

XIV—KNOWING HOW

KIERAN SETIYA

I argue from the possibility of basic intentional action to a non-propositional theory of knowing how. The argument supports a broadly Anscombean conception of the will as a capacity for practical knowledge.

My topic is the relationship between intentional action and knowing how. There are many things that I know how to do: how to write, and how to write this very sentence, how to type the letter ‘a’, how to move my finger, how to blink. When I manifest this knowledge in action, I act intentionally. I write something for a reason, say, or type a letter in order to make a word.

In what follows, I argue for two principal claims. First, that knowing how to ϕ , as it relates to intentional action, is not propositional knowledge: ‘intellectualism’ about knowing how is false. My strategy here extends the argument of an earlier paper, ‘Practical Knowledge’ (Setiya 2008a), to which a prominent intellectualist, Jason Stanley, has replied (2011, pp. 188–90). I go on to argue from the non-propositional character of knowing how to a picture of the will, or the capacity to act for reasons, as a capacity to know. Unless we accept this Anscombean conception, we cannot explain what is epistemological about knowing how: why knowing how to ϕ is an authentic form of knowledge.

I

I began with the suggestion that in exercising knowledge how to ϕ one acts intentionally. According to a converse claim,

If *A* is doing ϕ intentionally, then *A* knows how to ϕ .

You can’t intentionally do what you don’t know how to do. It is a

tempting proposition.¹ But there are difficulties. In ‘Practical Knowledge’, I gave the following example:

I am trying to defuse a bomb, staring with confusion at an array of colored wires. Which one to cut? In desperation, not having a clue what the wires do, whether they will trigger the bomb or not, I disconnect the red wire—and the timer stops. Even though I did not know how to defuse the bomb, and managed to do so through dumb luck, I count as having defused the bomb intentionally. (Setiya 2008a, p. 404)

This claim might be challenged. Is it clear that my action was intentional in defusing the bomb? Compare a lottery in which the winning ticket is determined in advance. Having no idea what that ticket is, I buy one, hoping to win—and by good fortune, so I do. Did I intentionally win the lottery? Surely not.² But what is the difference between the lottery and the bomb defusal? In each case, I intentionally take means that might lead to a desired end; whether they do so or not is out of my control; by luck, I achieve what I wanted to achieve. How could I intentionally defuse the bomb if I do not intentionally pick the winning ticket? And if I did not defuse the bomb intentionally, there is no problem for the principle above.

I agree that the cases are parallel, but this does not refute the example. To fill out the lottery case, suppose that I very much want to get rich. It is in pursuit of wealth that I enter the lottery, and my ambition is fulfilled. The right analogy would compare winning the lottery with cutting the correct wire. It is odd to say that I won intentionally: I did not intentionally pick the winning ticket. It is also odd to say that I intentionally cut the correct wire. At the same time, we can say that I defused the bomb intentionally, and that I intentionally got rich. So long as we compare like with like, the description of the bomb defusal stands, and the principle is undermined. One can ϕ intentionally without knowing how to ϕ .³ It is a good question why we are reluctant to say that I intentionally picked the winning ticket or cut the correct wire, even though I intentionally got rich or defused the bomb. We need not address this

¹ For tentative endorsements, see Gibbons (2001, pp. 597–8), Stanley and Williamson (2001, p. 415).

² For examples of this kind, see Gibbons (2001, pp. 587–90).

³ A version of the simple connection might be saved by admitting degrees of know-how, as we admit partial belief in the theory of intention sketched in §IV. But I won’t pursue this here.

puzzle here. Instead we can work around it:

If A is doing ϕ intentionally, then A knows how to ϕ , or else he is doing it by doing other things that he knows how to do.

In the bomb defusal, I do not know how to defuse the bomb, but I do so by cutting the red wire, which is something I know how to do. In the lottery, I do not know how to get rich; I do so by buying a ticket, which I know how to do. A consequence of the qualified principle is that you cannot ϕ intentionally as a *basic* action unless you know how to ϕ . When one is doing ϕ as a basic action, one is not doing it by intentionally doing other things. It follows that, for basic intentional action, the qualification in our principle is inert. We can thus rely on the following claim:

Basic Knowledge If A is doing ϕ intentionally as a basic action, then A knows how to ϕ .⁴

My focus in the following section will be the explanation of *Basic Knowledge*. Assuming the possibility of basic intentional action, I will argue that knowing how to perform such actions does not consist in knowledge of a proposition. Since the assumption of possibility has been questioned, I will say a word in defence of it here. Let me first distinguish my premiss from the more ambitious claim that every intentional action is ultimately performed by basic means. Those who defend this claim often do so by appeal to regress arguments. You can do A by doing B and B by doing C , but it can't go on forever. In the end, there must be basic intentional actions by which you do the whole thing.⁵ More precisely:

Basic Action When A is doing ϕ as a non-basic intentional action, she is doing it by performing basic intentional actions, B , such that every intentional means by which she is doing ϕ belongs to B , or is performed by doing some subset of B ; every

⁴ It is occasionally denied that we know how to perform basic actions, even though we perform them intentionally (as in Snowdon 2003, p. 12). This claim would undermine the central premiss of this paper. But I find the claim incredible, both in itself and because it conflicts with the argument for *Basic Knowledge* in the text. A different objection is that I can try to perform a basic action and succeed in doing so intentionally even when I do not know how to perform this action because I don't reliably succeed. On the view developed below, this is either a case in which I do not act intentionally or one in which I am sufficiently disposed to act on my intention that I count as knowing how, to some degree.

⁵ See Danto (1965) and Hornsby (1980, ch. VI) for arguments in this spirit.

means by which she is doing ϕ can be decomposed, exhaustively, into basic means.

