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Author(s): Andy Hamilton

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ANSCOMBIAN AND CARTESIAN SCEPTICISM

BY ANDY HAMILTON

I. THE ARGUMENT FROM SENSORY DEPRIVATION

In 'The First Person',¹ Elizabeth Anscombe presents a number of arguments intended to show that, in spite of appearances to the contrary, the first-person singular pronoun is not a referring expression. The most important of these – I shall call it the Argument from Sensory Deprivation – she characterizes as follows:

Sight is cut off, and I am locally anaesthetized everywhere, perhaps floated in a tank of tepid water; I am unable to speak, or to touch any part of my body with any other. Now 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? But have I lost what I mean by 'I'? . . . I have not lost my 'self-consciousness'; nor can what I mean by 'I' be an object no longer present to me. (p. 31)²

What follows, Anscombe argues, is that *if* 'I' is regarded as a referring expression, only a Cartesian Ego will serve as the referent. But, she argues, since Cartesian Egos are imponderable, we must contrapose and deny the original, unquestioned, assumption that 'I' is a referring expression.

Later, Anscombe briefly refers to a different (and I will argue) superior version of the Argument from Sensory Deprivation: in the tank, I may doubt whether I have a body, but not whether I have self-consciousness (p. 34). Her apparent adoption of the methods of Cartesian scepticism here yields, as in the first version, the unCartesian conclusion that 'I' does not refer; neither to something embodied, nor to an immaterial, thinking thing.

¹ In her *Collected Philosophical Papers Vol. II* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981); also in P. Yourgrau (ed.), *Demonstratives* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

² Subsequent unqualified references are to Anscombe's article, in her *Collected Philosophical Papers Vol. II*. Note that the sensory deprivation is total; it includes deprivation of kinaesthetic sensation (proprioception) – consciousness of posture, position, etc.

Anscombe bases her argument on guarantees against reference-failure that 'I' exhibits:

- (i) There can be no 'unnoticed substitution' of the referent of 'I' (p. 31).
- (ii) The object referred to by 'I' must exist (the 'I'-user cannot fail to refer to an existing object).
- (iii) The 'I'-user succeeds in referring to the object he or she intends to refer to, provided that the use of 'I' is comprehending (pp. 29–30).

These guarantees arouse Anscombe's Wittgensteinian suspicions. She feels that 'if you can't be wrong, you can't be right either', and that the guarantees of correctness are empty. Underlying this suspicion is a more pervasive Fregean concern that 'the use of a name for an object is connected with a conception of that object'; that a sortal term must be supplied for each putative proper name (pp. 26–8). Anscombe argues that only a Cartesian candidate for the sense of 'I' will secure guaranteed reference; and that there is no other conception which secures fully self-conscious self-reference. Furthermore, she argues from Sensory Deprivation that *even setting aside the Fregean requirement* guaranteed reference *per se* issues in incoherence, so it cannot be the role of 'I' to refer.³

The 'no-reference' position, which Anscombe comes to advocate, will strike some readers as idiosyncratic. It is perhaps best-known from the critical treatment of it in Strawson's *Individuals*, where he discussed the 'no-ownership' or 'no-subject' doctrine of the self. The doctrine has an anti-Cartesian lineage originating with Lichtenberg, and developed in the work of Hume, Mach, Carnap, Schlick, and Wittgenstein.⁴ Contemporary opponents of the 'no-subject' view (Strawson, Gareth Evans) minimize the differences between 'I' and third personal expressions by arguing that 'I' must refer to a person or living human being. In contrast, the 'no-reference' theorist preserves the epistemological asymmetry exploited by

³ Anscombe argues convincingly that there is no non-circular account of the sense of 'I': the self-reference principle (that 'I' is the word each person uses knowingly and intentionally to refer to him- or herself) is essentially circular. It is therefore not possible to specify, independently of the first person, the knowledge Oedipus lacks when he fortuitously self-refers in saying 'The person who has brought trouble to Thebes must be captured.' On the question of guaranteed reference, her suspicion has the same source as Wittgenstein's suspicion of the immunity to error through misidentification of the subject (IEM) exhibited by a range of first-person utterances, which likewise motivates an eliminative account of the self (L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), pp. 66–7). Anscombe seems to think, mistakenly, that guaranteed reference and IEM are the same phenomenon. On these questions, see my 'Hacker's Second Thoughts', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 39 (1989), pp. 233–7.

