

## 1

## Stipulative Agency

Derek Lam

## 1.1 Agential knowledge and non-observational warrant

When someone acts intentionally, she knows what she's doing. Call someone's knowledge of her own intentional action *agential knowledge*.<sup>1</sup> Agential knowledge is *constitutive* of the intentional action she performs.

Agential knowledge is peculiar. Ellie is climbing a tree to save a cat. Joel is at the scene. He knows that Ellie is saving the cat. Of course, Ellie herself knows that she is saving the cat. But, intuitively, Ellie's first-person knowledge about her action and the Joel's third-person knowledge about Ellie's action are different in kind.

This category difference manifests itself in multiple ways (see O'Brien 2003: 360–6); I won't be able to address them all. This chapter focuses on the apparently *non-observational* character of agential knowledge Anscombe (2000/1957) famously noticed. Whereas both Joel and Ellie are warranted in believing that the latter is saving the cat, their *warrants* are different in kind such that Ellie's warrant is, in a unique way, not based on observation. She doesn't learn that she's saving a cat because she observes anything. Let's call this claim about the non-observational warrant of agential knowledge the *Non-Observational Thesis* (NOT).

As Anscombe noted, whereas observation surely plays a role when we perform intentional actions, it plays the role of helping us execute those actions. For example, when I write my name on the whiteboard, I observe, among other things, what's going on the board. But observation is only used to guide my action so that I can write my name properly. I don't typically *come to know* that I'm writing my name via observation. The observation

<sup>1</sup> Philosophers sometimes call this 'practical knowledge.' However, the term 'practical knowledge' is frequently used to refer to the knowledge of *how* to do things. I choose the term 'agential knowledge' to avoid confusion.

typically plays a practical role instead of an epistemic role for the agent (see Falvey 2000: 32).<sup>2</sup>

Now it isn't uncommon for people to use the word 'observation' only for the outer senses, thereby excluding other forms of sensory access like proprioception and kinesthesia. But the intuition underlying NOT runs deeper. It also challenges attempts to base agential knowledge on these other forms of senses. Here's how Schwenkler puts it:

Well, what exactly do we mean in this context when we speak of an observer, and of knowledge had by observation? Surely, the implication of a reliance on sense perception is important here, but the notion of observation connotes more than this: observation involves not just perceiving something, but doing so somehow passively; to observe something is to sit back, as it were, and simply take it in for whatever it happens to be. (2011: 146)

A big part of the intuitive appeal of NOT is that, when we're aware of our intentional action, such awareness typically isn't acquired as information *given* to us. Agential knowledge isn't *passive* like observational knowledge.

One way to bring this intuition to a sharper focus is to consider how the word 'notice' is used. When you *see* a pen on the desk, it's appropriate to say that you *notice* a pen on the desk. When I *hear* piano music, it's appropriate to say that I *notice* someone playing the piano. For any knowledge obtained via the outer senses, we can describe that as our *noticing* something.

But 'notice' covers more than just the outer senses. It's also sensible to say I notice the following things: (i) that I'm tapping my foot to the beat, (ii) that I'm crossing my legs, (iii) that I'm grumpy, etc. So, it's sensible to speak of (i) kinesthesia, (ii) proprioception, and (iii) introspection as us *noticing* something. By contrast, we don't say that we *notice* what we do if the action is intentional.

My contention is that our linguistic intuition about how to use the word 'notice' echoes our intuition about a passive form of knowing. And intuitively, for reasons yet to be uncovered, our agential knowledge

<sup>2</sup> The word 'typically' is important. NOT itself doesn't deny that agents *also* have observational evidence at their disposal that *could* justify their beliefs about what they are doing intentionally. What NOT says is that this isn't typically the *actual* epistemic basis of our first-person agential knowledge. That being said, *some* action theorists go further. For example, Moran would say that we just don't have observational resources to justify our agential knowledge. See Section 1.5.3.

doesn't belong to this category. Hereafter, I'll use the word 'observation' to cover all forms of *noticing*: outer senses, kinesthesia, proprioception, introspection, etc.

None of this is meant to be conclusive evidence for NOT. What I hope to have shown, however, is that NOT is a plausible starting point for our inquiry.

## 1.2 Three desirable features

As Anscombe pointed out, an intentional action has to be intentional under a proper description, and the agent's agential knowledge about his own action must be under that description. She argued: 'The only description that I clearly know of what I am doing may be of something that is at a distance from me' (2000/1957: 53). We know what we do as writing on the board, baking bread, walking one's dog, etc., not just some internal flickers of the will. Intentional actions often consist of happenings beyond our skin.

This makes the idea of non-observational agential knowledge puzzling: if our intentional actions can consist of happenings beyond our skin, knowledge about our intentional actions may consist of knowledge about external happenings. Knowledge is at least warranted beliefs. How can our beliefs about external happenings be warranted non-observationally? Schwenkler calls this the *Self-Knowledge Problem* (2011: 139).

So, we need a theory of agential knowledge that can tell us what exactly is the source of our non-observational, epistemic warrant to form beliefs about our own intentional actions which typically contain external happenings.<sup>3</sup> But before we plunge ourselves into theory crafting, it's helpful to take a step back and ask: what do we want our theory to look like? I'll present three features that we have reason to desire in our theory.

<sup>3</sup> By framing the problem in terms of warrant for beliefs, I set aside Campbell's (2018) theory about agential knowledge. She thinks that there are two kinds of knowledge. Whereas standardly knowledge is considered *beliefs* (with extra qualifications), Campbell argues that *intentions* can sometimes play the knowledge-role that beliefs play and, therefore, there is another kind of knowledge that aren't beliefs but intentions. Since intentions aren't warranted by observation, this kind of knowledge is non-observational. Our agential knowledge happens to be an instance of that. My concern is that, even if I grant everything Campbell says, agents *do* have beliefs about their intentional actions and those beliefs *do* appear to be warranted independent of observation. Unless Campbell wants to deny that agents have belief-based agential knowledge, adding an extra kind of knowledge doesn't seem relevant to shedding light on the nature of the belief-based one.

