ON ANSCOMBE'S PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD

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While many of Elizabeth Anscombe's philosophical views are well-known (e.g. her views on practical knowledge or consequentialism), little has been written on her philosophical method, i.e., on her way of doing philosophy. This is unfortunate, for two reasons : First, the failure to understand Anscombe's method is a major stumbling block for many of her readers. Second, and more importantly, we can still learn a lot from Anscombe's way of doing philosophy : Her view differs considerably from current alternatives in metaphilosophy. Here we want to begin to fill this lacuna.

The paper is organized as follows : In Section 1, we describe an argumentative pattern that can be found in many of Anscombe's essays. This pattern is not the only one in her methodological toolkit, but it is particularly important. In Section 2, we isolate this pattern in three of Anscombe's essays. In Section 3, we locate Anscombe's implicit « philosophy of philosophy » relative to some rival metaphilosophies.

1. A Recurring Pattern in Anscombe's Work

The method on which we shall focus can be described as a four-step pattern. Anscombe applies this template to a large variety of topics, and her arguments at each step vary accordingly, but the general pattern can be described in the abstract.

1.1. Step 1 : Philosophically Puzzling « What Is *x ?* » - Questions

Anscombe uses this four-step pattern in cases where questions of the form « What is *x ?* » or « What does "*x*" mean ? » seem philosophically important. These questions are her starting point. Often, the first step involves a move from « What is *x ?* » to « What does '*x*' mean ? » Note that in asking the latter, Anscombe is not interested in questions regarding a particular language or a particular conception of *x*. She is interested in how we can understand and talk about *x* at all, i.e., what it is to understand and talk about *x*.

Here « about » is used in a thin sense that is roughly one of the senses that Ryle[1] famously groups together under the heading of « about-linguistic » [2] . After all, we cannot presuppose that *x* exists and that we are not confused about what our words refer to etc.

Anscombe usually starts by asking « What is *x* ? » The *x* in question typically plays (or seems to play) an important role in our practical or theoretical lives, and we take ourselves to have some grip on what *x* is. On reflection, however, puzzling questions regarding *x* arise, and we end up with a peculiar kind of puzzlement that we might call « philosophical puzzlement ». We somehow feel that we should know the answers to the puzzling questions regarding *x* and that empirical investigations will not help us answer them. But when pressed to answer them, we either don't know what to say or we are inclined to give answers that Anscombe reveals to be trivial, incoherent or highly implausible.

1.2. Step 2 : A Translation or Analysis of '*x*' Is Impossible

Anscombe's next step with respect to these puzzling cases is to argue that there can be no straightforward answer (as we shall call it) to the question what *x* is or what « *x* » means. Anscombe sometimes calls the type of answer she has in mind here a « translation or analysis[3] » ; sometimes she calls it a « definition[4] ». The idea is that the questions « What is *x* ? » and « What does "*x*" mean ? » can be answered by providing an expression « *y* » such that the answer « to be an *x* is to be a *y* » or « "*x*" means the same as "*y*" » respectively is informative and satisfying. Examples of such (alleged) straightforward answers may be the following : « Knowledge that *P* is a justified, true belief that *P* » or « The word "I" means the same as "the speaker/thinker of this" ». Such a « translation or analysis » must be non-circular ; we must be able to understand « *y* » without any prior understanding of *x*. Furthermore, the equivalence of « *x* » and « *y* » must help us to resolve our puzzlement regarding *x*. The connection between *x* and *y* might be a conceptual connection, or it might be some kind of metaphysical entailment or some kind of reductive explanation.

In many philosophically puzzling cases, Anscombe thinks, no such « translation or

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[1] G. Ryle, « About », *Analysis* 1/1, 1933, p. 10-12.

[2] Thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting this clarification (and further helpful comments).

[3] G. E. M. Anscombe, « The Reality of the Past », in *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe (vol. II)*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1981, p. 116.

[4] G. E. M. Anscombe, « On the Source of the Authority of the State », in *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe (vol. III)*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1981, p. 138.

analysis » is to be had. For some of these, she argues that any straightforward answer must run in a circle, for others, that all possible candidates for a « translation or analysis » must be rejected. In any event, our philosophical puzzle regarding *x* cannot be solved by giving a « translation or analysis » of « *x* ».

In this situation, we must find a different way of answering the questions « What is *x* ? » or « What does "*x*" mean ? » We need an explanation of *x* or the meaning of « *x* » that is not a translation, analysis or definition in Anscombe's sense. She says : « definition is not the only mode of explanation[5] ». This is not the platitude that some explanations are not definitions. She claims that there are illuminating answers to the questions « What is *x* ? » or « What does "*x*" mean ? » that do not provide informative and non-circular necessary and sufficient conditions for something being an *x* or meaning the same as « *x* » – and that in the philosophically puzzling cases at hand the right answers are of this kind.

