Saving the Patient

Practical Knowledge and the Problem of Receptivity

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1. Introduction

In her seminal work, *Intention*, Anscombe argues that the knowledge of one's own actions is distinguished from other knowledge not only by its content but also by its form. She calls this form of knowing 'practical knowledge,' and she distinguishes it from theoretical or 'speculative' knowledge by its distinctively agentive relation to what it knows. Quoting Aquinas, she writes: "Practical knowledge is 'the cause of what it understands', unlike speculative knowledge, which 'is derived from the objects known'" (par. 48).

At the core of Anscombe's conception of practical knowledge is the compelling thought that the knowledge of my own action is not, like theoretical knowledge, a matter of apprehending the nature and existence of some independently given thing. For in that case, the thing itself — the action — would be something whose nature and existence were determined independently of my knowing them. I should thus be a mere spectator to my own actions — a front-row member of the audience, but not the performer himself. Proponents of the Anscombean idea of 'practical knowledge' are thus motivated, above all, by the philosophical aim of 'saving the agent.' To assimilate the knowledge of one's own actions to the model of theoretical knowing is, on this view, to regard the 'agent' as a mere self-spectator and thus to undermine the very idea of action and agency.

But Anscombe's attempt to articulate the concept of practical knowledge is afflicted by a well-known inner tension between two of its central commitments. Anscombe expresses the distinctive nature of practical knowledge by claiming that I know my own actions 'without observation.' The underlying point of this formulation is to express the idea that my knowledge of my actions is not *receptive* knowledge; that is, it is not about, as it were, looking to see what I am doing. Call this the 'No Observation Commitment.' At the same time, she maintains that "I *do* what *happens*" (par. 29; emphasis Anscombe's). That is, Anscombe insists that the outer, material results of my action (so long as they were intended) are not something external to the action. They are not mere outer effects of some inner action but are, rather, internal to the action itself. Call this the 'Actuality Commitment.'

The exact meaning and scope of this knowledge 'without observation' has been debated among Anscombe scholars. All agree that, for Anscombe, I do not know my actions *merely* by observing them, and all agree that, for Anscombe, I do not know my actions through a kind of self-observation — i.e. by observing my mind or my bodily motions in the manner that an outside spectator (or a mind-reader) might view them. But Anscombe herself often appears to make a still stronger claim — namely, that practical knowledge also excludes observation of the effects which I bring about in the object acted upon.

> Thus in any operation we really can speak of two knowledges — the account that one could give of what one was doing, without adverting to observation; and the account of exactly what is happening at a given moment (say) to the material one is working on. The one is practical, the other speculative. (par. 48)

How can the former account exclude the latter without thereby excluding 'what happens'? There are, to be sure, numerous happenings in the materials that are quite extraneous to my purposes — clicking noises, shadows, etc. But there is also a baby in that bathwater. For one of the things that ought to be happening at a given moment to the materials is the actual realization of the intention — the house's actually being built, the sculpture's actually being sculpted. What about the account of *that*?

The contrastive form in the quoted passage seems to suggest that knowledge of what exactly is going on in the materials would require some observation. And how could it not? That is, how can I know exactly what is happening at a given moment to the materials I am working on without allowing myself to take a peek at the outside world? But if that is so, then how could we exclude such knowledge from the (practical) knowledge of my action, without thereby excluding 'what happens' from the action itself ?

Anscombe and her commentators have made various attempts to reconcile the two aforementioned commitments and to resolve the apparent conflict between them. Such an effort, I will argue, is not only futile but misbegotten in its very conception. The important question is not how practical knowledge can be safeguarded against encroachments from receptive knowledge of what goes on outside me. The question, rather, is whether the *requirement* that it be so guarded is *true* and necessary for an account of practical knowledge. The central thesis of this paper is that such a requirement is not only false but strictly incompatible with the concept of a distinctively practical form of knowing.

The source of this difficulty in Anscombe's account derives not merely from her arguably exaggerated claim that I know my action *without* observation (and not just 'non-observationally' in some weaker sense). That claim, I argue, is in fact a necessary consequence of a deeper conception of agentive self-knowledge of which Anscombe's particular account is but one example. The deeper source of the problem is a conception of agentive self-knowledge which conceives of the latter in direct opposition to receptive, other-knowledge. Under such a conception, the inclusion of such receptive, other-knowledge within the proper content of my agentive self-knowledge cannot but infect and compromise the agentive character of that practical perspective. But, on the other hand, the quarantine of agentive self-knowledge *from* such receptive knowledge cannot but exclude from the former the very knowledge of external circumstances required for the efficacy of my action.

The tension between Anscombe's two commitments is only the final manifestation of a tension which extends from the completed act all the way back to the formation of a concrete, practicable intention. Practical cognition, in order to be genuinely practical, is from start to finish thoroughly infected with receptive knowledge of the requisite outer circumstances. Pure, unmixed spontaneity can belong only to the productive perspective of divine intellectual intuition. It cannot belong to the perspective of agents with finite abilities who act in an already existing world. We can safeguard practical knowledge from outer receptivity only by safeguarding practical action from the outer world. Or so I'll argue.

In Part One, I will return to the aforementioned Anscombean tension and examine how the problem of self-knowledge infected by receptivity manifests itself in the context of knowing the outer realization of my intention. In Part Two, I will consider the manner in which this problem of infection spreads all the way to the knowledge of my intentions. To this end, I will focus on Richard Moran's account of transparency and first-personal knowledge in *Authority and Estrangement*, and I will conclude by returning to the Anscombean problem from the side of knowing my intention. My aim in these sections is not simply to critique Anscombe or Moran nor to make an interpretive intervention regarding their accounts. My aim, rather, is to bring into view the kind of conception of practical self-knowledge which renders the agentive character of that knowledge fatally vulnerable to the problem of infection by receptive, other-knowledge.

In Part Three, I will introduce a positive alternative to such a conception by looking to the the account of purposive action given in the 'Teleology' section of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. There, Hegel argues that the thoroughgoing dependence of purposive action on given, external conditions — indeed even the *resistance* of the outer world to my purposes — is not, properly viewed, a mere external limitation or outer prerequisite to my agency. It is, rather, an internal part of the purpose itself and belongs, in Hegel's words, to the "original *inner* externality of the concept [i.e. the purpose]."[1] To act is to *make* oneself receptive to the outer world — though not in a passive way, but in a manner governed and determined by my own purpose. Seen in this way, practical knowledge is, therefore, preserved against infection from receptive, other-knowledge — but not because it excludes or opposes it, nor because it is independent of it. It does not need to fear receptive knowledge, because, in truth, the infection runs the other way.

1. **The Infection of Self-Knowledge by Knowledge of the Realized Intention**

1.1. Killing the patient

Anscombe famously claims that I know my actions "without observation." The question of the exact meaning and justification of that claim has raised difficulties for interpreters. For we may readily admit that when a physician is performing an open-heart surgery, her knowledge of what she is doing is of a rather different kind than that of a medical student who merely observes the procedure from a viewing area. We could safely say, then, that her knowledge of her own actions is 'non-observational' in a merely negative sense: her knowledge is not like the medical student's.