⁴ P. Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959), pp. 94–9. Strawson's own view, in contrast to the seemingly obscure 'no-reference' account, could be called the 'no-nonsense' view of 'I'. Mach's eliminative account of the self is discussed in my 'Ernst Mach and the Elimination of Subjectivity', *Ratio* (New Series), III (1990).

Cartesianism and tending towards solipsism, but turns it on its head. Wittgenstein wrote that 'What the solipsist wants is not a notation in which the ego has a monopoly, but one in which the ego vanishes'; he sought to compare 'I' in 'I am thinking' with 'It' in 'It is raining'.⁵ The 'no-reference' view of 'I' is the semantic correlate of the 'disappearing self'.

My present purpose is not primarily to defend the 'no-reference' view, but to examine that particular justification for it which Anscombe finds in the consequences of Sensory Deprivation. This justification is, I argue, ultimately ineffective, and the upshot of the discussion paradoxical. The Cartesian toxin proves stronger than Anscombe's antidote, but she has none the less succeeded in isolating an important group of features of first-personal reference that require careful treatment to avoid the Cartesian disease of the intellect which they encourage.

II. THE 'REAL PRESENCE' VERSION

The central contention of the Argument from Sensory Deprivation is that since 'I' has guaranteed reference, only a Cartesian Ego will serve as the referent of 'I'; and that since such a notion is imponderable, 'I' cannot refer at all. In the first, non-sceptical, variant, Anscombe's line of thought seems to be this:

(1) If the referent of 'I' were not 'really present' to consciousness – 'not just that one is thinking of the thing' – it could slip away and be subject to 'unnoticed substitution'; and so the existence of the referent could be doubted (pp. 28, 31).

But (2) If 'I' is a referring expression, its reference must be guaranteed and not subject to unnoticed substitution.

and (3) 'I' is a referring expression.

So (4) The referent of 'I' must be really present to consciousness.

But (5) In the sensory deprivation tank, my body will not be really present to me.

Yet (6) I have not lost my self-consciousness: 'I' must still refer.

So (7) Nothing but a Cartesian Ego will serve as the referent of 'I' (p. 31).

(8) Such a conception is untenable.

So (9) We must contrapose and deny (3) – that 'I' is a referring expression.

⁵ A. Ambrose (ed.), *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932–1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 22; G.E. Moore, 'Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–33', *Mind*, LXIV (1955), p. 14. The 'impersonal' interpretation of solipsism is assumed also by Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 233–5.

But why does the referent of 'I' have to be 'really present' to consciousness? The reasons Anscombe gives turn out to be empty. First, she claims that 'if the thinking did not guarantee the presence, the existence of the referent could be doubted'. But the reply to this is that the thinking itself guarantees the existence, simply as a consequence of what has been termed the self-reference principle (that it is she herself that the thinker is thinking about). Second, she implies that real presence is required to ensure that there is no unnoticed substitution of 'I'; that I correctly re-identify the same self. But Gareth Evans, in a characteristic *aperçu*, showed the emptiness of the latter phenomenon:

But, of course, the 'logical guarantee' [of no unnoticed substitution] is simply produced by Miss Anscombe's way of describing the situation, in terms of one and the same subject having different thoughts at different times. It is a simple tautology that, if it is correct to describe the situation thus, the *self*-identifications are all identifications of the same self, and hence it cannot be a reason for anything.⁶

The 'Real Presence' argument fails therefore. The guarantee of 'no unnoticed substitution' is 'empty', not because 'I' does not have a referent, but because the feature is 'tautological' in Evans' sense. A second line of argument is not so easily dismissed, however.

