

Anscombe's Account of Voluntary Action in *Intention*

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Abstract

It might seem that Anscombe's book *Intention* dismisses the concept of the voluntary as of secondary philosophical significance. However, this impression is misconceived and stems from a misunderstanding of Anscombe's philosophy of action in general and the contribution of *Intention* in particular. The main contention of this essay is that to understand the scope and nature of the contribution of *Intention* to an understanding of the voluntary we must come to terms with not only the positive account that the book advances on the basis of its methods but also the nature of the problems that it deliberately leaves out, based on these same methods, on the grounds that they involve considerations pertaining to ethics. This essay is divided into seven sections. The introductory section expounds the charge that *Intention* relegates the concept of the voluntary into the periphery of the philosophy of action. The next section places §49 within *Intention* as a whole. It seeks to explain why a systematic account of the voluntary is deferred until such a late stage in the inquiry. I then proceed to give a commentary of section §49 with the aim of unpacking and defending the various insights that are there systematically brought together against the background of the pivotal distinction between the intentional and the voluntary. Sections 3 to 6, which constitute the main bulk of this essay, are respectively devoted to the four headings under which Anscombe successively apprehends the distinction between the intentional and the voluntary in §49. Finally, in the last section, I try to bring out the underlying unity of the account of the voluntary given in §49 as well as the deliberate nature of the limitations in this account.

Keywords: Anscombe; ethics; intentional action; voluntary action

Resum. *La concepció d'Anscombe de l'acció voluntària a Intention*

Podria semblar que el llibre d'Anscombe *Intention* considera que el concepte d'allò voluntari té una importància filosòfica secundària. No obstant això, aquesta impressió és errònia. Deriva d'un malentès de la filosofia de l'acció d'Anscombe en general i d'*Intention* en particular. L'argument principal d'aquest article és que, per entendre l'abast i la naturalesa de la contribució d'*Intention* a la comprensió d'allò voluntari, hem d'arribar a un entendiment no només de l'exposició positiva que avança el llibre partint del seus mètodes, sinó també de la naturalesa dels problemes que, sobre la base d'aquests mateixos mètodes, defugí deliberadament perquè impliquen consideracions relatives a l'ètica. Aquest article està dividit en set seccions. La secció introductòria exposa el fet que a *Intention* es relega el concepte de 'voluntari' a la periferia de la filosofia de l'acció. La segona secció situa el §49 considerant *Intention* en conjunt i mostra per què una explicació sistemàtica d'allò voluntari es posterga fins a una etapa tan tardana de la recerca. A continuació, es procedeix

a comentar la secció §49 amb l'objectiu de desplegar i defensar les diverses idees sobre el tema d'allò voluntari que s'hi apleguen sistemàticament en el context de la distinció fonamental entre allò intencional i allò voluntari. Les seccions 3-6, que constitueixen la major part de l'article, estan dedicades respectivament als quatre epígrafs sota els quals Anscombe aprehèn successivament la distinció entre allò intencional i allò voluntari en el §49. Finalment, a la darrera secció s'intenta posar en relleu la unitat subjacent de la teoria d'allò voluntari que figura en el §49, així com el caràcter deliberat de les limitacions que acompanyen aquesta explicació.

Paraules clau: Anscombe; acció intencional; acció voluntària; ètica

Summary

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1. Introduction

It might seem that Anscombe's book *Intention* dismisses the concept of the voluntary as of secondary philosophical significance. John Hyman holds it responsible for this concept's neglect within recent analytic philosophy:

Anscombe's book *Intention* persuaded philosophers that voluntariness plays a relatively minor role in our thought about human action, compared to the concept of acting intentionally or acting for a reason, and does not raise any interesting problems of its own, once the nature of intentional action has been explained. (Hyman, 2015: 75)

It is not hard to see why it might produce this impression. As John Hyman notes:

Anscombe says at the beginning of *Intention* that 'the object of the whole enquiry is really to delineate such concepts as the voluntary and the intentional', but she gives voluntariness short shrift. In fact, she devotes exactly two pages to it. (Hyman, 2015: 75)

However, this impression is misconceived and stems from a misunderstanding of Anscombe's philosophy of action in general and the contribution of *Intention* in particular.

Anscombe did think that a whole tradition, starting with Aristotle, had failed to avail itself of the concept of intention, which deserved to figure prominently in any inquiry into action. In her mind, however, no inquiry better brought out the need for the concept of intention than the inquiry into the voluntary initiated by Aristotle. In fact, the concept of intention can be regarded as the unwitting legacy of this inquiry:

We have to say that the uncontrolled man carries out a deliberation how to execute what would have been a 'choice' if he had been an *akolastos*; this, however, is something for which Aristotle has no regular name – for he has no general use of a psychological verb or abstract noun corresponding to 'ekousion' (usually translated 'voluntary') as '*prohaireshai*' ('choose'), '*prohairesis*' ('choice'), correspond to '*prohaireton*' ('chosen'). Of course, he regards the uncontrolled man as acting voluntarily. When he describes this man as calculating cleverly, he says he will get what he 'proposes' (*protithetai*), and this verb expresses a volition, or perhaps rather an intention. Aristotle ought, we may say, to have seen that he was here employing a key concept in the theory of action, but he did not do so; the innocent unnoticeable verb he uses receives no attention from him. (TAA: 69)

In Anscombe's philosophy of action, what is meant to supplant Aristotle's concept of the voluntary is not the concept of intention so much as the conceptual distinction between the voluntary and the intentional, which Aristotle's concept of the voluntary obfuscates (see Broady, 1991: 137).

What is more, Anscombe gives precedence to the concept of voluntary action over the concept of intentional action when her aim is to provide an account of human agency in general (see AIDE). She equates the concept of voluntary action with the Thomistic concept of *actus humanus* (human action):

We might say that human action = voluntary action. (AIDE: 208)

The concept of 'human action' (*actus humanus*) is a *restricted* concept of action. Aquinas contrasts it with the *unrestricted* concept of an 'action of a human being' (*actus hominis*), which encompasses all that happens to be 'done' by a human being. The concept of intentional action is also restricted, of course, but it is *too* restricted to provide the concept of human agency that Anscombe seeks. By contrast, the concept of voluntary action constitutes the broadest restricted concept of action.

As a matter of fact, the concept of the voluntary lies at the very centre of Anscombe's ethical thought precisely on account of its irreducibility to the concept of the intentional. For she understands the core of the distinction between intent and foresight – a distinction which she holds to be central to ethics – in terms of the contrast between the intentional and the merely voluntary. This contrast provides the foundation for, and the kernel of truth in, the traditional 'doctrine of double effect'.

Still, it might be replied, if both the concept of the voluntary and the relation that it bears to the concept of intention are in fact of paramount

importance in Anscombe's eyes, then why do they seem to occupy the periphery of *Intention*? Could it not be that Anscombe's views evolved between *Intention* and her later writings?

It can help at this point to recall the opening of 'Modern Moral Philosophy', published within a year after *Intention*:

I will begin by stating three theses which I present in this paper. The first is that it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking. The second is that the concepts of obligation, and duty – *moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say – and of what is *morally* right and wrong, and of the moral sense of 'ought', ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it. My third thesis is that the difference between the well-known English writers on moral philosophy from Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance. (MMM: 169)

Later in the same article, Anscombe indicates which fundamental error, shared by every English writer on moral philosophy since Sidgwick, justifies the sweeping claim that she states as her third thesis:

The denial of any distinction between foreseen and intended consequences, as far as responsibility is concerned, (...) on the part of Sidgwick explains the difference between old-fashioned utilitarianism and that consequentialism, as I name it, which marks him and every English academic philosopher since him. (MMM: 184)

Sidgwick's account of intention represents a turning point in the history of ethics because he defines intention 'in such a way that one must be said to intend any foreseen consequences of one's voluntary action' (MME: 183) and he employs this definition to advocate the ethical thesis that whether or not one intends a consequence that one foresees can make no difference to one's responsibility for it (MME: 183). This obliterates the difference between the intentional and the voluntary, and more generally the difference between the intended and the foreseen but unintended consequences of an action.