But this merely negative concept of non-observational knowledge of my actions could be specified in one of two ways. It could mean (1) knowledge that involves observation but is not reducible to it; or (2) knowledge that does not involve observation — i.e. is 'without it.' Anscombe herself prefers the stronger formulation: knowledge *without* observation.

But what can she mean by this? The idea that the surgeon knows what she is doing without *any* observation (namely, of the *patient*) is, on its face, quite absurd. Anscombe's own example of knowing what I'm writing even with my eyes closed does not transfer very well to the case of surgical procedures. Surgery evidently cannot proceed blindly like a game of breaking a piñata. If it did, it would inevitably produce a similar result.

[1] *Science of Logic* GW 12.171 (English p. 668)

Anscombe' s example of writing blindly is meant to illustrate that observation (of the script being written on the paper) is merely an *aid* to knowing my action, but not an integral or necessary part of the practical knowledge itself. But in the case of the surgery (and similarly in nearly all cases), observation seems to be a no less necessary aid to knowing what she is doing than the scalpel is to making her incision. The latter is a *conditio sine qua non* of the incision, the former of knowing what she is doing while she makes it. For the activity relies just as much on precise use of the outer senses as it does on precise use of the scalpel. The surgeon who relied exclusively on resources *other* than her outer senses would have done just that — that is, she would have taken leave of her senses. And the activity she thereby knew would not be a surgery but a slaughter (and a rather clumsy one at that).

Of course, the evident reliance of outer action on the outer senses has not gone unnoticed by readers of Anscombe. One possible solution would be to admit that observation is needed *prior* to the incision but not during the incision itself (maybe she can close her eyes at the last moment). But first of all, that is patently untrue, and more importantly, it is unclear how shifting around the requisite observational knowledge (which she must actively retain in making the cut) would meaningfully preserve the idea that she knows what she's doing 'without observation.' (I will return to this issue in Part Two).

Some readers have simply endorsed a weakened version of her claim by interpreting it to mean that observation is simply not a *sufficient* condition of knowing one's action.[2] But Anscombe's claim is that I know my action *without* observation. That is a denial that it is a *necessary condition* of practical knowledge — a condition without which not — not a mere denial that it is a sufficient condition. Perhaps we could regard the stronger language as a rather unnecessary, rhetorical exaggeration of the idea that the knowledge is not *merely* observational. But that would be quite an extraordinary exaggeration. It would be like saying that a Big Mac is 'without meat' when what I really mean is that it also includes lettuce and tomatoes.

But Anscombe's exclusion of observation seems to be a vital, principled one. For it pertains centrally to her conception of the direction of fit between practical knowing and its object. Adopting Aquinas's slogan, she says that "Practical knowledge is 'the cause of what it understands', unlike 'speculative ' knowledge, which 'is derived from the objects known '" (par. 48). But if the surgeon, in order to know that she is slicing open the patient's abdominal wall, had to see the response of that wall to her blade, then the unidirectional order of fit (from subject *to* object) would seem to be compromised. For her knowledge of her action would be, at least in part, derived from the object — i.e. the patient. In other words, if the knowledge of my own action depended on looking to the *object*, then the practical nature of that knowledge (so understood) would be compromised, infected by receptive knowledge. The strong claim that I know my action *without* observation is simply the measure which must be taken in order to quarantine practical knowledge from receptive knowledge. But what is the cost of this quarantine? Let's return to the passage quoted earlier:

> Thus in any operation we really can speak of two knowledges — the account that one could give of what one was doing, without adverting to observation; and the account of exactly what is happening at a given moment (say) to the material one is working on. The one is practical, the other speculative. (par. 48)

[2] Cf. Kieran Setiya's formulation of "Anscombe's Principle," namely, "If A has the capacity to act for reasons, she has the capacity to know what she is doing without observation or inference— in that her knowledge does not rest on sufficient prior evidence." ("Knowledge of Intention," p. 174).

The knowledge of exactly what is happening at a given moment to the material — in our case, the patient — will be, it seems, at least in part, derived from the patient and will depend upon observation. For without the outer senses of sight and touch, how should I know that the knife is cutting just through the left coronary artery without going too far and damaging the right ventricle or the left circumflex artery? Neither imagination, nor general knowledge of anatomy, nor general technical knowledge of heart surgery can do this work. For one who misses the mark in such a case will certainly have imagined that things were proceding by the book.[3] But, according to Anscombe, that observational knowledge is not a proper part of the practical knowledge — i.e. the knowledge of what she is doing, which she can say without adverting to observation.

But this means that we can only save the agentive, observationless character of practical knowledge by dispatching the patient in another way — namely, by removing precise knowledge of what is going on with the patient from the proper content of practical knowledge. At least, it seems that it *must* do this. For again, how could the surgeon know exactly what is going on with the patient without adverting to observation? For my own part, I do not possess the kind of superhuman philosophical imagination required to conceive of such a thing.

But then, in order to save the No Observation Commitment, we must give up the Actuality Commitment: i.e. the commitment to the claim that what I do is what happens. For I cannot know exactly what is happening with the patient without observation. If, despite this, I know what I'm doing without observation, then what I'm doing cannot include exactly what is happening with the patient. In a word, if agency is defined by the agent's possessing a certain certain receptivity-free knowledge (knowledge without observation), then, in order to save the agent, we must, it seems, eliminate the patient from the picture. In order to better see the cost of that elimination, let's take a brief detour to consider the strong version of the Actuality Commitment found in Aristotle.

1.2. Saving the Patient

I have focused on the perspective of the surgeon in order to emphasize the fact that *her* perspective when she acts is focused on the *patient* — namely, by careful perception of what is going on with the patient at all times. What the example of surgery illustrates is not simply that these procedures (unlike, say, writing 'I'm a fool' on the blackboard) require great precision. Rather, it illustrates something common to all action on the external world and something most evident in direct physical action — namely, that the operation, the activity itself, takes place *in* the body of the patient. This has two central consequences: (a) the singularity of the act (exactly what I'm doing) and (b) its success — the actual *realization* of the intention — depend upon the patient.

Aristotle writes that "causes which are actually at work and particular exist and cease to exist simultaneously with their effect, e.g. this healing person with this being-healed person and that housebuilding man with that being-built house" (*Physics* 195b15). That is, the surgeon's actually operating in a particular way (what exactly she is doing) coincides with the patient's actually being

[3] Cf. Ford (2016), p. 5: ""one does not encounter particulars in one's imagination, but, as it were, in the field, where one meets them face to face." Ford's whole essay is an excellent defense of the strict necessity of perceptual knowledge in the knowledge of my actions.

operated on in a particular way. Indeed, in Aristotle, the coincidence is not merely temporal simultaneity but a much stronger identity:

> [...] the actuality of that which has the power of causing motion is not other than the actuality of the movable; for it must be the fulfillment of *both*. A thing is capable of causing motion because it *can* do this, it is a mover because it actually *does* it. But it is on the movable that it is capable of acting. Hence there is a single actuality of both alike, just as one to two and two to one are the same interval, and the steep ascent and the steep descent are one (*Physics* 202a15-20)[4]

Aristotle, then, maintains a very strict Actuality Commitment: the actual action and the actual passion are simply one thing — the relevant movement in the patient, i.e. the effect. Hegel thinks the same: "The cause is first actual [*wirklich*] in the effect [*Wirkung*]" (*Encyclopaedia Logic*, par. 153). The single actuality, in Aristotle (as in Hegel) is distinguished by reference to the difference in the two potentialities (to act and to be acted upon). The actual doing, however, is simply one thing, which can be viewed from two perspectives, in the way that a steep ascent is at one and the same time a steep descent.