To assume the possibility of basic action, as I do, is not to assume the truth of *Basic Action*, or to accept the regress arguments. My claim is that it is possible to ϕ intentionally without taking intentional means, not that every intentional action is built from elements of this kind.

Still, even the modest claim has been denied. In ‘Naive Action Theory’, Michael Thompson (2008) argues that ordinary intentional movements are always performed by taking further means. His argument draws on the continuity of space. Here is the crucial passage:

Let it be, then, that I have pushed a stone along a certain path from α to ω , and that this is a completed intentional action of mine. It must also, of course, be that I have pushed the stone from α to β , if β is a place about halfway along the path from α to ω . And as I began to push off from α it would have been as much *true* for me to say, ‘I am pushing it to β ’ as ‘I am pushing it to ω .’ How, though, can we deny the further claim that I was pushing the stone to β , the midpoint, *intentionally*—just as, by hypothesis, I was pushing it to ω intentionally, and along that path? A proof that I must have done it intentionally will perhaps require the further premises that the whole trajectory is given to me in sensory intuition as I begin to push, and that the expression ‘ β ’ as it appears in the formula ‘I’m pushing it to β ’ makes what is called ‘direct reference’. But given all that, it is hard to see why we shouldn’t say not *just* that I was pushing the stone to β *intentionally*, but also that I was pushing, and pushed, the stone to β *because* I was pushing it to ω . Why not? (Thompson 2008, pp. 107–8)

As an argument against the possibility of basic intentional action, this has obvious limitations: it will not apply to intentional actions that do not involve movement, like staying still, or to most instances of mental action. That would be enough for my purposes. But even where it is most at home, Thompson’s argument is inconclusive. He spends some time arguing that movements of arbitrary small dimension meet the ‘implicit cognition requirement’ that one be aware of one’s intentional actions; they cannot be excluded on that ground (Thompson 2008, pp. 108–11). He may succeed here in refuting *Basic Action*, in showing that there is nothing vicious in the regress of increasingly minute means. But he ignores the answer to

his rhetorical question—‘Why not call these actions intentional?’—that appeals not to lack of cognition but to lack of desire. The best reason to deny that I am pushing the stone to γ intentionally, where γ is some minimal distance on the direct path from a to ω , is that I do not care whether I go through γ or not. Since intention is desiderative or motivating, as well as cognitive, I do not count as intending to go through γ . If I am doing so intentionally, it is only as a foreseen consequence of what I intend to do, not as the means to an end. So long as I get the stone from a to ω in reasonable time, it doesn’t matter to me which route I take. Thus, moving from a to ω may be an instance of basic intentional action. Because it can be faulted in this way, I am not convinced by Thompson’s argument. I continue to assert the possibility of basic action, even in physical movement, without insisting that every intentional action is performed by basic means.⁶

II

On a simple propositional theory, knowing how to perform a basic intentional action consists in knowledge of ability. I know how to ϕ , where ϕ -ing is a basic action, just in case I know that I am able to ϕ . The problem is that I can ϕ intentionally without knowing that I am able to do so. Imagine a case in which my arm has been paralysed for some time. With irrational optimism, I believe that I am cured. In particular, I believe that I am able to clench my fist. As it happens, my belief is true, though since it is unjustified, it does not amount to knowledge. This does not stop me from intending to clench my fist or from doing so intentionally. If we suppose that I clench my fist as a basic intentional action, it follows by *Basic Knowledge* that I know how to clench my fist—even though I do not know that I am able to do so. The simple theory is false.⁷

This argument is an instance of a broader challenge to intellectualism, on which knowing how to ϕ is knowledge of a proposition. Can the intellectualist account for *Basic Knowledge*? What is it about the nature of intentional action and knowing how,

⁶ In thinking through the possibility of basic action, I have learned a great deal from unpublished work by Kim Frost and Doug Lavin. I am grateful to both of them for discussing these issues with me.

⁷ An earlier version of this argument appears in Setiya (2008a, p. 405).

at least in the basic case, that makes it impossible to have one without the other?

In the background of these questions is a conception of metaphysical necessity that I will take for granted here. According to this conception, when a truth is necessary, it follows from the natures of things: it can be explained by what they are. In this sense, there is no brute necessity. The natural way to motivate this demand is to reflect on how we introduce or articulate the very idea of necessary truth. Conceding that there is no *logical* contradiction in supposing that Socrates is a tree, or that water is XYZ, we insist that these propositions conflict with the *essence* of Socrates, or with the *nature* of water as a sufficient quantity of H₂O in liquid form. Appeals of this kind operate in much philosophy, as for instance in Anscombe's theory of intentional action as that to which the question 'Why?' is given application (Anscombe 1963, p. 9). If we could not make sense of nature or essence, we would have no purchase on metaphysical necessity.⁸

It is the need to explain the truth of necessary truths, and in particular that of *Basic Knowledge*, that undermines intellectualism about knowing how. We saw above how a simple theory fails this test: it cannot explain, and in fact conflicts with, *Basic Knowledge*. What about the more sophisticated views of contemporary intellectualists? Building on joint work with Timothy Williamson, Jason Stanley has proposed the most persuasive and elaborately worked-out propositional theory of knowing how. His view can be summarized thus:

Stanley's Intellectualism Knowing how to ϕ is knowing, of some way of doing ϕ with which you are acquainted under a practical way of thinking, that it is a way in which you could ϕ .⁹

This conception is motivated by claims about the linguistics of knowing-*wh* that are independently plausible. Ascriptions of knowledge *who*, *what*, *which*, *when* and *why* are understood by linguists to involve embedded questions whose proper semantics yields a propositional theory of just this shape. Stanley's view gives a unified treatment of such constructions, including 'S knows how'. I will

⁸ Here I am indebted to Kit Fine and Cian Dorr; see, for instance, Fine (1994).