1.3. Step 3 : Descriptions of Our Practices or Abilities Provide an Answer

Anscombe's own solutions for philosophically puzzling cases rest on accounts of how we think about, talk about and act with respect to *x*. Such an account usually takes the form of a description of a practice or an ability[6]. This has two advantages. First, it allows Anscombe to use « *x* » in her description of our abilities and practices, where no « translation » is possible. After all, she is giving an account that situates our thinking and talking about *x* in the world, and the relevant worldly facts may involve *x*. In « The Reality of the Past », for instance, it allows her to use the past tense in an explanation of how our talk about the past connects with the actual past[7].

A second advantage of Anscombe's descriptive approach is that it puts sufficient distance between us and our common thought, talk and action regarding *x*, so as to see it as something that plays a non-mysterious role in the overall fabric of our practices and abilities.

1.4. Step 4 : How This is a Solution

Anscombe's final step is to demonstrate how the resulting account can resolve the

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Anscombe often sees such practices as grounded in or justified by something that – in contrast to the practice itself – does not depend on human conventions, e.g., a universal human need. This is particularly important in the normative domain.
[7] G. E. M. Anscombe, « The reality of the Past », art. cit., p. 118.

philosophical puzzle with which we began – even though we still don't have a « translation or analysis » of « *x* ». As we will see below, Anscombe at this point often presents results that have a therapeutic or deflationary aspect. Thus, her resolution often seems less « substantive » than one might have expected. Nevertheless, Anscombe's results are often not exclusively concerned with thought or language, and they often constitute surprising theses about *x*.

2. Three Examples

The above is an abstract description of Anscombe's four-step pattern. In the current section, we shall show how this pattern occurs at crucial passages in her writing, using as our examples arguments from three important essays : « Rules, Rights and Promises », « The First Person » and « The Intentionality of Sensation ». The same pattern can also be found in other places (e.g. in « The Reality of the Past »). But the three cases we are going to discuss strike us as important, representative and diverse enough to be helpful examples.

We cannot do justice to any of these rich and difficult papers, and we don't want to discuss – let alone defend – the substantive philosophical theses put forward in them. Our point is that they share a common argumentative structure.

2.1. « Rules, Rights and Promises »

In « Rules, Rights and Promises », Anscombe asks : What is a rule, a right or a promise ? Hume already posed this question for promises, and he answered that promises are not « naturally intelligible[8] » ; i.e., we cannot understand what promises are without understanding human practices and social conventions. Anscombe thinks that the same holds for rules and rights as well. Let us go through the four steps of her pattern, as it occurs in that paper.

Step 1 : Rules, rights and promises can be defined as entities that make certain actions necessary for us. Sometimes we *must* do something because a rule says so, because somebody else has a right that we do it or because we have given a promise. What is this necessity that rules, rights and promises generate ? What does it mean to say that doing something is « necessary » in this sense ?

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[8] D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford University Press, T 3.2.5, §1.

Step 2 : A straightforward answer to these questions would take the form : « the relevant kind of necessity is … » or « the expression "necessary" as used in the context of rules, rights, and promises means … » respectively – where what goes into the place of the dots can be understood without already understanding the necessity. We say in what sense it is necessary to perform the action by saying in what sense it is impossible not to perform it, where this explanation of the impossibility is independently intelligible. Anscombe argues that no such independently intelligible explanation can be found ; all answers that take the above form are ultimately circular. The only plausible answer is that one cannot perform the necessary act without being guilty of something : doing a wrong, making a mistake, being unjust, etc. As it turns out, though, we cannot understand the relevant kind of guilt, wrongness or injustice without already understanding the necessity that rules, rights and promises generate. (This problem is sometimes called « Hume's Circle[9] ».) Our x – the necessity that rules, rights and promises generate – thus is one of these philosophically puzzling cases. We must look for an answer that does not take the form of a « translation or analysis ».

Step 3 : Anscombe suggests : « What we have to attend to is the use of modals[10] ». Instead of offering a « translation or analysis » of *necessity-generated-by-rules-rights-or-promises*, Anscombe offers a description of our practices and of our ability to use certain modal expressions – in particular a class that she calls « stopping modals ». She illustrates what these modals are as follows :

> « If I say "You can't wear that !" and it's not, e.g., that you are too fat to get it on, that's what I call a stopping modal[11]. »

Anscombe gives a description of how children learn to use these modal expressions and what role they play in our lives. In particular, Anscombe points out that stopping modals often occur with « what sounds like a reason », although it turns out that it is not a reason in the sense of an independently intelligible fact that could serve to ground the stopping modal. She calls such reasons « logoi[12] ».