But the result of that Actuality Commitment is that, while the *power* or *potentiality* of building is in builder (i.e. the potential agent), the *actual* building is in the patient: "architecture is *in* the buildings it makes" (*Generation of Animals* 730b9). But this mean that if we remove the knowledge of 'exactly what is going on with the materials' — i.e. of the patient *qua* actual, we also remove the knowledge of the *agent* qua actual. That is, in leaving out the corresponding passion, I only know myself as *potential* agent, not actual agent. For, as Aristotle writes, "what [the producer] is in potentiality, his handiwork manifests in activity [*energeia*]" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1168a9).

But even without adverting to Aristotle, it is not difficult to see how knowledge of the details of my action is inseparably connected to the perception of the *realization* of my action in the materials one is working on. For, exactly how deep will the surgeon insert the scalpel in the opening incision? She will do it just until the knife has, say, penetrated through the abdominal wall and no further. She cuts carefully just until she sees and feels that the knife has gone through — i.e. that the wall has been breached. The details of her incision are determined by the success conditions, and everything she does leading up to it is oriented toward that.

Even in respect of effectively gripping the scalpel (something she must do in order to make the cut), she only knows that she is correctly gripping it when she feels and sees it being steadily and properly held in her fingers. She knows exactly what she is doing by deploying her outer senses in a purposive manner — i.e. by knowing that and when the scalpel is in the appropriate position. All of her action depends upon the precise particularities of the singular, external individual she is acting upon, and that knowledge depends upon perception.

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[4] Cf. Also *Metaphysics* 1050a30-35: "Where, then, the result is something apart from the exercise [τὴν χρῆσιν], the actuality [ἡ ἐνέργεια] is in the thing that is being made, e.g. the act of building is in the building that is being built and that of weaving in the thing that is being woven, and similarly in all other cases, and in general the movement is in the thing that is being moved."

In a word, her agentive knowledge of her own action is and *must be* thoroughly infected by receptive knowledge of the patient and its corresponding passion. In order for the patient to be receptive to my action, my own action must in turn be receptive to the particularities of the patient. My purposes — in order to be effective — must be flexible enough to incorporate external, given conditions. Action is always interaction with the external world, and this means that the knowledge of my action cannot be a pure one-way street from subject to object, agent to patient.

The idea that we must exclude this knowledge appears to be based on a false and one-sided conception of agentive or spontaneous knowledge, which simply opposes it to receptive knowledge. That the two cannot and need not be so opposed is perhaps most clearly illustrated through the outer sense of touch. This sense is generally overlooked in Anscombe's examples of knowledge without observation. But how will her benighted scribbler know she is even making contact with the paper or the chalkboard without it?

The outer sense of touch is, to be sure, a power of receptive knowledge. That is, it is a manner in which I can know how things are in the external world by being affected by them in a certain way. But it is the least 'speculative' of all the senses. For when the surgeon feels the appropriate resistance of the scalpel's handle on her fingers, she does not just know the scalpel passively — she does not just wait and see whether it is being firmly held in place. The scalpel does indeed act on her in a certain way, but it does so because she *makes* it act on her in a particular way — namely, the exact way which coincides with its being held firmly and (thus) her holding it firmly. In other words, she *generates* and *determines* her own receptivity through a purposive act. This kind of agentive receptivity is precisely what we express in English when we say "I'll see to it," which means the exact opposite of "I'll wait and see."

The exclusion of outer perception from knowledge of my action seems spring from the same kind of mistake committed by Kant's famous light dove, who, "cutting through the air the resistance of which it feels, could get the idea that it could do even better in airless space" (*Critique of Pure Reason* A5/B9). Spontaneous knowledge — in order to make contact with the outside world — must involve an element of receptivity. Otherwise we are dealing with mere concepts without intuition, merely possible cognition without actual cognition. But, like the dove in flight, this receptivity is not *opposed* to spontaneity, but is the very way in which this spontaneity is realized: by *using* the outside world actively, according to a purpose.

1.3 Withdrawing from the patient

Readers of Anscombe have often noticed that knowing that I'm actually getting anything done in the outside world might require getting my hands dirty with receptive knowledge. Accordingly, like a squeamish surgeon who flees from the sight of blood, some have attempted to save the agentive, non-observational nature of practical knowledge by withdrawing from the patient altogether.

One such example is found in Michael Thompson's view that practical knowledge properly pertains only to present imperfect action — i.e. action that is not yet done.[5] But there is a great difference between having partially completed an ongoing action and not having done anything at all. The consequence of Thompson's view is that the *paradigm* case of practical knowledge will be that

[5] "Anscombe's Intention and Practical Knowledge" p. 209

expressed by the child who shouts to his mother "I'm cleaning the dishes!" even while the plates are all dirty, and his hands are still dry. Unlike many philosophers of action, the child and his mother both know very well the difference between *this* sense of "I'm doing it" and the sense involved when the dishes are actually being cleaned. Philosophers of action seem to think that because I can truly say "I'm doing it" when I'm *about* to do it, what I mean and what I know when I'm actually doing it are the same as what I mean and what I know beforehand. In that case, I would have all of my practical knowledge in advance, and my knowledge that the dishes are actually getting cleaned will be a speculative addition. In other words, in order to know that I'm actually doing anything (i.e. that anything is actually getting done), I should have to step outside the agentive perspective.[6]

Another inward retreat is offered by Richard Moran. Recognizing that knowledge of whether I'm actually doing anything depends heavily upon observational knowledge, he insists that we must give up the Actuality Commitment — i.e. we must distinguish 'what I do' from 'what happens.' The grounds of the distinction lies in the idea that, whatever happens, only that can count as my action which falls under the purposive description under which I knowingly act. He quotes Anscombe: "it is the agent's knowledge of what he is doing that gives the description under which what is going on is the execution of an intention" (par. 48). But, for Moran, *that* description is something that I know without observation.[7] This description is constituted by the reasons for my action — i.e. everything that could be represented in a practical syllogism of which the intentional action is the conclusion. So, in *Authority and Estrangement*, he writes "[an agent] is in a position to know a true description of his action in knowing his reasons" (p. 127).