III. THE SCEPTICAL ARGUMENT

Under sensory deprivation, Anscombe writes, 'the possibility will perhaps strike me' that I don't have a body (p. 34). I cannot, however, doubt that I have self-consciousness; so 'I' cannot refer to something embodied. Anscombe seems to have in mind an argument like this:

- (1) If 'I' is a referring expression, then it is special in that each serious and comprehending use of 'I' is guaranteed to have successful reference, where success consists in (a) referring to an object that (b) one intends to refer to.
- (2) 'I' is a referring expression.
- So (3) Each serious and comprehending use of 'I' is guaranteed to have successful reference.

Now, for the subject in a sensory deprivation tank:

- (4) It is certain that the conditions for the successful reference of 'I' are met in the Tank.

⁶ Evans, *op. cit.*, note 5, p. 214.

- (5) It is not certain that the referent is embodied.
- So (6) That the referent is embodied is not one of the conditions for the successful reference of 'I'.
- So (7) It is no part of any conception of the referent that it be embodied ('Cartesian Ego' is the only sortal term that secures guaranteed reference).
- But (8) Such a conception is imponderable.
- So (9) (= not-(3)) It is not the case that each serious and successful use of 'I' is guaranteed to have successful reference.
- So (10) (= not-(2)) It is not the case that 'I' is a referring expression.

But there is a fallacy here. Premiss (4) must be strengthened to avoid it: not only must it be certain for the subject that the conditions for successful reference are met, but he or she must further know *what* these conditions are. 'That the referent is embodied' could, for all that the argument has established to the contrary, be one of the conditions for successful reference of which I know that, whatever they are, they are satisfied. But if I do not know it is one of the conditions, I may not be certain of its truth. Analogously, a person even more ignorant of the laws of Newtonian mechanics than the present writer, observes that his car is moving uniformly at 30 m.p.h. So he is certain that the conditions for its uniform motion at 30 m.p.h. are met. But he may *not* be certain that the forces acting upon the car are equal and opposite.

In summary, Anscombe's argument has the form

There is something of which I have no guarantee, viz. that I am embodied. This cannot figure as a condition of something of which I do have a guarantee – that every act of reference involving 'I' is successful. So 'I' doesn't refer to something embodied.

But the first step is invalid; for in addition to knowing that the conditions obtain, I also need to know, of each of the conditions, that it *is* a condition. Knowing that the conditions for successful reference, whatever they are, obtain, is compatible with ignorance that *one* of the conditions, viz. 'that the subject is embodied', obtains.

IV. THE DEFINITIVE ARGUMENT

The foregoing is probably the argument Anscombe intended by her laconic remarks. However, commencing with the anti-Cartesian assumption, instead of proceeding to a Cartesian conclusion and contraposing, issues in a more persuasive Anscombian argument. It has the merits of being free

from obvious fallacy, yet faithful to Anscombian intuitions. These intuitions are (i) that embodiment is necessary for the successful reference of 'I' (premiss (5)) and (ii) that I may doubt, while in the Tank, that I have a body (premiss (8)). Note that given the possibility of Anscombe's 'no-reference' viewpoint, these premisses are consistent.