## 1.2.1 Warrant in virtue of action

I briefly discussed that our agential knowledge isn't a form of noticing (i.e., a passive form of knowing) but observation is. I relied on there being a shared intuition. But there are considerable amount of confusion pertaining to this intuition. More can be said to clarify it. Doing so can help us get a better sense of what we want our theory of *non-passive* and non-observational agential knowledge to look like.

What exactly is it that appears intuitive to us when it rings true to say that agential knowledge isn't a passive form of knowing? Some philosophers unpack this intuition in terms of the *productivity* of agential knowledge. According to them, it's part of the essence of agential knowledge that it guides the action itself. My belief, which is my agential knowledge, that I'm peeling an orange serves as a focal point that guides the proper unfolding of the orange peeling. Moran (2001) argues that information obtained via observation only tells us what happens and doesn't tell us what *should* or *shouldn't* happen.<sup>4</sup> Hence, knowing something via observation doesn't have the productive feature of our agential knowledge. Here are at least two reasons for suspecting that this isn't what the intuitive activeness of agential knowledge is about primarily.

First of all, our intentional actions aren't something that we notice regardless of whether those actions are basic. Basic actions are actions that we don't perform by performing other actions as intermediate steps.<sup>5</sup> For example, when one winks at people, the action is intentional and is *typically* performed as one simple act without intermediate steps. *If* our agential knowledge is active in the sense that it informs us how we should act to perform that action, that action must be non-basic. But we have non-observational agential knowledge of basic actions too.

Second, I stated that the word 'notice' expresses a kind of passive knowing that our agential knowledge intuitively isn't. It's telling that the idea of a passive form of knowing finds its natural expression in our choice of the *verb* in a knowledge claim. This indicates *prima facie* that the relevant intuition is primarily about the passiveness of *how we come to have* such knowledge instead of about how the knowledge is put into use. The kind of activeness Moran et al. focuses on is about how a piece of knowledge is used.

<sup>4</sup> He says: '[T]he person's consciousness of his activity is not something that stands outside it observing but infuses and **informs** it, making a describable difference in the kind of activity it is' (2001: 31; my emphasis). See also Paul (2012: 330).

<sup>5</sup> See Danto (1963; 1965). Lavin (2013) and Thompson (2008) both challenge the idea of basic actions. For a response, see Amaya's (2017).

What, then, would it take for a form of knowing to be active in the way our agential knowledge intuitively is? One way to answer this question is to consult our linguistic intuition again. Imagine that you're at a restaurant. You decide to savor your soup slowly. The dutiful server thought that you were done with the soup. He walks over and tries to take it out of your way:

'I'm still working on this,' you said.

As he walked away, your friend said, 'I'm glad you *noticed* that. I've had to starve because someone took away my half-finished meal once.'

'To be fair, he made sure I saw him doing that.'

'Oh, I meant I was glad you noticed that you were still working on the soup.'

'... Huh? What do you mean by my *noticing* that?'

'I thought you knew that you were still working on the soup?'

In this bizarre scenario, you and your friend agreed that you knew *that you were working on the soup*. What confused you was your friend's description of *the way you acquired* that knowledge. Your friend described it as you *noticing* something. Thus, an intuitive response in this scenario shouldn't just *show that* you know (which is a common ground of the conversation) but should be understood as an attempt to shed light on *how* you knew that's what you were doing.

What response would be *pre-theoretically natural*? I reckon it would be some variations of this:

'I'm confused. Of course I knew. *I meant to finish the soup!*'

By saying 'I meant to finish the soup,' I'm not simply saying that I've the intention to work on the soup—we have many inefficacious intentions after all. Instead, I'm saying that working on the soup is an action I'm performing intentionally. This shows, when one is in a position where one must explain *how* one obtains knowledge about one's intentional action instead of *noticing* it, it's natural to cite *the intentional action itself* as explanation.

The question about how one comes to have a piece of knowledge is a question about one's *warrant* for the relevant belief. So, preferably, our account of agential knowledge can *somehow* explain our agential knowledge's *non-observational epistemic warrant*—not just its *truth*—by the intentional actions themselves. For example, I've the agential knowledge that I'm peeling an orange. The fact that I'm peeling an orange isn't only why

my belief that I'm peeling an orange is true. Preferably, it's also *somehow* a part of what gives my belief epistemic warrant. This is the first desirable feature. As far as I know, only Haddock (2011) has explicitly acknowledged this feature of agential knowledge.

### 1.2.2 Unified maker's knowledge

Consider the following two cases Anscombe uses to examine the nature of agential 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.

(2000/1957: 51)

We can now consider "practical knowledge" [i.e., agential knowledge]. Imagine someone directing a project, like the erection of a building which he cannot see and does not get reports on, purely by giving orders. [...] His knowledge of what is done is practical knowledge. But what is this "knowledge of what is done"? First and foremost, he can say what the house is like. (2000/1957: 82)

The cases are remarkably different. In the window-case, what is being known is an action. In the builder-case, what's being known are facts about the product of an action.

Despite the difference, it's not unnatural to group them together. Knowledge of one's intentional action has a natural affinity to knowledge of the product of one's action (traditionally known as *maker's knowledge*), an affinity that goes beyond the simple fact that there is a causal connection between one's action and the products of one's action. There is an intuitive—albeit slightly paradoxical—sense in which our intentional actions themselves are products of what we do. If so, agential knowledge is a form of maker's knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Ideally, we want a theory that unifies agential knowledge and maker's knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> Anscombe used the term 'practical knowledge' for all sorts of maker's knowledge. I reserve the term 'agential knowledge' to our knowledge of our intentional actions.

