

DISCUSIÓN

CRÍTICA, *Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía*
Vol. XXVI, No. 78 (diciembre 1994): 97–113

ANSCOMBE AND THE FIRST PERSON*

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1. There is a natural and common sense view of the first person pronoun according to which, whatever uncommon or unique features that pronoun may possess, it is a referring expression. In particular, a given token of 'I' refers to the human being who utters it. (Perhaps there could be 'I'-users who are not human—but that possibility is not relevant here.) This view explains why *X*'s utterance 'I am *F*' is true if and only if '*X* is *F*' is true: the tokens of 'I' and '*X*' are co-referential. Of course, the referential view cannot be the whole story about 'I'. Nothing in what has just been said explains why 'I'-judgements are expressions of self-consciousness. But it is surely an indispensable part of the story.

In her fascinating paper "The First Person", Elizabeth Anscombe attempts to undermine this common sense view: "'I' is neither a name nor another kind of referring expression whose logical role is to make a reference, *at all*." (32)¹

* Thanks to Michael Smith for his helpful comments.

¹ E. Anscombe, "The First Person," *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind* (Collected Papers, vol. II), Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1981, pp. 21–36.

Why does Anscombe defend this *prima facie* outrageous conclusion? Her paper contains a number of arguments for this conclusion which, though not ultimately cogent, are always illuminating. There is much in Anscombe's article with which to agree; but the sober and true things she has to say can be accommodated without forfeiting the referential status of 'I', or so I shall argue.

Although Anscombe never mentions Wittgenstein by name, many have taken her conclusion to be wittgensteinian in spirit. I think it is an exegetical mistake to hold that Wittgenstein denied the referentiality of 'I' (in any of its uses).² However, one of Anscombe's arguments con-sorts well with Wittgenstein's remark that, in one use of 'I' (what he called the 'as subject' use), "we don't use . . . ['I'] . . . because we recognise a particular person by his bodily characteristics; and this creates the illusion that we use this word to refer to something bodiless, which, however, has its seat in our body. In fact this seems to be the real ego, the one of which it was said, '*Cogito, ergo sum*'" (*Blue Book*, 69).

Anscombe's article contains three main lines of reasoning for the conclusion that (all) occurrences of 'I' are non-referential. One line presses the claim that the dictum 'I is the word that each person uses to refer to himself' is either circular or else fails to explain what is special about 'I' (namely, that its competent use manifests self-consciousness). This disjunction is held to be fatal for the dictum. A second line begins with the following request: "if 'I' expresses a way its object is reached [. . .] we want to know what that way is and how it comes about that the only object reached in that way by anyone is identical with himself". (23) Anscombe believes that this request cannot be

² See my "Wittgenstein on Solipsism and Avowals" in B. Garrett & K. Mulligan (eds.), *Themes from Wittgenstein*, RSSS Working Papers in Philosophy no. 3, Australian National University, 1993.

met, and concludes that 'I' has features that do not fit with the idea that its function is to *refer* to an object. The third line of reasoning incorporates (what I shall call) the Tank Argument, the conclusion of which is that "*if* 'I' is a referring expression, then Descartes was right about what the referent was". (31) That is, given the various guarantees to which 'I' is subject, if 'I' refers, it refers to an immaterial Cartesian Ego. (It is this argument which comports with the quotation from the *Blue Book*.) I want to evaluate these three arguments.

2. First, however, it may be useful to elucidate what many have taken to be salient features of 'I' (some of which are cited by Anscombe): (i) Competent use of 'I' is governed by the following self-reference rule: a token of 'I' refers to whoever produced it. (ii) A token of 'I' is guaranteed against reference-failure. (iii) An 'I'-user cannot "take the wrong object to be the object he means by 'I'. (The bishop may take the lady's knee for his, but could he take the lady herself to be himself?)". (30) (iv) In the case of 'I', there is no space for a distinction between actual referent and intended referent. Keith Donnellan's referential/attributional distinction is irrelevant to the semantics of 'I': there is no attributive reading of 'I'. (v) Competent use of 'I' can survive both total loss of 'objective' beliefs about oneself (e.g., beliefs about one's nature, history, and spatial and temporal location), and also acquisition of massively false beliefs about oneself (e.g., 'I am Caesar').