> « [What we mention] appears to be a reason. And it *is* a "reason" in the sense of a *logos*, a thought. But if we ask what the thought is, and for what it is a reason, we'll find that we can't explain them separately. We can't explain the "You can't" on its own ; in any

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[9] For a discussion of this see K. Nieswandt, « Di Rights Exist by Convention or by Nature ? », *Topoi*, online first, 2015.
[10] G. E. M. Anscombe, « Rules, Rights and Promises », *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe (vol. III)*, op. cit., 1981, p. 100.
[11] Ibid., p. 101.
[12] Ibid., pp. 101-102.

independent sense it is simply not true that he can't (unless "they" physically stop him). But neither does "it's N's …" have its peculiar sense independent of the relation to "you can't"[13]. »

Using stopping modals together with certain logoi is the paradigmatic way to express the necessity generated by a rule, a right or a promise.

> « Now, this form : "you can't …, its N's …", though it has other applications as well, is also the form *par excellence* in which a *right* is ascribed to N[14] ».

Anscombe goes on to suggest that « rule », « right » and « promise » indicate logos-types ; « they tell us the formal character of the stopping modal[15] ».

Step 4 : Anscombe's description of our practices helps us understand what a right (a rule or a promise) is, even though we still lack an independent explication. In the last paragraph of the paper, Anscombe summarizes her account thus :

> « These "musts" and "can'ts" are the most basic expression of such-and-such's being a rule ; just as they are the most basic expression in learning the rules of a game, and as they are too in being taught rights and manners. But they aren't, in Hume's phrase, "naturally intelligible". The mark of this is the relation of interdependence between the "you can't" and the "reason" where this is what I have called the theme or logos of the "you can't". These musts and can'ts are understood by those of normal intelligence as they are trained in the practices of reason[16]. »

This is a resolution of our philosophical puzzle because it (a) explains why we cannot give a straightforward answer to the question « What is the necessity generated by rules, rights, and promises ? » and (b) it allows us to see how our thought and talk about this necessity is grounded in an entirely non-mysterious practice. Stopping modals form part of larger social games, in which we are trained as we grow up. This is why rules, rights and promises on the one hand and the necessity they generate on the other depend on each other conceptually (but in a pragmatically grounded way). Anscombe has argued that the request to fill in the dots in : « The necessity that rules, rights, and promises give rise to is … » with something independently intelligible asks for something that cannot exist. Nevertheless, she has given us an informative alternative answer, namely that rules, rights, and promises can only exist within social practices, more precisely practices that involve the use of a particular kind of modal expression. This answer is not a « translation or analysis » because we cannot explain what a practice is without relying on the idea of

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13 Ibid., p. 101.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 102.
16 Ibid., p. 103.

a rule. We haven't broken out of Hume's Circle ; rather, we have situated rules, rights and promises from within the circle by attending to the broader context in which they have their home.

To summarize : We ask what that is, a rule, a right or a promise (step 1), and discover that any attempted definition or analysis ends up in a circle (step 2). An alternative, Anscombe suggests, is to look at how we think of and talk about rules, rights and promises. As it turns out, all three form part of larger social practices, in which we are trained as we grow up (step 3). How does this answer our original question ? It tells us why the type of answer we originally sought cannot exist, and it gives us insight into rules, rights and promises by relating them to a broader context of social practices. It furthermore contains a surprising thesis about the ontology of rules, rights and promises : they only exist as part of human practices (step 4).

2.2. « The First Person »

In « The First Person », Anscombe argues that « "I" is neither a name nor another kind of expression whose logical role is to make a reference[17] ». This thesis, she thinks, is an important step on the way to an adequate understanding of self-consciousness. Let us try to discern our pattern again.

Step 1 : Anscombe starts with the question : What does « I » mean ? She is clear that she does not mean this as a question about reference but as a question regarding the sense of the word « I ». She asks what grasping the concept expressed by « I » amounts to.