In accordance with the theses of 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Intention* sets itself the task of countering Sidgwick's catastrophic move by impugning the poor conception of the mind that underpins it. It seeks an understanding of intention and practical knowledge, on which to ground such distinctions as between an action's intended versus merely foreseen consequences (which includes merely voluntary ones), without yet engaging in ethics (see Wiseman, 2016a: 27). It refrains from going into ethics to make ethics possible again (see Wiseman, 2016b).

If this is so, we should expect *Intention* to lay the groundwork for an account of the voluntary on the basis of an account of the intentional, leaving out any feature of the concept of the voluntary that would require a venture

into ethics. Should the concept of the voluntary prove to have one foot in ethics, the inquiry will confine itself to the area of this concept that can be elucidated without actually stepping into ethics.

I shall argue that this is indeed exactly how *Intention* proceeds. Accordingly, the main contention of this essay is that to understand the scope and nature of *Intention*'s contribution to an understanding of the voluntary, we must come to terms with not only the positive account that the book advances on the basis of its methods but also the nature of the problems that, based on these same methods, it deliberately leaves out on the grounds that they involve considerations pertaining to ethics.

This essay is divided into seven sections. The next section places section §49 within *Intention* as a whole. It seeks to explain why a systematic account of the voluntary is deferred until so late a stage in the inquiry. I then proceed to give a commentary of §49 with the aim of unpacking and defending the various insights that are there systematically assembled against the background of the pivotal distinction between the intentional and the voluntary. Sections 3 to 6, which constitute the main bulk of the essay, are respectively devoted to the four headings under which Anscombe successively apprehends the distinction between the intentional and the voluntary in §49. Finally, in the last section, I try to bring out the underlying unity of the account of the voluntary given in §49 as well as the deliberate nature of the limitations in this account.

2. The place of §49 in *Intention*

The conceptual pair of the voluntary and the involuntary is first mentioned in §5 while delineating a difficulty that stands in the way of a direct characterisation of intentional action in terms of the concept of a reason for acting. This difficulty induces Anscombe to proceed in an apparently more round-about way: she will characterise 'intentional actions as ones to which a certain sense of the question "why?" has application' (INT: §6, 11), circumscribing the range of application of this question without presupposing the concept of a reason for acting. The difficulty, in a nutshell, is that the distinction between reasons for acting and reasons for thinking that something is true (i.e., evidence) is not an exhaustive one. It leaves out a third sort of reasons: the reason mentioned in 'I knocked the cup off the table because I thought I saw a face at the window and it made me jump' is neither a reason for thinking that something is the case nor a reason for acting. Anscombe calls it a 'mental cause'.

The difficulty is aggravated by the fact that an action resulting from a mental cause need not be involuntary. It may be either involuntary or voluntary (INT: §5d, 10-11; §16, 24). Thus, walking up and down *because* one is excited by the music played by a military band is both a movement resulting from a mental cause (such being the import of this occurrence of 'because') and a voluntary and intentional action (INT: §5d, 11). This does not mean that its mental cause provides the relevant answer to the question 'Why?' that

asks for a reason for acting, which would imply that the mental cause *is* at the same time a reason for acting in such a case. It is not at all an answer to this last question. What this means is that involuntariness cannot be regarded as a criterion for distinguishing a mental cause from a reason for acting (INT: §5d, 10).

The general distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary is briefly considered in §7, only for its study to be declared premature and postponed until after the concept of intentional action has been clarified, which in turn requires clarification of the concept of practical knowledge. Anscombe remarks that just as an action is not intentional under a given description if the agent is not aware of doing it under that description, or if she is aware of doing it only on the basis of observation, so an action is not intentional under a given description if it is *involuntary* under that description: the answer ‘It was involuntary...’ constitutes a rejection of the question ‘Why?’ in the special sense of asking for reasons for acting (INT: §7a, 12).¹

An additional reason for postponing the study of the distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary is that it is far less straightforward than the distinction between the intentional and the unintentional. This suggests that the concept of voluntary action is, if anything, far more complex than that of intentional action and that consequently the latter takes methodological priority over the former.

We can also easily get confused by the fact that ‘involuntary’ neither means simply non-voluntary nor has an unproblematic sense of its own. In fact, this pair of concepts is altogether very confusing. (INT: §7d, 11-12)

To substantiate this diagnosis, Anscombe introduces four heterogeneous sub-classes of applications of the term ‘involuntary’:

Consider the four following examples of the involuntary:

- (a) The peristaltic movement of the gut.
- (b) The odd sort of jerk or twitch that one’s body sometimes makes when falling asleep.
- (c) ‘He withdrew his hand in a movement of involuntary recoil.’
- (d) ‘The involuntary benefit I did him by a stroke I meant to harm him.’

(INT: §7d, 13)

The senses of ‘involuntary’ illustrated by (c) and (d) cannot be invoked to negatively circumscribe the range of application of the question ‘Why?’ without begging the question. The examples of involuntary actions resulting from a mental cause previously adduced by Anscombe fall under (c). As for the first example (a), it is irrelevant at this point, since it characterises movements that

1. In §7, Anscombe rejects the claim, familiar from the writings of ordinary language philosophers (John L. Austin, Gilbert Ryle), that modifiers like ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ apply to an action only if it is fishy. This all-important topic falls outside the compass of the present essay.

cannot be known except by observation (INT: §8c, 14). Matters stand otherwise with example (b) (which is also illustrated by tics and the knee's reflex kicks), which can be explained without resorting to any of the concepts at hand. It characterises the subclass of involuntary actions that comprises all and solely the movements of the body, in a purely physical description, which are known without observation but have no room whatsoever for a cause known without observation (INT: §8e, 15; §17a, 25). Unlike actions that result from a mental cause (say, jumping at the leap and bellow of a crocodile), these actions are involuntary in a purely physical sense. Both the jump at the leap and bellow of a crocodile and the odd jump or twitch of one's body while dropping off to sleep are involuntary physical movements. But only the latter is a mere physical movement. To characterise a physical movement as 'involuntary' in this sense is in effect to reject the question 'Why?' and to exclude it from the class of intentional actions.

The upshot of §§7-8 is twofold: first, if the cause of an action of which one has non-observational knowledge is such that it can be known only by observation, then that action is involuntary (in a purely physical sense) and therefore not intentional (INT: §8e, 25); secondly and conversely, to the extent that it is subject to causality at all, an action of which one has non-observational knowledge must have room for mental causality if it is to count as intentional (INT: §16, 24; §17a, 25).

This last point has eluded the vast majority of *Intention*'s readers because it seems to contradict its claim that the distinction between a reason for acting and a mental cause is absolute.²

However, a movement being subject to mental causality is only a necessary condition for that movement to be intentional. For a movement to count as intentional under a given description, it is not sufficient for it to be subject to mental causality under that description since many movements subject to this causality are involuntary actions and therefore not intentional actions. That is why 'intentional actions are not marked off just by being subject to mental causality' (INT: §16, 24).

The elucidation of the distinction between the voluntary and the intentional is postponed until section §49. It must await completion of the analysis of the concept of intentional action. The heart of this analysis lies in an account of practical knowledge in terms of practical reasoning. The indefinite number of descriptions under which an action counts as intentional are shown to fall into definite *series*, whose order and internal unity are dictated by the transitive, anti-symmetric relation that any two members of the series bear with each other, namely, the teleological relation \langle doing *X* in order to do *Y* \rangle . These series can be generated by iterations of the question 'Why?' in the spe-

2. For example, Rachael Wiseman mistakenly equates the class of 'descriptions which are justified by mental causes' with the class of descriptions of 'involuntary actions' (Wiseman, 2016: 79) and suggests that the only reason why involuntariness is not invoked as a criterion to tell reasons for acting from 'reasons' that are mere mental causes is that this would be begging the question (Wiseman, 2016: 82).

cial sense: 'Why are you moving your arm up and down?' (D) – 'I'm pumping' (C). 'Why are you pumping?' (C) – 'I'm replenishing the water supply for the house' (B). 'Why are you replenishing the water supply?' (B) – 'To poison the inhabitants of the house' (A).