There are also interesting distinctions to be made within the category of 'I'-judgements. In particular, for a certain class of present-tense psychological self-ascriptions —e.g., avowals such as 'I am in pain'— the following hold: (vi) A sincere avowal is authoritative, and criterial for any corresponding third person attribution. (vii) Sincere avowals are immune from doubt (at least in standard cases). (viii)

Avowals do not have grounds. (ix) Knowledge-claims involving avowals are redundant (a fact that much impressed Wittgenstein: see, e.g., *Investigations* 246). (x) An avowal ‘I am F ’ is arrived at in a way that does not involve any ‘outer’ perception of inference (e.g., an avowal ‘I am in pain’ is not inferred *via* premises ‘ X is in pain’ and ‘I am X ’). (xi) An avowal ‘I am F ’ is arrived at in such a way that the question ‘Someone is F , but is it me?’ makes no sense.³ These eleven platitudes give the meaning of the pronoun ‘I’. And these platitudes, according to Anscombe, force the conclusion that ‘I’ is not referential.

3. Anscombe’s first argument against the referentiality of ‘I’ springs from certain intuitive differences between sentences of the form (a) X believes that he is F , and sentences of the form (b) X believes that he himself is F . Castañeda pointed out that there are situations in which sentences of form (a) are true, while corresponding sentences of form (b) are false.⁴ For example, suppose that X is amnesiac, but learns through a newspaper that X is F . So X believes that he (X) is F , but does not believe that he himself is F : (a) is true and (b) is false. (I take that (b) implies (a); but

³ There is much to be said about these features, which need to be carefully unpacked. But I will just mention one reservation about feature (iii). As it stands, (iii) rules out perfectly possible situations in which we would be inclined to say that I had misidentified myself. For example, in a mirror or photograph, I may single out a person X and falsely judge that person to be myself. In similar circumstances, the bishop could indeed take the lady to be himself. Anscombe’s oversight may here be linked to her failure to distinguish between ‘as subject’ and ‘as object’ uses of ‘I’. In its ‘as object’ use, misidentification of the subject is possible; not so in its ‘as subject’ use. What is true in (iii) is captured in (xi). (Conditions (x) and (xi) best capture what Wittgenstein intended by the ‘as subject’ use of ‘I’. See *Blue Book*, pp. 66–67. For a commentary, see my “Wittgenstein and the First Person” (forthcoming).)

⁴ See, e.g., H.-N. Castañeda, “He: A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness,” *Ratio*, v. 8, 1966, pp. 130–157.

note that there can be cases in which (b) is true, yet X fails to believe that X is F .) Whenever (b) is true, we can infer that X is disposed to think or say ‘I am F ’; we have no such guarantee when (a) is true.

The difference between such occurrences of ‘he’ has been marked by grammarians as that between the ‘direct’ (‘he’) and the ‘indirect’ (‘he himself’) reflexive. Castañeda introduced a new piece of terminology to mark the distinction: his ‘he*’ corresponds to the indirect reflexive. The key word here is ‘mark’. All we have as a datum is a potential divergence in the truth-values of sentences of type (a) and corresponding sentences of type (b). We have, as yet, no explanation of this potential divergence. It would be premature to infer that the occurrences of ‘he’ in (a) and (b) belong to different syntactic or semantic categories. (No one thinks that ‘Tully’ and ‘Cicero’ are expressions of different syntactic or semantic types just because X can believe that Cicero is bald, but not believe that Tully is bald.)⁵ Arguably, the differences between sentences of type (a) and sentences of type (b) can be traced to certain *epistemological* differences, different ways of knowing truths about oneself (see especially conditions (x) and (xi) above). These ways correspond to first and third person modes of presentation of oneself, of the person that one is. Be that as it may, we can certainly acknowledge, which is all Anscombe needs, that there are significant differences between two types of anaphoric occurrence of ‘he’ in intentional contexts.⁶

If we retain the terminology of ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ reflexives, Anscombe’s argument can be presented as follows. Is the reflexive in the dictum “‘I’ is the word each one uses in speaking of himself” direct or indirect? It cannot be

⁵ In opposition to some current trends, I assume that there are referentially opaque contexts.