Step 2 : Anscombe explores different straightforward answers, all of which are proposals for how to pick out the referent of « I » so as to employ the concept expressed by « I ». That is, they are accounts of the form : grasping the meaning of « I » is to be able to pick out object *O* in way *W*. None of these straightforward answers works. To see this, let's first assume that the way *W* of picking out *O* must involve sensory stimulation. Now, « I » cannot be a name for oneself, nor a demonstrative, nor any other kind of indexical that is such that we need sensory stimulation to determine its referent. After all, sensory deprivation does not prevent us from using « I » in the usual way. In a situation of sensory deprivation, « I have not lost my "self-consciousness" ; nor can what I mean by "I" be an

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[17] G. E. M. Anscombe, « The First Person », *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe (vol. II)*, op. cit., p. 32.

object no longer present to me[18] ». If way *W* does not involve sensory stimulation, then the referent of « I » must be given to me in some non-sensory way. It thus seems that « I » must mean something like « my Cartesian Ego » or « the thinker/speaker of this ». However, neither of these « translations or analyses » work. The first « translation » cannot explain why we cannot make mistakes in identifying our Cartesian Egos ; the second cannot guarantee that there is really only one thinker/speaker and not many. So all our attempts to say what « I » means by specifying how the user of « I » must pick out its referent fail. An understanding of « I » must consist in something other than the ability to pick out a certain referent.

Step 3 : Anscombe suggests that to grasp the meaning of « I » is to possess a certain ability. It is to be able to express and use-in-thought the unmediated, reflective consciousness of states, actions, motions etc. of our body. Uses of « I » must be appropriately related to this « subjectless[19] » consciousness of states, actions, motions etc. This constitutes the meaning of « I »[20].

> « [...] "I" is not a name : these I-thoughts are examples of reflective consciousness of states, actions, motions, etc., not of an object I mean by "I", but of this body. These I-thoughts (allow me to pause to think some !) ... are unmediated conceptions (knowledge or belief, true of false) of states, motions, etc., of this object here, about which I can find out (if I don't know it) that it is E.A[21]. »

Step 4 : Anscombe concludes her paper by saying : « The (deeply rooted) grammatical illusion of a subject is what generates all the errors which we have been considering[22] ». She thinks that what lies at the bottom of the puzzles about « I » is that we are looking for a conception of oneself, a way of picking out oneself, that one must have in order to use « I » correctly. If Anscombe is right, however, then there is no need for such a conception. Instead, the unmediated conceptions that allow us to have I-thoughts are « subjectless ». « I » is, as it were, marking a particular status of a conception as acquired by reflective consciousness, rather than picking out the subject of the conception. So, our ability to use « I » neither depends on sensory stimulation nor on our ability to identify a Cartesian Ego or a thinker. As in the case of rules, rights and promises, our problems are dissolved in that we realize we have been looking for the wrong kind of answer all along.

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[18] Ibid., p. 31.
[19] Ibid., p. 36.
[20] Anscombe spells out why she can still accept the principle that if *X* asserts something with « I » as subject, her assertion is true just in case it is true of *X*.
[21] G. E. M. Anscombe, « The First Person », art. cit., p. 34.
[22] Ibid., p. 36.

The question « What does "I" mean ? » receives a deflationary answer, in the sense that, on Anscombe's view, there is no such thing as an « I » or a « self ». Although this reaction of Anscombe has a « deflationary » aspect, it is also a substantive metaphysical thesis.

2.3. « The Intentionality of Sensation »

In « The Intentionality of Sensation », Anscombe asks : What are the immediate objects of sensation ? She focuses on the sense modality of sight and argues that we must distinguish what she calls « material objects » of sight from « intentional objects » of sight. Intentional objects are not objects in the sense of entities. Rather, the idea of an intentional object should be understood on the model of a grammatical object. Let's go through our pattern again[23].

Step 1 : Anscombe asks : What are the « proper » and « immediate » objects of sight ? Some people think that these are the ordinary physical objects around us ; others believe that we immediately only see sense-data or something the like. This disagreement reflects a puzzle that naturally arises. On the one hand, it seems commonsensical to think that you sometimes see things like tables, chairs or dogs. On the other hand, in cases of illusions and hallucinations, we can sometimes truly say of someone that she sees, e.g., a pink elephant although there is no such elephant anywhere near her. In such cases, we might be inclined to say that what the subject sees is a sense-image or something the like. If that is what one sees in cases of illusions and hallucinations, however, then it seems implausible to think that we don't see such sense-images in cases of veridical perception, too – thus rejecting commonsense regarding tables, chairs and the like. And from that position it is not far to skepticism about the external world.