⁹ Stanley (2011, pp. 122, 129–30); see also Stanley and Williamson (2001, pp. 426–30), Snowdon (2003).

come back to this motivation, briefly, in §III. For now, we will look directly at the view itself.

Three elements need further explanation. First, what is a ‘way of doing ϕ ’? For Stanley,

Ways are properties of actions, which are certain kinds of events. Just as ‘where’ means ‘at which place’, ‘how’ means ‘in what way’. In short, the word ‘how’ ranges over the meanings of *adverbs*. (Stanley 2011, p. 58)

Adverbs of particular interest here are those which take the form ‘by doing x ’. But we should not assume that the way in which one knows how to ϕ always involves some intentional means to that end.

Second, what are ‘practical ways of thinking’? Stanley (2011, ch. 4) defends a broadly Fregean view of thoughts, on which they are more fine-grained than Russellian propositions. They incorporate ways of thinking of the objects and properties they concern. This explains how it is possible to believe of some object one knows under a description that it is F , without believing of that very same object that it is F when it is given demonstratively in perception. Likewise for oneself, given demonstratively or under the first-person concept. And so for ways of doing things, given by description, demonstration, or in a practical way.¹⁰ An important fact about ways of thinking is that they may involve dispositions to act on and be affected by their objects.¹¹ If knowing how to ϕ involves a disposition to act in certain ways in certain circumstances, that it involves a practical way of thinking of a way of acting can explain why.

Finally, how to interpret ‘could’ in *Stanley’s Intellectualism*? Not, he insists, as ‘ability’ in the ordinary sense. In general, modal auxiliaries like ‘could’ are highly context-sensitive. Ignoring some details, a use of ‘ A could ϕ ’ is true just in case A succeeds in ϕ -ing in some contextually salient world.

The difference between explicit ability modals and ascriptions of knowing how is that the former typically ... require success in conditions like those obtaining in the actual world. In contrast, ascriptions

¹⁰ See Stanley (2011, pp. 123–4, 129–30).

¹¹ See Stanley (2011, pp. 109–10), Stanley and Williamson (2001, pp. 428–30).

of knowing how tolerate cases in which there is counterfactual success only in more distant situations. (Stanley 2011, p. 127)¹²

For instance, the relevant conditions might be ones in which my body is working properly, or as it normally does. This is how Stanley deals with the case of recent paralysis. Although I do not know that I am able to clench my fist, I do know, of a way of clenching my fist with which I am acquainted under a practical way of thinking, that it is a way in which I could clench my fist, in that I would do so in that way if I were healthy and not paralysed (Stanley 2011, pp. 127, 189). Thus, when I clench my fist intentionally, knowing how to do so, I need not know that I am able to clench my fist in order to have the propositional knowledge required by Stanley's account. The example does not conflict with intellectualism in this more sophisticated guise.

It is less clear, however, that this move solves the deeper problem. In my view, it does not. We can begin by asking: What exactly is the content of my knowledge when I know how to clench my fist as a basic intentional action? In what way do I know that I could clench my fist? Stanley is not explicit about this, but if we are dealing with basic action, it cannot be by taking further means—at least not ones that I take intentionally. One might think that, when I know how to clench my fist as a basic intentional action, I know, of clenching my fist, given to me under a practical way of thinking, that it is a way in which I could clench my fist. But this cannot be right. For in that case, I would know that I can clench my fist by doing *this*—where *this* is not a perceptual demonstrative, but stands for a practical way of thinking—and doing *this* would be the basic intentional action. (It is important not be misled here by the idea that doing *this* and clenching my fist are the very same action. In the sense that matters to our topic, actions are individuated as finely as the contents of intentions, which are ways of thinking, or Fregean thoughts.) A better view is that when I know how to clench my fist as a basic intentional action, I know that I could do so by *intending* to clench my fist, where intending is not itself an intentional action.

The question is whether I am bound to have such knowledge when I intentionally clench my fist. Stanley argues that the answer is yes:

¹² Stanley credits this point to Hawley (2003); his account of modal auxiliaries derives from Kratzer (1977).

Raising a problem for the conjunction of [*Basic Knowledge*] and the view of knowing how I have defended in this book would require an example of a Gettiered case of basic action, where the agent genuinely lacks knowledge of counterfactual success. It is not clear to me that there are persuasive cases of this kind, because I have a hard time imagining cases in which someone can reliably clench their fist on the basis of their intention to do so and yet lacks the propositional knowledge in question. In the case of basic actions, such as fist-clenchings, it may be sufficient for possession of the propositional knowledge in question that the subject has the disposition to clench [their] fist in the relevant manner when they form the intention to do so (as long as the agent possesses the relevant concepts, such as the concept of a fist). Certainly ... the behaviour of clenching one's fist is a characteristic expression of the relevant propositional knowledge. Finally, if the agent lacks such a disposition, it is not clear to me that her action in clenching her fist would be best described as intentional. (Stanley 2011, p. 190)

This passage is in certain ways misleading. The problem of *Basic Knowledge* for Stanley's *Intellectualism* does not depend on finding Gettiered cases of basic action, in which I believe with justification that I could clench my fist by intending to do so, but do not know that this is true. Nor does it depend on finding cases of basic action in which my belief in counterfactual success is true but not justified. (It was an accident that the case of recent paralysis had this shape.) The most that is required is a case of basic intentional action in which I do not know that I could clench my fist by intending to do so either because my belief is Gettiered, or because it is unjustified, or because I lack the relevant belief. It is the final possibility that is most challenging for Stanley's view.

