Essentially Intentional Action[1]

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1 Introduction

An act type is something that an agent can do: walk to the store, climb Mount Everest, trip over a wire. Act types are 'repeatables': many have walked to the store, climbed Everest, and tripped over a wire. Act types are not events. If you climb Everest, an event occurs—your cold, brutal climb—but this event is not what you do. What you do is climb Everest.

Many act types can be done intentionally or non-intentionally. You can break a vase intentionally by throwing it out the window. You can break it non-intentionally while stretching your arms. Some act types cannot be done intentionally. If you commit involuntary manslaughter, you do so non-intentionally. Anscombe famously said that some act types can only be done intentionally. We defend Anscombe: some act types are *essentially intentional*.

In §2–3, we argue that *Ving intentionally* is itself essentially intentional: it is not possible to be non-intentionally Ving intentionally. And we show how this explains why various other act types—such as trying, thanking, and lying—are essentially intentional.[3]

In §4, we turn to an important application. The claim that there are essentially intentional act types is a premise in recent arguments against Anscombe's practical knowledge thesis: the thesis that if you are Ving intentionally, then you know that you are Ving.[4] Beddor & Pavese (2021) say that we should give up on essentially intentional act types to preserve the practical knowledge thesis. We disagree. Anscombe's view that there are essentially intentional act types is in far better standing than her practical knowledge thesis.

2 Anscombean Verbs

We will say that an act type V is *essentially intentional* if and only if, necessarily, if you are Ving, you are Ving intentionally. (Note: it is uncontroversial that, necessarily, if you are Ving intentionally, you are Ving. It follows that an act type V is essentially intentional if and only if: necessarily, you are Ving if and only if you are Ving intentionally.)

Anscombe offers a list of verbs that are supposed to stand for essentially intentional act types. Her list includes 'sell', 'hire', 'marry', and 'greet'. Many have expressed doubts about Anscombe's list. Setiya (2016) says: 'The cases do not convince. These are all things one can do unintentionally.' Beddor & Pavese also reject Anscombe's examples. Though they focus on

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[3]Since Anscombe, some authors have defended the existence of essentially intentional act types. See Ford (2011) and Ludwig (2014, 2017).

[4]See Piñeros Glasscock (2020) and Beddor & Pavese (2021).

'greet', they claim that their arguments generalize to the other verbs on Anscombe's list—and indeed, to all verbs and verb phrases.

We will say that a verb or verb phrase is *Anscombean* if and only if it stands for an essentially intentional act type. Suppose Setiya's and Beddor & Pavese's arguments convince us that the English verb 'greet' isn't Anscombean: 'greet' does not stand for an essentially intentional act type. Still, one might wonder: Couldn't we just introduce a new verb 'greet$_{int}$' that stands for intentionally greeting. If we do, will we have invented an Anscombean verb? Will we have shown that there *is* an essentially intentional act type: the act type denoted by 'greet$_{int}$'?

No. To greet$_{int}$ your friend is to do something intentionally: to greet your friend intentionally. But it does not follow that to greet$_{int}$ your friend is to greet$_{int}$ your friend intentionally.

It does not follow. But it still might be true that to greet$_{int}$ your friend is to greet$_{int}$ your friend intentionally. We think it is true. It is true because, for any V, 'intentionally V' is Anscombean, and intentionally Ving is essentially intentional. That is to say, 'intentionally' iterates: you are intentionally Ving if and only if you are intentionally intentionally Ving.

Given the assumption that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional, the following are equivalent:

You are greeting$_{int}$ your friend.

You are intentionally greeting your friend.

You are intentionally: greeting your friend intentionally.

You are intentionally greeting$_{int}$ your friend.

We start, in §2.1, by briefly motivating the idea that, for any V, 'intentionally V' is Anscombean. (We offer a more sustained defense of this claim in §3.) In §2.2, we show how this claim can explain why other verbs and verb phrases are Anscombean.

2.1 Intentionally Ving is Essentially Intentional

Consider:

(1)   # I was intentionally walking, but I wasn't intentionally walking intentionally.

(2)   # Sorry, I had no idea I was walking intentionally! I only meant to be walking.

(1) and (2) sound utterly bizarre: we cannot make sense of them.[5]
    Contrast (1) and (2) with the following perfectly normal assertions:

(3)   I was walking intentionally, but I wasn't intentionally walking slowly.

(4)   Sorry, I had no idea I was walking slowly! I only meant to be walking.