The argument is expressed within the scope of 'It is knowable *a priori*' throughout. This avoids the intractable problem of deriving from premisses within the scope of 'It is certain that', the required intermediate conclusion that 'It is not knowable *a priori* that 'I' is a referring expression':⁷

- (1) It is knowable *a priori* that if 'I' is a referring expression, then each serious and comprehending use of it is guaranteed to have successful reference. [Ass.]
- (2) It is knowable *a priori* that 'I' is a referring expression. [Ass.]
- So (1,2) (3) It is knowable *a priori* that each serious and comprehending use of 'I' is guaranteed to have successful reference. [from 1,2]
- So (1,2) (4) It is knowable *a priori* that the conditions for the successful reference of any genuine 'I'-thought are met in the Tank. [from 3]
[The Anscombian will deny this premise]
- (5) It is knowable *a priori* that embodiment is a necessary one of these conditions. [Ass.]
[The Cartesian will deny this premise]
- (6) It is knowable *a priori* that if I think 'I'm missing the 2.30 at Goodwood' in the Tank, I am thinking a genuine 'I'-thought. [Ass.]
- So (1,2,5,6) (7) It is knowable *a priori* that if I think 'I'm missing the 2.30 at Goodwood' in the Tank, I am embodied. [from 4,5,6]
- But (8) (= not-7) It is not knowable *a priori* that when I think 'I'm missing the 2.30 at Goodwood' in the Tank, I am embodied. [Ass.]

So, granted the truth of (5), (6) and (8), we must deny (4):

⁷ The problem arises because even if the subject clearly comprehends yet doubts whether 'I' is a referring expression, '“I” is a referring expression' may still be knowable *a priori*. There are many truths which can be known *a priori*, yet whose truth is highly unobvious – the incompleteness of arithmetic, for instance. For this reason *a prioricity* has been preferred to certainty from the outset. Note that in the argument, numbers of the LHS indicate assumptions, and on the RHS derivations.

- (9) (= not-4) It is not knowable *a priori* that the conditions for the successful reference of any genuine 'I'-thought of the sort which could figure in premise (8) are met in the Tank. [from 5,6,8]
- So (5,6,8) (10) It is not knowable *a priori* that each serious and comprehending use of 'I', in the sort of thought which could figure in (8), is guaranteed to have successful reference. [from 9]
- So (1,5,6,8) (11) It is not knowable *a priori* that 'I' is a referring expression in the sort of thought which could figure in (8). [from 1,10]
- Now (12) If 'I' is a referring expression, it is knowable *a priori* that it is so. [Ass.]
- So (1,5,6,8,12) (13) It is not the case that 'I' is a referring expression, in the sort of thought which could figure in (8). [from 11,12]

The conclusion is that in a range of uses, 'I' is not a referring expression. This range is that of the 'I'-thoughts which the subject can entertain consistently with doubting the existence of his or her body, and which constitute so-called 'psychological' self-ascriptions.

V. RESPONSES TO THE ARGUMENT

A straw-poll of contemporary philosophers in the Analytic Tradition would probably produce a majority hostile to Anscombe's conclusion. Questions will for instance be raised about the truth-value links that obtain between 'I have some doubts' and 'Hamilton has some doubts', or 'He has some doubts' said of me. 'I', and the subject's proper name or some description true of the subject, are intersubstitutable *salva veritate* (provided appropriate changes are made to verb inflections, etc.). Doesn't this show that 'I' must be a referring expression? Likewise with apparent identities like 'I am AH'. Is one to deny the obvious account: that the statement is true when uttered by me just because 'I' on that occasion of utterance refers to what 'AH' refers to? But these objections are not insurmountable; and one only has to look at the mess philosophers have got into, in explaining how 'I' refers, to feel the temptations of the Anscombian viewpoint.⁸ My present concern is with Anscombe's argument, however, rather than the viability of her conclusion.

The two undischarged assumptions of the argument most likely to arouse suspicion are (5) and (8). These will be examined in order. First,

⁸ It is the truth-value links and not the co-reference that are the data. Although co-reference is the most natural explanation of such links, the 'no-reference' theorist may not be at a loss for an alternative one – even if this turned out to be one small aspect of a general Wittgensteinian rejection of a truth-conditional (and indeed any systematic) semantics.

premise (5): is Anscombe entitled to the assumption that it is knowable *a priori* that embodiment is a necessary condition of successful reference? The denial of (5) requires the possibility of reference to a Cartesian Ego. Objections to such entities have a long history. Anscombe focuses on the problems of their re-identification and individuation, and I have nothing to add to her arguments, which seem to me convincing.