⁶ The qualification ‘intentional’ is important. It would be strictly senseless to say, e.g., ‘Concerning Nixon: he* weighs 100 kg.’.

direct, since attributions using the direct reflexive can be true, even though the subject lacks the relevant piece of fully self-consciousness self-knowledge (as in our example of the amnesiac X). It cannot be indirect, since the dictum will then be circular. To say ‘ A believes that he himself is F ’ is to attribute to A a first person mode of thinking about himself. We would end up explaining the first person pronoun in terms of the first person mode of presentation—and that is no explanation!

It is important to realise that these are our alternatives; but it is a mistake to think that we face a genuine dilemma. Anscombe has done nothing to show that the circularity of the second horn is vicious or otherwise objectionable. It would be objectionable if the only acceptable account of ‘I’ had to be reductive, if our use of ‘I’ had to be analysed in terms which do not themselves presuppose the first person. But there is no reason to think that our analysis is subject to such a constraint. True, it would be fairly useless if *all* we could say was: “‘I’ is that term that each person uses to refer to himself *in the first person way*.”⁷ But, as noted in the previous section, there are many illuminating things to be said about the first person mode of presentation, and that is why the circularity of the dictum is inoffensive.

4. The observation that we cannot analyse ‘I’ in terms of the direct reflexive is reinforced by Anscombe’s discussion of the ‘ A ’-users. We are to imagine a community in which each person has a name (ranging from ‘ B ’ to ‘ Z ’) stamped

⁷ Just as it would be fairly useless if all we could say about the concept *red* was: x is red if and only if x is red. The familiar response-dependent analysis — x is red if and only if x looks red to standard observers under standard lighting conditions— is illuminating even though strictly circular. (It is illuminating because it reveals links between the target concept and other concepts —looking red, standard conditions, etc.) The dictum about ‘I’ can reasonably be thought to possess such benign circularity.

on their chest and back. Everyone also has the name ‘*A*’ stamped on their wrists. Each person in this community has two proper names: one that is unique and one that is shared (‘*A*’), but which each person uses only to refer to himself. These are the only devices of self-reference in this community. Reports on one’s own actions are made on the basis of observation (using the name on one’s wrist), and on the basis of inference (including inference from the testimony of others). Hence, ‘*A*’ is not a translation of our ‘*I*’ since “our description does not include self-consciousness on the part of people who use the name ‘*A*’”. (24) The ‘*A*’-users suffer from the same “lapse of self-consciousness” (36) displayed by William James’ character Baldy. “We were driving [...] in a wagonette; the door flew open and *X*, alias ‘Baldy’, fell out on the road. We pulled up at once, and then he said ‘Did anyone fall out?’ [...] When told that Baldy fell out he said ‘Did Baldy fall out? Poor Baldy!’” (quoted on 36).

The example of the ‘*A*’-users is introduced to illustrate the falsity of the claim that ‘*I*’ is not a proper name because everyone uses it only to refer to himself. It is also pressed into service for other ends. But it is important to be clear about the example. When an ‘*A*’-user says ‘*A* is *F*’ his judgement is always based on third person or publicly accessible grounds, e.g., observation of his bodily condition, of inference from the testimony of others (on hearing ‘*B* is *F*’, *B* can infer ‘*A* is *F*’ given that he accepts ‘*A* is *B*’). This means that the ‘*A*’-users are *very* unlike us. If the ‘*A*’-users are conscious beings who can feel pleasure and pain, their self-ascriptions of pain will have to be based on behavioural data. If they are not conscious beings, they are even less like us. This does not invalidate the example, but it makes it clear that the ‘*A*’-users (and Baldy) are radically different from psychologically normal human beings.

There are a number of ways in which ‘I’ contrasts with ‘A’. First, unlike ‘I’, the name ‘A’ is not governed by the self-reference rule. Anscombe writes that “[t]he ‘A’-user [using ‘A’] means to speak of a certain human being, one who falls under his observation in a rather special way”. (30) This “special way” gives the sense of ‘A’: it is the “characteristically limited and also characteristically privileged views” (24) that an ‘A’-user has of himself. “[E]xcept in mirrors he never sees the whole person, and can only get rather special views of what he does see.” (24) This description implies that, in certain circumstances, an ‘A’-user may refer to someone else using ‘A’, or fail to refer at all. (The ‘A’-user may mistake the wrist of another for his wrist, or he may hallucinate an ‘A’-inscribed wrist.)⁸ In contrast, the self-reference rule guarantees uses of ‘I’ against both misreference and reference-failure.