Step 2 : A straightforward answer to the question « What are the objects of sensation ? » would take the form « The objects of sensation are ... », where « ... » is some description of a particular kind of object. Anscombe argues that no account of this type works. After having explained the general structure of her own solution (to which we'll turn below), Anscombe opens the second part of her essay thus :

> « In the philosophy of sense-perception there are two opposing positions. One says that what we are immediately aware of in sensation is sense-impressions, called « ideas » by Berkeley and "sense-data" by Russell. The other, taken up nowadays by "ordinary language" philosophy, says that on the contrary we at any rate *see* objects (in the *wide* modern sense which would include e.g. shadows) without any such

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[23] The order of the steps of our pattern does not match the order of exposition in Anscombe's essay.

intermediaries. […] I wish to say that both these positions are wrong […][24]. »

Hallucinations speak against the ordinary language view. In such cases, we can truly say that someone *sees* something, without there being any object (in the relevant sense) that is seen and without using the verb « to see » in a derivative or secondary sense. Against the sense-data view, Anscombe points out that there really is a sense in which one cannot see what isn't there and that this sense is epistemologically prior and fundamental.

> « [W]e ought to say, not : "Being red is looking red in normal light to the normal-sighted", but rather "Looking red is looking as a thing that *is* red looks in normal light to the normal-sighted"[25]. »

The sense-data theorist cannot easily accept this explanation of « looks red » – at least not for things other than sense-data. Furthermore, the idea that someone who hallucinates is really seeing a sense-image is analogous to the idea that someone who is worshipping a god that does not exist is really worshipping an idea – and the latter claim is clearly false. Thus, the sense-data theorist's solution to the problem of non-existing objects of sensation does not carry over to cases to which it should, at least *prima facie*, carry over.

One might try to find a third kind of straightforward answer by suggesting that the things seen in hallucinations are unreal or non-existing objects. But Anscombe thinks that this suggestion succumbs to the same objection that was raised against sense-data theories. Drawing an analogy between seeing and thinking, she says :

> « [T]he mere fact of real existence (is this now beginning to be opposed to existence of some other kind ?) can't make so very much difference to the analysis of a sentence like "X thought of –". So if the idea is to be brought in when the object doesn't exist, then equally it should be brought in when the object does exist. Yet [in such cases] one is thinking, surely, of [e.g.] Winston Churchill [the man himself][26]. »

It seems that no account of the form « the objects of sensation are … » can be successful. After all, neither « ordinary objects », nor « sense-images » or the like, nor « unreal objects » can fill the place of the dots. And there seems to be no further plausible candidate.

Anscombe thinks that it is a mistake to look for an answer of the form : « the objects of sensation are … » In the first part of her essay, she discusses this issue with view to the

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[24] G. E. M. Anscombe, « The Intentionality of Sensation », », *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe (vol. II)*, op. cit., p. 11.
[25] Ibid., p. 14.
[26] Ibid., p. 5.

more encompassing class of what she calls « intentional objects », and she says :

> « The question [of what an intentional object is] is based on a mistake, namely that an explanatory answer running say "An intentional […] object is such-and-such" is possible and requisite. But this need not be so. Indeed the only reasonable candidates to be answers are the ones we have failed[27]. »

How can the question what kind of entity the objects of sensation are be a mistake ? This will become clearer in the next step.

Step 3 : Anscombe thinks it is helpful, in this situation, to compare our ability to think and talk about objects of sensation to our ability to think and talk about grammatical objects. (And here the « about » is again of Ryle's linguistic variety.) For a similar, but less puzzling, situation arises there. We find out, e.g., what the direct object of the sentence « John sent Mary a book » is by asking : « What did John send Mary (according to the sentence) ? » And we answer : « A book ». However, there might not be any book that John sent Mary. And even if such a book exists, we cannot substitute *salva veritate* co-referring terms in our answer. This seems to suggest that our answer should really be « a book », i.e., that we should mention and not use the word « book ». However, the question « What did John send ? » cannot be answered correctly by saying, « The words "a book" ». Put differently, although there is a sense in which the grammatical object of a sentence is clearly a word or a phrase, you cannot understand what a grammatical object is unless you know how to answer questions like : « What did John send ? » And in the answer « a book » you are using the word « book » in a special way that is analogous to the way in which we use words that describe objects of sensation. The question « What kind of thing is this book that you are talking about ? » does not have any reasonable answer – nor does it need one. Anscombe thinks that this also holds for (a particular use of) questions like this : « What kind of thing is the pink elephant that you say you are seeing ? » Thus, a description of our ability to think and talk about grammatical objects gives us some insight into our ability to think and talk about objects of sensation.

Step 4 : Our puzzle was that it seems that the objects of sensation are either ordinary objects or sense images (or the like) and that neither of these options is acceptable. Anscombe's solution is this : We must distinguish between intentional objects and material objects of sensation. An expression that gives an intentional object of sensation is like « a book » in the answer to « What did John send ? » in the following way : (a) the

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[27] Ibid., p. 8.

thing it mentions might not exist, (b) where the thing exists we cannot always substitute a co-referential expression for our expression *salva veritate*, and (c) what is named can be indeterminate or vague (in a way that ordinary objects cannot be). With the analogy to grammatical objects in mind, we can say all that. And we can say it without being forced to say that we see sense-images (which would be the sense-data theorist's way of explaining these three features)[28]. Turning to the other side of the distinction, the material object of a sensation is given by any expression that is co-referential with an expression that gives an (existing) intentional object of the sensation.

