the expression of intention parallels the expression of *belief*. The expression of intention is not merely a manifestation of how things are within oneself, but a sign that points beyond one's own psychology and represents how things are or will be in the world.¹⁷

¹⁷This is also what Anscombe has in mind when, at the end of Section 2, she corrects Wittgenstein's remark in the *Investigations* about the “natural expression of intention”, saying instead that the expression of intention “is purely conventional”, and that as a consequence non-linguistic animals, though they do have intentions and engage in intentional action, cannot have “any distinct expression of intention” (see §2, 5:3-4; and cf. §47, 86:2-87:1 for more on the

One might wonder, however, whether the factualist analysis (F) also applies to cases where a person expresses her intention by saying that she *intends* (or means, plans, etc.) to do something, and not simply that she will do it. An example (compare §2, 5:2) might be saying

(3) I intend to go for a walk.

Doesn't a person who says something like (3) express an intention by describing her state of mind? Recalling the parallel with the expression of belief can help dislodge this intuition. If, for example, a person says

(4) I believe that it is going to rain tomorrow

her statement functions quite differently from a superficially similar statement that attributes a belief to someone else. To see this, notice that the conjunction in

(5) She believes that it will rain tomorrow, but it will not

is in no way strange, but the first-personal counterpart

(6) I believe that it will rain tomorrow, but it will not

has the ring of paradox.¹⁸ A plausible explanation of this is that a statement like (4) is usually not a *mere* description of one's belief in the same way as one like

(7) She believes that it will rain tomorrow

is *merely* a description of the belief of someone else. And as Anscombe points out toward the end of Section 2, something similar holds for talk of what one *intends* to do: thus a statement like

(8) I intend to go for a walk but shall not go for a walk

intentions of non-linguistic animals). That is, Anscombe's position is that while intention can be *manifested* in non-verbal behavior (as when a cat is "crouching and slinking along with its eye fixed on [a] bird and its whiskers twitching" (§47, 86:2)), the expressive resources available to a non-linguistic creature do not allow for a way to *express* intention that is distinct from the expression of mere desire. A non-linguistic creature whose expressive resources are limited to behaviors like laughing and whimpering can express emotions like joy and sadness, and these can of course be clues to its intentions. But something further is available to us: we can use language to say what we are going to do.

¹⁸Here we might compare Wittgenstein's remarks on Moore's paradox in *Philosophical Investigations* II.x. I discuss this parallel at length in section 7.2 below.

“does sound in some way contradictory” (§2, 5:2), whereas there is no such appearance of contradiction in a corresponding statement about someone else. Exactly how a statement like (8) is contradictory (if it really is at all) is a question Anscombe will return to later on.¹⁹ For now it is enough to note the difficulty of accounting for this appearance of contradictoriness on the supposition that a statement of the form “I intend to *F*” does not offer any description of what one will in fact do.

A final objection one might raise to the factualist analysis (F) is that there seems to be a difference between the *kind* of thing which, in expressing an intention, one says is going to happen, and the kind of thing which one says is going to happen when one describes future happenings other than one’s intentional actions. More specifically, one might suggest that the future state of the world one describes in expressing an intention will be one “in which the speaker is *some sort of agent*” (§3, 6:3; emphasis added), whereas this is not the case in an estimate of the future. While this suggestion seems right as far as it goes, there are some difficulties with it. For one thing, if a person says something like (1) and means it as an estimate of the future, clearly she is *some* sort of agent in the future she describes. More importantly, making good on this suggestion would require an explanation of what it is to *be* an agent in the relevant sense, which would take us to the second heading in Anscombe’s initial division, i.e. the concept of intentional action. This will be the focus of our inquiry beginning just below.

First, however, we need to look more closely at two dense but important paragraphs where Anscombe gestures at a pair of distinctions that will turn out to be crucial later on, namely that expressions of intention might differ from estimates of the future in respect of (1) how they are *grounded or justified* (see §2, 3:5-4:1) and (2) the way they establish a *standard of correctness* for the events they describe (see §2, 4:5-5:1). Below I will consider each point in turn.