Now, I concede that it is difficult to imagine someone clenching her fist intentionally without the belief that she can do so by intending to clench her fist. But this is not enough. What is required is an explanation of *Basic Knowledge* on which its truth derives from the nature of basic intentional action and knowing how. Like Stanley, I assume that it is a condition of clenching one's fist intentionally as a basic action that one be disposed to act in the relevant way when one intends to do so. In fact, I would make a stronger claim. It is *sufficient* for basic intentional action that one form and execute the intention to act, in that one's action is guided by this intention. The notion of guidance I am invoking here is standard in the philosophy

of action; its precise explanation is immaterial.¹³ For our purposes, it does not matter whether guidance is a causal concept, or whether it can be reduced to anything else. What matters is that I need no more than the intention to clench my fist, and the disposition to do so under the guidance of that intention, in order to clench my fist intentionally as a basic action. If *Basic Knowledge* is true, it must follow from the nature of these elements that I know how to clench my fist. What Stanley owes us, then, is an account of what it is to have the relevant intention and disposition on which they entail the belief that I could clench my fist by intending to do so. The problem here is not simply one of omission, that there is more to say, but that it is difficult to see how any plausible account of intention or guidance would entail this belief. For instance, while it is hard to imagine an agent who lacks the concept *could*, possession of this concept is not, on the face of it, part of what is involved in intending to clench one's fist, or in executing that intention. (Think, by contrast, of the concept of clenching one's fist, which is involved in this intention, or the concept of intention, which might be.) What is more, even if the concept *could* were involved in one's intention—perhaps we need it in order to grasp the idea of doing anything at all—the conditions of basic intentional action do not require one to put this concept together with others in the way described by Stanley's view. It does not follow from one's having the intention to clench one's fist, and the concept *could*, that one believes one could clench one's fist by intending to do so. It may be risky to intend what one does not believe one can do; but it is not impossible. Nor does it follow that one has this belief if we add the disposition to succeed.

Here is another way to make this point. Stanley may be right that 'the behaviour of clenching one's fist is a characteristic expression of the relevant propositional knowledge' (2011, p. 190). Clenching one's fist as a basic intentional action when one intends to do so is what we expect of someone who knows that they can clench their fist in just in this way. Given the appeal to practical ways of thinking, the disposition to act on this intention may be a necessary condition of such knowledge. The objection is that it is not sufficient. Even on a functionalist account, knowledge and belief involve complicated, multi-track dispositions, dispositions to act in different ways in different circumstances, to form and revise other mental

¹³ See Frankfurt (1978), Thalberg (1984), Setiya (2007a, pp. 31–2).

states. To have a given belief, it is not enough that one be disposed in one of these ways. In particular, it is not sufficient for the belief that one could clench one's fist by intending to do so that one be disposed to clench one's fist when one so intends.

None of this implies that knowledge of counterfactual success is irrelevant to action theory. As Stanley insists (2011, pp. 187–8), it may play a role in explaining how we know what we are doing when we do it intentionally.¹⁴ But while knowledge of counterfactual success *may* be required for knowledge of intentional action, it is not required for intentional action itself.¹⁵ Since knowing how *is* required for basic intentional action, as *Basic Knowledge* tells us, Stanley's *Intellectualism* fails. It cannot explain why *Basic Knowledge* holds.

Although I cannot prove it, I think this result will generalize to other forms of intellectualism about knowing how. There are two main reasons for this. First, Stanley's *Intellectualism* is the form of intellectualism motivated by the linguistics of knowing-*wh*. Since this is the most powerful case for intellectualism, there is reason to think that if intellectualism is true, it will have to take this form. Second, the argument against intellectualism from *Basic Knowledge* cites the minimal conditions of basic intentional action. What creates the problem is not specifically the concept *could* or any idiosyncrasy of Stanley's view, but that the only concepts and beliefs involved in intending to clench my fist and doing so intentionally are the concepts and beliefs involved in that intention. The materials they provide are too impoverished for the extraction of any belief we could identify with knowing how to clench my fist. At any rate, that is my conjecture. I conclude that knowing how to ϕ is not, in the case of basic action, a matter of propositional knowledge. In the remaining sections, I ask what it could be and explore the implications of the non-propositional view.

¹⁴ I raise doubts about this condition in Setiya (2009, pp. 133–4).

¹⁵ On the theory sketched in §IV, one can fail to know what one is doing intentionally, so long as one has a relevant partial belief.

III

My argument against intellectualism suggests that knowing how to perform a basic action is being disposed to act on the relevant intention when one has it. Like other dispositions, this one can be ‘masked’ or prevented from manifesting in unfavourable environments.¹⁶ It does not imply ability in the conditional sense: if I were to intend, I would. When one’s intention guides the performance of basic action, one manifests the disposition to act on this intention when one has it. This disposition is thus a condition of doing ϕ intentionally as a basic action, and the truth of *Basic Knowledge* is explained.

What about non-basic action? Presumably, it is sufficient for knowing how to perform a non-basic intentional action that I have propositional knowledge of basic means and that I know how to take those means. But it is hard to believe that this is necessary. Think of general know-how. I know how to make toast, though not as a basic intentional action. When I make toast, I do so by taking various means. Sitting at my computer, however, while I know a great many facts about the making of toast, what it is made of, how toasters work, and so on, I do not know, right now, a set of basic actions by which I could successfully make toast. If I decided to make toast, I would figure out which basic actions to perform as I went along.¹⁷ My tentative proposal is that, even where ϕ -ing is a non-basic action, we can equate knowledge how to ϕ with being disposed to ϕ when one so intends. This disposition may depend on propositional knowledge of means, without which one would be disposed to fail; but the means need not be basic actions. I would not be disposed to succeed in making toast if I did not know that I could do so by putting bread in a toaster and turning it on, but those are things I do, on a given occasion, by determining how.