Moran's account of the way in which an agent knows his reasons is just the account of first-personal manner in which he forms his practical intentions. This account, in turn, is extended from the model Moran applies to the first-personal, authorial manner in which one knows one's own beliefs — namely, by making up one's mind about it. There is, on this account, one element of knowledge without observation or receptivity — an element which the agent knows simply by determining it — namely, the knowledge of the intention with which he acts. And this determines the essential *what* of the action itself — i.e. what counts as an intentional action at all.

In the following section, I will argue that there is no safe haven in which to preserve practical knowledge from receptive knowledge — that is, without retreating merely to the subjective recesses of my own mind. Practical Knowledge is infected with receptivity as soon as it extends beyond those boundaries. To show this, I will begin by considering Moran's account of knowing my belief, and I will examine what happens when we try to extend that account to the domain of the practical.

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[6] For a more extended critique of the 'presentist' view of practical knowledge, cf. Matthias Haase, "Knowing What I Have Done."

[7] "Anscombe on Practical Knowledge" p. 68. Both Moran and Setiya argue, on these grounds, that Anscombe's Thomist formula of practical knowledge should be interpreted to mean not that it is the efficient cause of a corresponding external reality, but the formal cause of my action — i.e. that in virtue of which anything which happens can count as my intentional action at all. (Cf. Setiya "Anscombe on Practical Knowledge" p. 160).

2. The Infection of Self-Knowledge by Knowledge of the Means

2. 1 Transparency and the Knowledge of my Beliefs

Moran's project in *Authority and Estrangement* is guided by central thought that understanding the special first-personal character of self-knowledge "will require bringing the agent more explicitly into the picture" (p. 33). The reason, he thinks, is that to subsume the knowledge of our own minds under the model of merely theoretical knowledge is to treat our knowledge of our minds merely as one of a spectator. But to know our own minds only in such a way is to stand in an essentially *alienated* relation to our minds.

In theoretical knowledge, I relate to my object as something given, something already determined, and I know it simply by apprehending what is going on independently of my individual awareness. But to know my mind only that way would be like knowing it in the way in which I know the involuntary spasms of my own arm — as a mere external fact indifferent to my personal awareness of it. The difference between merely knowing *about* my arm's movement and *knowingly* moving my arm is the kind of difference which distinguishes an essentially first-personal, agentive knowledge from an essentially third-personal, theoretical knowledge.

For, *contrary* to the requirements of merely theoretical self-knowledge, the characteristic and healthy relation that I have to my thoughts and actions is one of *consciously determining them*. That is, I do not merely look upon them as though my own awareness had nothing to do with their nature and existence. *Having* any agency over my thoughts and actions also involves knowing them in a different, agentive way.

Moran's account of the distinctively agentive perspective takes as its starting point a certain kind of intellectual agency — namely, what we might call doxastic agency, the conscious determination of my beliefs. To illustrate the distinct *perspective* that belongs to this agency, he highlights the difference between the merely theoretical perspective and the deliberative perspective.

This difference can be seen by considering two different ways of answering a question. If I am asked what I weigh, what my blood type is, etc., I am simply investigating some fact about myself, and I look for the evidence of that predetermined fact. I may not happen to know these facts about myself, but I do not doubt that the facts are what they are and that I could find them out. By contrast, if someone asks me whether I *believe* we will have an early spring, I do not answer that question by searching inside my mind for some pre-existing doxastic *fact* about myself. Rather, I consider the circumstances relevant to the question of the vernal weather itself. That is, if asked whether I think *p*, I do not answer this question by looking inward and thinking about *me*. Rather, I answer that question by thinking about whether or not *p* is true — consulting the evidence regarding *it*. The two questions are 'transparent' to one another. In the oft-quoted words of Gareth Evans: "[I]n making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward—upon the world."[8]

[8] *Varieties of Reference,* p. 225 (quoted in Moran, p. 61). The term 'transparency derives from Roy Edgley (p. 90), cited in Moran, p. 61

The distinction between these two ways of knowing does not simply bring to light the interestingly outward-directed manner of knowing my beliefs. It pertains, rather, to my being and conceiving of myself as a rational agent.

> But, as I conceive of myself as a rational agent, my awareness of my belief is awareness of my commitment to its truth, a commitment to something that transcends any description of my psychological state. And the expression of this commitment lies in the fact that my reports on my belief are obliged to conform to the condition of transparency: that I can report on my belief about X by considering (nothing but) X itself. (84)

Here the two sides of 'rationality' (commitment to truth and agency) are inseparable. For, when my belief satisfies this 'transparency condition,' I know my belief not merely by learning about it, but by consciously *determining* it. This agentive relation to my own mind is what is shown in distinguishing the theoretical from the deliberative by two ways of answering a question about myself. Moran summarizes the distinction thus:

> What we're calling a theoretical question about oneself, then, is one that is answered by discovery of the fact of which one was ignorant, whereas a practical or deliberative question is answered by a decision or commitment of some sort, and it is not a response to ignorance of some antecedent fact about oneself (58).

Moran distinguishes these two ways of knowing (from the theoretical or deliberative perspective) by a distinction between 'attribution' and 'avowal,' respectively (p. 88ff). The concepts of first-personal self-knowledge, 'transparent' self-knowledge, and 'knowledge by avowal' thus coincide in Moran's account: I know something with first-personal authority when I know it by avowal. And I know something by avowal when the fact about me is determined in the manner of answering an outward-looking deliberative question. In questions of belief, I ask whether a proposition is *true*, or what I am *to believe*. In matters of practical deliberation, I ask whether the action is good or desirable, or what I am *to do* (cf. 57, 97, 118). I determine these matters by making up my mind about them and by endorsing the conclusion of my deliberation, not by looking for some inner fact about myself. In this way, I assume a first-personal, agentive relation to my beliefs, actions, and intentions.

Moran's account uses the case of knowing my beliefs as its conceptual springboard. But, as noted, he thinks that from that springboard we can also jump to the practical case — to transparent, first-personal knowledge of my intentions and actions, or, what is the same, to practical knowledge by avowal. But how well does the model transfer to the practical case? Can I know my intentions first-personally, by the criteria of Moran's account? Can I know my intentions by avowal?

2.2 *Knowing my intentions: the problem of infected transparency*

In order to answer this question, it will be helpful to draw some comparisons and contrasts between the cases of knowing my beliefs and knowing my intentions. On Moran's account, the question of whether I believe X is (in the good case) transparent to the question of whether X is true: I answer that question not by considering facts about myself, but by considering the proposition itself — namely, the reasons for or against affirming its truth. I consider "nothing but X itself." What is the correlate in

the case of knowing my intentions? To what outward-directed question is knowledge of my intentions transparent?

The most direct correlate would be that, whereas in determining whether I believe *p*, I ask whether p is true, in the case of determining whether I intend to *q*, I should consider the *goodness* of q. We can that goodness in as deflationary a sense as we like — i.e. we can bracket the question of whether I think q is good absolutely or morally or simply good for me, etc. Moran frequently puts the matter in terms of the *desirability* of the possible object of an intention. In order to consider whether I intend *q*, I consider its desirability.