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[5]Grano (2017) makes a similar observation. He notices that sentences like (i) are invariably defective.

(i)   # John intends to break the window unintentionally.

If 'intentionally V' is Anscombean, we have a simple, compelling explanation of this contrast. (1) straightforwardly describes an impossibility. So does (2), on the plausible assumption that I cannot be Ving intentionally if I have no idea that I am Ving. Nothing is wrong with (3) and (4), on the other hand, for it of course does not follow from the fact that I am walking intentionally that I am intentionally walking slowly.[6]

If 'intentionally V' were not Anscombean, we would expect it to work more like 'V slowly'. We would expect to find, and to be able to describe, cases in which you are intentionally Ving, but you are not intentionally Ving intentionally. That is not what we find.

This provides some prima facie support for the hypothesis that 'intentionally V' is Anscombean, that it stands for an essentially intentional act type. Why care about this?

One reason is that it can help explain why other verbs are Anscombean. To see how, consider 'deceive'. Many authors say that deceiving is essentially intentional. For example, Carson (2010) says: 'I take it to be self-contradictory to say that someone deceived another person unintentionally.' But now consider how Carson argues for this hypothesis:[7]

> Deception requires some sort of intention to cause others to have false beliefs. [...] In order to deceive you, I must intentionally mislead you, or intentionally cause you to have false beliefs.

To deceive someone, Carson says, is to do something intentionally: to intentionally cause them to have false beliefs. But as we have seen, it does not follow that to deceive is to deceive intentionally. That is, it does not follow unless 'intentionally V' is Anscombean. If 'intentionally V' is Anscombean, the inference is valid: if deceiving is intentionally causing to have false beliefs, and 'intentionally cause...' is Anscombean, then 'deceive' is Anscombean.

More generally, let 'V' be a verb or verb phrase that stands for the act type of intentionally Zing, for some act type Z. Then it follows that Ving is essentially intentional and 'V' is Anscombean. We think many verbs are like this, on at least some of their readings, including 'try', 'thank', and 'lie'. These verbs are Anscombean because, for some Z, they stand for the act type intentionally Zing.

We begin with 'try'.

2.2 Trying

It is natural to think that trying is essentially intentional: I can accidentally break a vase, but I cannot accidentally *try* to break a vase. I can accidentally poison the water, but I cannot accidentally *try* to poison the water.[8]

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[6] One might say that we don't need to say that 'intentionally V' is Anscombean to account for the infelicity of (1). We have an alternative explanation: it has repeated words. But (2) sounds just as bad to us, and 'intentionally' is not repeated in (2).

[7] See pages 48-49 of Carson (2010).

[8] For defenses of the view that trying is essentially intentional, see McCann (1975), Adams (1995), Ginet (1990), and Holguín and Lederman (ms).

Holguín and Lederman (ms) defend the claim trying is essentially intentional. They observe that trying passes Anscombe's 'Why' test for intentional action. According to Anscombe, you are Ving intentionally if the question 'Why are you Ving?', understood as a request for your reasons, 'has application'. To say that the question has application is to say, roughly, that you cannot truthfully reject the question by saying something like:

(5)   I was Ving, but not intentionally.

(6)   I didn't mean to be Ving—it was just an accident.

(7)   I had no idea I was Ving!

For example, if I am intentionally poisoning the water, I cannot truthfully reject the question, 'Why are you poisoning the water?' by saying any of the following.

(8)   I was poisoning the water, but not intentionally.

(9)   I didn't mean to be poisoning the water—it was just an accident.

(10)   I had no idea I was poisoning the water!

Now consider *trying* to poison the water. If I ask you why you are trying to poison the water, I would be very surprised to hear any of the following in response.

(11)   ? I was trying to poisoning the water, but not intentionally trying.

(12)   ? I didn't mean to be trying to poison the water—it was just an accident.

(13)   ? I had no idea I was trying to poison the water.

The infelicity of (11)–(13) certainly suggests that 'try' is Anscombean—that it stands for an essentially intentional act type.

But things are not so straightforward. The word 'try' is context-sensitive: 'try to V' stands for different act types in different contexts. Sometimes our standards for trying are demanding, and 'try' is roughly synonymous with 'try with enough effort'. In other contexts, we use 'try' permissively, so that it is very easy to count as trying to do something.[9] If 'try to V' is context sensitive, standing for different act types in different contexts, then it may be that 'try to V' stands for an essentially intentional act type in some contexts, but not in others.