(1) Anscombe introduces the first distinction as follows:

... there is a difference between the types of ground on which we call an order, and an estimate of the future, sound. The reasons justifying an order are not ones suggesting what is probable, or likely to happen, but e.g. ones suggesting what it would be good to make happen with a view to an objective, or with a view to a sound

¹⁹See Sections 31-32 and 50-52, discussed in sections 4.3 and 7.2 below.

objective. (§2, 3:5-4:1)

As Anscombe's wording makes clear, *soundness* here is a different concept from *truth*. A statement is *sound* in the sense at issue here to the extent that it is *justified* by the considerations that are supposed to support it—and thus e.g. a well-informed weather forecast may be sound even if it turns out to be incorrect. And so Anscombe's point is that when a person expresses the intention to do something, the considerations that are supposed to support her statement are similar to those that would support an *order*: “not [considerations] suggesting what is probable, or likely to happen, but e.g. ones suggesting what it would be good to make happen with a view to an objective” (§2, 4:1). That is, the “description of something future” offered in an expression of intention will be grounded in “reasons for acting, sc. reasons why it would be useful or attractive if the description came true, not by evidence that it is [or will be] true” (§3, 6:3). Anscombe says briefly that “What is meant by ‘reason’ here is obviously a fruitful line of inquiry” (§3, 7:2), but she sets it aside for now.

(2) The second difference between expressions of intention and estimates of the future is that when a person fails to do what she says she will, the *fault* or *mistake* may lie not in what she said, but rather in her failure to *act* as she said she would. This is not just a reiteration of the earlier point that a person can be truthful in expressing the intention to do something she doesn't eventually do. What Anscombe observes now is when this happens, the speaker can be faulted or criticized for *failing to act* in the way that she says she will—a possibility that does not arise concerning a mere estimate of the future, where the speaker can be faulted only for what she said. As Anscombe puts it, in the first sort of criticism “the facts are, so to speak, impugned for not being in accordance with the words, rather than *vice versa*” (§2, 4:5-5:1). And she identifies three ways that there may be such a lack of accordance (I have added the bracketed numbers for ease of reference):

This is sometimes so when [1] I change my mind; but another case of it occurs when [2] e.g. I write something other than I think I am writing; as Theophrastus says (*Magna Moralia*, 1189b 22²⁰), the mistake here is one of performance, not of judgment. There are other

²⁰The passage Anscombe cites here is from Book I, ch. xvii of the *Magna Moralia*: “No one debates with himself how the name of Archicles should be written, for that is already defined; so that errors arise, not in the conscious Understanding [*dianoia*], but in activity of writing.” The authorship of this text is still disputed.

cases too: [3] for example, St. Peter did not *change his mind* about denying Christ; and yet it would not be correct to say he made a lying promise of faithfulness. (§2, 5:1)

The differences between these three phenomena—of changing one's mind, failing to execute an action that one attempts to perform, and acting against an intention without changing one's mind—will be explored at length later on,²¹ but there are two points that are important to appreciate right now. First, the possibility of “impugning the facts” seems to arise *only* in connection with commands and expressions of intention, and not with estimates of the future. And second, notice that in saying that the *mistake* in these cases “is one of performance, not of judgment”, Anscombe does not abandon her factualist analysis of the expression of intention—that is, she does not deny that a person who expresses the intention to do something which, in the end, she does not, will have said something untrue. Indeed she says just the contrary: the possibility of mistaken performance “only shows that *there are other ways of saying what is not true*, besides lying and being mistaken” (§2, 4:3; emphasis added).²² Her position is that even though, for expressions of intention no less than estimates of the future, it *is* the case that “if I don't do what I said, what I said was not true” (§2, 4:5), expressions of intention make room for a *kind* of fault or mistake that estimates of the future do not. We will consider in more detail later on how Anscombe thinks this distinctive kind of mistake is to be understood.

So far my discussion of these sections has focused on explaining how Anscombe's factualist analysis of the expression of intention challenges the idea that in expressing an intention a person offers “a description ... of a present state of mind” (§2, 2:2). But what about the other possibility that we considered: that while the expression of an intention *describes* what will happen, rather than the speaker's state of mind, what distinguishes these statements from estimates of the future is the state of mind that the speaker is *in* when she makes them—that is, in the state of mind that these statements *express*? The simple answer is that this strategy would require us to go beyond the first of Anscombe's three headings, since it would depend on a prior understanding of the concept of intention as a mental state. But this is not where Anscombe turns next: she proposes to

²¹Once again see Sections 31-32 and 50-52, discussed in sections 4.3 and 7.2 below.

