

John Schwenkler, *Anscombe's Intention. A Guide*, Oxford University Press, New York 2019, pp. 272, £ 91.00, ISBN 9780190052027*

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In *Anscombe's Intention. A Guide*, John Schwenkler gives a significant overview of G.E.M. Anscombe's famous book, aiming to shed light on its complex set of arguments by also underlining its bond with the work of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Wittgenstein. The attempt to provide an outline of Schwenkler's *Guide* is certainly complex, since the author's work carries out a very accurate analysis of Anscombe's book, providing not only a conceptual examination of her arguments but also a textual analysis carried out thanks to a detailed study of the 52 sections which make up the work. Therefore, the review aims to provide a summary of the main lines addressed by Schwenkler, and then to focus on the features of the work and its impact on the study of G.E.M. Anscombe's *Intention*.

Generally speaking, the *Guide* makes room for the historical context which characterises the development of the "Project of Intention" (pp. xvii-xxvi), by sketching out the key elements that impacted Anscombe's work. The book provides an "Outline of the Text" (pp. xxxi-xxxiii), where it is possible to have a broad perspective of the contents, thanks to the summary of each paragraph or groups of paragraphs which are analysed in the *Guide*.

Schwenkler organises the work into seven chapters, starting with the "Preliminaries" (pp. 3-16) where he mainly focuses on Anscombe's "three headings" and the notion of intentional action, which concerns what someone does. The main claim of the section is the refusal of the idea that Anscombe's methodology is behaviourist, as she considers the possibility of a "purely interior" intention while maintaining an *action-first* approach (p. 3).

In the second chapter, “Beginning of an Account” (pp. 17-48), Schwenkler discusses the concept of intentional action through the analysis of the role of the question “Why?”, an essential element in Anscombe’s work, since she defines the intentional action the one “to which a certain sense of the question ‘Why?’ is given application” (§5). The question “Why?” and its application opens the investigation of the essential concepts of “reason for acting” and “non-observational knowledge”, going through the notions of reason, motive, and cause. Schwenkler also addresses the difference between the “reason-giving explanations and explanations that identify the *causes* of what takes place” (p. 17), the possibility of the absence of reason in acting intentionally, and the one of unawareness of reasons.

In the third chapter, “The Unity of Action” (pp. 49-92), the author, in following Anscombe, underlines that defining an action as intentional does not mean adding an *extra feature* to it but specifying the kind of description that makes the action intentional. Going through all §§22-27, Schwenkler sheds light on the thesis that the intentional action is a teleological unity “that can be represented by a series of descriptions that relate to one another in an order of means to ends” (p. 90). Being able to know what an intentional action is means to acknowledge the unity identified by the series of these descriptions.

The aim of the following chapter, “Knowledge without Observation” (pp. 93-116), is trying to understand if the kind of knowledge at stake is the one “without observation”. This theme, as Schwenkler underlines, is a problematic one, and the fourth section of the *Guide* introduces the difficulties raised by Anscombe herself concerning *knowledge without observation* (§28), especially when related to “descriptions of an action in terms of what is happening at a distance from the agent and her immediate bodily movements.” (p. 95), where the distance can be both spatial or temporal. Even if Anscombe agrees that the background knowledge about our actions can be observational, this does not result in observational knowledge of our intentional actions. The introduction of these difficulties is at the core of this chapter. Schwenkler points out that while Anscombe aims to clarify them, she argues against what he presents as “False venues of escape (§§29-30)” (pp. 99-105), such as interiorising perspectives on the subject, and starts to

find a possible solution in §§31-32. The technical distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge is certainly one of the most prominent among the ones Anscombe introduces in defence of her factualist view of knowledge concerning one's intentional actions. As Schwenkler himself highlights at the end of the chapter, the difference can be properly understood when analysing the notion of practical reasoning.

At the beginning of the fifth chapter, "Practical Reasoning" (pp. 117-154), the author underlines that at the end of §32 Anscombe introduces the notion of practical knowledge as "the key to the utter darkness in which we found ourselves" (§32, 57:3), namely the correct way to understand the non-observational knowledge of action. Still, to have an appropriate insight into practical knowledge, we first need to investigate the concept of practical reasoning (§33), which she thinks to be essential to propose a solution to the problems addressed so far. Schwenkler points out that although the discussion of practical reasoning is crucial to Anscombe's argumentation, it is not always easy to clarify each of its steps. For this reason, he aims to provide the reader with some context to be able to navigate through Anscombe's arguments, without losing sight of their significance as a whole.