Now, if the formation of a belief about *p* depends only on considering whether p is true, it is clear that the formation of an intention to *q* depends on more than considering whether q is desirable, or even desirable for me. For there are many good and desirable things that I cannot *intend*, unless we count sheer delusion among intentions. I think it is desirable that I should win a million dollars tomorrow. I think that a number of foreign politicians should be voted out of office. I think the cost of groceries should be much lower than it is. But I do not intend to win a million dollars tomorrow, nor do I intend to vote these officials out of office or to reduce the price of groceries. For I am well aware that I cannot achieve those aims, regardless of how good they may be in themselves or for me.

That is, intentions concern not simply what I desire or wish or hope for in general, but what I may bring about by my action. Accordingly, practical deliberation does not, of course, *end* with my determination of something as good or desirable. It only begins with this. Aristotle illustrates the structure of deliberation through examples of practical syllogisms. These examples involve two premises (or really, two kinds of premise) and a conclusion. The major premise defines some end, the minor gives some means by which that end can be realized, and the conclusion is to take those means for the sake of realizing that end. Aristotle calls the major premise 'the premise of the good,' and the minor 'the premise of the possible' (*Movement of Animals* 700b19), where possible does not just mean in general or for anyone, but possible for me.

Now, if the question of what I intend to do is transparent to the question of my reasons for doing it, it is clear that these reasons must include not only the 'premise of the good' but also the 'premises of the possible.' But how do I know the 'premises of the possible'? Now, the question of what is possible *for me* must necessarily take into account both conditions pertaining to the external world and conditions pertaining to myself — that is, my own particular capacities. To borrow an example from Anton Ford, reading a French newspaper will not a means of learning the news unless I can read French.[9] The ability of some means to satisfy my ends depends also on my own ability to use those means in such a way. Knowing the premises of the possible requires knowing both of these.

These reflections, however, raise two questions. The first is, if knowledge of my intentions requires knowledge of such facts about myself and the external world — facts which cannot themselves be known merely by avowal — then can I know even my intentions by avowal? The second is, does knowledge of my intentions in fact require knowledge of my abilities or only a belief in them?

[9] "On What Is In Front of Your Nose," p. 7

The issue, again, is simply another version of the Problem of Infected Self-Knowledge, where here the form it takes can be called the Problem of Infected Transparency or the Problem of Infected Authority. That is, it is the problem that arises when one purportedly transparent bit of knowledge A inherently requires some non-transparent bit of knowledge B, where by 'transparent bit of knowledge' I mean knowledge which satisfies the 'Transparency Condition' — i.e. what I can know by avowal. Does the non-transparency of B 'infect' that of A, so that A too is in fact not knowable by avowal?

In order to treat this question, let me consider the two alternatives in turn and consider their consequences. In the first case, I will assume that knowing my intention requires knowing (and not merely believing in) my abilities, and I'll consider the case where I cannot know my abilities themselves by avowal.[10] In the second case, I will assume that knowing my intention does not require knowing my abilities, but only believing in them.

2.2 (a). Case 1: Intentions with Knowledge of My Ability (Knowledge of the Means)

The presently operative assumption is that I cannot know my intention to Q without knowing my ability to Q, and that my knowledge of my ability to Q is not knowable merely by avowal. Can I know my *intention* by avowal?

An affirmative answer might go something like this: provided I know my ability to Q, the question of whether I intend Q is settled by an avowal — e.g. of whether it is desirable, etc. There are conditions upon whether I can know it by avowal — namely, that I also know my ability — but, once that condition is satisfied, we can say that I know my intention by avowal. That is, on that view, the transparency of my intention is not infected by the non-transparency of my ability.

But can we make such a claim to preserved transparency, and what does it mean? The question at issue has the following form: If my knowledge of A requires knowledge of some B, and I cannot know B by manner M, can I know A by manner M?

Let's consider an example. A chemistry professor enters into his lab with a few of his graduate students. He asks aloud — where is the ethyl alcohol? After looking among some containers, he spots an unmarked bottle of clear liquid and says 'Ah, here it is.' The graduate students, knowing that ethyl alcohol is only one among very many colorless liquids, might be puzzled at how he knew that this clear liquid is ethyl alcohol merely by looking at it. For ethyl alcohol cannot be distinguished from water, vinegar, or hydrochloric acid merely by *sight*.

Now, suppose they asked how he knew this liquid is ethyl alcohol, and he responded, 'I spoke to my lab assistant a minute ago. He said that the ethyl alcohol was the only clear liquid on the second shelf, and that he had just put it there an hour ago but forgot to mark it.' Now, once the lab technician knows all of this, then knowing that this bottle is ethyl alcohol only requires *further* knowing that the liquid in the bottle is clear and on the second shelf. This he can judge by sight.

[10] What it could mean to know my abilities by avowal is not entirely clear. Kant's 'I ought therefore I can' appears to be an example of this idea. Leaving aside worries about Kant's claim, his formula concerns whether I can act from duty (not merely from self-love)— that is, it is a question merely of a psychological ability, not, say, an ability to build houses or lift a hundred pounds.

Can we say that he knows that this container contains ethyl alcohol 'by sight?' This, it seems, would be a rather loose way of talking. He knows it by sight combined with the trustworthy testimony of his lab assistant. That is, he knows by sight that this bottle is on the second shelf and contains clear liquid. This knowledge, combined with what the technician told him, allows him to know that it is ethyl alcohol. To say that he knows 'by sight' would just be to attribute his manner of knowing to the last bit of his total knowledge. But by that token, if he had noted the clear bottle and then called the technician, we would say that he knows not by sight but by testimony.

A similar situation is involved in the alleged knowledge of my intention by avowal. For if we grant that knowing my intention requires knowing some facts concerning my ability to realize it (something I cannot know by avowal), then the same situation applies here as with the chemist. That is, if I am well aware of my ability to do something, and the only remaining question is what I *want* to do, then I can settle the question of my intention merely by considering what is desirable — i.e. by making up my mind. This could occur, for instance, if a child is holding a ten dollar bill and deciding among candy bars at the store. But here knowledge by avowal is not *adequate* for knowledge of what he intends to buy, for he also has to know that he has enough money for it. The avowal merely happens to be the *last* thing required.

The situation could easily have been the other wary around. That is, the child could have *first* decided he wanted a Snickers, and only then checked his pockets to see if he had any cash. If we say, in the other case, that he knew his intention by avowal, then here we would have to say he knew his intention by *observation* (i.e. by seeing the ten dollar bill he possesses). But the confirmation of funds just happens to be the last bit of a piece of knowledge which essentially required two elements — avowal (of what he wants) and observation (of his ability to get it — i.e. of his money). The knowledge of his intention requires both, and it makes no difference which one he happens to have first or second.