We can use the verb « see » with an intentional or a material object. Those who think that the objects of sensation are ordinary objects treat « to see » as if it could only occur with a material object. That is the use of « see » in which we can say « You cannot see what isn't there ». Anscombe acknowledges that there really is this use of « to see », but she thinks that there is also another use, namely the use with an intentional object. By distinguishing these, we can do justice to the correct motivations behind sense-data theory and those behind direct realism ; and we can do so without having to posit anything like sense-data. Thus, Anscombe's account resolves our philosophical puzzle, without giving a translation or analysis of « object of sensation ».

One upshot of Anscombe's view is that perception must have content. We always perceive things « under a description », as it were. This comes out in the fact that descriptions of what one perceives are intentional in the sense of having features (a)-(c) above. So in spite of rejecting the question « What are the immediate objects of sensation ? », Anscombe puts forward a substantive thesis about perception.

3. Anscombe's Implicit Metaphilosophy

All three papers we have looked at follow the structural pattern described in Section 1. In all three, Anscombe argues for a novel and interesting solution to the respective philosophical puzzle. One might take issue with many of her arguments and theses. Our aim in this last section, though, is not to defend them. Whatever the merits of Anscombe's particular claims in the three discussed papers, we think that Anscombe's argumentative pattern provides a useful approach to philosophical puzzles. And we want

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[28] A sense-data theorist's explanation of the three features would go like this : (a) Images can show things that do not exist. (b) We cannot substitute parts of images that picture the same object for one another without changing the identity of the overall images. (c) There can be an image of, e.g., a tree that does not picture the tree as having a particular number of leaves.

to put this approach on the map of current alternatives in metaphilosophy.

3.1. Her Deflationary Method Produces Substantive Metaphysical Claims

Anscombe's method typically leads to metaphysically deflationary accounts, very broadly construed. Either the puzzling « entity » turns out to be of a different metaphysical kind from what one has been looking for at the outset or the very question after its metaphysical status turns out to be a mistake. In « Rules, Rights and Promises », the necessity that arises from all three is found to be the necessity of a move within a certain practice. There is no « deeper » explanation of this necessity than simply putting the relevant practice in plain view. In « The First Person », we start by looking for a way of picking out a subject. This results in the need for an explanation of what egos, « selves », or « Is » are. Anscombe instead argues that « I » does not refer to any such entity ; it marks a certain perspective on objects and events. And in « The Intentionality of Sensation », Anscombe argues that our talk of the « object » of a perception lets us forget that perceptions are intentional ; they don't have an « object » whose metaphysical status we could then further investigate (except a material object). (Is it a sense datum ? A real table ?)

Notice, however, that the kinds of « deflation » Anscombe offers in the three papers differ in important respects. It does make sense, e.g., to ask after the metaphysical status of a right, at least in the sense in which this question is answered by saying : a right is something « whose existence does depend on human linguistic practice[29] ». This is a substantive metaphysical thesis about rights, since it amounts to a denial of the idea of natural rights. The answer is not a « translation or analysis » because we cannot understand what a practice is without relying on the idea of a rule and, hence, on an antecedent understanding of the necessity that is imposed, by rules, rights and promises. But the result is reached by showing that the relevant kind of necessity cannot be explained in a non-circular fashion [30]. The « deflation » consists in the ungrudging recognition that we cannot dig deeper than an account of our practices of using certain modal expressions. By contrast, Anscombe rejects the question after the metaphysical

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[29] G. E. M. Anscombe, « The Question of Linguistic Idealism », *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe (vol. I)*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1981, p. 118.
[30] Here we leave out the important step form the claim that the necessity involved in rules, rights and promises cannot be explained without circularity to the claim that rules, rights, and promises exist by convention.

status of intentional « objects » of perception as a mistake. Here the « deflation » consists in the claim that the puzzle rests on our impulse to find an entity wherever there is an intentional object. Anscombe « deflates » the object of sensation to something that is not an entity. The « deflation » in « The First Person » is similar to this. After all, « I » does not have a referent. As in the case of rules, rights and promises, however, there is something informative that we can say in response to our initial question. We asked : What does « I » mean ? That is, what is it to grasp the meaning of sentences in which « I » occurs ? And we can say at least this much : « I-thoughts […] are unmediated conceptions […] of states, motions etc., of this object here », i.e. of my body[31].