Second, many ‘I’-judgements are criterionless (not based on observation or inference); all ‘A’-judgements are based on criteria. Third, some uses of ‘I’ are immune to error through misidentification of the subject; all ‘A’-judgements are liable to such error. It is these contrasts which give content to the truth that ‘I’ is an expression of self-consciousness: self-consciousness *is* having self-directed thoughts which have those features ((i)–(xi) above) distinctive of ‘I’. And if those features cannot be characterised without invoking the first person mode of presentation, then we will have shown that and why the concept of self-consciousness is irreducible.⁹ Consequently, we can agree with Anscombe

⁸ Hence, given her own characterisation of the ‘A’-users, Anscombe is wrong to attribute guaranteed reference to ‘A’. (30) For more on this, see H. Noonan “Identity and the First Person” in C. Diamond & J. Teichman (eds.), *Intention and Intentionality*, London: Harvester, 1979, pp. 55–70.

⁹ It does not follow, of course, that self-consciousness is ontologically irreducible. No objection has been raised to the thesis that purely

that self-consciousness is best understood, not as consciousness of a self, but as “consciousness that such-and-such holds of oneself” (26), provided that this consciousness incorporates a first person way of being given that such-and-such holds of oneself.

Anscombe thinks that these contrasts give us reasons to deny that ‘I’ is a name or any other type of referring expression (used by a human being to refer to himself under a certain aspect). The referential view is “blown up out of a misconstrual of the reflexive pronoun”. (25) Why?

[1] “That it is nonsense comes out [...] in the following fact: it would be a question what guaranteed that one got hold of the right self.” (25) The guarantee of successful reference features in her later argument that, if ‘I’ refers, it can only refer to a Cartesian Ego. It also appears in a principle of symmetry argument in favour of the non-referential status of ‘I’.¹⁰ But, for all that Anscombe has said, there is no reason why we cannot explain the guarantee to surefire reference by citing the self-reference rule which governs ‘I’: a token of ‘I’ refers to whoever produced it.

[2] If a self is a human being, in a certain aspect, or under a certain conception, then we will be “driven to look for something that, for each ‘I’-user, will be the conception re-

physical systems can be self-conscious. (This explains why it is unsound to argue: (i) if purely physical systems are self-conscious, the concept of self-consciousness is reducible to concepts of some other range; (ii) the concept of self-consciousness is not reducible; so (iii) purely physical systems cannot be self-conscious. The first premise of this argument for dualism is false.)

¹⁰ The principle is that ‘I’ is referential if and only if misreference using ‘I’ is possible. This argument is not explicitly endorsed by Anscombe, though it hovers under the surface of some of her remarks. Wittgenstein was fond of such *prima facie* very weak arguments (see e.g., *Philosophical Remarks* VI).

lated to the supposed name ‘I’”. (26) This is true even if ‘I’ is thought to be a demonstrative (akin to ‘this’ or ‘that’) since “there is the same need of a ‘conception’ through which it attaches to its object”. (28–29)¹¹ Anscombe assumes, with Frege, that every referring expression has a sense, or conception of its object, associated with it. This assumption has been questioned by the so-called ‘direct reference’ theorists. But, even given the Fregean framework, why cannot we regard *human being* as the sortal governing ‘I’, in just the way that *city* covers ‘Sydney’ and *kangaroo* covers ‘Skippy’?

Anscombe has two worries about this suggestion. If a token of ‘I’ refers to the human being who uttered it, then the relation of reference together with the sortal *human being* should enable us to explain the puzzling properties of ‘I’. But they do not: the name ‘Richard Nixon’ refers to a human being, and that name has none of the puzzling features of ‘I’. But why would anyone think that the interesting features of ‘I’ have to be explained solely in terms of the sortal *human being* and the relation of reference? Obviously they cannot; we have to appeal to the features (i)–(xi) above. Second, Anscombe thinks that *human being* cannot serve as a covering sortal for ‘I’ since, if ‘I’ refers, it can only refer to an immaterial Ego and not to a human being. The only sortal that could cover ‘I’, if it were a referring expression, would be *Ego*. I will discuss this argument shortly.