We will say that a verb or verb phrase 'V' is *partly Anscombean* if it stands for an essentially intentional act type in some contexts. We will say that 'V' is *fully Anscombean* if it stands for an essentially intentional act type in all contexts.

On the basis of (11)–(13), we might be tempted to say that 'try' is fully Anscombean: for any context, if 'I'm trying to poison the water' expresses a truth in that context, so does 'I'm intentionally trying to poison the water'.

But we should not say that 'try' is fully Anscombean. In some contexts, 'try to V' has what we call a *merely purposive* interpretation. You can count as trying to V in the merely purposive

[9]See Holguín & Lederman (ms) on the context sensitivity of 'try'. See also Sharvit (2003) and Grano (2011).

sense if you are acting in order to V, whether or not you are doing so intentionally.

Consider an example. David is a sleepwalker. One night, he gets up from bed and walks towards his sister's room. David pulls on the handle of the door, but the door is locked. You and I are watching from the other room. You ask what David is doing, and I reply:

(14)   David is trying to open his sister's door again.

Or suppose David is asleep with his arms tied behind his back. He has an itch on his cheek. He reflexively moves his arm to scratch the itch, but since his arms are tied, he cannot extend his arm. You ask: 'Why did David flinch just now?' I reply:

(15)   He is trying to scratch an itch.

In both cases, David is trying to do something, but he is not intentionally trying, since he's asleep. What you do when you're asleep may be done for a purpose, but it is not done intentionally.

Let 'try$_1$' stand for trying in the merely purposive sense: the sense in which David is trying to open the door, or trying to scratch an itch. What does 'try$_1$' mean? Plausibly, to be trying$_1$ to V is to be Zing in order to V, for some Z.[10] To say that David is trying$_1$ to open the door is to say that he is doing something—such as pulling the door handle—in order to open the door. To say that David is trying$_1$ to scratch an itch is to say that he is doing something—such as moving his arm towards the itch—in order to scratch his itch.

To try$_1$ to V is not to intentionally try$_1$ to V: 'try$_1$' is not Anscombean. But the infelicity of (11)–(13) suggests that 'try' also has an Anscombean reading. We can bring out this Anscombean reading in the sleepwalker case by imagining that, one morning, David's sister asks him, 'Why are you trying to open my door every night? It's locked for a reason.' David replies:

(16)   I'm not *trying* to open your door every night—I have a sleepwalking problem!

Let 'try$_2$' stand for the stronger kind of trying David has in mind in (16). What might 'try$_2$' mean? We suggest that it means intentionally try$_1$: to be trying$_2$ to V is, roughly, to be intentionally Zing in order to V, for some Z. When he is sleepwalking, David is pulling the handle in order to open his sister's door, but he's not intentionally pulling the handle in order to open her door: He has no idea he is doing this. David is not intentionally trying$_1$ to open his sister's door.

If this is right, we can use the fact that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional to explain why 'try' has an Anscombean use: the use David has in mind in (16), and the use that is responsible for the oddness of (11)-(13). If trying$_2$ to V is intentionally trying$_1$ to V, and intentionally Ving is essentially intentional for any V, then whenever you are trying$_2$ to V, you are intentionally trying$_2$ to V: trying$_2$ is essentially intentional.[11]

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[10] McCann (1975), Thompson (2008).

[11] Objection: we say that sometimes 'try' means try$_1$, which is not essentially intentional, and sometimes it means try$_2$, which is. But if 'try' has a non-Anscombean reading, shouldn't (11)–(13) sometimes strike us as okay? Shouldn't we expect speakers to accommodate, to try to find the non-Anscombean reading? (Thanks to [redacted] for this question.) Reply: we think that sentences like (11)–(13) can sound okay. David, the recurrent sleepwalker,

2.3   Speech Act Verbs

We think that something similar happens with some speech act verbs. Consider 'thank (some-one)'. It is clear that 'thank' has at least one reading that is not Anscombean. Suppose I show my enemy a thank you sign in Japanese (a language that I cannot read). My enemy sees it, and they are pleased. I have thanked them. But I have not intentionally thanked them.

This shows that there's a use of 'thank' on which it means, roughly, that you have done something that conventionally expresses gratitude, such as holding up a thank you sign in Japanese. Let 'thank$_1$' stand for this act type of conventionally expressing gratitude.