Notice also what Anscombe does not do. (a) She does not presume that philosophy consists in analyzing concepts. In fact, she typically begins her philosophical investigations where the possibility of providing analyses gives out. (b) She does not pay disproportionate respect to the ordinary use of expressions and concepts[32]. When Anscombe argues that there is no straightforward solution to a problem, she is not restricting herself to solutions that are in accordance with the ordinary use of words. In « The Intentionality of Sensation », e.g., she also discusses the usual suspects in the philosophical tradition, which are often clearly revisionary. Where her arguments are successful, we could hence not evade the conclusion that there is no straightforward answer by changing our way of talking or thinking. She does not stubbornly refuse to consider the possibility that ordinary thought and talk need reform, as some philosophers in the Wittgensteinian tradition are sometimes accused of doing. (c) For the same reason, Anscombe's appeals to our ordinary practices of using certain expressions and concepts as a solution to a puzzle is not aimed at critiquing alternative philosophical theories. She brings in our practices and abilities only after having rejected alternative views. (d) She is not claiming that all philosophical problems rest on confusions. Rather, she merely holds that some important philosophical problems don't have straightforward solutions. And that is something very different.

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[31] G. E. M. Anscombe, « The First Person », art. cit., p. 34.

[32] As Anselm Müller (« G. E. M. Anscombe : Entdeckung einer philosophischen Entdeckerin », in *Anscombe : Aufsätze*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2014, p. 361) puts it, Anscombe « is not an advocate of "ordinary language philosophy", which she thinks pays undue respect to colloquial speech and its nuances ». Roger Teichmann (*The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 228-229) makes a similar point.

3.2. Anscombe's Metaphilosophy in Relation to Current Alternatives

The conception of philosophy implicitly at work in the discussed papers can be summarized thus : (A) Many philosophical problems take the form of « What is *x* ? » or « What does "*x*" mean ? » (B) Solutions to such problems need not take the form of a « translation or analysis ». (C) When the method of analysis gives out, it is often helpful to look at the practices and abilities underlying our talk, thought and action regarding the puzzling phenomenon. Descriptions of these practices and abilities often provide us with an indirect solution to our problem.

To be sure, these three points vastly underspecify Anscombe's conception of philosophy. Nevertheless, it will be helpful to locate the resulting metaphilosophy relative to other metaphilosophies. To this end, we can adapt Kevin Sharp's[33] helpful classification of philosophical methods. Sharp distinguishes six philosophical methods. In the list below we have changed Sharp's ordering and added a few names. (For each of the named philosophers, some might question whether they actually fall into the respective category, but our point here simply is to sketch a map.)

1. « Methodological Naturalism » claims that philosophy is continuous with the sciences and should be pursued as the most abstract and theoretical part of the sciences. (W.v.O. Quine)

2. « Experimental Philosophy » suggests we should investigate our intuitions and concepts empirically. (J. Knobe, E. Machery)

3. « Conceptual analysis » tries to solve philosophical puzzles through finding illuminating *a priori* or analytic connections between concepts. (A.J. Ayer)

4. « Reductive explanations » try to explain philosophically puzzling phenomena by means of some kind of reduction to less puzzling phenomena via translation, *a priori* entailment, or metaphysical constitution/grounding/identity relations (or a combination thereof). (J.J. Smart, F. Jackson on ethics)

5. « Quietism » about phenomena « avoids proposing and defending philosophical theories, and instead sees philosophical problems as the result of confusions that are often caused by misunderstanding language » (Scharp 2013, Sect. 0.1.5). (J. McDowell is often named as a proponent, but he sometimes protests against this label.)

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[33] K. Sharp, *Replacing Truth*, Oxford University Press, 2013, Sect. 0.1.5.

6. « Analytic Pragmatism », which « [i]nstead of emphasizing the relations between sets of concepts on which conceptual analysis or reductive explanation focuses » looks « to relations between how words are used and the concepts those words express » (Scharp 2013, Sect. 0.1.5). (W. Sellars, R. Brandom)

Anscombe's view clearly differs from Methodological Naturalism and Experimental Philosophy in that, for her, philosophical problems are typically problems that cannot be fruitfully addressed by empirical means. The method of conceptual analysis, too, has limited applicability for her. After all, she holds that in some important cases, there are principled reasons to think that we cannot give a « translation or analysis » of the crucial concepts. For the same reason, Anscombe must think that there are cases where no reductive explanation is possible. For we cannot find the translations or *a priori* entailments or metaphysical relations that would be needed for such an explanation. Note that Anscombe's descriptions of practices are not (attempted) reductive explanations. It is clear, e.g., that Anscombe does not think that we can give a reductive explanation of what a rule is – doing so would mean to escape Hume's Circle.[34]

Anscombe is also not a quietist. She believes that philosophy can yield interesting and surprising results. She clearly does not think, e.g., that her claims that the normative force of rules, rights and promises depends on human practices or that « I » is not a referring expression are unsurprising or not substantive. Furthermore, she is not reluctant to put forward philosophical theses and theories.