[3] Anscombe claims that ‘I’ is not a proper name (nor, presumably, any other type of referring expression) since,

¹¹ It is striking that Anscombe never compares ‘I’ with the semantic category to which it appears to have the strongest affinity: that of indexicals. ‘Here’ and ‘now’, for example, have many features in common with ‘I’. (The proper interpretation of the Tank Argument will allow us to make sense of this otherwise remarkable omission. See below.)

if it were, “a repeated use of ‘I’ in connection with the same self would have to involve a reidentification of that self [...] but this is not any part of the role of ‘I’. The corresponding reidentification *was* involved in the use of ‘A’, and that makes an additional difference between them”. (27) It is true that certain uses of ‘I’ are criterionless: when I come to believe, in the normal way, that I am in pain, I do not judge that something which satisfies a certain criterion or condition is in pain. (Contrast the judgement ‘I am 6” tall’ made on the basis of observation.) Similarly, my use of ‘I’ in judgements of memory or intention do not involve any reidentification of their subject. In first person judgements of memory and intention, judgements whose content builds in the subjects’ identity over time, a person does not need to ‘keep track’ of an object. Knowledge of one’s own identity over time does not involve the exercise of a skill, in contrast to one’s knowledge of the identity over time of other people, places, or times.

Why does Anscombe think that if ‘I’ were a referring term its continued use by the same individual would have to involve a reidentification of its object? She must assume that the continued use of any referring term involves a reidentification of its object. In particular, since an ‘A’-user’s continued use of ‘A’ involves a reidentification of its object, the same must be true of ‘I’ if it is a referring term. But this does not follow. There is no reason why ‘I’ cannot be a referring term even though its continued use does not involve any reidentification of its object. The absence of any need for reidentification is a consequence of the semantics of ‘I’ (in particular, features (i)–(xi) listed above). In sum, Anscombe has given us no good reason to think that the semantic features of ‘I’ militate against its claim to be a referring term.¹²

¹² If ‘I’ is a referring term, to which category of referring terms

5. Which features of ‘I’ are supposed to ensure that if ‘I’ refers, it refers to an immaterial Cartesian Ego? “Let us waive the question about the sense of ‘I’ and ask *only* how reference to the right object could be guaranteed [... T]his reference could only be surefire if the referent of ‘I’ were both freshly defined with each use of ‘I’, and also remained in view so long as something was taken to be I [... I]t seems to follow that what ‘I’ stands for must be a Cartesian Ego.” (30–31)

These features are exploited in the Tank Argument. “[I]magine that I get into a state of ‘sensory deprivation’. [...] I tell myself ‘I won’t let this happen again!’. If the object meant by ‘I’ is this body, this human being, then in these circumstances it won’t be present to my senses; and how else can it be ‘present to’ me? Am I reduced to, as it were, ‘referring in absence’? I have not lost my ‘self-consciousness’; nor can what I mean by ‘I’ be an object no longer present to me.” (31)

In different words: if ‘I’ refers, what I mean by ‘I’ is an object that is always ‘present to’ me. In a sensorily deprived state, no material object (e.g., human body or human being) is ‘present to’ me. Since I remain a competent ‘I’-user whilst sensorily deprived, what is ‘present to’ me must be something immaterial, a Cartesian Ego. But the Cartesian view is plainly absurd, and has “the intolerable difficulty of requiring an identification of the same referent in different ‘I’-thoughts”. (31) We should reject the assumption that

does it belong? Anscombe attempts to create embarrassment for the referential view of ‘I’ by suggesting that we cannot happily see ‘I’ as belonging to the categories of either *proper name*, *demonstrative*, or *definite description*. But, as noted, Anscombe nowhere considers the possibility that ‘I’ might be classified under the category of indexicals; nor, anyway, does she have the resources to rebut the thought that ‘I’ is a *sui generis* referring expression.

led to this result, and conclude that 'I' is not a referring expression.