Insofar as one can speak of *the* description of an intentional action, it lies in the last term mentioned thus far that still qualifies as a wider description of what the agent is doing (rather than a description of a future state of affairs) (see INT: §23, §26). This term 'gives the intention *with* which the act in each of its other descriptions was done, and this intention so to speak swallows up all the preceding intentions *with* which earlier members of the series were done' (INT: §26, 46). The mark of this swallowing is that A constitutes an adequate answer to the question 'Why?' as raised about D.

Now an intentional action bearing this teleological order takes place through the agent's consciousness of this order. For the agent to take the means to this end and to apprehend these means as ways of achieving that end are one and the same thing (see Rödl, 2011: 216). But this manner of apprehending is a form of reasoning; it consists in *calculating* means to an end. The same series that can be generated in one direction by iterations of the question 'Why?' can also be generated in the opposite direction by iterations of the question 'How?' (INT: §§42-43).

The account of the distinction between the voluntary and the intentional given in §49 is structured along a four-way division. The four headings into which Anscombe divides her topic, numbered (1) to (4), are the subjects of the next four sections.

3. Non-intentional voluntary motions: §49 (1)

At the outset, we should dispose of three serious misunderstandings of the subject of section §49 – distinguishing the voluntary and the intentional – that threaten to bar access to it. Thus, it has been thought that the main contention of this section was 'that there are two kinds of unintentional voluntary action' (Hyman, 2015: 75). But, first, Anscombe is concerned with elucidating the distinction between the two categories or 'forms of description' (see INT: §46) of *the voluntary* and *the intentional*, not with marking out subsets of the class of *unintentional* actions. The movements and actions falling under headings (1) and (2) cannot be so much as *called* 'intentional' (i.e., described through this *form*) in the first place: that is to say, they are neither 'intentional' nor 'unintentional'. Secondly, there is no indication that Anscombe is in the business of providing necessary and sufficient conditions for counting something as voluntary. All she seems concerned with is providing sufficient conditions for counting something as voluntary rather than intentional. A third and even cruder mistake would be to think that the aim of §49 is to circumscribe the class of voluntary events. Such an undertaking makes no sense, as the same event may count as voluntary under one description but not under another (see AIDE: 209).

The mere physical movements that an agent performs *automatically*, 'without thinking' (as we ordinarily say), are grouped under the first heading. Although these mere physical movements are subject to the question 'Why?' in the relevant sense, they are not performed as the result of reasoning about what to do here and now. To this extent, they count as voluntary rather than as intentional. The class of these mere physical movements is further divided into two sub-classes:

The distinction between the voluntary and the intentional seems to be as follows: (1) Mere physical movements, to whose description our question 'Why?' is applicable, are called voluntary rather than intentional when (a) the answer is, e.g., 'I was fiddling', 'it was a casual movement', or even 'I don't know why'; (b) the movements are not considered by the agent, though he can say what they are if he does consider them. (INT: §49, 89)

This passage refers back to §17:

Now of course a possible answer to the question 'Why?' is one like 'I just thought I would' or 'It was an impulse' or 'For no particular reason' or 'It was an idle action – I was just doodling'. I do not call an answer of this sort a rejection of the question. The question is not refused application because the answer to it says that there is *no* reason, any more than the question how much money I have in my pocket is refused application by the answer 'None'. (INT: §17b, 25)

To put things the other way around, not every answer falling within the range of application of the question 'Why?' in the special sense mentions a reason for acting, let alone a further intention:

The answers to the question 'Why?' which grant it application are (...) more extensive in range than the answers which give reasons for acting. (INT: §18f, 28)

At this point, however, we begin to run into difficulties. On the face of things, what Anscombe says about the first sort of cases grouped under (1) (a) fails to square with what she says elsewhere in the book, as well as with what she says in other writings. First, from the main contention of §17, namely that 'The question "Why?" is not refused application where the answer is, e.g., "For no particular reason" or "I don't know why I did it"' (INT: v), it would seem to follow that the corresponding actions, in particular idle actions, *do* count as intentional. Second, in later writings, Anscombe maintains that idle actions are not human actions at all and therefore not voluntary actions.

To resolve the first difficulty, it is natural to advocate either one of two diametrically opposed interpretations.

According to one line of interpretation, adopted by Roger Teichmann, for example, for an action to count as intentional under a certain description, it is not sufficient that the question 'Why?' in the special sense should admit an answer falling within its range of application. Absent a substantial answer, i.e.,

one providing a reason for acting, the action counts not as intentional but merely as voluntary under the description in question. In other words, although every action description under which an action counts as intentional is subject to the special sense of the question ‘Why?’, the converse is not true: among the action descriptions that are subject to the question ‘Why?’, only those that elicit a substantive answer are descriptions under which the action counts as intentional (see Teichmann, 2014: 467).

However, this interpretation runs afoul of Anscombe’s repeated affirmation that the applicability of the special sense of the question ‘Why?’ to an action description constitutes not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition for the action to count as intentional under that description:

Our enquiries into the question ‘Why?’ enable us to narrow down our consideration of descriptions of what he is doing to a range covering *all and only* his intentional actions. ‘He is X-ing’ is a description of an intentional action if (a) it is true and (b) there is such a thing as *an answer in the range* I have defined to the question ‘Why are you X-ing?’ (INT: §23d, 38) (emphasis added)

If the answer to the question ‘Why did you replenish the house supply with poisoned water?’ is ‘To polish them off’, or any answer within the range, like ‘I just thought I would’, then by my criterion the action under that description is characterised as intentional. (INT: §25, 43)

In sections §§17-21, Anscombe argues that we must take a middle course between the conception, familiar from the works of ancient and medieval philosophers, that every human action is done with a view to achieving some end, even some unique end, and the modern conception that no human action needs to be done with a view to achieving some end, let alone one final end, the same for all human actions (INT: §21a, 33-45). According to the former, the range of application of the question ‘Why?’ in the relevant sense simply does not include the answer ‘I just did, for no particular reason’, while according to the latter, it could in theory be exhausted by this answer.

In §17, as we saw, Anscombe criticises the former on the grounds that the answer ‘I just did, for no particular reason’ does not fall outside the range of application of the question ‘Why?’ any more than the answer ‘None’ falls outside the range of application of the question ‘How much money do you have in your pocket?’. In §21, she charges that the claim that all human actions are done for the same final end rests on the illicit transition from ‘all chains must stop somewhere’ to ‘there is somewhere where all chains must stop’ (INT: §21a, 34). On the other hand, §22 contains an argument to the effect that there would be no such things as the question ‘Why?’ in the special sense and our concepts of intentional action and voluntary action if the only answer that ever occurred was ‘I just did, for no particular reason’ (INT: §22, 33). She sums up her discussion in §21:

As we have seen, this does not mean that an action cannot be called voluntary or intentional unless the agent has an end in view; it means that the concept of voluntary or intentional action would not exist if the question ‘Why?’,

with answers that give reasons for acting, did not. Given that it does exist, the cases where the answer is 'For no particular reason', etc. can occur, but their interest is slight, and it must not be supposed that because they can occur that answer would be intelligible everywhere, or that it could be the only answer ever given. (INT: §21b, 34)

There is no mention of any asymmetry between the concepts of voluntary and intentional with respect to their compatibility with cases of the form 'For no particular reason'.