There is a long history of interest in maker's knowledge. Hobbes (1845/1656: 183–4) conceived of our geometrical knowledge as a form of maker's knowledge in the hope of making sense of geometry's certainty. Contrary to the rationalists' obsession with the natural sciences, Locke (1979/1600: 2.31) was also interested in the epistemic status of humanities as a form of maker's knowledge about the social-cultural world we create. Vico (1988: 52) argued that the natural sciences can achieve the status of knowledge to a certain extent only because their experimental procedure is a creation process, producing a form of maker's knowledge (see also Gaukroger 1986: 33). Finally, Kripke (1980) is interested in our knowledge that the standard meter is one meter as maker's knowledge of a measurement unit.

Developing an account of maker's knowledge to bring *all* these forms of maker's knowledge together is already a daunting task. It's unrealistic to expect that we can, in this chapter, develop a view of agential knowledge that delivers a grand unification of maker's knowledge as such *and* agential knowledge. We may, however, realistically aim for something more modest. An account has no hope in *eventually* delivering said grand unification if it cannot unify agential knowledge and *one kind* of maker's knowledge: Kripkean contingent a priori. Preferably, our account can offer us a framework that explicitly assimilates (i) our non-observationally warranted agential knowledge and (ii) the Kripkean contingent *a priori* as *the same kind of knowledge*. This is the second desirable feature.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.2.3 Independent of knowledge of intention

Our self-knowledge about beliefs is transparent:

[I]n making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward—upon the world. If someone asks me “Do you think there is going to be a third world war?” I must attend,

<sup>7</sup> Is it arbitrary that I choose Kripkean contingent a priori over other forms of maker's knowledge in my second desirable feature? Not in an objectionable way. Notice that I'm not neglecting other forms of maker's knowledge. *Ultimately*, we should aspire to unify our agential knowledge and *all* forms of maker's knowledge. We pick one out only to start *somewhere*. All endeavors begin with baby steps and we should pick our baby steps wisely. Choosing contingent a priori as our target for unification has its strategic value. But as long as all other forms of maker's knowledge are still to be handled, this pragmatic arbitrariness isn't objectionable.

in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question “Will there be a third world war?” (Evans 1982: 225)

The question about one’s belief is said to be transparent to the question about the things believed in the sense that ‘a first-person present-tense question about one’s belief is answered by reference to (or consideration of) the same reasons that would justify an answer to the corresponding question about the world’ (Moran 2001: 62; see also Valaris 2014).

Some (e.g., Boyle 2009) appear to think that transparency is unique to self-knowledge about mental states under rational control (e.g., judgment). But self-knowledge about consciousness arguably also has this feature:

[...] the moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see what, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. [...] [T]hat which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us; it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent—we look through it and see nothing but the blue [...].

(Moore 1903: 446; also Harman 1997: 667)

The transparency of conscious experiences is often described as the *impossibility* of attending to what it’s like to experience *x* without simply attending to *x* itself. The same is often said about the transparency of beliefs. In the quote from Evans, he said that to answer questions about what I believe, I *must* attend outwards. These are overstatements.

There are situations where it first occurs to us that we have certain beliefs and *only then* do we turn to the world to see whether it matches our beliefs. So, we *can* attend to our beliefs directly. The same is true for consciousness. By conceiving of my conscious experience of redness as being qualitatively the same as your conscious experience of greenness, we *can* bring our attention to our conscious experiences themselves and not the features experienced (Block 1996: 27–8). As Kind (2003) argued, interpreted charitably, even Moore only seems to think that attending to our consciousness itself without simply attending to what we are conscious of is *difficult* or *atypical*, not impossible. The transparency of our beliefs and our consciousness should be understood as a weaker claim about our *typical* access to our beliefs and our consciousness.



Intentions are transparent too. Intentions are about actions. *Typically*, to figure out what to intend, we figure out what to do. As Shah (2008: 2) notes, ‘[a]iming to arrive at an intention with respect to *A*-ing via deliberation thus requires that you determine whether to *A*.’

Admittedly, the primary concern of Shah’s claim is deliberation as the practical process of making up our mind that *produces* intentions and actions, not the epistemic process of *learning* about our intentions and actions. One might then argue that the intuitiveness of Shah’s claim doesn’t support the transparency of intention as an epistemological feature of intention.

Yet, our agential knowledge is a form of maker’s knowledge (Section 1.2.2), where we know about something by producing it. *If* we typically form our intentions by engaging in the deliberative process of producing intentional actions as Shah says, what intentions we form depends on the process that produces intentional actions and thereby agential knowledge. We then have strong reason to agree with Setiya: ‘Our capacity for self-knowledge of belief exploits a prior capacity to know the world by forming beliefs about it. Like-wise, our capacity to know what we intend exploits a prior capacity to know what we are doing by forming intentions’ (2011: 177). Analogy: since the kind of food poisoning one gets depends on one’s process of choosing what to eat, it’s *implausible* that the food one chooses depends on one’s knowledge about one’s food poisoning. Preferably, our theory doesn’t make our agential knowledge depend on our knowledge about our intentions. This is the third desirable feature.

### 1.3 Something’s missing

There are plenty of theories about the non-observational character of agential knowledge. None of the major views has *all* the three desirable features we discussed in Section 1.2:

- [1] warrant in virtue of the action itself;
- [2] unification with some form of maker’s knowledge (other than agential knowledge);
- [3] agential knowledge independent of self-knowledge about intention.