Anscombe makes two questionable assumptions in the course of this argument. First, she assumes that if 'I' refers, its object must be 'present to' me. But the thesis that self-reference implies self-presentation of self-acquaintance has little to recommend it. As Hume recognised, it is simply false that I am 'present to' myself whenever I use 'I'. There is no distinctive introspective phenomenology of the self.¹³ Second, Anscombe assumes that if 'I' were to refer to my body, then the referent of 'I' would have to 'present' itself to me *as a body*. This assumption stands in need of support. Why assume that if the self were something bodily, and were perceived introspectively, it would have to be perceived *as something bodily*?¹⁴

These assumptions have a deeper source. The underlying presupposition is that if 'I' were a referring term, it would be analogous to the demonstrative 'this' rather than to the indexical 'here'. On one plausible view, 'this' differs from 'here' in the following respect. It is necessary in order for a subject to individuate an object demonstratively that he actually has information deriving from that object. This constraint is not necessary in order for a subject to think of a place as here; he only needs to be *disposed* to have his 'here'-thinking controlled by appropriate information. (See Evans Chs. 6 & 7, esp. 216 n. 21.) Anscombe's guiding thought in the Tank Argument is that if 'I' refers, it is a

¹³ Anscombe does offer the following argument in favour of her first assumption. "[I]f the thinking did not guarantee the presence, the existence of the referent could be doubted." (28) This is unconvincing: the whole point of the *Cogito* was to show that thinking 'I . . .' alone guarantees the existence of the thinker. Descartes' discussion makes vivid the force of the self-reference rule governing 'I'.

¹⁴ See S. Shoemaker, "Introspection and the Self" in P. French, T. Uehling & H.K. Wettstein (eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, X, 1986, p. 113.

device of demonstrative reference, rather than of indexical reference. It is this assumption which needs to be justified.

Even if this assumption could be made good, Anscombe's intermediate conclusion that "[n]othing but a Cartesian Ego will serve" (31) may not constitute a stable resting place (independently of worries about reidentifying the same Ego). Surely, no immaterial Ego is 'present to' me in a state of total sensory deprivation or at any other time. It would have been better if the Tank Argument had simply read: in a state of sensory deprivation, no object (material or immaterial) is 'present to' me. A necessary condition of self-reference is that the referent of 'I' is present to me; so, 'I' is not a referring expression. However, this modified argument, which requires the additional assumption that 'I' never refers if it fails to refer in the sensory deprivation tank, is still subject to the above criticisms.¹⁵

¹⁵ What is Anscombe's positive view of 'I'? This is sketched in the last few pages of her article. Neither 'I am *EA*' nor 'I am this thing here' is a proposition of identity. Rather " 'I am this thing here' means: this thing here is the thing, the person (in the 'offences against the person's' sense) of whose action *this* idea of action is an idea, of whose movements *these* ideas of movements are ideas". (33) " 'The person' is a living human body." (33) " '[T]his body is my body' means 'my idea that I am standing up is verified by this body, if it is standing up'." (34) "These 'I'-thoughts [such as 'I am sitting'] 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 [...] are unmediated conceptions [...] of states [...] of this object here [*EA*]." (34)

I have three comments to make about Anscombe's positive view. First, there is much with which one can agree —e.g., that a person is a human being, and that a person can have 'unmediated' access to a range of states that he is in, such as sitting. The observation that one can have 'unmediated' knowledge of physical self-ascriptions such as 'I am sitting' prefigures Gareth Evans' insight that 'as subject' uses of 'I' are not confined to mental self-ascriptions. (See Evans Ch. 7, esp. Sect. 7.2.) We could retain these truths while dropping the restriction that 'I' is not a referring term.

Second, note that Anscombe cannot be offering a reductive account of 'I'. That is, the demonstrative '*this* idea' in the phrase "whose action

6. In sum, we have been given no good reason to deny the referential status of ‘I’.¹⁶ It does not follow that ‘I’ is a referring expression but, as Anscombe is aware, two considerations strongly favour such a view. First, ‘I’ has the same “syntactical place” (29) as a referring expression. Second, an occurrence of ‘I’ in a sentence ‘I am *F*’, uttered by *X*, can be replaced *salva veritate* by a name of *X* (e.g., ‘*X*’). Both considerations make a powerful case for the referentiality of ‘I’. But Anscombe is not convinced. She objects to the first consideration on the grounds that it is “absurd” to argue from syntax to reference — “no one thinks that ‘it is raining’ contains a referring expression,

this idea of action is an idea” must denote a first person mode of access to an idea. If it did not, ‘I’ would not be guaranteed to possess features (i)–(xi) above.