Moreover, when Anscombe mentions the action of walking up and down because of some external stimulus as an example of an action that results from a mental cause but is nevertheless voluntary, she specifies that this action is not only voluntary but also intentional (INT: §5d, 11) (see Section 2). Yet it may be that the only answer to the question 'Why?' in the special sense, in this case, is 'For no particular reason'.

Considerations of this sort have led other commentators to embrace the opposite interpretation. Thus, according to John Schwenkler, despite appearances to the contrary, in §49 Anscombe does not maintain that some purely physical movements to which the question 'Why?' applies *are* nevertheless *not* intentional, but only that as a matter of fact we are not prone to *call* them intentional. From this perspective, the 'low stakes' of the merely terminological issue addressed by (1) should be contrasted with the philosophical import of the other divisions in §49 (see Schwenkler, 2019: 201).

However, the latter interpretation seems to conflict with the unqualified assertion in the last paragraph of section §17 that when the answer to the question 'Why?' is 'I don't know why I did it', the action description on which the question bears is the description of a voluntary action, rather than that of an intentional action. Moreover, inasmuch as this reading drives a wedge between (1) and the rest of §49, it can hardly be reconciled with the claim that the intermediary case of §17 presents an affinity with the case considered in §25, which case (as we shall see) falls under (2):

I shall later be discussing the difference between the intentional and the voluntary; and once that distinction is made we shall be able to say: an action of this sort is voluntary, rather than intentional. And we shall see (§25) that there are other more ordinary cases where the question 'Why?' is not *made out* to be inapplicable, and yet is not granted application. (INT: §17e, 26)

It is tempting at this point to reply that it is no coincidence that the difference between the intentional and the voluntary is introduced in connection with the second sort of answer considered in §17 (of the form 'I don't know why I did it') rather than with the first (of the form 'I just did, for no particular reason'). For when it comes to the second sort of answer, it is true in a sense that the question 'Why?' does *not* have application; and *that* is something it shares with the sort of answer considered in (2). After all, section §17 is supposed to complete the account of when the question 'Why?' is shown not to

have application (see INT: §6a, 11; §17a, 25). Indeed, Anscombe says the following about the words ‘I don’t know why I did it’, understood in the relevant way:

They are a curious intermediary case: the question ‘Why?’ has and yet has not application; it has application in the sense that it is admitted as an appropriate question; it lacks it in the sense that the answer is that there is no answer. (INT: §17d, 26)

But the main thesis of §17, on Anscombe’s own account, is that ‘the question “Why?” is not refused application when the answer is e.g. “For no particular reason” or “I don’t know why I did it”’ (INT: v), and the two answers are brought together in §49 (1) (a) *qua* answers attesting to the applicability of the question ‘Why?’.

The two interpretations above rightly concur in the idea that the crucial point for the overall purpose of Anscombe’s inquiry is that the applicability of the question ‘Why?’ is a necessary and sufficient condition that an action in the unrestricted sense (i.e., anything someone can be said to ‘do’) must meet in order to count as an action in a restricted sense. Whether that restricted sense is equated with the intentional or with the voluntary is to some extent immaterial.

Without pretending to solve these difficulties, we can make some progress on two fronts. First, the range of application of the distinction drawn in (1) (a) is restricted to ‘mere physical movements’. The class (1) (a) is not meant to cover all cases in which the question ‘Why?’ only admits a non-substantial answer. It is not even clear that it covers impulsive actions. In fact, it’s not clear that the movements grouped under (1) (a) are ‘voluntary’ in any but the purely physical sense. They do not seem to be ‘voluntary’ in the sense in which all intentional action is ‘voluntary’ (see Section 6). Be that as it may, the fact that the cases grouped under (1) (a) do not count as intentional seems to have at least as much to do with the fact that they are ‘mere physical movements’ as with the fact that they are not performed for a reason. Second, the end of §17 contains a precious clue. It suggests that in general the concept of voluntary action applies to an action inasmuch as the special sense of the question ‘Why?’ is not simply and overtly irrelevant to it, whereas the concept of intentional action only applies provided the question ‘Why?’ has full-blown application, so that the latter fails to apply when the question ‘Why?’ either is not granted full-blown application or is not granted application at all.

That only ‘mere physical movements’ fall under (1) (a) is the key to solving our second difficulty. In later writings, Anscombe maintains that idle actions like those mentioned in (1) (a) do not belong to the class of human actions. She insists that the thesis that human actions are ‘under the command of reason’ cannot be reduced to the claim that reason can intervene to forbid them since the latter ‘holds of idle actions, too’ (AIDE: 208). Idle actions belong with mere acts of a human being (*actus hominis*):

Idly stroking one's beard, or idly scratching one's head, may be an 'act of a human being' without being a 'human act'. (AIDE: 208)

Here, Anscombe is echoing Aquinas:

Such actions [as moving one's foot or hand, or scratching one's beard while intent on something else] are not properly human actions, since they do not proceed from deliberation of reason, which is the proper principle of human actions. (Aquinas: ST 1a, 2ae, Q1, A1)

However, this is compatible with idle actions counting as 'voluntary' in another sense, namely the merely physiological sense:

We are speaking of voluntary action not in a merely physiological sense; not in the sense in which idly stroking your beard *is* a voluntary action. (AIDE: 208-209)

Once it is understood to relate to the merely physiological sense of the voluntary, the subsumption of 'idle actions' under the concept of the voluntary in §49 (1), (a) no longer appears incompatible with their exclusion from the class of voluntary actions in other writings.

Since idle physical movements are voluntary in a merely physiological sense, they are of course not involuntary in that sense – the sense in which reflex movements or the sort of sudden jerk that one's body sometimes makes while one is falling asleep, not to mention movements such as the peristaltic movement of the gut, *are* involuntary (INT: §§7-8, §17). But neither are they involuntary in the sense in which knocking a cup off a table when jumping because of something one thought one saw (or suddenly jumping backwards at the leap and bellow of a crocodile) *is* involuntary (INT: §§7-8, §9, §15). In fact, while there is a sense in which idle actions are not voluntary, there is no sense in which they are involuntary, contrary to what is sometimes suggested.³

Classifying idle actions like stroking one's beard as voluntary actions seems problematic on yet another score. It seems to stand in stark contradiction with Anscombe's later claim that 'all human action *in concreto* is either good or bad *simpliciter*' (AIDE: 214).

Like 'picking a dandelion flower', 'walking from point A to point B' or 'chucking a pebble into the sea' (see GBHA: 204; AIDE: 2010), 'stroking one's beard' is a morally indifferent, or neutral, action description. That is to say, the action of stroking one's beard, like picking a flower or walking, is indifferent in its species (Aquinas: ST 1a, 2ae, Q18, A8). But whereas the particular action of picking a flower or walking is not itself morally indifferent or neutral, insofar as it can be brought under some moral action description, a particular action of stroking one's beard is not only morally indifferent in its species but also morally indifferent as an individual action, insofar as it does not admit

3. See, e.g., Wiseman (2016a: 83).

any action description that is not indifferent. The solution to this difficulty is the same as before: the description 'stroking one's beard' is not in fact a human action description, unlike 'picking a dandelion flower' or 'walking from point A to B'. Although they are equally neutral, the latter descriptions are neutral *human* action descriptions, inasmuch as the particular actions falling under them are moral actions. After arguing that every human action, insofar as it is under the command of reason, is good or bad individually, Aquinas adds:

If, however, it does not proceed from deliberate reason but from some act of the imagination, as when a man strokes his beard, or moves his hand or foot, such an action, properly speaking, is not moral or human since this depends on reason. Hence it will be indifferent, as standing apart from the genus of moral actions. (Aquinas: ST, Q18, A9)

We can now turn to the second class of mere physical movements subject to the question 'Why?' that count as voluntary rather than intentional, namely (b), that is, movements that 'are not considered by the agent, though he can say what they are if he does consider them'. Here, we are meant to recall the end of §30:

In general, as Aristotle says, one does not deliberate about an acquired skill; the description of what one is doing, which one completely understands, is at a distance from the details of one's movements, which one does not consider at all. (INT: §30, 54)

On the view of intentional action that Anscombe criticizes in §30, an intentional action is to be equated with the intention with which one performs certain basic bodily movements, which the action is calculated to result from, and which exhaust the content of one's practical knowledge. In this view, my practical knowledge of what I am doing when I am tying my shoelaces does not reach beyond what is described by 'I am tying'. I am only of the *opinion* that my shoelaces are getting tied (INT: §30, 54). I only move my limbs; all the rest is up to nature.