So, if we grant that knowledge of my intention does not involve merely knowing the premise of the good but also the premise of the possible, and if this last premise is not known by avowal, then we must say that I *do not* know my intention by avowal. We can grant that I know what I *want* by avowal. And that knowledge, combined with knowledge of my ability, can yield knowledge of my intention. That is, either my intention pertains only to the premise of the good, or it also involves the premises of the possible. If the former, then knowing my intention does not require knowing anything about what I'm capable of. If the latter, then it does require that. But, strictly speaking, what I know by *avowal* is only what I want. So if intention pertains only to what is possible for me, then we should say that, according to Moran's criteria, I cannot know my *intention* with first-personal authority, but only what I *want*, regardless of my ability to do or obtain it.

Perhaps, however, we can quarantine the knowledge of my intention from the non-transparency (or non-avowability) of knowledge of my abilities by reducing the required attitude toward my abilities only to a *belief*. Let us consider what such a reduction involves and what the cost of that quarantine is.

2.2(b) Case 2: Intentions **without** *Knowledge of my Ability (Knowledge of the Means).*

Our assumption here is that I do not need to know my ability to realize my end in order to know my intention to do it, but I only need to *believe* in my ability. This view indeed seems to more faithfully

express the idea behind the claim that my knowledge of my intention to Q is transparent to *my* reasons for Q-ing. For, it is one thing to say that deliberation requires taking into account my abilities — both in terms of my personal capacities and the external means at my disposal. But do I have to *know* these things in order to know my intention? For, in the case of belief, we say that knowing my belief that *p* requires taking into account the truth of *p*. But saying "I believe *p*" is not the same as saying simply "p." For I am aware that the former can be true even if the latter is not. I have to take *p* into consideration to know my belief, and my aim is to have the right view about *p* (i.e. to know p), but knowing my belief does not require *knowing* p. It requires only knowing that I take p to be true — for that is simply what believing is.

Accordingly, we can say that knowing my intention involves having a conscious belief in the premises of the good and of the possible, and in this sense we can say that knowing my intention involves knowing my beliefs about these matters. That, we might say, is simply what we mean by saying that I know my intention to Q by knowing *my* reasons for Q-ing. But if I can know what I *want* by avowal, and if I can know my *belief* in my ability by avowal, then the combination of these (knowledge of my intention) can also be called knowledge by avowal.

So we can quarantine knowledge of my intention from non-transparent questions of fact about myself and my circumstances by replacing the requirement of knowing my abilities with the requirement only of consciously or knowingly believing in them. But what is the cost of this quarantine? Consider the following line of practical reasoning:

> [...] look yonder, friend Sancho Panza, where you may discover somewhat more than thirty monstrous giants, with whom I intend to fight, and take away all their lives: with whose spoils we will begin to enrich ourselves; for it is lawful war, and doing God good service to take away so wicked a generation from off the face of the earth.[11]

Here there are two ends to be realized in the single action: (a) making a fortune; (b) performing God's good service. The means are the obtaining of great spoils from evil giants by engaging them in battle and slaying them. Don Quixote can avow both the goodness of the ends as well as his belief that he possesses the means. For he takes it to be true that there are thirty or more monstrous giants, and he believes he can slay them with a lance. So he knows his intention by avowal, and he thereby knows the description under which he intentionally acts.

Now, if *mere* conscious belief in my abilities is all that is required for an intention, then the concept of intention itself possesses no inherent criterion for distinguishing between an informed, rational will and a mere quixotic fantasy. My intention as such will be something essentially subjective, and all objective knowledge will be a supplementation by a heterogenous element of knowledge — i.e. something which I cannot know by avowal. For if my intention included that objective knowledge, then I could no longer know it with first-personal authority, for I should have imported an alien, factual knowledge within it.

Perhaps we could find a middle ground between mere belief and knowledge of the means— namely, justified belief. That may be a perfectly sensible amendment in itself, but it raises the same problem of

[11] Cervantes, p. 59

infected transparency as the case of knowledge. For what is the justification based on? Is it based on knowledge — for instance, that I have done similar things successfully in the past, or that someone like me has done so? Or can that justification again be a mere belief, which need not involve any knowledge? If the former, then we are back at Case 1; if the latter, we are back at the ingenuous gentleman from La Mancha.

Anscombe, in outlining the conditions for having an intention, explicitly denies the requirement of knowledge or even justified belief in the efficacy of my means for achieving my end. She writes:

> My reply is that the topic of an intention may be matter on which there is knowledge or opinion based on observation, inference, hearsay, superstition or anything that knowledge or opinion ever are based on; or again matter on which an opinion is held without any foundation at all. When knowledge or opinion are present concerning what is the case, and what can happen — say Z — if one does certain things, say ABC, then it is possible to have the intention of doing Z in doing ABC; and if the case is one of knowledge or if the opinion is correct, then doing or causing Z is an intentional action, and it is not by observation that one knows one is doing Z; or in so far as one is observing, inferring etc. that Z is actually taking place, one's knowledge is not the knowledge that a man has of his intentional actions. (*Intention*, par. 28)

So, on her view, my attitude toward the 'premises of the possible' may be mere opinion grounded in sheer superstition or even an opinion held "without any foundation at all." Moreover, all that is required for knowing my action is that I have a true belief about the means, however groundless that belief may be.

It may seem that Anscombe sets the bar unnecessarily low for my relation to the means. But, I have argued, it *is* a necessary view, so long as we wish to maintain that my intentions are transparent to *my* reasons — i.e. that I can know them merely by knowing *my* reasons for having them, however groundless and fantastical they may be (so long as I don't regard them that way but earnestly avow them). For if knowledge and not *mere* belief in the relevant facts of the situation is required, then, as I have argued at length, transparency to my reasons is infected — or, what amounts to the same, I do not know my intention merely by avowal or without receptive knowledge.

But the hopelessness of excluding receptive knowledge from knowledge of my intentions and actions can be most easily seen by noting the reliance of perceptual knowledge in the knowledge of the means. That is, we are now in a position to return to an issue in Anscombe I raised earlier — namely, whether shifting observational knowledge to the *anterior* of my action can meaningfully preserve the sense in which I know my action 'without observation.' Anscombe, as we have just seen, explicitly allows observational knowledge within my knowledge of the *means* (*Intention* par. 28). When I proceed to the action itself, is my knowledge of the means *included* in that, or is it not? That is, if I close my eyes and write "I am a fool" on the blackboard, presumably I will have seen that there is a blackboard in front of me to be written on. Otherwise I would be too foolish even to express my foolishness. Leaving aside the issue of feeling the blackboard while my eyes are closed, is my earlier knowledge by observation part of my knowledge that I'm writing on the blackboard or is it not?

Obviously it is. If I forgot that there was a blackboard there to be written on, then I should be truly in the dark about what I'm doing. For to know that I'm writing is to know that I'm writing *on* something. The knowledge of the presence of a patient (some patient at least) must be included in the knowledge of the action. But that knowledge is just observational knowledge. And it cannot be swept into the dustbin of my epistemic history. I must presently know the present truth of that knowledge *in knowing* that I'm writing *on* anything at all, and therefore in knowing that I'm writing at all. Again, knowledge of an external action *must* include knowledge of the patient, and this must include receptive knowledge (I did not cook up a blackboard out of thin air). Eliminating the patient is just eliminating the action. The knowledge of what I'm doing is infected by the receptive knowledge of the patient.