There is also a stronger use of 'thank' on which I do not count as thanking my enemy just by holding up a sign. Upon learning what the sign says, I might exclaim:

(17)   Oh no, I wasn't *thanking* you! I thought the sign said something much ruder.

Let 'thank$_2$' stand for this stronger sense of thanking. What does 'thank$_2$' mean? Plausibly, 'thank$_2$' means intentionally thank$_1$: to thank$_2$ is to intentionally do something that conventionally expresses gratitude. It is no coincidence that we can paraphrase (17) with 'mean' or 'intend': 'I didn't mean to be thanking you! I thought the sign said something much ruder.' You are not thanking$_2$ your enemy because you are not intentionally thanking$_1$ her.

This is not the place to defend a full account of thanking or of 'thanking'. That would require saying much more about how speech acts work, and this is not a paper about speech acts. We will only observe that if something like what we've said is right, then 'thank' is partly Anscombean. If 'thank' sometimes means thank$_2$, and to thank$_2$ is to intentionally thank$_1$, then thank$_2$ is essentially intentional: whenever you are thanking$_2$ someone, you are intentionally thanking$_2$ them.

2.4   Lying

As a final example, consider 'lie'. Sometimes we use the word 'lie' in a way that counts any false claim as a lie. 'Where are the keys?' my partner asks. 'They're on the table' I reply. (That's where I saw them last.) A few minutes later I look down and see them in her purse. 'Oops! I lied—the keys are in your purse!' I exclaim.

We are inclined to think this is a non-literal use of 'lie'. If a friend asks 'Why would you lie to your partner about her keys?', I would respond 'No, it wasn't really a lie at all. I just meant that I was mistaken.'

If we set aside this non-literal use, it seems plausible that 'lie' is fully Anscombean. I ask my friend why he lied to me about his dog's age. I would be surprised to hear that he wasn't lying on purpose, or that his lying was a sheer accident. How could it be a sheer accident? If he tells me that he was confused, then we aren't dealing with the literal use. If he tells me he

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can say: 'I didn't mean to be trying to open your door—I was sleepwalking again!' or 'I had no idea I was trying to open your door!' The fact that speakers often don't access the non-Anscombean reading when they encounter such sentences out of context does not show that there is no such reading. Many context sensitive words have readings that require more contextual clues than others.

blurted out the words without thinking, his lie would still be intentional, even if done without prior deliberation. If he tells me that he blurted out the words without even knowing what he was saying—maybe he's still learning English—then he didn't lie at all.

If lying is fully Anscombean, we can explain why by appealing to the fact that 'intentionally V' is fully Anscombean. Plausibly, to lie is to intentionally assert something false. Since 'intentionally assert something false' is fully Anscombean, it follows that 'lie' is too.

Not everyone agrees that to lie is to intentionally assert something false. Some theorists say that you must also intend to deceive your audience.[12] But these theorists can still agree that 'lie' is at least partly Anscombean. For them, to lie is, roughly, to try to deceive someone by asserting something false. Since 'try' is partly Anscombean, 'lie' is too.

3 Objections

We began §2 by showing that there is prima facie evidence that 'intentionally V' is Anscombean. To move beyond prima facie support, we should consider possible counterexamples and objections. We start with purported counterexamples in §3.1. Then in §3.2 and §3.3, we present and respond to two objections.

3.1 Purported Counterexamples

We can partition potential counterexamples into three types of cases. They differ in what your intentions are with respect to intentionally Ving.

In an *against* case, you are Ving intentionally against your intentions. Your intention is not to V intentionally, but instead to V non-intentionally. Despite your intentions, you are Ving intentionally. And so you are not intentionally Ving intentionally.

In a *neutral* case, you are Ving intentionally with neutral intentions. You do not intend to V intentionally, nor do you intend to V non-intentionally. And so you are not intentionally Ving intentionally.

In a *for* case, you are Ving intentionally, and you intend to V intentionally, yet your intentional Ving is caused in a deviant way by your intention, rather than the one planned. And so you are not intentionally Ving intentionally.

(Note, our description of against cases and neutral cases assumes that if you are Ving Zly, and yet do not intend to V Zly, then you are not intentionally Ving Zly. This assumption follows from what Bratman calls the 'Simple View': the view that, necessarily, if you are Ving intentionally, you intend to V.[13] We discuss the Simple View in more detail when we introduce neutral cases.)

We argue that all three types of cases are unconvincing on reflection: we have no good reason to think that against cases, neutral cases, or for cases are possible.