This view lends credence to the claim that one's non-observational knowledge of one's intentional actions is restricted to one's intentions, or at best encompasses only one's bodily movements (INT: §29, 51). It naturally arises in the course of trying 'to push what is known by being the content of intention back and back; first to the bodily movement, then perhaps to the contraction of the muscles, then to the attempt to do the thing' (INT: §30, 53). It is but one step short of the conclusion that the content of intention is reduced to a special interior movement only known to the mind in which it occurs. If nothing guarantees that my shoelaces are getting tied when I am tying my shoelaces, then nothing guarantees that my fingers are moving when I am moving my fingers (see INT: §29, 52).

In proposing that, rigorously speaking, I can only account for the movements of my limbs, the above view gets things almost exactly wrong. For it may well be the case that the only account I can give of the motions I am

making is 'moving my arms and fingers as tying one's shoelaces requires' and that I can give a much more exact account of what I am doing *at a distance* than of what my limbs are doing (see INT: §30). If I am asked what I am doing, I am able to answer spontaneously, 'perhaps even without reflection, certainly without adverting to observation' (INT: §4, 8), that 'I am tying my shoelaces', or even that 'I am getting ready for a walk', whereas I find myself unable to say what movements I am making without pausing to reflect.

The difference is not explained by the fact that my knowledge of what I am doing at a distance is non-observational, for that is equally true of my knowledge of my limb movements, which I can retrieve through reflection. In effect, if I am asked to say what exact movements I am making with my arms and fingers, I can find out simply by going through the motions in my imagination, that is to say, by imagining myself doing the action (INT: §49, 89). Rather, the difference has everything to do with the fact that I do not perform the motions of tying my shoelaces on the basis of reasoning about what I should do here and now. I perform these motions automatically, as a result of habit (hence the superficial resemblance with idle actions). In general, I need not calculate here and now how to do an action at which I excel. A skill constitutes general knowledge of how to perform a certain type of action that can be actualised through instantiation without any further calculation (see Rödl, 2011: 226).

This is not to deny that the sequence of motions comprising the action of tying one's shoelaces is ordered in a way that can be formally represented by means of such artificial devices as the question 'Why?' or Aristotle's practical syllogism. On the contrary, the reason why it is superfluous to calculate how to perform the sequence of motions here and now is that it is sufficient to apply a certain general calculation that has been consolidated into habit.

Yet nor does this reduce to the general point that such a teleological order need not come before one's mind at all (let alone come before the action) to be representable in this way (see INT: §§42-43). For this equally applies to actions that are performed on the basis of calculating what to do on the spot and are *bona fide* intentional actions.⁴ There is no such thing as a 'phenomenology' of practical reasoning anyway (see Rödl, 2011: 227). The sug-

4. The general point applies for example to some intentional actions that are essentially unplanned and unreflective, yet are evidently the result of calculating what to do *on the spot*, like a tennis player's intentional action of 'trying a drop shot' at a specific juncture in a game (see McDowell, 2011a: §1). However unreflective, the latter action is evidently the conclusion of thinking what to do *in the circumstances at hand* and only qualifies as a means to the end (winning a point) relative to these circumstances. The motions whose sequence is integral to any exercise of the skill to make a drop shot in tennis are not derived from the end (hitting a drop shot) in that way. The descriptions of these motions occupy a middle position between, on the one hand, descriptions of intentional actions like trying a drop shot and, on the other hand, descriptions of the utter specifics of intentional actions (say, the specifics of what one is doing *here and now* with one's hips and knees as one is trying a drop shot), whose 'determination is not a task for the practical thinking that intention belongs to' (see McDowell, 2011b).

gestion is rather that the teleological order of certain actions gets incorporated into one's being, becomes *second nature*. Where there is practical reasoning but no calculation *on the spot*, however unreflective, the action is best regarded as merely voluntary.

4. Non-intentional voluntary actions: §49 (2)

The second heading of §49 goes to the heart of the distinction between the intentional and the voluntary:

(2) Something is voluntary though not intentional if it is the previously known concomitant result of one's intentional action, so that one could have prevented it if one would have foregone the action; but it is not intentional: one rejects the question 'Why?' in its connexion. (INT: §49, 89)

The second heading of §49 harks back to §25. Considering a further difficulty attending the question of *the* description of what a man is driving at (see Section 2 above), there Anscombe considers the difference between two variants on the scenario introduced in §23a, in which a man is pumping water from a spring in order to replenish the cistern that supplies the house's drinking water, after it was disclosed to him that the spring had been contaminated with a deadly poison in order to kill the inhabitants of the house and to put an end to the abhorrent scheme in which they are engaged (see INT: §23a, 37). Pumping water into the cistern is this man's normal job in both cases. But in the first scenario he is pleased at the idea that the inhabitants of the house will be poisoned if he co-operates by continuing to do his usual job, whereas in the second scenario he doesn't care whether the people are actually poisoned or not and is only concerned with getting paid as usual. In the former, his reply to the question 'Why did you replenish the house water supply with poisoned water?' is 'I was glad to help to polish them off', whereas in the latter his reply is 'I didn't care about that, I wanted my pay and just did my usual job' (INT: §25a, 42; §25e, 43-44).

The contrast between the two cases raises a difficulty insofar as it 'is not one that necessarily entails any difference in what the man overtly does or how he looks' (INT: §25d, 44). That is to say, there may be no overt difference apart from the difference between the *words* that the man *would* utter if he were asked the question 'Why did you replenish the house water supply with poisoned water?' and replied truthfully.

By Anscombe's own criteria, the action of poisoning the inhabitants of the house counts as intentional in the first scenario but not in the second one, even though in the latter scenario it *also* counts as a case of *knowingly* poisoning the inhabitants (see INT: §25a, 42). For the answer 'I couldn't care tuppence' is one that falls altogether outside the range of application of the question 'Why?' and so does not grant application to this question. Anscombe writes:

In that case, although he knows that an intentional act of his – for replenishing the house water supply is intentional by our criteria – is also an act of replenishing the house water supply with poisoned water, it would be incorrect, by our criteria, to say that his act of replenishing the house supply with poisoned water was intentional. And I do not doubt the correctness of the conclusion; it seems to show that our criteria are rather good. (INT: §25a, 42)

These considerations: (i) suggest that there may be a point at which there is no sign that a man has a certain intention except what he says; (ii) evidently belie the unqualified claim that 'what a man intends is what he does' (INT: §25g, 45) (even restricting it to what he knowingly does); and (iii) fuel the temptation to say that '*In the end*, only you can know whether that is your intention or not', an intention being 'a special internal movement' accessible only to the one who has it (INT: §27a, 48; INT: §25a, 44); so that (iv) at the very least they afford a genealogical insight into one source of this view and show what kernel of truth it contains. Anscombe continues:

On the other hand, we really do seem to be in a bit of a bind to find the intentional act of poisoning those people, supposing that this is what his intentional act is. It is really not at all to be wondered that so very many people have thought of intention as a special interior movement; then the thing that marked this man's proceedings as intentional poisoning of those people would just be that this interior movement occurred in him. (INT: §25a, 42)