Third, Anscombe thinks that her positive theory cannot easily accommodate purely mental self-ascriptions such as ‘I see a variety of colours’. What verifies such a self-ascription? “Of course, you may say, if you like, that this is verified if this person here sees a variety of colours, but the question is, what is it for it to be so verified?” (35) But this question seems hard to answer only because Anscombe is working with an impoverished conception of what it is to be a human being — “a conception of the identity of human beings in which human life is conceived as what is left over after a Cartesian skimming off of ‘cogitation’.” (J.H. McDowell, “The First Person,” *Reading Parfit*, Ed. J. Dancy, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993. McDowell’s criticism of Locke applies equally to Anscombe.) If, instead, we think of human beings as essentially both mental and physical beings, there is no reason why “[it] is verified if this person here sees a variety of colours” is not a good enough answer to the question of what verifies the self-ascription ‘I see a variety of colours’.

¹⁶ Evans has claimed that ‘I’ is not immune to reference-failure (see Evans 7.6.). A permanently envatted subject, force fed hallucinations by scientists, could not acquire an “adequate Idea of himself” since “a considerable element of the subject’s conception of himself [...] derives from nothing.” (250) These claims obviously deserve further comment, but I note here that they pose no serious threat to the thesis that ‘I’ is referential. That thesis was always implicitly assumed to be conditional on a subject’s *competent* use of ‘I’ (contrast a talking parrot) or the subject’s possession of a *coherent* Idea of himself.

‘it’”. (30) The analogy is lame. The non-referential character of such uses of ‘it’ is confirmed in other ways: for example, we cannot infer ‘Something is raining’ from ‘it is raining’. But we *can* infer ‘Someone is in pain’ from ‘I am in pain’.

Anscombe objects to the second observation on the grounds that although the rule “If X asserts something with ‘I’ as subject, his assertion will be true if and only if what he asserts is true of X ” is perfectly correct, it is not a “sufficient account” of ‘I’, since it does not distinguish between ‘I’ and ‘ A ’. (32) This is true, but no one has suggested that the truth-value link rule gives the complete account of ‘I’. Anscombe’s objection is irrelevant. We can still maintain that the best explanation of the correctness of the rule is the *co-reference* of ‘I’ and ‘ X ’.

7. Anscombe ends her article with some comments on the story of Baldy, her prototype ‘ A ’-user. She says of Baldy that “[h]e did not have what I call ‘unmediated agent-or-patient conceptions of actions, happenings and states’”. These conceptions are subjectless. That is, they do not involve the connection of what is understood by a predicate with a distinctly conceived subject. The (deeply rooted) grammatical illusion of a subject is what generates all the errors we have been considering”. (36)

Here, as elsewhere in Anscombe’s article, there is much that is right. Baldy does lack ‘unmediated’ conceptions of his states and actions. But the assertion that ‘unmediated’ conceptions are ‘subjectless’ runs together two distinct thoughts, one good, the other bad. The good thought is that when I think, in an ‘unmediated’ or ‘as subject’ way, that I am F , the concept of a subject does not enter into a description of my experience of having F .¹⁷ This should be

¹⁷ I take this to be the point of Wittgenstein’s remark, quoted by Moore, that “‘the idea of a person’ does not enter into the description

distinguished from the bad thought according to which 'unmediated' conceptions are subjectless in the sense that there is no subject to which 'I' refers. There is indeed no 'distinctly conceived subject' in unmediated conceptions of one's states and doings (that is what makes them unmediated); but this does not imply that there is no subject. The subject of first person reference exists. It is not an 'illusion' or a shadow cast by the intriguing features of the pronoun 'I'.

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Recibido: 19 de marzo de 1994

of 'having toothache'". (G.E. Moore, "Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–1933," *Philosophical Papers*, New York: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 308–309.) It may also be what he meant by the claim "Visual space has no owner" (*Philosophical Remarks*, 100).