Is being disposed to act on the intention to ϕ sufficient for knowing how to ϕ , even when doing ϕ is not a basic action, as this

¹⁶ The terminology of ‘masking’ comes from Johnston (1992, p. 233). Dispositions may also vary in strength, or in the extent to which they are fallible, in which case there will be degrees of knowing how. As earlier footnotes suggest, this possibility is relevant to *Basic Knowledge* and to the stronger claim that one cannot ϕ intentionally without knowing how to ϕ .

¹⁷ The question of general know-how is raised, but not resolved, in Setiya (2009, pp. 135–6). The issue is taken up, as a problem for intellectualism, in Stanley (2011, pp. 181–5).

proposal claims? There are difficult cases. Katherine Hawley objects that counterfactual success, or the disposition for it, is not sufficient for knowing how to ϕ when one's success is accidental.

[Consider] Susie, who likes to annoy Joe, and believes that she does so by smoking. In fact Joe is annoyed by Susie's tapping on her cigarette box, which she does whenever she smokes. Susie would succeed in annoying Joe if she tried, but it seems that she doesn't know how to annoy Joe, because she misconstrues the situation. (Hawley 2003, p. 27)

The problem in such examples is that, while Susie annoys Joe, she does not do so intentionally. This is a case of non-basic deviance in the causation of action.¹⁸ We need not solve the problem of non-basic deviance in order to avoid it here. We need only insist that what matters for knowing how in the practical sense is being disposed to execute one's intention in intentional action. This disposition is, I believe, sufficient for knowing how.

A different problem appears when I am disposed to acquire the knowledge I need in order to ϕ , though I do not yet possess it. I don't know how to play chess, but if I decided to play, I would read the instructions and figure it out. Am I disposed to play chess when I intend to do so, even though I don't know how? The answer, I think, is that I lack this disposition. Although I could learn how to play chess, I am not now disposed to recognize the means by which to make legal moves, and so not now disposed to succeed in playing chess under the guidance of my intention. In this respect, my relation to chess is different from my relation to making toast. In neither case do I know basic means by which to do so now. But I am already disposed to recognize the means by which I can make toast on a given occasion; not so the means to playing chess. In effect, the case is one of 'altering', in which I would ϕ in C not because I am disposed to do so but because I would acquire that disposition.¹⁹

A challenge can be posed from the other side: not that the disposition is insufficient for knowing how, but that it is unnecessary. Can't we say of someone who has read and understood a textbook on the construction of spaceships that he knows how to build a spaceship, even though he is not disposed to succeed when he forms the relevant intention? I am inclined to answer yes: that

¹⁸ See Davidson (1973, pp. 78–9), Gibbons (2001, pp. 588–90), Setiya (2007a, p. 32).

¹⁹ On the possibility of 'altering', see Johnston (1992, pp. 232–3).

sentence can be used to state a truth, that the textbook reader has propositional knowledge, of some way of building a spaceship, that it is a way in which he could do so. It is just that he doesn't know how to take the relevant means. How to make sense of this? Like Ian Rumfitt (2003, p. 165), I suspect that 'knows how to' is ambiguous between an embedded question reading and one which is subject to the dispositional theory. Hence the qualification, in the statements above, that *in the practical sense* knowing how to ϕ is being disposed to act on the relevant intention when one has it. In one sense, the textbook reader knows how to build a spaceship, but, as we might protest, he doesn't *really* know how to do it. In the sense that is relevant to *Basic Knowledge* and intentional action, he doesn't know how. The same point applies to alleged examples of knowing how to ϕ in the face of physical incapacity, and so without the disposition to succeed.²⁰ A concert pianist who is permanently disabled still has propositional knowledge of how to play the piano, perhaps largely inarticulate, though her practical know-how is gone.

The thesis of ambiguity brings us close to the linguistic evidence for and against intellectualism. According to Rumfitt, the ambiguity in question is made explicit in certain languages. For instance, it shows up as the distinction between 'savoir faire' and 'savoir comment faire', where the former is practical, the latter propositional (Rumfitt 2003, pp. 160–2). In Russian, a different verb is used to ascribe propositional knowledge or knowledge of the answer to a question from the one we translate as 'knowing how' (pp. 163–5). The interpretation of this data is controversial, and I cannot hope to resolve it here. But I will make some brief remarks. To begin with, unlike Rumfitt, I am not using this data to argue against intellectualism. My argument to that effect is the one set out above. I agree with Stanley that, given powerful arguments for intellectualism, the data can be absorbed. Thus, even if there is no question-word in 'Pierre sait nager', we can give a compositional semantics that takes the complement of 'savoir' to denote the content of an embedded question. And we can give a pragmatic account of the apparent difference in meaning between 'savoir faire' and 'savoir comment faire'.²¹ My claim is the modest one that the linguistic data does not

²⁰ See Stanley and Williamson (2001, p. 416), Snowdon (2003, pp. 8–10).

²¹ These strategies are pursued in Stanley (2011, pp. 138–41).

preclude an anti-intellectualist view, if there are independent arguments to believe that it is true. That there are such arguments was the upshot of §II.