This difficulty will have to await §27 for a solution (see above Section 2). It seriously aggravates the difficulty raised in §23 as to which description of an intentional action is to be regarded as *its* description, i.e. as *the* description of this action (see Section 2). For it may seem that only the agent himself can authoritatively settle the question of the identity of this privileged description (INT: §25a, 42). In this context, Anscombe expounds and attacks the view, familiar from Christian writings, that an agent can 'direct his intention' by making a little speech to himself, of the form 'What I mean to be doing is...', and thereby determine that he does not intend, but only foresees, a certain consequence of his action (INT: §25a; see also WM: 59; AIDE: 223).⁵

On what grounds do we assert that the man's answer does not grant application to the question 'Why?' in the special sense? By replying 'I didn't care about that, I wanted my pay and just did my usual job', the man declines to provide an answer to the question 'Why?' on the grounds that he did not act with any end in view other than earning his pay by doing his usual job. If genuine, these grounds are adequate. Given that replenishing the cistern with *poisoned* water is not part of his usual job, he cannot be said to have replenished the cistern with poisoned water to earn his pay (i.e., with the intention to earn his pay). That is to say, it would be wrong to say that he replenished

5. Anscombe maintains that this doctrine of the 'direction of intention' *abuses* the Christian doctrine of 'double-effect' (on which more in Section 7 below) (see WM: 54) or at any rate its kernel of truth (see AIDE: 222-225).

the cistern with poisoned water in order to earn his pay. Since he did not act with any end in view other than earning his pay, he cannot be said to have replenished the cistern with *poisoned* water with *any* end in view, including any further intention (i.e., finite end). This, in turn, implies that the action that resulted in the cistern being replenished with poisoned water is not intentional under the description ‘replenishing the house water supply with poisoned water’. For replenishing a cistern with poisoned water is not the sort of intentional action that can intelligibly be conceived to be done without any reason, let alone with no further intention.

In terms of the distinction that is the topic of §49, the man’s act of poisoning the inhabitants of the house by replenishing the cistern with water that he knows to be poisoned counts as voluntary rather than intentional. As we saw earlier, this move is explicitly anticipated at the end of §17:

I shall later be discussing the difference between the intentional and the voluntary; and once this distinction is made we shall be able to say: an action of this sort is voluntary, rather than intentional. And we shall see (§25) that there are other more ordinary cases where the question ‘Why?’ is not *made out* to be inapplicable, and yet is not granted application. (INT: §17e, 26)

Unlike the case considered in the second part of §17 (the ‘I don’t know why I did it’ case), the case in §25 is neither curious nor intermediate. For the man’s answer employs words in a most ordinary way and clearly does not grant application to the question ‘Why?’ in the special sense. However, the two cases are similar in that the question ‘Why?’ is not rejected as inappropriate in its demand (to provide a reason for acting), yet is also not answered with an answer appropriate to its demand. The question ‘Why?’ is not refused application as it is refused application when the answer is of the form ‘I was not aware I was doing that’ or carries the implication that ‘I observed that I was doing that’; it is not simply and recognisably inapplicable (‘made out to be inapplicable’), but it is not given any appropriate answer either. By contrast, not only is the question ‘Why?’ not refused application when the answer is ‘For no particular reason’, but it is also given a straightforward (if degenerate)⁶ answer, one that lies in the same space of possible answers as those providing a reason for acting. The difference between the ‘I don’t know why I did it’ case and the ‘I didn’t care about that’ case is that in the latter the question ‘Why?’ is not granted application *at all*, as the elicited answer falls altogether outside its range, from which it directly follows that the action does *not* count as intentional under the description under consideration. But even though the action does not count as intentional under that description inasmuch as the answer elicited by the question ‘Why?’ does not fall within its range, it counts as voluntary inasmuch as the question ‘Why?’ is not simply discarded in the way it is discarded when the answer is of the form ‘I was not aware I

6. In the sense, familiar from mathematics, in which the apex of a cone is a ‘degenerate’ conic section.

was doing that'. To that extent, the 'I didn't care about that' case can be said to be 'intermediate' between the case where the question 'Why?' is provided with an appropriate answer, such as a positive one ('Why are you beating out that curious rhythm?' – 'Oh, I found out how to do it, as the pump clicks anyway, and I'm doing it just for fun') and the case where that question is straightforwardly denied application ('Why are you beating out that curious rhythm?' – 'Oh I didn't know I was doing that; I was not aware that the clicking came from the pump') (see INT: §6, §23).

Even though the man's response, if truthful, precludes ascribing him the intention of replenishing the cistern with poisoned water, it is not exculpating. It does not exonerate him from the charge of having committed murder (INT: §25f, 45). He is responsible for the action of replenishing the cistern with poisoned water, not only in the sense that he is accountable for it (the action is imputable to him *unless* it is excused), but also in the sense that he is guilty of it (the action *is* in fact imputable to him). He is guilty of poisoning the people in the house. If they die, he will have committed murder.

Although the concept of murder applies paradigmatically to the intentional killing of innocent people, it is by no means restricted to it. It would be a mistake to think that Anscombe implies otherwise in admitting that the man's action is not intentional under the description 'poisoning the people in the house'.⁷ She writes:

Murder is not committed only where there was an intention to kill. The arsonist who burns down a house, not caring that there are people in it, is as much a murderer if they are burned to death by his action as if he had aimed to kill them. (AIDE: 219)⁸

Some readers of *Intention* have expressed bewilderment over the fact that the pair of contrasting examples through which Anscombe illustrates the distinction between intent and foresight in §25 is precisely one in which the difference between intent and foresight makes *no difference at all* not just to causal but also to *moral* responsibility.

But that is precisely how things should be in the context at hand. To say this is not to deny that the distinction between the intentional and the merely voluntary adumbrated in (2) *can* carry implications regarding the agent's moral responsibility for the concomitant result under consideration (i.e., this distinction bears on the question of whether that result can be imputed to him, 'laid at his doorstep'). It is only to deny that it *must* have such moral

7. We must reject Rachael Wiseman's claim that 'if we are concerned with the question of whether this man is a murderer, we must say that he is not' (Wiseman, 2016a: 130).
8. Another pair of contrasting examples, also involving the killing of innocent people, is adduced by Philippa Foot: 'To be sure it often makes no difference to the injustice of an action whether an injury which it causes is something the agent aims at or is something he foresees but has not made the object of his will. A merchant who sold food he knew to be poisonous in order to make money would be morally no better than an unemployed grave-digger who deliberately killed to get business' (Foot, 1985: 69). See also Foot (1979: 146).

import, or that such moral import is *built into* it. In certain cases, the distinction is indeed clear from its moral import. That is to say, the distinction having a clear moral import speaks for its indispensability:

We all make such a distinction: for example, a man who goes to prison rather than do something disgraceful may thereby knowingly deprive his family of support but is not therefore held to be guilty of this as if he had sought it or chosen it as a means to some end of his. (GW: 247)

Even though withdrawing support from his family is a concomitant result of this man's intentional action (the action of going to prison) that was previously known to him, so that he cannot be said to do it unwittingly, and even though he is no less accountable for it than if he had sought it, he is not responsible for it except in the sense of having caused it.

But the existence of this sort of case should not mislead us into thinking that the distinction drawn in the second heading of §49 is of a piece with, let alone grounded upon, the notion that one bears less moral responsibility for what one brings about merely voluntarily than for what one brings about intentionally.