According to Paul’s view (2009; 2012; 2015), our agential knowledge consists of three steps. First, we’ve maker’s knowledge about our conscious

decisions simply by making those decisions. Second, our conscious decisions typically lead to the formation of intentions to do what we decide upon. This allows us to form inferentially justified beliefs about our intentions based on the decisions we've made. Finally, since we're disposed to do what we intend to do, we're allowed to form inferentially justified beliefs about our actions based on our intentions.

This account doesn't have [1] and [3]. Whereas this account says our self-knowledge about our decisions is based on our mental acts of making those decisions, it can't say the same about all other intentional actions. Furthermore, by the light of Paul's view, agential knowledge depends on knowledge about intention.

Extending Burge's (1996) theory about our entitlement to hold beliefs about our mental states, O'Brien (2003; 2005; 2007) and Luthra (2017) explain the non-observational character of agential knowledge with the idea that we are, without the need for observation, epistemically entitled to hold warranted beliefs about our intentional actions. How so? Our intentional actions are products of rational deliberation. We cannot shape what we do rationally if we have no access to our intentional actions. Hence, the fact that we perform intentional actions via rational deliberation alone entails that we have warrant for holding beliefs about our intentional actions.

This account has [3]. Nothing in the aforementioned reasoning refers to knowledge of intentions. But it doesn't have [1]. The non-observational warrant of our agential knowledge doesn't stem from our performing those actions. All this approach says is that we couldn't have performed rationally guided intentional actions if we hadn't had access to our own actions. Given this assumption, that we perform intentional actions indeed *entails* that we're warranted to form beliefs about our own actions. *Yet*, this is merely a fact entailing its own *precondition*. X's precondition is entailed by but doesn't stem from X.<sup>8</sup>

The Burge-inspired approach isn't the only way to explain agential knowledge as some form of epistemic entitlement. Velleman (1989) and Setiya (2008; 2009; 2012) both think that we have non-observational warrant to hold beliefs about our intentional actions because we have non-observational warrant to *expect* what we'll do. On the one hand, Velleman thinks that we have warrant to do so because expectations about one's own

<sup>8</sup> See Gertler (2018) for further discussion.

actions are self-fulfilling. Self-fulfilling expectations are automatically warranted. No prior evidence is required. On the other hand, Setiya thinks that these expectations are warranted because we have the non-propositional know-how either for the expected actions themselves or for the actions we may perform in order to perform the expected actions. For Setiya, the non-propositional know-how for an action just is the disposition to perform that action if one intends to do so. No observation is required.

Velleman's and Setiya's views have [3]. But they don't have [1]. Accounts that appeal to warrant for *expectations before our actions* clearly can't ground the warrant for our agential knowledge on our performing those actions. When someone asks, 'How do you know that you are working on your soup?', these responses aren't sensible: 'Because I knew I was about to do so,' 'Because I had the know-how.' Neither account captures the intuitive sense in which our agential knowledge is an active form of knowing, i.e., consists of epistemic warrant that stems from the intentional actions themselves.

Finally, there are views that explain NOT by extending the 'reach' of our introspection. This is done *either* (i) by working on the metaphysics of the things that are typically considered objects of introspection *or* (ii) by adopting a more liberal view of what can be represented by our introspective states. For example, Falvey (2000) rejects a sharp metaphysical distinction between intention and intentional action. By doing so, there is a sense in which introspective access to our intentions just is access to our intentional actions themselves. O'Shaughnessy (1980) does something similar by extending the state of *willing* beyond our skulls. On the contrary, in Peacocke's (2009) discussion about *mental* actions, he argues that we have direct conscious awareness of our mental actions.<sup>9</sup> And it's part of the possession conditions for concepts of mental actions (e.g., the concept 'judging') that someone who possesses those concepts takes her awareness of her own mental actions at face value. So, simply by possessing concepts for mental actions, a person is entitled to hold beliefs about the mental actions she's performing. We can imagine extending this view to all intentional actions.

Since these views still rely on a passive form of knowing that can be described as we *noticing* something—whether it's introspection or conscious awareness, they fall short of actually offering an account for the

<sup>9</sup> Pickard (2004) holds a similar view, arguing that we can *perceive* our intentional actions from within.

non-observational character of agential knowledge. These views don't have [1]. And, quite clearly, they don't have [3].

I've been focusing on [1] and [3] and said nothing about [2]. Philosophers who develop views about agential knowledge don't explicitly address the Kripkean contingent a priori. So, strictly speaking, none of these views, in their current forms, has [2]. That said, nothing prevents us from developing these views to cover other forms of maker's knowledge. How optimistic we can be depends on the specific view. And we should be cautious that, whereas some views may allow us to explain how a person's contingent a priori knowledge depends on her agential knowledge about what she does intentionally, that isn't the same as explaining contingent a priori and agential knowledge *as the same kind of knowledge* with the same kind of epistemic warrant. (I'll say more about this in Section 1.5.) As it stands, it remains at least uncertain whether any of the theories currently available has [2].

This chapter focuses on the positive task. Although I state that none of the major theories has all [1]–[3], I don't intend to argue that any of these theories should be abandoned *simply for this reason*. Perhaps they have other good features that outweigh the cost. Nonetheless, it's dialectically valuable to have an account that clearly has all three features to serve as a reference point. My goal is to develop such an account.

#### 1.4 The stipulative account

The Self-Knowledge Problem highlights the puzzling fact that agential knowledge is both warranted without observation and about external happenings. As puzzling as it may be, agential knowledge isn't unique in this respect. Even if we set knowledge about abstract objects aside, the idea of non-observational knowledge about the external world isn't unprecedented. Kripke (1980) argues that there are contingent facts about the world that one can know a priori: 'A man might know [some of Aristotle's achievements] a priori in some sense, if he in fact fixes the reference of "Aristotle" as the man who did one of [his famous achievements]. Still it won't be a necessary truth for him' (62–3). Perhaps more famously, he states that a person who stipulates a stick's length as the standard meter thereby knows a priori that the stick is one meter. In these cases, a person knows contingent facts a priori by going through certain procedures to

*create semantic facts* about the reference/extension of notions like ‘meter’ and ‘Aristotle.’