Turning then to premise (8) – what is the motivation for: ‘It is not knowable *a priori* that when I think “I’m missing the 2.30 at Goodwood” in the Tank, I am embodied?’ The connection with the original Anscombian doubt needs spelling out:

- (i) If it is *a priori* in this sense that *p*, then *any* reflective rational agent, in conditions conducive to reflection, can come to know that *p*;
 - (ii) The Tank provides conditions conducive to reflection;
 - (iii) There are no means, in the Tank, whereby I can come to know that I have a body.
- So (iv) It is not knowable *a priori* that when I think ‘I’m missing the 2.30 at Goodwood’ in the Tank, I am embodied.

It is the move from (iii) to (iv) which will generate misgivings. Anthony Kenny has some, though he agrees with Anscombe’s ‘no-reference’ conclusion.⁹ Can I really have the thought ‘Maybe I don’t have a body’ (which is what (iv) amounts to)? Kenny’s main argument against the doubt seems to be this:

- (1) An asserted ‘I’-thought is verified or falsified with essential respect to the behaviour of the body; this fact is part of the sense of ‘I’.
- (2) The doubt ‘Maybe I don’t have a body’ must violate this rule (in a way to be specified).

So either:

- (3) It has no clear public sense.
- Or (4) It must have a logically private sense belonging to it when it is entertained in thought.

Kenny believes that Anscombe will have to endorse the incoherent and pernicious (4). But (4) is just a coda; there is no reason to attribute this

⁹ Anthony Kenny, ‘The First Person’, in C. Diamond and J. Teichman (eds), *Intention and Intentionality* (Brighton: Harvester, 1979).

disjunct (rather than (3)) to Anscombe.¹⁰ Moreover, there must be some doubt over the correctness of (1). *If* an asserted 'I'-thought is verifiable (by a third party), the behaviour of the subject's body may enter into the verification procedure; but not in cases like 'I'm thinking of that beautiful sunset', etc.

Perhaps the point Kenny is trying to express is as follows. There is a class of *pragmatically self-defeating* doubts. Contenders include 'Maybe I don't have a body', 'Maybe I'm dreaming', and more picturesquely, 'Maybe I'm mad' (i.e., psychotic). These are doubts the public expression of which, given a certain condition, defeats the doubt. The precise condition varies from case to case – usually it is that the verbal expression must be a comprehending one.

But from the fact that a doubt is *pragmatically* self-defeating, it does not follow that it is *essentially* so, i.e., incoherent or self-contradictory. In some cases, pragmatic and essential self-defeat go together, but in many cases they do not. Consider the example of dreaming. Judgement-making requires that one is conscious, but this does not imply that 'I am dreaming' is senseless, since a waking person might falsely judge that he or she is dreaming.¹¹

Merely *thinking* 'Maybe I don't have a body' is clearly not objectionable in the extreme way that thinking 'Maybe I'm not thinking' (in the Cartesian sense of 'thinking') is – that is, because it is pragmatically self-defeating in thought. But what other kind of self-defeat, short of the latter, could there be? It has been argued that 'I'-thoughts are *de re*, dependent for their existence on the existence of an embodied subject that entertains them.¹² If this were so, then it would not be possible for anything disembodied (e.g., a brain in a vat) to entertain such thoughts – even if it thought it did. Nor presumably would there be any content to the supposition, by an embodied subject, that some condition which is necessary for that subject to entertain 'I'-thoughts did not, in fact, obtain. What that supposition amounts to, according to the *de re* theorist, is 'This thought (the thought which it seems I am now entertaining) is not a genuine "I"-thought'.

¹⁰ It is often mistakenly thought that, since the 'no-reference' theorist denies that 'I' refers to something embodied, he or she is thereby countenancing the existence of an incorporeal self. It is this line of thought, and the related concern that Anscombe's positive account of self-consciousness makes play with the *bête noire* of private ostensive definition, that makes Kenny query whether the article marks her conversion from Wittgenstein to Descartes.