Analytic Pragmatism seems closer to Anscombe's way of doing philosophy than any of the other methods. Like Sellars and Brandom, Anscombe believes that a large part of the philosopher's task is to describe the use of terms that are crucial for a given philosophical topic (such as the terms « promise » or « I »). For the analytic pragmatists, however, most philosophically interesting concepts, on reflection, turn out to be « covertly metalinguistic ». The role of these concepts is to « make explicit », describe, convey or express fundamental and universal features of our talk and thought. These concepts may, e.g., allow us to express ideas regarding the conceptual framework that we are using. Or they « convey » the same ideas as overtly metalinguistic claims[35]. For

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[34] Anscombe's attitude towards « purely metaphysical reductions » that do not claim to give any explanation of, e.g., the concept of a right is complex. She has her own, very special, version of « nothing over and above »-theses. See her « On Brute Facts » (*The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe (vol. III)*, op. cit., 1981).

[35] (see R. Brandom, *From Empiricism to Expressivism : Brandom Reads Sellars*, Harvard University Press, 2014, Ch. 1 and 7, for a helpful discussion of this)

Anscombe, on the other hand, the mere fact that there is no « translation or analysis » of a concept and that we must understand it through describing the practices in which it is used, does not imply that this concept has the role of expressing, conveying or making explicit something about these practices (although some of the concepts in which Anscombe is interested might be of this metalinguistic type).

The pattern we have described does hence not fit nicely into any of the six categories that Sharp helpfully distinguishes. We think that Anscombe's view deserves careful consideration and its own place on the map of current metaphilosophy.

3.3. Anscombe Values T-Philosophy

In Anscombe's writings, we can see a version of the conceptual turn (broadly construed) at work that does not treat philosophical problems as pseudo-problems, as resting on confusions that are particular to the philosopher or as problems that are in an important sense merely about thought and talk and not about the world[36]. In the papers we discussed, e.g., Anscombe argues that rules, rights and promises depend for their existence on social practices, that there are no such things as Cartesian Egos or the like, and that perception has content. These are not just claims about the way we think or talk, nor are these claims responses to pseudo-problems or something that is obvious to everyone who is not in the grip of some confusion induced by philosophy. Thus, Anscombe must think that putting forward substantive and surprising philosophical theses about the world can be rational. (Naturally, reflecting on our conceptual abilities and practices can be a crucial step on the way to such a thesis.) This sets Anscombe's view apart from metaphilosophies like the one Paul Horwich[37] attributes to Wittgenstein.

Of course, Anscombe's way of doing philosophy is heavily influenced by Wittgenstein. In « The Reality of the Past », e.g., she says : « Everywhere in this paper I have imitated his [i.e. Wittgenstein's] ideas and methods of discussion[38] ». And Anscombe, just like Wittgenstein, « is infuriatingly prone to take each case on its merits[39] », rather than to apply a general theory.

However, she is equally influenced by the views of Aristotle, Aquinas, Hume and

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[36] For a defense of conceptual analysis against Williamson's (*The Philosophy of Philosophy*, Blackwell, 2007) criticism that makes some related points see M. Balcerak Jackson & B. Balcerak Jackson's « Understanding and Philosophical Methodology » (*Philosophical Studies* 161/2, 2012, pp. 185-205).

[37] P. Horwich, *Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

[38] G. E. M. Anscombe, « The Reality of the Past », art. cit., p. 114n.

[39] R. Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, op. cit., p. 1.

Frege – at least some of which Horwich would presumably classify as « T-philosophy ». Anscombe does not share Horwich's conviction that « T-philosophy is indeed irrational[40] ». Rather, her philosophy is an attempt to synthesize analytic philosophy with the ancient and medieval tradition.

Conclusion

We hope to have accomplished two things : first, we hope that our description of the pattern we identified in Anscombe's work helps in understanding that work. Seeing the pattern can help to identify the crucial claims of a given paper as well as Anscombe's general stance on what philosophical problems are and how to tackle them. Second, we hope to have shown that Anscombe's method – or at least the part we have described here – does not fit easily into any preconceived metaphilosophy. Perhaps we have even convinced the reader that Anscombe's implicit conception of philosophy is worth exploring and deserves a place in current debates in metaphilosophy.

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