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[12]See Lackey (2013). For objections, see Carson (2006) and Sorensen (2007).

[13]See Bratman (1984) for arguments against the Simple View. See Amaya (2018) for a defense. Note that the Simple View is more often formulated with the perfective: if I intentionally Ved, then I intended to V.

Against Cases

Here is a potential against case.

> *Breathe Naturally*
> Over the past minute, you have started paying too much attention to your breathing and are having trouble breathing unintentionally. You want to breathe unintentionally, and so you try to distract yourself from your breath. But you fail: your breathing continues to be intentional.

If Breathe Naturally is a genuine against case, then you are breathing intentionally against your intentions: you intend to breathe unintentionally.

We are not convinced that you do intend to breathe unintentionally, and so we are not convinced that Breathe Naturally is a genuine against case. What's clear is that you intend to cause yourself to breathe unintentionally. You intend to distract yourself—say, by working on your paper, or by doing some jumping jacks—thereby causing yourself to breathe unintentionally. Should we also say that you have another intention—an intention to breathe unintentionally?

We think we shouldn't. If you intend to breathe unintentionally, then you have an intention that it is metaphysically impossible for you to fulfill. (We will explain why in just a moment.) In general, it is better not to attribute to others intentions that it is metaphysically impossible to fulfill—if we can avoid it. And in Breathe Naturally, we can avoid it. For we can explain your behavior by saying that you intend to cause yourself to breathe unintentionally. There is no need to appeal to an intention to breathe unintentionally.

It is impossible to fulfill your intention to breathe unintentionally because it is impossible to intentionally breathe unintentionally. This follows from the following more general principle.

> *Adverb Dropping*
> If you are intentionally Ving Z-ly, and necessarily, anyone who is Ving Z-ly is Ving, then: you are intentionally Ving.

Adverb Dropping is plausible: if you are intentionally running slowly, you are intentionally running. If you are intentionally dancing gracefully, you are intentionally dancing.

(Why restrict the principle to act types V such that, necessarily, anyone who is Ving Zly is Ving? Because without this restriction, there are counterexamples. Take adverbs of completion, such as 'partly' or 'halfway'. I can intentionally shut the door halfway without intentionally shutting the door. Adverb Dropping is not subject to this counterexample: if you are shutting the door halfway, you are not shutting the door.)

Adverb Dropping entails that it is impossible to be intentionally breathing unintentionally. For suppose you could be intentionally breathing unintentionally. Then, by Adverb Dropping,

you would be intentionally breathing. And so you would not be unintentionally breathing after all.[14]

Neutral cases

In a neutral case, you are Ving intentionally with neutral intentions. You do not intend to V intentionally. Nor do you intend to V non-intentionally. And so you are not intentionally Ving intentionally.

Why think neutral cases are possible? We will consider two arguments.

The first argument appeals to a particular version of the Simple View on which intentionally Ving requires an occurrent intention to V—an intention that is, in Mele's (2009) words, 'at work in producing relevant intentional actions.' What does it take to have an occurrent intention? One might accept this requirement: if I occurrently intend to V, then I am thinking about Ving.

If this is right, then neutral cases are possible, even common. Suppose I am intentionally Ving, yet I am not thinking about whether I am Ving. By the thinking requirement, I do not have an occurrent intention to V intentionally, and so I am not intentionally Ving intentionally.

But it can't be right. If intentionally Ving requires an occurrent intention to V, which requires thinking about Ving, then it follows that whenever you are intentionally Ving, you are thinking about Ving. And that's wrong. Ballerinas can intentionally dance gracefully without thinking about whether their dancing is graceful. Basketball players can intentionally shoot with their feet shoulder width apart without thinking about their feet.

Now, the kind of thinking we've had in mind is conscious thinking. But thinking about Ving may be required for intentionally Ving, so long as thinking is understood broadly. This brings us to the second argument.

Suppose that intending to V does require thinking about Ving, broadly understood. Then we have that intentionally Ving requires intending to V (by the Simple View), which requires thinking about Ving, broadly understood. Suppose further that thinking about Ving requires having the concept V. Then, putting everything together, it follows that intentionally Ving requires having the concept V. Call this the 'conceptual requirement' on intentional action.

We can try to use the conceptual requirement to show that neutral cases are possible. Consider an agent who is intentionally Ving, yet lacks the concept *V intentionally*. By the conceptual requirement, she is not intentionally Ving intentionally.