Let’s focus on the case where a person picks a stick *s* as the standard meter. Her belief that *s* is one meter is justified solely on the basis of the meaning of ‘meter’ that she establishes by stipulation. This is a case of *analytic* justification in the sense that her belief is justified because it’s true in virtue of the proper semantic understanding of her concepts alone.<sup>10</sup> My view is that agential knowledge is warranted in the same way. Agential knowledge is a form of knowledge by semantic stipulation. As analytically justified beliefs, they are warranted non-observationally. Call this the **stipulative account** of agential knowledge. To flesh out how the stipulative account works, we need two further ideas: *physical stipulation* and *self-stipulation*.

When we think about the standard cases of Kripkean contingent a priori, we typically think of stipulation as a *mental* act. It’s a mental act of *deciding* to pick this instead of that stick to be the standard meter. But stipulations don’t have to be mental acts.<sup>11</sup> Suppose I’m a prison guard responsible for handing out numbered uniforms to new prisoners. Whatever number is on the uniform a prisoner receives, that is his/her prisoner number. I may not care enough to look at the numbers when I hand them out; nonetheless, by handing out a uniform with the number 24601 to a prisoner, I perform a *physical act* which itself stipulates the prisoner’s number to be 24,601. That can be so even if, since I don’t care to look, I don’t have the belief that the

<sup>10</sup> Kripke hesitates to use the label ‘analytic’ for contingent a priori claims because he wants to emphasize that using a stick as the standard meter *only fixes the reference* of ‘meter’, not giving the notion any *descriptive meaning* (1980: 122). This is meant to be in contrast with the typical examples for analytic truths like ‘bachelors are unmarried,’ which are true in virtue of the descriptive meaning of the notions involved; in these cases, the a priori truths are also necessary. It’s harmless that Kripke, for his purpose, restricts the use of the term ‘analytic.’ But here’s why I resist overcategorization. What Kripke says about the reference fixing of ‘meter’ applies to the first-person pronoun ‘I’ too. The act of uttering ‘I’m here now’ makes itself true. It’s a principle essentially associated with ‘I’ that ‘I’ refers to whoever is uttering it now. There are well-known reasons for thinking that this reference-fixing principle isn’t the descriptive meaning ‘I’ expresses. *Yet*, I reckon we can agree that, even if this isn’t what ‘I’ expresses, knowing that the reference of ‘I’ is fixed in this way is a crucial component of our understanding of the notion. That’s why it’s appropriate to say ‘I’m here now’ is true on the basis of the *proper semantic understanding* of the notions involved *even if* what’s understood aren’t the descriptive meanings of those notions. The same is applicable to the stipulator’s belief that *s* is one meter; it’s justified because it’s true in virtue of her semantic understanding of the notions involved alone. Since the interest in analytic truths as an epistemological category consists in the fact that we’re justified to believe in them because they are true solely in virtue of the proper semantic understanding of the notions involved, it’s epistemologically well-principled to use ‘analytic’ in an inclusive way.

<sup>11</sup> This isn’t even how measurement is standardized; see Tal (2011; 2016).

prisoner is represented by the number 24601. This is a case of **physical stipulation** where *the reference of a representation is fixed* by a physical act.

Next, we sometimes do things with words. When I say ‘I apologize for the interruption,’ this utterance doesn’t merely state the fact that I apologize. This utterance is *itself* the act of apology. Why is this utterance an act of apology? *Partly* because it says so. The same applies to utterances like ‘I promise...’ and ‘I consent...’ These speech acts do what they do *partly* because they *say* so.<sup>12</sup> These are examples of a special form of physical stipulation—**self-stipulation**: they stipulate themselves to be the kind of action they are. Notice that *stipulation* itself can be an instance of self-stipulation: uttering ‘I hereby stipulate...’ is a speech act of stipulation that both stipulates whatever ‘...’ is *and* stipulates itself to be an act of stipulation.

Stipulation *creates semantic facts*. That’s what stipulations are. The act of handing out a prisoner’s uniform creates the semantic fact that the number 24601 *refers* to a prisoner. By stipulating the utterance ‘I promise...’ to be an act of promise, I create the semantic fact that the utterance counts as part of the reference/extension of the notion ‘promise.’ Having uttered ‘I promise...,’ my belief that I’m making a promise is justified because it’s true in virtue of the meaning of the notion ‘promise.’

The agential knowledge of self-stipulating speech acts (e.g., my knowledge that I’m making a promise while uttering ‘I promise...’) is non-observational because it’s analytic according to my analysis. Now my stipulative account says, far from being a special characteristic of agential knowledge of self-stipulating speech acts, this is a universal feature of agential knowledge. *Every* intentional action is, simultaneously, an act of self-stipulation that stipulates itself to be the kind of action it is in the same way sincerely uttering ‘I apologize...’ stipulates the utterance itself to be an act of apology. For example, when I make an omelette, as an intentional action, the omelette-making action stipulates itself to *count as* an act of omelette-making no matter how clumsy and poor my execution of the action is. That is, the action itself establishes the semantic fact that it’s part of the reference/extension of the notion ‘making omelette.’ Thus, if I hold the belief that I’m making an omelette (as I must be when the action is intentional), that belief

<sup>12</sup> I emphasize ‘partly’ because, surely, there are other factors. For example, to perform a speech act of promise, it isn’t sufficient that the agent says so. The interlocutor’s reception of the speech-act as a promise is *arguably* also required. I say more about such additional requirements for stipulations (and for intentional actions in general) in Section 1.5.1. The detail doesn’t matter for our current purpose.

is justified *in virtue of the stipulative meaning* of ‘making omelette.’<sup>13</sup> The belief is warranted a priori. This metaphysics of intentional action explains NOT.