This point is relevant to another, more indirect path from uniformity to intellectualism in Stanley's book (2011, pp. 133–5, 141–2). According to Stanley, '[in so far] as there is an intuitive basis for thinking that knowing how to do something is not a species of propositional knowledge, it survives as an intuitive basis for thinking that knowing where to do something, knowing when to do something, and knowing what to do are not species of propositional knowledge' (p. 133). He cites two intuitive grounds: the attribution of knowing how to animals when it is controversial that they have knowledge of propositions, and the automatic quality of its manifestation. As he points out, similar arguments could be made about knowing when and knowing where. But here the linguistic data is consistent: these constructions are treated cross-linguistically as embedded questions. Since we must accept a propositional theory of knowing who, what, which, when, why, despite the intuitive motivations for anti-intellectualism, we can only regard these motivations as unsound. This is as true of their application to knowing how as it is of their application to knowing when and knowing where. The weakness of this argument is that the best case for anti-intellectualism is specific to knowing how. It turns on a connection between knowing how and intentional action that has no analogue for knowing who, what, which, when, why. It is therefore no surprise that 'ascriptions of knowing how to ϕ are cross-linguistic outliers' (Stanley 2011, p. 134). We have no need to explain this appearance away, even if it is possible to do so.

There is a final challenge to the present view, on linguistic and conceptual grounds. For intellectualists, it is perfectly clear why knowing how to ϕ should count as knowledge, why the same verb figures in 'savoir faire' and 'savoir comment faire'. Knowing how to ϕ is knowledge of a proposition. The epistemic character of knowing how is much more puzzling on a non-propositional view. In particular, if we turn to basic action, we can ask: Why is the disposition to act on this intention when one has it properly conceived of as a form of knowledge? Why is it right to describe a mere disposition, one that need not involve belief, in epistemic terms? It is to this question, and its implications, that we turn.

IV

Let me approach this topic by considering some claims about knowledge of intentional action. According to Anscombe's *Intention*, what I do intentionally, I know that I am doing, and I know this 'without observation' (Anscombe 1963, pp. 11–15). If I am frowning intentionally, I know that I am frowning, and my knowledge does not rest on observation of myself or on inference from evidence about my likely behaviour. Anscombe does not deny that knowledge of one's intentional actions often draws on empirical or other knowledge of the world. But it is not exhausted by this.

[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, the 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. (Anscombe 1963, p. 50)

As I understand her view, for Anscombe, knowledge of intentional action does not rest on sufficient prior evidence, either perceptual or inferential. The epistemology of such knowledge has been a source of puzzlement to Anscombe's readers.²² I have tried to address these puzzles elsewhere (Setiya 2008a, 2009). But there are more mundane objections. As Donald Davidson observes, 'a man may be making ten carbon copies as he writes, and this may be intentional; yet he may not know that he is; all he knows is that he is trying' (Davidson 1971, p. 50). As I press hard on the paper, I may not believe that the copies are going through, though I hope they are. If my hope is being fulfilled, I am making ten copies intentionally without the belief, and thus without knowledge, that I am doing so.

We might reply to this example by revising Anscombe's principle, as we revised the connection between acting intentionally and

²² Especially Grice (1971), Langton (2004), Paul (2009, §II).

knowing how in §1.²³

If *A* is doing ϕ intentionally, he knows without observation or inference that he is doing ϕ , or else he is doing ϕ by doing other things for which this condition holds.

But this is not enough. In the case of recent paralysis, I clench my fist as a basic intentional action, not by doing other things, but I do not know that I am clenching my fist without observation or inference. It is only with irrational optimism that I believe that I am cured. If I clenched my fist behind my back, under anaesthetic, deprived of perceptual and proprioceptive access, I would not be entitled to believe that I am clenching my fist, even though I am doing so intentionally. In other cases, belief is simply absent. Suppose that I am cautiously optimistic, believing that I *might* be cured, though doubtful that I am. When I clench my fist intentionally behind my back, under anaesthetic, I do not believe that I am doing so. My degree of confidence is too low.

In my view, these problems turn on a simplification, harmless enough in many contexts, but potentially confounding here: that of ignoring partial belief.²⁴ When one acts intentionally, one may not have knowledge of what one is doing or believe that one is doing it. Still, intentional action is bound up with a capacity for partial belief that does not rest on observation or inference, for confidence about what one is doing that outruns one's prior evidence. It is not easy to formulate the role of partial belief in intentional action as a necessary condition.²⁵ A more promising approach looks not to particular actions but to the will as a rational capacity, the capacity to act for reasons. On the Anscombean conception, the will is a capacity for non-perceptual, non-inferential knowledge of what one is doing and why. Such knowledge is practical in that it motivates action,

²³ See Thompson (2011, pp. 209–10) for a less concessive response. Thompson contrasts two carbon-copiers, one of whom will check and confirm that the copies are made, the other of whom has only one shot. The first carbon-copier knows that he is making ten copies, even if he does not know that the copies are going through the first time. The second carbon-copier may succeed in making the copies, but he is not doing so intentionally, since he can only succeed by luck. Thompson admits that the latter claim sounds odd, but argues that we are forced to make it if we hope to preserve the unity of Anscombe's topic. As I explain in the text, I think we can preserve a unified picture of intentional action and 'practical knowledge' without rejecting common sense.

²⁴ For a similar complaint, see Pears (1985, pp. 78–81).

²⁵ I made an attempt at this in Setiya (2008a, pp. 390–2). For discussion, see Paul (2009, §1), Setiya (2009, pp. 129–31; 2011, pp. 171–2, 192–3).

though it is a matter of controversy whether motivation is causal or constitutive.²⁶ To adapt this picture to partial belief, we need only recognize that, like other epistemic capacities, the will may be limited by interference of various kinds. It may not issue in knowledge, but in confidence of some degree. In this respect, it is like the capacity for perceptual knowledge, or for knowledge by inference. Although in the paradigm case such capacities allow us to know that *p*, their actual exercise can be more subtle. To take one example: on the basis of visual perception, I may become more confident that *p* without achieving full belief. Suppose that I am looking at a distant figure in the ocean at dusk. Is it a man or a woman? Swimming towards me or away? Waving or drowning? Perception rationally affects my degrees of belief about these questions in complex interaction with other sources of evidence. Likewise with the capacity to act for reasons as the capacity to know what I am doing and why. The exercise of this capacity interacts with evidence of other kinds and may affect one's degree of confidence without sufficing for knowledge or belief. That is what happens in the case of recent paralysis, where I am clenching my fist intentionally but only partly believe that I am doing so because I am not sure that I've recovered. Such examples do not refute the Anscombean conception of the will, any more than examples of perceptual uncertainty refute the idea of perception as a source of knowledge.²⁷