And here again, we find the necessary reliance on receptive knowledge for any effective action at all. If I do not know the particular external circumstances, then there is no possibility of effectively acting. But I know the particular external circumstances through the senses — there is no other way of knowing them. If that knowledge is included in the knowledge of my action, then my knowledge of my action itself is in no remaining sense 'without observation,' for these circumstances must be included in the description under which I act.

In sum, my knowledge of the description under which I act is no safe haven from receptive knowledge. For if the description under which I act includes empirical knowledge of the means and external circumstances, then I simply do not know *that* without observation either. Of course, I can remember observational knowledge without present observation. But this is like saying that I know what a street sign says without observation because I read it just a moment ago.

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The Problem of Infected Self-Knowledge is necessarily fatal so long as agentive knowledge is defined simply *by opposition* to receptive knowledge, and likewise so long as self-knowledge is defined by *opposition* to other-knowledge. For all I can know *without* receptive knowledge is my general purpose — what I want. Everything pertaining to the actual practicability of my intention requires knowledge of the actual outside world, including my own matter-of-fact, finite capacities. The keystone of my knowledge of the means will be my perception of the *present* availability of the requisite outer conditions. Without this, I will be like the fool who tries to write on the blackboard without correctly perceiving that there is something to be written on. In general, to lack *knowledge* of the requisite external circumstances is simply to tilt at windmills. If by some miracle, my groundless beliefs turn out to be true, then the knowledge of my action will be nothing more than the knowledge of the 'intentional action' of winning the lottery. Indeed, I shall be able to say, before the numbers are announced, "I'm winning the lottery," so long as that is my end and I believe that buying a ticket is an effective means to get rich (maybe I saw a lucky dove fly onto my windowsill) .

If practical self-knowledge must include receptive knowledge in order to be practical, then we are faced with the following question. How can the agentive, spontaneous character of practical knowledge be preserved and explained while also doing justice to the pervasive element of receptivity which this knowledge must contain in order to actually be practical? How can my agentive self-knowledge survive the infection of receptive other-knowledge, without simply retreating inward?

In the concluding section, I will offer a brief account of the kind of solution to this problem offered in Hegel's account of purposive action. The key to this solution is that, in effect, the true infection is not of spontaneity by receptivity, but of receptivity by spontaneity. That is, in general, the dependence of purpose on the external world is not truly a corruption of its agentive nature — it is an internal condition of it. The corruption runs the other way — the element of externality and receptivity is, from the outset, infected by purposiveness.

3. The Realization of Self-Knowledge through Knowledge of Another

In Part One, I made a brief comment on the rather deviant 'receptivity' involved in the sense of touch. When I actively *feel* an outer object, when I seek out knowledge of it by touch, it is true that the external object must act on me in order for me to know it. But the receptivity is by no means a passivity: I make the object act on me — I create a counter-force on my finger by pressing on the object itself. If, for instance, I need to adjust my grip on a tool in order that it should be firmly held in place, it is true that I can only *know* the thing is being held by feeling it — i.e. by becoming aware of an external fact through the outer sense of touch. But the pressure from the object by which I know this is something I generate — I squeeze the hammer until I feel it held tightly in my hand. The object puts up no resistance to my extraction of knowledge because the resistance just is the compliance. I am the source of the object's resistance and it presses on me in exact proportion to my pressing on it. My purpose is the measure of its resistance.

In other words, in adopting a purpose, I do and must *make* myself receptive to the requisite circumstances. But, for just that reason, the receptivity is not a mere passivity but a willed and self-governed receptivity — i.e. it is an act of spontaneity. Like Kant's dove, I can only swim by making the water exert a counterforce on my arms and legs. I make the other act on me — not absolutely (for to act is to intentionally expose oneself to misfortune)[12] — but in the way that is necessary under the circumstances for realizing my purpose in and through it. Birds often remain in the air simply by seeking out an upward draft and maintaining themselves within it. Their action is nothing but a self-controlled passion.

On Hegel's view, this kind of self-determined dependence on the outer world defines the concept of purposive action essentially. It is what he calls the "inner externality of the concept [i.e. the purpose]" — the 'otherness' which is defined by purpose itself, so that, even in its *resistance* to my purposes, it is not simply something alien but my own other, an opponent or obstacle which I create for myself by my own purposes.[13]

Hegel's whole account of purposive action is aimed at reconciling the two elements of purpose that I have been discussing all along: (1) the dependence of my purpose on given, external conditions and the resistance of those conditions to my purposes and (2) the self-determining nature of purposive action. Hegel contrasts these two components in terms of the opposition between 'positing' (*setzen*) and

[12] "[...] in their actions, human beings are necessarily involved in externality. An old proverb rightly says, 'The stone belongs to the devil when it leaves the hand that threw it." By acting, I expose myself to misfortune, which accordingly has a right over me and is an existence of my own volition." *Philosophy of Right,* par. 119(Z).

[13] Cf. Ford (2016): "if what I perceive is an obstacle, it is only an obstacle because of what I am doing—say, walking home." (p. 17)

'presupposing' (*voraussetzen*) — i.e. between the content of a purpose which I determine and the external conditions that are given to me:

> The first immediate positing in purpose is equally the positing of something *internally* determined, that is, determined as *posited*, and, at the same time, the presupposing of an objective world, one indifferent to the determination of purpose. (*SL* 12.162/659)

This opposition is what makes my still subjective purpose subjective in a double sense. On the one hand, the purpose is subjective in the sense of being a *self-determination*, namely, one which is defined not by what is given to me externally and objectively, but by a chosen negation of what is given — a view of the world not in terms of how it happens to be but of how it *ought* to be. On the other hand, for just this reason, my purpose is initially *merely* subjective. It is *only* a view of how the world ought to be, and so the purpose remains something merely in me. Accordingly, Hegel writes, "the movement of purpose can now be expressed as being directed at sublating its *presupposition*, that is, the immediacy of the object, and at *positing* it as determined by the concept. This negative relating to the object is equally a negative attitude toward itself, a sublating of the subjectivity of purpose" (*SL* 12.162/658).

But Hegel's claim here must be understood as having a kind of twofold significance. The one is the simple, first-order claim about purposive action itself: it is the activity of bringing the external world into conformity with my purpose and thereby making my subjective purpose objective — i.e. realizing it. But the deeper claim is a higher-order claim about the *concept* of purposive action as such. That is, the exposition of the concept of purpose is meant to demonstrate that the very 'presupposition' of the external, given conditions is, in truth, not merely an extrinsic prerequisite of purposive action. Rather, the very externality of these conditions to my subjective purposes is a kind of determination or *positing* of purposive action itself. What does Hegel mean by this?