Firstly, Schwenkler addresses Anscombe's position on the difference between practical and theoretical reasoning, which she claims to be a formal one, namely "a difference in the way that the conclusion of a practical inference *relates* to its premises" (p. 117) and not a matter of content. Then, the author introduces Anscombe's debt to Aristotle (without entering the analysis of the correctness of this reading) from which she draws the idea that "the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action, and not merely a judgment about what ought to be done" (p. 120). By going through the following sections, Schwenkler discusses the calculative feature of practical reasoning (pp. 131-134), namely the calculation "of means to ends, or of ways of doing what one wants to" (§38, 73:1), the specific role of wanting, and the link between the function of the desire in practical reasoning and the concept of goodness. In fact, Anscombe herself puts what Schwenkler calls "a *formal* restriction" (p. 140) on the desiderative aspect, since a person has to "see what he wants under the aspect of some good" (§39, 75:2).

Schwenkler emphasises that Anscombe's position of the role of the goodness in practical reasoning does not end in moral reasoning, since she understands it as a characteristic of the practical one. In fact, as Schwenkler underlines, "in practical reasoning, it is not that the goodness of something is *shown to be true* by the premises, but that the premises *show the goodness of the action* one decides on." (p. 145). In the final part of the chapter, Schwenkler focuses on the kind of process practical reason is by specifying that its philosophical understanding is not to be confused with the psychological one, namely the "mechanisms from which action results" (p. 148). All these issues are linked in Schwenkler's analysis, which highlights their problematic aspects without, however, losing the aim of trying to understand them in their unity in Anscombe's work. In concluding this section, the author introduces the theme of the last chapter, "something that modern philosophy has blankly misunderstood: namely what ancient and medieval philosophers meant by practical knowledge" (§32, 57:3). Schwenkler's goal is to see whether it is possible to fill what Anscombe sees as a lacuna and whether it can impact on the difficulties related to the claim of the non-observational knowledge of one's intentional actions.

In the last chapter "Practical Knowledge" (pp. 155-200), the author investigates the nature of the relations between Anscombe's account of practical reasoning and the distinctive practical knowledge that the agent has of her intentional actions. The section opens with the discussion of Anscombe's Thomistic background regarding the concept of practical knowledge. To give a wider perspective on the roots of the Anscombean analysis, Schwenkler starts from the Aristotelian concept of *nous praktikòs*, and how Aquinas then developed his notion of a form of practical knowledge that, unlike the speculative one, is "a form of knowledge that is the *measure* of its object" (p. 156). Then, as Schwenkler himself specifies at the beginning of the following section, he goes on with a close analysis of §48 where Anscombe refers directly to the Thomistic view of practical knowledge, and then with the examination of the causal relationship entertained by practical knowledge and its object. In the last sections of the chapter, Schwenkler's goal is to attempt to bridge what was discussed so far with the non-observational knowledge of one's own intentional action.

The seventh chapter is devoted to the “Concluding Discussion” (pp. 201-210), which considers the last paragraphs of *Intention*, where the main topics are the distinction between voluntary and intentional action (§49), and the expression of intention for the future (§§50-52). Schwenkler remarks the importance of these last sections, since they underline what he defines from the beginning of the *Guide* the *factualist* elements of Anscombe’s approach, namely “that in expressing the intention to do something, *what* a person says is simply that something *will happen* – namely, that she will do what she says she will.” (p. 8). Schwenkler’s book is certainly an excellent tool for the study of *Intention*. The strength of the work lies in its ability to provide an accurate study of the main themes of Anscombe’s text, combining the conceptual analysis with the commentary of a large selection of passages from the text. Moreover, the structure of the *Guide* helps to focus on the main problematic nuclei, without, however, giving up the attempt to make an exhaustive analysis. In fact, each chapter is provided with brief introductions and conclusions that aim to maintain the connection with what has been previously analysed and what will be investigated afterwards. In addition, there are the reading suggestions at the end of each section; they allow the reader to delve deeper into the topics discussed, and also provide a bibliographic guide. At the same time, Schwenkler’s text should not be considered only a didactic guide: the author undertakes a philosophical discussion of Anscombe’s work examining the conceptual roots of the text’s central themes and setting off its theoretical complexity.