We have two responses to this argument.

First, the conceptual requirement seems to be false: A toddler can intentionally steal my computer—she wants my attention—without having the concept *computer*. She can intentionally eat a legume—she loves peanuts—without having the concept *legume*.[15]

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[14]See Wilson (1989) and Ginet (1990) for defense of an even stronger thesis—that, necessarily, if we intend to V, we intend to V intentionally. We are sympathetic to this claim, but we won't defend it here.

[15]See Holguín & Lederman (ms) for arguments against a similar objection to their claim that 'try' entails 'try to try'.

Second, the conceptual requirement does not obviously lead to the possibility of neutral cases. For there is reason to think that agents capable of intentional action must have the concept *intentional action*.[16] Here's one reason to think that they must. Necessarily, if you are Ving intentionally, you have some idea that you are Ving intentionally. But then you must possess the concept *V intentionally*. (Why must you have some idea that you are Ving intentionally? Consider Anscombe's 'Why?' test. If you are Ving intentionally, then the question 'Why are you Ving?', understood as a request for your reasons, 'has application'. We take this to mean that you are willing to accept the question's presupposition—namely, that you are Ving intentionally. But if you are willing to accept the presupposition that you are Ving intentionally, then you must have some idea that you are Ving intentionally.)

For cases

In a for case, you are Ving intentionally and you intend to V intentionally. But you are not intentionally Ving intentionally because your intentional Ving is caused by your intention to V in a deviant way, rather than the one planned.

Here is a classic case of deviantly caused, and thus non-intentional Ving: Davidson's mountain climber. Climbing down a mountain, the climber intends to drop down from a ledge. His intention unnerves him, and he starts to sweat. His grip on the ledge loosens, and he drops down accidentally. The climber intends to drop down from the ledge, his intention causes him to drop down from the ledge, and yet he does not drop down intentionally because the causation is deviant.

Can we find a structurally similar example of deviant intentional Ving?

We're not convinced that we can. In general, if we want to construct a case of deviant Ving, here's what we do. First we find an example of non-intentional Ving. Then we find a case in which that non-intentional Ving is caused by the agent's intention to V. The mountain climber loses his grip on the ledge and he accidentally drops down. This is caused by his intention to drop down, which unnerves him, causing him to lose his grip. But while we know what it is to accidentally drop down, we don't yet know what it would be to accidentally V intentionally. To come up with a case of deviantly caused intentional Ving, we would need to already have a non-deviant case of non-intentional intentional Ving.

3.2   Objection: Intention ad Infinitum

Recall the 'Simple View' of intentional action: the view that if I am intentionally Ving, then I intend to V. Given the Simple View, if intentionally Ving is essentially intentional, then whenever I intentionally V, I have infinitely many intentions: I intend to V, intend to intentionally V, intend to intentionally intentionally V, and so forth. Some will worry about this: how did I fit so many intentions inside my finite head?

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[16]Levy forthcoming argues on the basis of empirical work in developmental psychology (Saxe et al 2005) that the concept of acting intentionally is a very basic, ubiquitous concept, possessed even by infants.

We have two responses.

First, our view does not entail that you have infinitely many intentions, even given the Simple View. We say that to intentionally intentionally V just is to intentionally V. (Likewise, to intentionally intentionally intentionally V just is to intentionally V, and so forth). So there are only two things you intend to do: to V and to intentionally V.

Second, there is nothing unusual about having infinitely many intentions. I intend to draw a straight line that is more than two inches long. Then I also intend to draw a line that is more than one inch long, to draw a line that is more than one half an inch long, and so forth.

3.3   Objection: Control

A final objection concerns control constraints on intentional action. Some will worry that our claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional is in tension with a control constraint: that you are Ving intentionally only if your Ving is under your control.[17]

Some control constraints are formulated in terms of propositional knowledge. Beddor & Pavese (2021) say that your Ving is under your control only if you know you are Ving. We are not concerned to accommodate such views: we reject the practical knowledge thesis (§4).

Other control constraints are modal. Here is a particularly simple modal constraint.

Nearby Robustness
If S is Ving intentionally, then S is Ving in all nearby worlds where she is trying to V.

Nearby Robustness is in tension with our claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional. Intentionally Ving requires that there are no nearby worlds where I am trying to V and yet I am not Ving. But intentionally Ving intentionally requires more: that there are no nearby worlds in which there are nearby worlds where I am trying to V and yet I am not Ving. So intentionally Ving is not essentially intentional: I can be Ving intentionally without intentionally Ving intentionally.