There exists another concurrent point of view, however, in which some of the things falling under the second heading may be called 'involuntary' rather than 'voluntary, albeit not intentional':

From another point of view, however, such things can be called involuntary if one regrets them very much but feels 'compelled' to persist in the intentional actions in spite of that. (INT: §49, 89)

In this usage, the term 'involuntary' is no longer incompatible with the term 'intentional' (as we shall see when we turn to the last heading of §49). Be that as it may, the term 'involuntary' can certainly be used in such a way that it applies to a foreseen but not intended result of an intentional action done 'unwillingly' in the sense of *reluctantly*. One example is the example above of a man who loses his job as a result of going to prison rather than doing a wicked deed, who knew prior to performing the action of going to prison that he would inevitably lose his job as a result of it (see WM: 54). This infelicitous yet inevitable consequence of his action can hardly be regarded as 'intentional' simply because he knew beforehand that he would bring it about. Not only that, this consequence can even be regarded as 'involuntary' (though not 'unintentional') inasmuch as it is embraced reluctantly, far from being desired for itself (in the abstract, losing one's job is undesirable).⁹

9. It is worth noting that this alternative way of using the term 'involuntary' is tailor-made for the notion that wrong-doing must be voluntary: 'What excludes voluntariness excludes guilt. However, note that "voluntary" is being used in an especially broad way when we say that. If someone does something under threat from another man, say of pain or death or eviction, we would say it was forced on him. "I did it quite voluntarily" implies that I acted without such compulsion. But when we are using "voluntary" to speak of human acts as having to be voluntary – this being part of what we mean by a "human act" or "human

5. Non-intentional voluntary passive motions: §49 (3)

The summary that the book provides of section §49 – namely, ‘Account of “voluntary” action’ (INT: ix) – should not mislead us into thinking that the notion of the voluntary elucidated in this section applies exclusively to actions. Only the items falling under headings (2) and (4) can properly be called ‘actions’. We already saw that the voluntary ‘actions’ falling under (1) are more aptly called voluntary ‘movements’, as they are purely physical. As we shall see, there is a restriction at work in §49, but it is methodological in nature and it is a restriction, not to the actions performed by an agent, but to the proceedings that an agent knows without observation, yet does not know because of reasoning about what to do.

The subject of (3) is voluntary passivity. It is illustrated by voluntary passive movements (at this point, we may want to rename instances of (1), by contrast, ‘voluntary *active* movements’):

(3) Things may be voluntary which are not one's own doing at all, but which happen to one's delight, so that one consents and does not protest or take steps against them: as when someone on the bank pushes out a punt into the river so that one is carried out, and one is pleased. – ‘Why’ it might be asked, ‘did you go sliding down the hill into that party of people?’ to which the answer might be ‘I was pushed so that I went sliding down the bank’. But a rejoinder might be ‘You didn't mind; you didn't shout, or try to roll aside, did you?’ (INT: §49, 89-90)

We could also think of the case of the ship's captain who finds himself and his ship irresistibly carried away by the winds towards a destination other than the one he was heading to, yet who positively rejoices in it, far from being grieved by it. Sliding down the hill into the party of people is obviously not a voluntary movement in the physiological sense. In this respect, it is like being dragged. However, someone who saw me dragged would see that my motion is not a physiologically voluntary movement on my part (see S: 129), whereas sliding can be intentional (see INT: §47, 85). Nor for that matter is sliding down the hill into a party of people a physiologically involuntary movement of which one has non-observational knowledge, like a gasp, a start, ‘the odd sort of jerk or twitch that one's whole body sometimes makes when one is falling asleep’ (INT: §7) or a knee-jerk, and so on (cf. INT: §7, §20) (needless to say, it is not ‘involuntary’ in the way digestive movements are, but that is irrelevant here).

Yet the fact that the motion is not a voluntary action in the physiological sense and is the object of (what Anscombe calls) an “unmediated patient-conception” does not suffice to establish that it is not voluntary, let alone invol-

action” – we do not say that acts under threat are not voluntary. An act is voluntary in the way we are speaking of here if it is in the power of the agent to do it or not – he can resist the threat, that is: he can refuse to do what he is being “made” to do, if possible, by threat.’ (S: 127)

unitary.¹⁰ At most, it suffices to establish that the motion fails to be a voluntary action even in the not merely physiological sense (which again does not imply that the motion is an involuntary action in that sense, for here the motion is not an action at all, not even someone else's, as when one is being dragged by someone else).

Based on the fact that violence cannot be directly exerted on the will – that is to say, that it does not make sense to think of physical force as being applied to someone's intentions – it should not be inferred that the application of physical force on someone's body suffices in itself to make his motion or position involuntary. Thus, when Aquinas maintains that 'a man can be dragged violently, but for this to be from his will is contrary to the concept of violence' (see S: 129), it is quite clear that in this context the concept of the voluntary is restricted to what is voluntary in the physiological sense:

A movement's being 'from his will' here means the same as its being physiologically voluntary; for him to have arranged with some people in advance that they should drag him is of course not excluded by 'not from his will'. (S: 129)

If the motion was arranged in advance, then it can hardly be deemed involuntary (S: 130). If we say that something is involuntary through violence, 'when for example winds or strong men carry you where you do not want to go', our characterisation needs to be supplemented with a further condition: 'you contributing nothing to your passage' (see S: 130). On the other hand, if the person undergoing the motion were aggrieved by it or its consequences, that would speak for the motion being involuntary.

To clarify the nature of this case, it may help to contrast it with two other cases. In the first case, the person is sliding down the hill into a party of people as a result of being pushed but she does not rejoice in it. Sliding down the hill and hitting the party of people, perhaps killing some of them, is then simply involuntary on her part, on account of its being due to violence, namely, the violence exerted by the person who intentionally pushes the punter with her on it. She may be held accountable for what happens (a defence on her part is in order), but she cannot be held responsible for it except in the causal sense (the defence exonerates her, i.e., exculpates her completely). The fact that she must answer for the killing, if only to be completely exonerated, goes with the fact that 'killing' is not a neutral action description but a moral (or human) action description (see AIDE: 215). But even though 'killing' is a human action description, it does not apply to the human action here. Sliding down the hill, hitting the party of people and killing some of them are not her human actions; they are only acts of the human being that she is, acts of a body that happens to be a human being. This would remain true both if hers were the only body to hit the people (say, she was made into a parcel and set rolling down a hill in

10. Anscombe circumscribes and characterizes the generic concept of 'unmediated agent-or-patient conceptions of actions, happenings, and states' in the last tract of her essay, 'The First Person' (Anscombe FP: 36).

such circumstances that she kills someone by knocking him into the path of a rapid vehicle) and if there were no voluntary action of pushing her (say, she got set rolling down the hill by sheer accident) (see AIDE: 210).

In the second case, the person who is sliding down the hill into a party of people, perhaps killing some of them, does rejoice in it for the simple reason that she herself arranged it: the man who intentionally pushed the punter with her on it acted on her instruction; she instructed him to do so to polish off the party of people in such a way that it looked as if she bore no responsibility whatsoever (except in a merely causal sense). This second case is not very different from one in which a person intentionally makes herself fall off a tree branch onto someone's neck to kill him. The falling is then voluntary, even though it is not physiologically voluntary. Likewise, if it was arranged, being dragged is voluntary, even though it is not physiologically voluntary (see S: 129). But falling is not a voluntary action (nor therefore a human action), even though bringing it about *is* a voluntary action (and so a human action). Although falling is not a voluntary action, we shall hardly be content to say that it is 'not her own doing at all', if only because it resulted from a voluntary action of hers (see AIDE: 204). The same holds of sliding down the hill or being dragged if it was arranged.

The case brought under consideration in (3) differs from the second case in that the things happening are not one's own doing *at all*, any more than they are one's own doing in the first case. Yet it differs from the first case in that the things happening are as voluntary as in the second case.

The concept of voluntary passivity articulated in (3) can be seen as the solution to an old puzzle. The claim that something done through violence or ignorance is thereby rendered involuntary seems to give rise to an inconsistency when it is coupled with the claim that what is involuntary causes grief. Aquinas formulates the puzzle thus:

Sometimes a man suffers compulsion without being grieved thereby. Therefore, violence does not cause involuntariness. (Aquinas: ST 1a, 2ae, Q6, A5)

In a later article, Anscombe reformulates the puzzle in terms of the very example that illustrates the third heading of §49:

Now suppose you are lying in a punt – a flat-bottomed boat – and you meant to stay there for a while, you do not want to be carried into the middle of the river. But someone jestingly pushes your punt out with a pole. Is this not counter-voluntary [= involuntary] for you? You did not want to be pushed out. But suppose when it happens you are pleased? No distress or grief here – yet you were carried by being pushed where you did not want to go.