²⁶ When Anscombe calls practical knowledge 'the cause of what it understands', she means formal not efficient cause, and then only when 'the description of the event is of the type to be formally the description of an executed intention' (Anscombe 1963, pp. 87–8). Anscombe goes on to deny that 'the relation of *being done in execution of a certain intention*, or *being done intentionally*, is a causal relation between act and intention' (Anscombe 1983, p. 95). But her arguments are inconclusive (as I explain in Setiya 2007a, pp. 56–7). In earlier work, I took the opposite view, that intention is the cause of intentional action. But I am no longer sure. If we have knowledge in intention, and knowledge is an irreducibly factive mental state (see Williamson 2000, ch. 1), the relation of intention to action will be one of entailment, not causality. This does not conflict with the dispositional theory of know-how developed in §III. To say that you are disposed to ϕ when you so intend is not to posit a causal relation between intention and its execution; it is enough that you tend to have practical knowledge, not mere belief, when you have either one.

²⁷ This paragraph draws on Setiya (2011, pp. 192–3). The theory of Setiya (2007a, pp. 39–51) is restricted to the paradigm case; see also Velleman (1989). Anscombe might resist the assumption, implicit in my discussion, that knowledge of action involves belief. Thus, when 'a man is *simply* not doing what he [intends to be doing]'—as in a failure to execute a basic action—'the mistake is not one of judgement but of performance' (Anscombe 1963, p. 57). On the more natural view, his mistake is one of judgement *and* performance. When I intend to be pushing button *A* and I am actually pushing *B*, there is a mistake in what I do, but also a mistake in what I believe about myself.

Now, so far all I have done is to articulate a version of the Anscombean view that is consistent with our examples. We could think of intention as knowledge or partial belief that motivates action and can legitimately outrun one's prior evidence. I have not argued that we should. Though some find the connection between intentional action and knowledge without observation or inference immediately obvious, I have learned that some do not. Why believe that this connection holds?

There are several arguments.²⁸ One is that the natural expression of one's intention in acting is the assertion, 'I am doing ϕ ' (Anscombe 1963, p. 1). Since this is the expression of belief, intention must be cognitive: one's intention in action is in part the belief that one is doing ϕ .²⁹ We do not form intentions, or the beliefs that they involve, by observation or inference, but on the basis of practical reasons. The will is thus a capacity for non-perceptual, non-inferential belief. (It is not merely such a capacity: the beliefs it generates are intentions and have the power to motivate action.) A second argument would cite the entailment from 'I am doing A in order to do B', in which one's action is explained by a further intention, to 'I am doing A because I am doing B' or 'My reason for doing A is that I am doing B', in which it is explained by a further belief. This entailment suggests, again, that intending is a mode of believing. As before, we can infer from this connection an Anscombean picture of the will.³⁰ Other arguments are less direct: they cite the role of the Anscombean view in explaining the nature of instrumental reason (Setiya 2007b), why it is impossible to believe at will (Setiya 2008b), and how we know what we intend (Setiya 2011). The argument I am about to give is of the indirect kind: unless we think of the will as a capacity for knowledge of action, we cannot explain why knowing how is a form of knowledge. We cannot answer the question framed by §III.³¹

²⁸ Unlike Stanley (2011, pp. 187–8), I do not believe that Anscombe gives a 'phenomenological' argument for her view, though it is not easy to say what her actual argument is.

²⁹ On intention as a species of belief, see Hampshire and Hart (1958), Harman (1976), Pears (1985), Velleman (1989, ch. 4) and Setiya (2007a, Part 1). Critics of this doctrine include Davidson (1978, pp. 91–4), Bratman (1981, pp. 254–6) and Mele (1992, ch. 8).

³⁰ There are suggestions of this argument in Setiya (2007a, pp. 51–2).

³¹ My strategy here is the converse of that pursued in 'Practical Knowledge' (Setiya 2008a, §V), which argued from the Anscombean conception of the will to anti-intellectualism about knowing how. That argument now seems to me flawed, or badly put. The real case against intellectualism is the one that was made in §II above.

The thought here is simple. Take an instance of basic intentional action, as when I intentionally clench my fist. Knowing how to do so is being disposed to act on the relevant intention if I have it. We can see why this disposition should be conceived of as knowledge if we accept two further claims. First, the Anscombean view, on which—if this is a paradigm case of intentional action—I know without observation or inference that I am clenching my fist, and my intention constitutes this knowledge. Second, that the disposition helps to make this knowledge possible by explaining why the relevant belief is non-accidentally true. Its truth is no accident because I am disposed to act on this intention if I have it. It is not an accident that, when I intend to clench my fist and thus believe that I am doing so, my belief is true.³² To say this is not to identify knowledge with non-accidentally true belief. It is merely to note that, in the Anscombean picture, the disposition to act on one's intention does epistemic work. If knowing how to perform a basic action is a disposition of this kind, it is at the same time an epistemic capacity. It is a determination of the capacity for practical knowledge, that is, the will. Although its epistemic role is quite different from that of knowing a proposition, knowing how to perform a basic action makes practical knowledge possible, and in that way counts as knowledge too.³³