The stipulative account delivers all three features we want in an account of agential knowledge. First, the view gives us [1]. The warrant for our agential knowledge stems from our performance of those actions. Unlike Haddock, who simply argues why that *must* be the case, the stipulative account explains *how* the actions themselves can do that. It’s straightforwardly the actions themselves that create the analytic justification for our agential knowledge. There is no middleman between the action and our agential knowledge doing the justificatory work.

Second, the account also gives us [3]. It makes our agential knowledge independent of self-knowledge about intentions. Surely, if  $\varphi$ -ing intentionally entails having the intention to  $\varphi$ ,<sup>14</sup> the warrant of our agential knowledge of  $\varphi$ -ing is impossible without our intention to  $\varphi$ . And surely, *if* Shoemaker’s right that self-blindness is impossible for mental states under our rational control, it’s necessary that, whenever one has an intention, one has access to that intention. As a result, there is a trivial sense that it’s impossible for a rational agent to have agential knowledge of her  $\varphi$ -ing without also knowing that she intends to  $\varphi$ . Still, her agential knowledge doesn’t, in a more robust sense, *stem from* her knowledge of her intent to  $\varphi$ .

Finally, the account also has [2]. It provides us with theoretical resources for explicitly unifying agential knowledge and the Kripkean contingent a priori as a kind of maker’s knowledge. It’s already hinted at earlier. But to fully appreciate the kind of unification the stipulative account offers, it’s useful to discuss a tempting yet ultimately unsatisfactory way to unify agential knowledge and the contingent a priori by considering a well-known objection to the Kripkean examples.

It seems that a stipulator doesn’t need empirical inquiry to figure out that *s* is one meter. At the same time, it seems that her knowledge is about a contingent fact. Putting the two together, it does seem that Kripke has given

<sup>13</sup> This implies, if I weren’t making an omelette *despite my intention and belief to be doing so*, my belief wouldn’t be analytically justified as it would have been if I were indeed making an omelette. No intentional action, no analytic justification—regardless of what the agent believes. How can intentional actions fail to happen despite one’s belief and intent? To answer this fully, we need an analysis of all the essential components of an intentional action. A comprehensive analysis of intentional action is beyond the scope of this chapter. For a partial answer, see Section 1.5.1. Here, I want to focus on presenting the basics of the account before diving into complications.

<sup>14</sup> Bratman (1984) argues against this. But I find Ludwig’s (1992: 270) response compelling.

us an example where a single piece of knowledge is both contingent and a priori. But, so the objection goes, the person actually has two pieces of knowledge. She knows that (a) whatever object she uses as the standard meter, that object is one meter and that (b) she uses *s* as the standard meter. While (a) is knowable *a priori*, it's necessary. By contrast, while (b) is contingent, it's only knowable a posteriori. So, the stipulator of the standard meter has two pieces of knowledge. One of them is necessary and a priori, the other contingent and a posteriori. It's by conflating these two that creates the illusion that the stipulator has one piece of knowledge that's both contingent and a priori.<sup>15</sup> Since this objection relies on some form of two-dimensionalist analysis of content, I'll call it the 2D objection.<sup>16</sup>

The 2D objection assumes that (b) is only knowable a posteriori. But the stipulator's knowledge of (b) is agential knowledge. Is that a problem? Not everyone who accepts NOT has a problem with that. For example, if you are like Peacocke who thinks that we're consciously aware of our intentional actions and that such action awareness—though *somehow* not a kind of observation<sup>17</sup>—is no more a source of a priori knowledge than our awareness of our headache, then you may be content with the claim that the stipulator's knowledge of (b) is a posteriori yet not observational in a restricted sense.

If we pull (a) and (b) apart as the 2D objection suggests, one might be tempted to think that, if we accept that the stipulator's knowledge that *s* is one meter just is her knowledge of (a) and (b), and if the stipulator's

<sup>15</sup> See BonJour (1998); Turri (2011).

<sup>16</sup> A clarification about the dialectic. Although (a) and (b) jointly entail that *s* is one meter, that alone *doesn't imply* that the stipulator's belief that *s* is one meter *just is* the fact of her holding two distinct beliefs (a) and (b), let alone implying that the belief's appearance of being contingent a priori stems from our conflating (a) and (b). The 2D objection serves as a *way out* for those who already have an initial inclination to accept the traditional view that necessity and apriority go together. Its goal isn't to prove that the Kripkean examples are indeed confusions but to show that those examples aren't strong evidence to convince someone who is initially skeptical of contingent a priori. These examples still work for those who are initially neutral. By setting out to explain away the appearance of contingent a priori, the objection basically acknowledges that those Kripkean cases have the *prima facie* appearance of being contingent a priori.

<sup>17</sup> I say 'somehow' because I confess I don't understand how Peacocke's action awareness isn't a form of observation. He argued that Shoemaker's Independent Condition (IC) of observation doesn't apply to action awareness. One would have thought that Peacocke takes IC to be a defining feature for observation. But his argument ends up implying that IC doesn't even apply to observation: 'The blind person can conceive of objective states of affairs involving objects, events, their properties, and spatial relations only because she is capable of perceiving these things and properties in at least some other sense modality' (2009: 205). So, I'm not sure what to make of the argument.



knowledge of (b) is agential knowledge, then the stipulator's knowledge is based on agential knowledge *no matter what theory of agential knowledge one endorses*. It's tempting to think that we already have a way to put agential knowledge and Kripkean contingent a priori in a unified picture. We don't need a specific theory of agential knowledge for that. It isn't something the stipulative account is in a better position to offer.