²²Compare as well the last sentence in the entry for Section 2 in the Table of Contents: “The falsity of expressions of intention in the simple future tense (*a*) as lying and (*b*) as falsity because the intention is not carried out” (*I*, p. iii).

focus first on the concept of intentional *action* rather than the mental state of intention. We will consider below why this is.

1.3 Action first (§§3-4)

If expression of intention is the wrong place to begin our inquiry, which of the other two headings should we consider first instead? At the end of Section 4, Anscombe indicates some of the reasons why we might want to start with the concept of further intention. In particular, she notes that often when we want to understand a person's intentions our interest is "not just in [that person's] intention *of* doing what he does, but in his intention *in* doing it", and moreover that "a man can form an intention which he then does nothing to carry out, either because he is prevented or because he changes his mind: but the intention itself can be complete, although it remains a purely interior thing" (*I*, §4, 9:2). The effect of this is

to make us think that if we want to know a man's intentions it is into the contents of his mind, and only into these, that we must enquire; and hence, that if we wish to understand what intention is, we must be investigating something whose existence is purely in the sphere of the mind; and that although intention issues in actions, and the way this happens also presents interesting questions, still what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does, is the very last thing we need consider in our enquiry. (*ibid.*)

This approach seems attractive. But Anscombe says that it is backwards: what we should really consider first is intentional action itself. What are her reasons for favoring this *action-first* approach?

In these early sections of *Intention* the main reasons given in favor of Anscombe's strategy are epistemological. For example, she argues in Section 4 that is simply not the case that intention is *in general* something "purely interior", since if it were we would not be able to know a person's intentions in the way we very often do, namely by observing their overt behavior:

... if you want to say at least some true things about a man's intentions, you will have a strong chance of success if you mention what he actually did or is doing. For whatever else he may intend, or whatever may be his intentions in doing what he does, the greater

number of the things which you would say straight off a man did or was doing, will be things he intends. (§4, 8:1)

The point Anscombe is making here is not merely that a person's intentions are often revealed in what she does. Rather, her point is that in many everyday situations the most natural ways we have of describing what a person does will already implicate "intention"-concepts: the ascription of intention to a person is something we engage in *simply* in describing what happens when a person acts. She gives an example (see §4, 8:2): a person who sees Anscombe at work on her book will say that she is sitting in a chair writing, and will not talk about her mere bodily movements or the way that they are "affecting the acoustic properties of the room" (ibid.). Yet to say that Anscombe *is writing* is already to say something about the intention with which she acts. This description of what she is doing is already a description of her intention.

It might be objected, however, that this argument overlooks what is distinctive in the way we know *our own* intentions—for this knowledge seems not to require observing our own behavior, and its scope extends far beyond what we are evidently doing at a moment, encompassing as well our further intentions and intentions for the future. While *we* can see Anscombe writing, and so know that she has the intention of doing this, *she* also knows exactly *what* she is writing, as well as her purpose in writing this and what she intends to do next, and so on. Doesn't this first-person perspective provide a window into something that is real but "purely interior"?

The objection gets this much right: the knowledge of one's own intentional actions is not knowledge by observation, or at least is not usually dependent on observation in the same way as knowledge of the actions of others; and it usually extends well beyond what one is observably doing at any given moment. What Anscombe wants us to resist, however, is the interpretation of these phenomena in terms of privileged first-personal access to the contents of an inner domain. One reason for this is that *what* we know when we know what are doing or are going to do is not anything interior: for otherwise it would not be knowledge of what we are *doing* or are going to do. Second, while no doubt there is an "intuitively obvious" or "intuitively clear" (cf. §2, 1:3) difference between intending to do something and not intending to do it, in attempting to to *explain* what we understand in grasping this distinction "we are likely to find ourselves in one or another of several dead ends, e.g.: psychological jargon about 'drives' and 'sets'; reduction of intention to a species of desire, i.e. a kind of emotion, or irreducible

intuition of the meaning of 'I intend'" (§3, 5:4-6:1). (What makes the attempted explanations are "dead ends" is that they do not aid in our understanding, but only shift the location of our ignorance. What *sort* of motivation or "drive" is involved in intention? *Which* species of desire is it?) Finally, serious philosophical difficulties arise for any attempt to explain the self-knowledge of intention as a matter of *recognizing* one's inner mental state:

If this were correct, there would have to be room for the possibility that [one] misrecognizes. Further, when we remember having meant to do something, what memory reveals as having gone on in our consciousness is a few scanty items at most, which by no means add up to such an intention; or it simply prompts us to use the words 'I meant to ...', without even a mental picture of which we judge the words to be an appropriate description. (§3, 6:2)²³

This is not a behaviorist argument, or even an argument that the mental states of intention or meaning ever lack a distinctive "cognitive phenomenology". Rather, the point of the argument is that this is not what we *understand* when we understand what an intention is, nor is it the means by which we identify our own mental states as intentions rather than beliefs. Together, these considerations make clear the difficulty in giving an illuminating philosophical explanation of the concept of an aim or purpose that does not presuppose a prior grasp of intentional action as something that happens in the world.

Nothing in these considerations is likely to yield to a decisive argument in favor of an action-first approach. But since the stakes here concern philosophical strategy rather than matters of substance, it is not clear that we should demand anything more than this—we may learn a lot from Anscombe's approach even if a different one could also have yielded good fruit. It is, however, worth noting two more reasons to favor an action-first approach over one that prioritizes the concept of intention as a psychological state. First, since in having an intention a person intends *to do* something, and not merely that something happen merely by accident or chance, it might be that the concept of intentional action is required to explicate the content of the state of intention.²⁴ Second, it is widely acknowledged that attempts to explain intentional action in terms of an agent's mental states have trouble accounting for the possibility of "deviant

²³As Anscombe notes, these arguments are indebted to Wittgenstein. See e.g. *PI*, §§633-638.

²⁴For an argument in this vein, see Matthew Boyle and Douglas Lavin, "Goodness and Desire".

causal chains", in which a person's mental states give rise to an action of the sort they rationalize, but not in a way that renders that action intentional.²⁵ While this problem might not show that we cannot analyze intentional action in terms of the mental states that cause it, it does give reason to think that any understanding of how intention is the cause of intentional action will likely presuppose a prior understanding of intentional action itself. Together these arguments seem like reason enough to take the action-first approach seriously, and follow Anscombe's arguments to see what fruit they bear.

1.4 Summary discussion

The principal aim of these opening sections is to show the necessity for a philosophical inquiry into the concept of intention, by exploring some of the puzzles, confusions, and dead-ends into which our thinking about these matters can lead us. Despite their aporetic character, these sections do plant seeds for some of the most important ideas that Anscombe will go on to develop in the remainder of the book. These include:

- The focus on *what happens* in the world, rather than on the mental state of a speaker or agent, in the analysis of how the concept of intention is usually deployed;
- The idea that statements about what will happen—and, as we will see, statements about what *has* happened in the past or *is* happening now—can be justified by *reasons for acting* rather than evidence about what will come to pass; and
- The distinction between mistakes in *judgment* and mistakes in *performance*, as two different ways to falsify an expression of intention.

The second of these ideas will play a central role in the discussion of intentional action that begins in Section 5.

²⁵For example: "A climber might want to rid himself of the weight and danger of holding another man on a rope, and he might know that by loosening his hold on the rope he could rid himself of the weight and danger. This belief and want might so unnerve him as to cause him to loosen his hold, and yet it might be the case that he never chose to loosen his hold, nor did he do it intentionally" (Donald Davidson, "Freedom to Act", at p. 79).

Suggestions for further reading

- For a close reading of Anscombe's discussion of the expression of intention, see Richard Moran and Martin Stone, "Anscombe on Expression of Intention: An Exegesis".
- For an illuminating account of the Wittgensteinian method that Anscombe employs in her opening sections, see Chapter 3 of Rachael Wiseman's *Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*.