¹¹ As Kenny argues in *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1968).

¹² As Gareth Evans argues (op. cit., note 5, pp. 249–55). His assumption is clearly anti-Cartesian; though there could be an interpretation of *de re* under which the object required for a genuine 'I'-thought, and with which the subject must be identical, is a Cartesian ego.

This line of objection need not be pursued here, however, for the following reason. *De re* thoughts are meant to be object-directed thoughts. So if 'I'-thoughts are *de re*, 'I' must refer; and to argue against Anscombe on the basis that they are is to beg the question against her account.¹³ The *de re* theorist can of course deny Anscombe's *arguments* for her view; in particular, he or she could offer an explanation of guaranteed reference that allays suspicions about it. But then the objection to Anscombe's position would be not that 'I'-thoughts are *de re*, but that there is nothing questionable about the referential guarantees pertaining to 'I'.

VI. SENSORY DEPRIVATION AND THE GROUNDS FOR ANSCOMBIAN DOUBT

Attacking the *grounds* rather than the *coherence* of the Anscombian doubt is a more effective strategy. An initial counter-argument, based on a suggestion by Kenny, makes use of what I will call principle (E):¹⁴

- (1) (*Principle E*) It is not merely by current sensory experience that I know I have a body (i.e. past experience will do).
 So (2) Lack of present sensory experience in the Tank cannot ground a doubt about whether I have a body.

To defeat this argument, Anscombe simply needs the further condition that her victim is amnesiac – no *recollected* sensory experience either.¹⁵ The postulation of amnesia in addition to total sensory deprivation means that Anscombe's opponent has to rely on the more contentious principle (E*):

- (1) (E*) It is not by sensory experience that I know I have a body.
 So (2) Lack of sensory experience in the Tank cannot ground a doubt about whether I have a body.

Some may consider that principle (E*) is obviously false; if not by sensory experience, how else do I know I have a body? But the claim is about

¹³ I also suspect that there are no thoughts that are *de re* in the relevant sense, as David Bell has argued in 'Phenomenology, Solipsism and Egocentric Thought', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume*, LXII (1988), pp. 45–60. There is a tension in Gareth Evans' thought between the commitment to such thoughts *de re*, and the acknowledgement that self-ascriptions of propositional attitudes are authoritative (op. cit. note 5, pp. 224–35 and *passim*).

¹⁴ Kenny, op. cit., note 9, p. 12.

¹⁵ It is presumably this premature refutation that leads C. Rovane to talk of 'Anscombe's amnesiac under sensory deprivation' in her article 'The Epistemology of First-Person Reference', *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXXIV (1987).

justification, not *causality*. Sensory experience, it is claimed, has no role as a *ground*, though it may have a role as a *cause*, of my belief that I have a body.¹⁶

It is important to exclude one fallacious justification for this argument. One interpretation of principle (E*) that is plausible is the following: it is not the role of my experience to ‘confirm’ (provide evidence for the fact that) I have a body. But the plausibility here could simply result from the enormous evidential over-determination of ‘I have a body’. Sensory experience could not, in the normal course of events, be said to confirm that I have two legs. But experience as of lacking a leg might *disconfirm* this. Indeed any unsurprising observation may have negligible or non-existent confirmatory value, while its perhaps startling negation may in contrast have high disconfirmatory value (‘This raven is black’ in relation to ‘All ravens are black’, for instance, to take a well-worn example).

In such cases there is an asymmetry between confirmation and disconfirmation. That is, the implication

If not (*p* confirms *q*)
Then not (not-*p* disconfirms *q*)

does not hold. Furthermore, following an extraordinary apparent disconfirmation, it will make sense to talk of (re-)confirmation. It would, of course, be absurd to claim that there is a determinate point at which the human infant arrives at the belief that it has two legs, based on the evidence of a fairly limited and manageable amount of sensory experience. But a doubt, entertained while in a state of sensory deprivation, that I have two legs, may be dispelled by the discovery that my leg has been locally anaesthetized.