What [2] asks for is a framework to unify agential knowledge and some form of maker's knowledge *as the same kind of knowledge*. The basis for [2] is that, intuitively, an intentional action is what we produce and that, like other forms of maker's knowledge, we know about our actions by producing them.

For the sake of illustration, let's assume Setiya's view that the stipulator's agential knowledge of (b) is based on her *knowing how* to pick a stick as a measurement standard. Then, based on (a), she's justified to believe that the stick she picks is one meter in virtue of what she knowingly stipulates 'meter' to mean. Notice that, regardless of how she comes to learn about what 'meter' means, her belief that *s* is one meter is true in virtue of the meaning of 'meter.' So, whereas her agential knowledge is warranted based on her know-how, her knowledge that *s* is one meter isn't; whereas her knowledge that *s* is one meter is warranted analytically, her agential knowledge isn't. In this picture, agential knowledge and the Kripkean contingent a priori are intimately related; yet, they are different kinds of knowledge.

The stipulative account can do better. According to it, *not only* can we say that the stipulator's knowledge that *s* is one meter is inferentially related to her agential knowledge of (b). We can *also* say that they are *both* stipulative knowledge: something we know analytically in virtue of the semantic facts we create.<sup>18</sup> Anscombe argued that intentional actions are *epistemic* phenomena. Intentional actions are epistemic phenomena because, more fundamentally, they are *semantic* phenomena.

## 1.5 Objections

There is much more to be said to develop my account than what I can adequately discuss in one chapter. I'll focus on three potential objections to clarify some key elements of the view.

<sup>18</sup> If my account is true, the 2D objection fails because (a) and (b) are both a priori.

## 1.5.1 Easiness

Does my theory make intentional action too easy? Analytic justification is conclusive. By making stipulation sufficient for the analytic justification of our beliefs about our intentional actions, my theory implies that we can *truly* be doing something by stipulation. That seems to make actions *too* easy; after all, I can't jump to the moon simply by declaring so.

My response has two parts: (a) properly understood, performing an action isn't as *difficult* as the objection suggests; (b) properly understood, stipulation isn't as *easy* as the objection suggests.

(a) *Performance isn't that difficult*. Performing an action does not mean the action is *successfully executed*. I might be *walking to the store*, but the action I'm performing may fail to be successfully executed because I'm knocked down by a car before I get there (e.g., see Thompson 2011; Falvey 2000). I might also perform the action of shooting a three-pointer but execute that poorly. Once we acknowledge that poorly executed actions are intentional actions nonetheless, we'll realize that failure to perform an intentional action isn't as widespread as one might have thought. Agential knowledge is about an agent's knowing the intentional actions she *performs*, well executed or not.

(b) *Stipulation isn't that easy*. The objection stems partly from the fact that stipulation seems trivial. It's tempting to think so if we conflate stipulating with *assuming* or *guessing* or *pretending*. Consider this: a family can stipulate Friday nights to be family nights when everyone should be home for dinner. Their stipulation *makes* Friday nights their family nights. By contrast, I cannot stipulate Friday nights to be *their* family nights. At best, I can *assume* or *guess* or *pretend* that Friday nights are their family nights. I'm not *in the position* to literally make that stipulation even if I wholeheartedly believe otherwise. My point being, there are nontrivial restrictions on stipulation that aren't up to us.

We shouldn't think that stipulating what one's doing is trivial as long as we recall how the relevant stipulations work in my account. When I  $\phi$  intentionally, the intentional action  $\phi$  *itself* is the act of stipulation. The stipulation that produces the relevant analytic justification isn't a separate mental act that accompanies  $\phi$ . Since the act of stipulation is identical to the intentional action itself, any necessary condition for intentional actions is automatically a necessary condition for the stipulation that produces analytic justification for our agential knowledge. This brings in nontrivial constraints on an agent's self-stipulation that isn't up to us.

Although agential knowledge is an essential component of intentional action, the goal of this essay is to analyze agential knowledge, not intentional action per se. So, as disappointing as it might be, I won't commit myself to any necessary components of intentional actions beyond the requirement of agential knowledge. But just to illustrate how the metaphysics of intentional action can impose nontrivial constraint on our ability to stipulate in a way that isn't up to us, let's *assume* the following necessary condition for intentional action: to perform an intentional action, it's necessary that its successful execution is objectively probable. The chance of winning the lottery is objectively slim. Although one can buy a lottery ticket intentionally and even happen to win; one cannot *intentionally win* the lottery. Since one cannot perform the intentional action of winning the lottery, the self-stipulation my account appeals to—i.e., the intentional action itself—isn't available. Thus, *even if* one wholeheartedly believes that one is intentionally winning the lottery by buying a ticket on a particular day and happens to win, that belief wouldn't be justified by self-stipulation.

Putting the two together, making stipulation sufficient for intentional action doesn't make intentional action *too* easy because, *properly understood*, intentional actions aren't hard and stipulation isn't easy.

This response highlights a unique aspect of my view. Discussion about agential knowledge often carries a reductionist undertone. We're meant to *build up* our understanding of intentional actions by *first* investigating their components, e.g., agential knowledge. The stipulative account requires a holistic reimagining of the division of labor. As much as studying the nature of agential knowledge helps us understand intentional actions, having a grasp of the nature of intentional actions also informs our epistemology of agential knowledge in an indispensable way. Neither of them comes first.<sup>19</sup> To ease ourselves into this hermeneutical circle, I have been focusing on agential knowledge and remained largely non-committal regarding intentional actions but, actually, a *full* understanding of agential knowledge cannot be achieved with a blank slate about intentional actions.