Hegel's discussion of purpose in his 'Teleology' chapter is not, per se, a discussion of the relation between the practical and theoretical *perspectives* involved in action, but its central point can be nonetheless expressed in those terms. Hegel's claim, in effect, is that the practical perspective on my purpose (i.e. on what ought to be) appears, on its surface, to be opposed to the theoretical perspective on the given world — i.e. the knowledge of what is presently the case outside me. In truth, however, the practical perspective spans both sides of the relation. As he puts it in the *Philosophy of Right,* "The theoretical [attitude] is essentially contained within the practical" (par. 4(Z)). But this containment does not leave the theoretical perspective unaffected. That is, my knowledge of what is the case is no longer a merely theoretical attitude, like a perspective of scientific inquiry, when it figures in the practical perspective.

For, under the practical attitude, my perspective on what is in fact the case has two inseparable aspects — we might say, a positive and a negative relation to the external circumstances. Positively, it pertains to the contribution of external circumstances to my purpose — i.e. my knowledge of the external world *as potential means*. These means will be both instrumental (what tools I can use) and material (what can be made to satisfy my end). But this positive aspect on the external world (as potential means) is, at the same time, a negative one. For what these things are potentially, they are not yet actually. The steep descent is at the same time a steep ascent: to see the external world's *potential* for satisfying my purposes is likewise to see its present non-conformity to my purposes. The difference between what the world can become (i.e. my realized purpose) and what it presently is is simply, as it

were, the exact measure of the world's resistance to my purposes. The receptive component of the practical perspective is just the precise knowledge of this difference.

But the former, positive aspect is by no means something external to my purpose. Otherwise put, my knowledge of the external world *as means* is by no means a theoretical knowledge — a knowledge of these things in themselves or independently of me. It is a knowledge of these objects *qua* determined by my purpose — i.e. as having a particular character relative to my purpose. Of course, the exact particularities of the presently available means are not something I know without receptivity; my purpose does not determine these things all the way down. But the given particularities of the available means are not something simply extrinsic to my purpose. Rather, they are incorporated into the purpose itself. That is, my purpose is at first something general and indeterminate. And it *must be*, for a purpose can only be realized by taking into account conditions in the external world. What *specifically* I aim to do will depend upon the given conditions. Only by knowing the particularities of the present circumstances does my purpose itself take a definite shape. But this means that the outer, given conditions which can serve as my means are not mere extrinsic limitations to my purpose. Rather, they are precisely what allows my purpose to crystalize, to become a definite, particular task. They are the determinate specifications of my purpose itself.

But this is only the positive side of my knowledge of external conditions — knowledge of the external world insofar as it offers definite affordances for my purposive activity. But the external world does not simply roll out a red carpet for me whenever I want to act. The negative side of my receptivity to the world is the recognition of the harsh realities which confront my purpose. That is, it is the recognition of the specific difference between the present circumstances and the intended result. We might call this the specific contrariety of the external world to my purposes.

But the specific contrariety of the world to my purposes is itself determined by the purpose. The earth in which a farmer must plant seeds is not already tilled. The felt resistance which it offers to the plough is just the tactile manifestation of that fact. The knowledge of that resistance — whether prior to or during the action (e.g. in the feeling of its counterthrust to the instruments) — is the knowledge of its externality to my subjective purpose, its non-conformity to my immediate wishes. But this resistance itself is not an intrinsic quality of the earth. It is a purely relational quality — the specific force required to make a furrow. This particular characteristic of the object is just the particular characteristic of the task. Like my knowledge of the available means, it is simply the determinate specification of the purpose itself.

The cardiological surgeon possesses a general technical knowledge of her craft. Her work is the mending of broken hearts. But that is only a general, potential purpose. Her purpose becomes particular and actual only in accordance with the requirements of the particular case — i.e. the particular conditions of the patient. But this knowledge is again not a merely theoretical knowledge. It is simply a knowledge of the exact task which lies before her — her own purpose *in concreto*.

The point is that the external world which confronts and constrains my subjective, general purpose is not, in truth, something external to the purpose. It is, rather, the concrete reality of the purpose itself: the objective task which I have set before me. What that reality is opposed to is not, therefore, the purpose as such, but only the merely subjective, abstract and internal form it has in its initial conception. The element of receptivity inherent in purpose is simply the manifestation of what the

purpose truly means — what it truly involves and consists in. This is not a speculative knowledge of some intrinsic quality in the external world. It belongs, rather, to the 'original inner externality' of the purpose itself: its inherent need for material realization in the external world.

In discovering the requirements of the external world — the requirements of the patient qua patient — I discover only my own purpose *in concreto*, the objective reality of my own action and my own agency. That receptive, other-knowledge is not, therefore, opposed to my agentive, self-knowledge. It is, rather, the concrete objective side of my own agency. The external terrain in which a purpose is realized is from the very beginning its home turf. It is simply the work to be done.

There is, then, no passivity even in the painful confrontation of my subjective purposes with the harsh realities outside me. The resistance is generated by me; the greater and more significant my purpose, the greater the resistance I encounter. That resistance is simply the pain of giving birth to an intention in the external world. What offers resistance is, so to speak, or occasionally literally, one's own child, one's own creation. For 'agent' and 'patient' are purely relational terms: in practical activity, the one does not exist without the other, although the agent qua agent is the source of the patient qua patient. What unites the two is a single, common purpose. In forming a purpose I immediately create recalcitrant patients — that is, the specific, external conditions required for realizing my purpose. This creation is what Hegel calls the "self-repulsion" of purpose (*SL* 12.171/668), its immediate negative relation toward its merely subjective existence and its intrinsic need to be realized in the external world. In knowing and interacting with a patient qua patient, I am, in a sense, only interacting with myself, my own agency in its objective reality. My agency generates, 'posits' its own receptivity, its own external presuppositions. It is the source of its own infection. Like Kant's dove in flight, my practical receptivity is nothing but the awareness of my agency in its concrete actuality.

4. Conclusion

In the foregoing paper, I have argued that the exact contents and requirements of my own purposive action are not known by mere avowal or without observation. I do not know my action simply by making up my mind, and practical knowledge does not spring from my inner intentions like Athena from the head of Zeus. What I can know in that way is only an abstract, indeterminate, subjective end. The exact specifications of the purposive action are known only in interacting with the external conditions. I do whatever is necessary to realize my purpose — whatever works — , and I find out what works by engaging with the outer objects, by tending carefully to the patient, by getting my hands dirty. My agentive self-knowledge must be infected by receptive knowledge in order for me to actually act in the external world.

But this dependence on the external world and on my knowledge thereof is not a sacrifice of my agency; it is not an encroachment of an alien, exogenous element into my practical knowledge. The agent does not need to fear the patient or faint at the sight of blood. For the determinate requirements of the patient are, properly viewed, only my own requirements — the requirements of the objective task I have set before me.

But, for just that reason, my purpose itself only achieves a final, definite shape in its actual realization. The knowledge of my action always remains partial, incomplete, imperfect until the last detail has been determined. In the finished product, my initial general concept has finally taken the form of a singular

intuition. The sight of the finished product is not a transition from practical knowledge to speculative knowledge. It is the perfection, the completion of practical knowledge itself. In seeing the external product, I see only my own work, my own agency in actuality.

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