

Anscombe's "Why?" and Davidson's "because"

I examine two moments in the philosophy of action, central to the development of that area in the 20th Century. The first is that of Elizabeth Anscombe who writes that intentional actions are 'the actions to which a certain sense of the question "Why?" is given application'. The second comes from Donald Davidson: 'Central to the relation between a reason and an action it explains is that the agent performed the action *because* he had the reason.' I argue that Davidson's "because" gives a requirement which all accounts of action must meet, and that Anscombe's "Why?" gives the initial point from which we must start in order for that requirement to be met. I conclude with a possible consequence of this approach, given Anscombe's notion of "practical knowledge". To perform an action *because* of a reason involves having a piece of self-knowledge available—in some sense—to another.