Is the Tank-victim’s belief ‘I have a body’ similarly re-confirmed by the gradual return of sensation to the totally locally anaesthetized body? Is it simply evidential over-determination that disinclines us to talk of an initial confirmation in this case? I think not. Experience does not confirm that I have a body because the acquisition of sensory experience necessarily goes together with a developing conception of oneself as an embodied subject. One could not acquire the concepts exercised in sensory experience without at the same time acquiring the concept ‘my body’. (None of this is in conflict with the ‘no-reference’ view *per se*, and so does not beg any

¹⁶ It may be objected that *justification* of the Tank-victim’s doubt is not at issue; Anscombe’s scenario involves a purely imaginative exercise. But then if justification is not at issue, there would be no point to the scenario. I might just as well be entertaining a doubt about whether I have a body while sitting by the fire wearing a winter cloak and holding a piece of paper in my hands.

question against it.) My sensory experience, therefore, cannot provide evidence for the fact that I have a body – rather, it presupposes this fact. My belief that I have a body is not grounded in sensory experience, nor in anything else. So premise (8) is false: it *is* knowable *a priori*, in the Tank, that I have a body.¹⁷

A victim in the Tank, becoming panic-stricken at his or her total failure to gain any bodily sensation, is admittedly unlikely to be consoled by the thought ‘Hang on, it’s not the role of experience to confirm that I have a body – the acquisition of sensory experience goes together with a developing conception of oneself as an embodied subject . . .’ But why should this be any more than an interesting psychological fact? Deprivation of sensory experience can have a bizarre effect on my basic network of beliefs.¹⁸ But such a deficit does not *justify* the Anscombian doubt, it merely *causes* it.

VII. ANSCOMBE’S CARTESIANISM

These considerations are unlikely to persuade those in the conscious or unconscious grip of a Cartesian conception of the mind. Like Anscombe perhaps? For the Anscombian doubt is not merely unwarranted; it is also essentially Cartesian. So it turns out that the doubt and the anti-Cartesian premiss are indeed mutually undermining – despite their superficial consistency. Setting aside complications arising from the phenomenology of amnesia, the subject is justified in thinking the following:

- (i) ‘Nothing in my present or recollected experience is experience of a body’

But that does not imply the proposition required to motivate the Anscombian doubt, which is:

- (ii) ‘This is what I’d experience if I had no body’

Or perhaps even:

- (iii) ‘I have had and am having an experience as of lacking a body’

¹⁷ One development of the idea that it is not by sensory experience that I know I have a body, is the Wittgensteinian proposal that ‘I have a body’ is a member of the fluctuating class of groundless judgements (L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969)).

¹⁸ The tragic case of Christina ‘The Disembodied Lady’, who inexplicably lost her proprioceptive sense, illustrates the kind of conceptual confusion that long-term impairment can cause (O. Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat* (London: Duckworth, 1985)). Short-term sensory deprivation in a ‘flotation tank’ is in contrast used as relaxation therapy (Julia Brown, ‘Floating a new idea in relaxation’, *The Independent*, 28 March 1989).

Proposition (i) suffices for the ‘Real Presence’ argument; but (ii) or (iii) are required for the sceptical argument.

The line of thought that gets us from (i) to (ii) or (iii) is this. The particular bodily experiences I have – the aches and pains, feelings of warmth and coldness, of the wind blowing on my face, of moving my limbs, etc. – together make up the experience as of being embodied. So when I am deprived of all such experiences, I have the experience as of not being embodied, as of lacking a body.