Anscombe then goes on to credit Aquinas with having resolved this puzzle:

St. Thomas perceived the problem, and in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he says that being *pleased* is a contribution on your part. This saves the case from being one of counter-voluntary [= involuntary] motion. (S: 130)

The argument to which Anscombe redirects us here is also to be found in the *Summa theologiae* in the Question about the voluntary and the involuntary:

When action is brought to bear on something by an extrinsic agent, as long as the will to suffer that action remains in the passive subject, that is not violence simply: for although the patient does nothing by way of action, he does something by being willing to suffer. Consequently, this cannot be called involuntary. (Aquinas ST, 1a, 2ae, Q6, A5)

6. Intentional voluntary actions: §49 (4)

Last, but certainly not least, counting as an intentional action under a certain description is a sufficient condition for counting as a voluntary action under that description. In a nutshell, all intentional action is voluntary:

(4) Every intentional action is also voluntary, though again, as at (2), intentional actions can also be described as involuntary from another point of view, as when one regrets 'having' to do them. But 'reluctant' would be the more commonly used word. (INT: §49, 90)

As we saw in Section 2, as early as in §7 Anscombe maintains that *not* being *involuntary* is a necessary condition for an action to be intentional (INT: §7a, 12). The present claim – that being voluntary is a necessary condition for an action to be intentional – is in fact stronger because 'involuntary' does not mean simply 'non-voluntary' (being involuntary is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for being non-voluntary) (INT: §5d, 12-13). Combined with the claim established in (1) and (2), that not every voluntary action is intentional, the claim that every intentional action is voluntary implies that the concept of voluntary action can be more widely applied than that of intentional action. In light of (3), the concept of voluntary can be even more widely applied since it is not confined to actions. By contrast, the concept of intentional is restricted to actions, whether underway or proposed.

The two concepts of voluntary and intentional thus overlap to a large extent, the former being more inclusive than the latter. This means that the topic of the voluntary has been the subject of Anscombe's inquiry all along.

7. The contribution of *Intention* to an account of the voluntary: The unity and limitations of §49

The account given of the voluntary in §49 shows a great deal of unity with respect to both what it says and what it refrains from saying about the voluntary.

What the merely physical active movements (1), actions (2) and passive movements (3) displaying the difference between the voluntary and the intentional have in common is that they are known by the person performing or undergoing them without observation, like intentional actions, but do not occur as the result of calculating what to do, unlike actions done with a further

intention, and yet the question 'Why?' is not simply and overtly irrelevant to them, even or rather especially when it is not granted application to them. They neither arise from the sort of practical calculation that is the hallmark of intentional actions nor emanate from knowledge that is 'the cause of what it understands' after the manner of intentional actions (INT: §48, 83), and yet they somehow partake of practical knowledge in one way or another.

The account in §49 is obviously restricted in several ways. It hardly touches on the involuntary. Moreover, it says nothing about voluntary omissions and how they differ from intentional ones. Voluntary omissions are particularly tricky, as they do not require so much as an act of the will, unlike the voluntary passive motions grouped under §49 (3).¹¹ Finally, §49 confines itself to the practical sphere in the narrow sense, without considering the possibility of applying the concept of the voluntary to such things as habits, feelings or – last but not least – knowledge.

Indeed, the single most conspicuous absence from §49 is the lack of any attempt to elucidate the relation between voluntariness and knowledge. Must an agent know without observation that he is doing an action for that action to be voluntary? Section §49 might seem to suggest as much, given that all four classes of voluntary movements (1) to (4) meet this requirement.

If it were so, however, then to make sure that one did not commit adultery (in any but the material sense), it would suffice to abstain from inquiring into the marital status of one's partner; and the reckless driver to whom it simply did not occur that he was endangering the lives of others would be entitled to plead that this was not voluntary on his part. As Anscombe puts it:

We may not believe someone who says 'it never occurred to me that driving at 90 m.p.h. through a town might well result in someone's death', but even if we do, we would be right to think 'it ought to have occurred to him'. (S: 136)

Actions resulting from rashness, carelessness or negligence do not count as intentional (at least in the default case) since the agent acts without knowing or without fully knowing what he is doing. But such actions can hardly be regarded as not voluntary: to characterise an action as an act of rashness, carelessness or negligence is, if anything, to imply that it *is* voluntary, even though it is not intentional (see AIDE: 213; BGF: 105-106). As Anscombe writes:

Something may be a human action under a description under which it is not an intentional action. Acts of carelessness, negligence and omission may be of this nature. For though they can be intentional, they may not be so, but

11. Anscombe credits Aquinas with the insight that 'voluntariness can occur without any act at all, interior or exterior' (S: 136, 130-131). She takes this thesis to be 'proved by the fact that one has it in one's power *not* to do some things which one also has in one's power to do. Sometimes one may make a definite (datable) decision not to do something, and that is an action. But one may merely not do something without any such decision.' (S: 136) That is to say, there can be voluntary omission without so much as an interior act of the will.

not being intentional does not strip them of their nature as human action. (AIDE: 213)

By Anscombe's own lights, the asymmetry between intentional action and voluntary action with respect to the knowledge requirement constitutes the most significant difference between the two concepts:

The difference between voluntariness and intentionality that I refer to here is this: one cannot intentionally, but one can voluntarily, do something without knowing what one is doing: e.g., some voluntary cases are like those of bigamy and adultery when the agent made no inquiry. (TKEA: 7, note 2)

Therefore, even if we confine ourselves to the sphere of actions and passions, the voluntary extends even further than section §19 acknowledges, since it extends beyond the limits of what the agent knows:

It is clear that, for any deed X, you cannot have intentionally done X unless you know you are doing X, except in a psychoanalytical sense in which there can be unconscious intentions (...) This, then, is the truth in the condition of 'full knowledge' for mortal sin: where the mortal sin is a specific act in a kind of case which requires intention on the part of the accused, then the act of mortal sin was not committed by an agent who did not have full knowledge. We can often say that an action was either intentional or involuntary. I do not think that the condition ought to be more generously stated than that. For the limits of the voluntary are far wider than the limits of the intentional: but sin essentially requires not intention but voluntariness. (M: 114-115)

Of course, ignorance often renders an action involuntary, thereby exculpating its agent. The problem is to find a criterion for when ignorance fails to render an action involuntary. Following Aquinas, Anscombe contends that ignorance can itself be voluntary and thereby blameworthy, somewhat in the manner in which an omission can also be voluntary and thereby blameworthy.

Another issue conspicuously left unaddressed by *Intention*, arising in connection with the sort of case that is considered in §25 and §49 (2), is the following:

The fact that there is murder where death foreseeably results from one's action, without the actual intention to kill, naturally leads to a problem. One cannot say that no action may be done which foreseeably leads to some death, or that all such actions are murderous. (AIDE: 219)

This is of course the problem that the 'doctrine of double effect' seeks to address through the distinction between intention and foresight. Its core consists in what Anscombe calls the 'principle of side effects'. This is the principle that 'the prohibition on murder does not cover all unintended deaths' (AIDE: 220).¹²

12. See also MME, 274: 'The principle of side-effects states a possibility: where you may not aim at someone's death, causing it does not necessarily incur guilt'.

The problem is to find a criterion for when an agent is exculpated by the fact that he does not intend a death that he knowingly brings about (i.e., that his action of causing a death, however voluntary, is not intentional on his part).

Addressing these issues on the basis of Anscombe's writings lies beyond the scope of this paper. But it should be obvious by now that they cannot be addressed without dipping into ethics. They concern an area within the concept of the voluntary that cannot be investigated solely with the tools of the philosophy of psychology. This explains why *Intention* stops at the threshold of this further stage in the elucidation of the voluntary, having cleared the way for it.

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