We have two responses: one less conciliatory, one more conciliatory.

The less conciliatory response is that there are counterexamples to Nearby Robustness. Suppose I'm writing my name with a pen. Conditions are normal: the pen works, my hand is steady, and so on. But the pen has barely enough ink. If it had slightly less, I would not be writing my name. Nearby Robustness seems to say that I am not intentionally writing my name. But surely I am.[18]

We will not press this problem further, but instead turn to our conciliatory response. Some modal control constraints, such as Nearby Robustness, conflict with our claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional. But not all do. Compare: while some reliability constraints on knowledge conflict with the claim that knowing entails knowing that you know,

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[17] Frankfurt (1978), Bishop (1987, 1989), Mele & Moser (1994), Wu (2016), and Beddor & Pavese (2022).

[18] For similar examples, see Carter & Shepherd (2022), Shepherd & Carter (2023), and Holguín & Lederman (ms, §8).

others do not. For example, Goodman & Salow (2018) say that a belief is reliable if it is true in all worlds at least as normal as the actual world.[19] This is compatible with the claim that knowing entails knowing that you know. In a similar spirit, we might endorse the following.[20]

> *Normal Robustness*
> If S is Ving intentionally in *w*, then S is Ving in all worlds at least as normal as *w* where S is trying to V.

Normal Robustness is compatible with the claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional because 'at least as normal as' is transitive. You are intentionally Ving only if there are no worlds at least as normal as the actual world where you are trying to V and not Ving. You are intentionally Ving intentionally only if there are no worlds where you are trying to V and not Ving that are at least as normal as some world that is at least as normal as the actual world. But any world that is at least as normal as some world that is at least as normal as the actual world is itself at least as normal as the actual world. According to Normal Robustness, intentionally Ving intentionally does not require more modal robustness than Ving intentionally.

To be clear, we do not endorse Normal Robustness. Like Nearby Robustness, it faces apparent counterexamples, such as the case of the nearly inkless pen. Our point is just that the claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional is consistent with there being modal control constraints on intentional action.

4   Practical Knowledge

As we said in the Introduction, the claim that there are essentially intentional act types is a premise in recent arguments against Anscombe's practical knowledge thesis. Beddor & Pavese (2021) say that we should give up on essentially intentional act types and keep the practical knowledge thesis. We disagree. As we have seen, Anscombe's view that there are essentially intentional act types is intrinsically plausible, and it is far more plausible than her practical knowledge thesis.

4.1   The Argument from Anti-Luminosity

Piñeros Glasscock shows that one version of the practical knowledge thesis is inconsistent with certain plausible, and widely accepted, Williamsonian theses about knowledge. We present his argument in a simplified form.

Say that a proposition *p* is luminous for a subject S if and only if whenever *p* is true, S knows that *p* is true. It is natural to think that certain special propositions—such as propositions about our own phenomenal experiences—are luminous. If I am in pain or feel cold, then surely I can always tell that this is so by carefully attending to how I am feeling.

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[19] For other normal conditions approaches, see Stalnaker (2006, 2009, 2015) Greco (2014), and Goodman & Salow (2023).

[20] For a modal control constraint in terms of normality, see Valaris (2022).

But Williamson (2000) gives a powerful argument—his anti-luminosity argument—that there are no (non-trivial) luminous propositions.[21]

Anti-Luminosity
There are no non-trivial luminous propositions.

Briefly, here's how the argument works. Knowledge requires a margin for error: if you know p, then p must be true in all worlds that are very similar to your world. These very similar worlds are meant to be so similar that you cannot tell the difference between them and your own.

If this margin for error principle is true, then, as Williamson shows, there are no non-trivial luminous propositions. Why? If p is non-trivial, then there's a world w_1 where p is true that is very similar to a world w_2 … that is very similar to a world w_n where p is false. Now suppose, for reductio, that p is luminous. Then, since p is true in w_1, you know p is true in w_1. By the margin for error principle, p is true in w_2. By another application of luminosity, it follows that you know p in w_2, and so by another application of the margin for error principle, p is true in w_3. By iterating this argument many times, we reach the conclusion that p is true in w_n. But by hypothesis, p is false in w_n.[22]

Now, here is the version of the practical knowledge thesis Piñeros Glasscock targets.