I have argued that knowing how to ϕ in the practical sense is being disposed to act on the relevant intention when one has it. The Anscombean view explains why this state should count as knowledge, even when it does not involve knowledge of means. The explanation is not that every enabling condition of knowledge is itself an instance of knowledge, but that, on the Anscombean view, the disposition involved in knowing how to ϕ is a capacity to know. No similar story can be told by those who reject this view. If intention is a non-cognitive state, an attitude that motivates action but does not involve any belief about it, why is the disposition to act on one's intention rightly conceived of as knowledge? Of course, it is something you can know about, and this knowledge might help to

³² Technically, the intention to ϕ involves the belief that I am *going to* ϕ , not the belief that I am *doing* ϕ , that is part of my intention in acting. In other circumstances, we should mark this distinction, as when we consider prospective intention or planning for the future. But when I intend to ϕ right now, I believe that I am going to ϕ right now, and so believe that I am ϕ -ing. The complications here are traced in Setiya (2007a, pp. 57–8; 2008a, pp. 406–7).

³³ This paragraph draws on Setiya (2008a, pp. 404–7; 2009, pp. 135–6).

explain how you know what you are doing. But the disposition as such is epistemically inert. It is propositional knowledge that does the work; there is no need to regard the disposition as knowledge in its own right. If we want to make sense of know-how as knowledge, in a non-propositional theory, we are pushed towards a picture of the will as a capacity to know. There is a path from anti-intellectualism about knowing how to the possibility of practical knowledge.³⁴

Department of Philosophy
1001 Cathedral of Learning
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
USA
kis23@pitt.edu

REFERENCES

- Anscombe, G. E. M. 1963: *Intention*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- 1983: 'The Causation of Action'. Reprinted in *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally, pp. 89–108. Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005.
- Bratman, Michael 1981: 'Intention and Means–End Reasoning'. *Philosophical Review*, 90(2), pp. 252–65.
- Danto, Arthur C. 1965: 'Basic Actions'. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2(2), pp. 141–8.
- Davidson, Donald 1971: 'Agency'. Reprinted in Davidson 1980, pp. 43–61.
- 1973: 'Freedom to Act'. Reprinted in Davidson 1980, pp. 63–81.
- 1978: 'Intending'. Reprinted in Davidson 1980, pp. 83–102.
- 1980: *Essays on Actions and Events*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fine, Kit 1994: 'Essence and Modality'. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 8, pp. 1–16.
- Ford, Anton, Jennifer Hornsby, and Frederick Stoutland (eds.) 2011: *Essays on Anscombe's Intention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Frankfurt, Harry 1978: 'The Problem of Action'. Reprinted in his *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 69–79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

³⁴ For comments on this material in earlier forms, I am indebted to John Gibbons, Sarah Paul, Jason Stanley, and to audiences at the Aristotelian Society and the University of Pittsburgh.

- Gibbons, John 2001: 'Knowledge in Action'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 62(3), pp. 579–600.
- Grice, H. P. 1971: 'Intention and Uncertainty'. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 57, pp. 263–79.
- Hampshire, Stuart, and H. L. A. Hart 1958: 'Decision, Intention, and Certainty'. *Mind*, 67, pp. 1–12.
- Harman, Gilbert 1976: 'Practical Reasoning'. Reprinted in Alfred R. Mele (ed.), *The Philosophy of Action*, pp. 149–77. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Hawley, Katherine 2003: 'Success and Knowledge-How'. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 40(1), pp. 19–31.
- Hornsby, Jennifer 1980: *Actions*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Johnston, Mark 1992: 'How to Speak of the Colors'. *Philosophical Studies*, 68(3), pp. 221–63.
- Kratzer, Angelika 1977: 'What *Must* and *Can Must* and *Can Mean*'. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 1(3), pp. 337–55.
- Langton, Rae 2004: 'Intention as Faith'. In John Hyman and Helen Steward (eds.), *Agency and Action*, pp. 243–58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mele, Alfred R. 1992: *Springs of Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paul, Sarah K. 2009: 'Intention, Belief, and Wishful Thinking: Setiya on "Practical Knowledge"'. *Ethics*, 119(3), pp. 546–57.
- Pears, D. F. 1985: 'Intention and Belief'. In Bruce Vermazen and Merrill B. Hintikka (eds.), *Essays on Davidson: Actions and Events*, pp. 75–88. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rumfitt, Ian 2003: 'Savoir Faire'. *Journal of Philosophy*, 100(3), pp. 158–66.
- Setiya, Kieran 2007a: *Reasons without Rationalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 2007b: 'Cognitivism About Instrumental Reason'. *Ethics*, 117(4), pp. 649–73.
- 2008a: 'Practical Knowledge'. *Ethics*, 118(3), pp. 388–409.
- 2008b: 'Believing At Will'. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 32(1), pp. 36–52.
- 2009: 'Practical Knowledge Revisited'. *Ethics*, 120(1), pp. 128–37.
- 2011: 'Knowledge of Intention'. In Ford, Hornsby and Stoutland 2011, pp. 170–97.
- Snowdon, Paul 2003: 'Knowing How and Knowing That: A Distinction Reconsidered'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 104, pp. 1–29.
- Stanley, Jason 2011: *Know How*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- and Timothy Williamson 2001: 'Knowing How'. *Journal of Philosophy*, 98(8), pp. 411–44.
- Thalberg, Irving 1984: 'Do Our Intentions Cause Our Intentional Actions?'

- American Philosophical Quarterly*, 21(3), pp. 249–60.
- Thompson, Michael 2008: *Life and Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 2011: ‘Anscombe’s *Intention* and Practical Knowledge’. In Ford, Hornsby and Stoutland 2011, pp. 198–210.
- Velleman, J. David 1989: *Practical Reflection*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Williamson, Timothy 2000: *Knowledge and its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.