### 1.5.2 Stipulate knowingly

I omitted one detail when I presented the stipulative theory. My prison guard example shows that the idea of physical stipulation allows someone to

<sup>19</sup> Thus, I'm not advocating an intentional action-first approach (see Levy 2013).

stipulate unknowingly. However, for a stipulation to generate a priori justification, it must be done *knowingly*.

Say one  $\varphi$ -s intentionally. According to my view, this intentional action makes two descriptions true simultaneously: (1) one is  $\varphi$ -ing; and (2) one is stipulating *this* to count as  $\varphi$ -ing. One might object that people who  $\varphi$  intentionally don't normally know (2). Why? One might say, if those agents were asked whether they're stipulating anything, they're unlikely to respond positively. Whereas this is a *prima facie* reason for thinking that agents who  $\varphi$  don't necessarily know (2), it's inconclusive.

I want to say those agents *do* know that (2). Imagine you're making pancakes. Being an incompetent cook, you buzz around making a mess, not unlike the mess you made baking a cake before. What makes this mess *count as* pancake-making and that mess cake-baking? *You* do. I reckon you would acknowledge that. In this sense, agents who  $\varphi$  intentionally know they *make something count as*  $\varphi$ -ing. One simply needs to probe in the right way to elicit responses that reveal this.

Stipulative justification requires the stipulation to be done knowingly, but it doesn't require the stipulation to be an *intentional* action itself. Thus, technically, the agent's first-person knowledge of (1) and (2) don't need to be justified the same way, both as agential knowledge. Nonetheless, it's plausible and parsimonious to say so. A problem arises though.

If an agent's knowledge of (2) is agential knowledge of that very intentional act of stipulation, my account implies that *this intentional stipulation* is, in turn, also an act of self-stipulation that stipulates itself to count as an act of stipulation. The agent knows a priori that she stipulates what she does to count as  $\varphi$ -ing because, with the same act, she stipulates that to be an act of stipulation. An infinite regress of stipulative knowledge emerges whenever one acts intentionally.

One might present this as a *reductio* against my theory because our finite minds cannot hold infinitely many beliefs. But that's false. Our mind can't hold infinitely many *occurrent beliefs*, but we have infinitely many *standing beliefs*. For all number  $n > 2$ , I *know* I'm shorter than  $n$  meters. There are infinitely many  $n$ ; therefore, I have infinitely many beliefs. My view accepts that it's constitutive of every intentional action that the agent has infinitely many levels of stipulative knowledge: *that she's  $\varphi$ -ing, that she makes this count as  $\varphi$ -ing, that she makes this count as making this count as  $\varphi$ -ing*, etc. And the regress isn't vicious: each layer of agential knowledge is explained by stipulation at the next level without circularity and without running out of explanation.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Is invoking infinitely many layers of agential knowledge non-parsimonious? Not obviously. A theory is non-parsimonious only if everything it's meant to do can be achieved by

### 1.5.3 The third-person

We began with the intuition that an agent's knowledge about her actions is different in kind from a spectator's knowledge about others' actions. Intuitively, part of this difference consists in the fact that agential knowledge is based on a special, non-observational warrant and a spectator's knowledge isn't.

*Let's say* Newton defined a technical notion of force by his laws of motion. So, it's true in virtue of meaning that  $F = ma$ . And it's an analytic truth not only for Newton, who stipulated the technical meaning of force, but for everyone who is part of the discourse.

According to my view, when I'm making an omelette, my intentional action stipulates itself to count as an instance of omelette-making. As a result, my belief that I'm making an omelette is analytically justified because it's true on the basis of what I help stipulate 'omelette-making' to mean. Suppose you, also being in the kitchen, believe that I'm making an omelette too. If my belief is analytically justified, so is yours. The stipulative account implies that agential knowledge and *spectator knowledge* are both typically non-observationally justified. Isn't that a problem?

I'm not sure that this *isn't* a cost of the view. But I'm not sure that it *is* a cost either. That agential and some spectator knowledge both turn out to be a priori doesn't mean they are a priori in the same way. In fact, my account says that they aren't: an agent's analytic justification is based on the semantic facts she creates by performing intentional actions; a spectator's analytic justification is based on the semantic facts that she acknowledges others create. The view doesn't eliminate the first-person vs. third-person asymmetry.

If not being in total agreement with our intuition alone is a cost, and *if it's* intuitively the case that the agential vs. spectator knowledge asymmetry partly consists in the fact that the latter is observational but the former isn't, then it's *prima facie* a cost of my view that both agential and spectator knowledge are justified a priori. But it's a cost my view can say something about to neutralize. (So, perhaps, it's no longer a cost.)

Intuitively, these two claims are true: (1) agential knowledge is non-observational; and (2) agential and spectator knowledge have different kinds of warrant. One might say that it's a tempting mistake to make the

fewer commitments. So far, only my view can accommodate the three desirable features in Section 1.2. *Perhaps* there are other criteria that we want our theory to capture and doing so requires us to compromise some of the three features. But that would be about weighing different explanatory goals, not about parsimony.

further claim that spectator knowledge is observational; it's a result of an invalid inference based on (1) and (2). And there is an *independent* motivation for saying so *if* one is sympathetic to Moran's (2004: 57) reason for thinking that agential knowledge is non-observational. He says that, if you're walking down the Fifth Avenue but forget what you're doing, no amount of observation can restore your agential knowledge about what you are doing. You just have to decide what to do again. If none of *my* observations can restore knowledge of what I'm doing, I don't see how an onlooker's observation can do better.

All I want to do is to show how my view has the resources to defuse this objection. Developing an account of third-person knowledge about intentional actions to complement the stipulative account is a task for another occasion.<sup>21</sup>

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