Practical Knowledge
Necessarily, if you are Ving intentionally, you know that you are Ving intentionally.

Practical Knowledge says that the proposition that you are Ving intentionally is luminous for you. Anti-Luminosity says there are no luminous propositions. So Practical Knowledge is inconsistent with Anti-Luminosity.

In response to this argument, Beddor & Pavese reject Practical Knowledge in favor of the following weaker thesis, which we call 'Weak Practical Knowledge'.[23]

Weak Practical Knowledge
Necessarily, if you are Ving intentionally, then you know that you are Ving.

Weak Practical Knowledge does not say that the proposition that you are Ving intentionally is luminous for you, since it doesn't say that whenever you are Ving intentionally, you know you are Ving intentionally. Practical Knowledge is consistent with Anti-Luminosity.

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[21]A non-trivial proposition is a proposition that is sometimes true and sometimes false.

[22]Williamson's argument has not convinced everyone. For objections, see Berker (2008), Wong (2008), and Stalnaker (2015). For a defense of Williamson, see Srinivasan (2013).

[23]As Tomlinson (forthcoming) shows, Anscombe herself seems to endorse Practical Knowledge. On Anscombe's view, when I am Ving intentionally, I know that I am Ving in order to Z, or I am Ving because p, or I am Ving for its own sake, or I am Ving for no particular reason. But all of these straightforwardly entail that you are Ving intentionally, on Ansccombe's view. Tomlinson also discusses essentially intentional action. She says: 'All intentional actions, when we consider the forms of description that render them intentional, are essentially intentional.' See Ford (2011) for a similar claim.

But it's not consistent with Anti-Luminosity together with the claim that there are essentially intentional act types, as Beddor & Pavese observe. To see why, suppose V is an essentially intentional act type. Then:

1. Necessarily, if S is Ving, S is Ving intentionally.

By Weak Practical Knowledge:

2. Necessarily, if S is Ving intentionally, then S knows that she is Ving.

It follows from (1) and (2) that:

3. Necessarily, if S is Ving, S knows that she is Ving.

4.2 Rejecting Practical Knowledge

Given Anti-Luminosity, we have two options: reject Weak Practical Knowledge, or deny that there are essentially intentional act types. We reject Weak Practical Knowledge.

It is well known that Weak Practical Knowledge suffers from counterexamples. Here's one that we find especially compelling. My house is out of water. I go outside, in the middle of the pitch-black night, to replenish the water supply by operating the pump. I believe the pump is working—my landlord told me it is. I know how to replenish the water supply—I've done it before. And the pump is working—I'm replenishing the water supply.

Then I am intentionally replenishing the water. But do I know that I am replenishing the water? Not necessarily.

I think that I am replenishing the water, since I think the pump is working. But suppose it turns out that I don't know that the pump is working. Maybe I don't know because my landlord often lies. Or maybe I don't know because I'm surrounded by broken pumps. In any case, if I don't know the pump is working, I don't know that I am replenishing the water.[24]

Friends of Weak Practical Knowledge often point out that the principle is stated in the present progressive ('is Ving').[25] It is easier to know that I am replenishing the water than that I have replenished the water or that I will replenish the water: the fact that I am replenishing the water doesn't entail that I have replenished the water or that I ever will. (Compare: the fact that I am crossing the street does not entail that I have crossed the street or that I ever will. A bus may hit me before I make it across.)

Appealing to the present progressive may help with some apparent counterexamples to Weak Practical Knowledge. But it does not help with the pump example. If I don't know the pump is working, I don't know that I am replenishing the water. For I am replenishing the

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[24]This kind of example is due to Schwenkler (2015). Similar cases can be found in Shephard & Carter (forthcoming) and Holguín and Lederman (ms).

[25]See Falvey 2000, Thompson 2011.

water only if I have started to replenish the water. And I don't know that I have started if I don't know the pump is working.[26]

Those who defend Weak Practical Knowledge must bite the bullet and deny that I am intentionally replenishing the water. Is it worth it to bite the bullet? No, because Weak Practical Knowledge is still in trouble: that is the lesson of the anti-luminosity argument. Defenders of Weak Practical Knowledge must also either defend the luminosity of intentional action, or deny the existence of essentially intentional act types. That cost is too high: the arguments for anti-luminosity and essentially intentional act types are powerful. The only remaining option is to deny Weak Practical Knowledge.

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[26] See Szabo (2007) for defense of the claim that I am Ving only if I can start to V.

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