It is true that there is experience as of lacking a part of one’s body; it can seem to me, possibly correctly, as if I have lost a leg. But there is no such thing as the experience as of lacking *a body*, since there is no experience as of having one. Though the particular experiences mentioned are experiences *of my body*, they are not experiences of *being embodied*. This, however, is what they must be if their absence is to motivate the Anscombian doubt. ‘Experience of being embodied’ implies a ‘body-independent’ perspective from which it would be possible to describe what embodied existence felt like. But there is no such perspective, just as there is no ‘species-independent’ perspective from which it would make sense to say what it is like to be a bat, for instance.¹⁹ This provides a further justification for principle (E*).

It may be objected that surely there *is* such a thing as the experience as of lacking a body – it is precisely this experience that the Tank-victim is having. But for the reason just given, this is not so. The Tank-victim is experiencing an absence of current or recollected information from his or her body. There is no justification for equating such an experience with the experience a subject would allegedly have if *per impossibile* it lacked a body.

Propositions (ii) and (iii) assume the possibility of disembodied existence, and hence of Cartesian egos. It is true that Anscombian doubt makes no play with the idea that experience of a body could be hallucinatory in the Cartesian way. But still it requires the truth, when entertained by the Tank-subject, of ‘This is what I’d experience if I had no body’, with its presupposition that disembodied experience is possible. It is for this reason that Anscombian scepticism is essentially Cartesian; rather

¹⁹ Which is what makes Thomas Nagel’s speculations curious (‘What is it like to be a bat?’ in his *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)). Merleau-Ponty argues that I don’t have ‘experience of being embodied’. My body *per se* is not an object to me:

I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk round them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe. (*The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 91)

Miles Burnyeat, in ‘Idealism and Greek Philosophy’, explains how it was only post-Descartes that the ‘external world’ came to include the subject’s own body (in G. Vesey (ed.), *Idealism Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), especially pp. 40–1).

than because it involves some covert predilection for logical privacy, as Kenny claims.²⁰

From this Cartesian assumption arises a fatal objection to Anscombe's Argument from Sensory Deprivation. The very reasons, that ground premiss (5), argue *against* premiss (8) of the definitive argument. How can I have a doubt about whether I have a body (required for premiss (8)), when it is knowable *a priori* that embodiment is a condition of the successful reference of 'I' (premiss (5))? Doesn't such a doubt lead one ineluctably to the Cartesian position that it is not knowable *a priori* that embodiment is a condition of successful reference (indeed that it is knowable *a priori* that it is not)? Conversely, if it *is* knowable *a priori* that embodiment is a condition of successful reference, doesn't this mean that the Anscombian doubt is illegitimate? Premisses (5) and (8) are therefore mutually undermining.

Note that these premisses are not contradictory. The appearance that they are is a product of the conviction that 'I' must refer – either to a Cartesian ego or to a person; the possibility of Anscombe's non-referential alternative makes them strictly consistent. It may be knowable *a priori* that embodiment is a condition for the successful reference of 'I', but if 'I' does not refer, then consistently it may not be knowable *a priori* that I have a body. However, as we have just seen, the Anscombian *justification* for the two premisses conflicts. The *ground* for premiss (5) is that Cartesian egos are imponderable; but premiss (8), I have argued, requires the possibility of countenancing them. Therefore, *on the grounds provided by Anscombe's scenario*, the 'no-reference' view collapses into Cartesianism.

VIII. THE MORAL OF THE STORY

To the extent to which Anscombe wishes to pursue a convincing Argument from Sensory Deprivation, therefore, she must be a fellow-traveller with Cartesianism. To that extent, of course, these arguments undermine her original purpose. There is a Sensory Deprivation Argument to be had, but it is a Cartesian one. Instead of contraposing and denying the referential assumption, one has to deny the anti-Cartesian assumption, replacing premiss (9) with the conclusion

(9*) (= not-5) It is not knowable *a priori* that embodiment is a necessary condition for the successful reference of 'I'.

²⁰ Anscombe's account of the necessary 'real presence' of 'I' is also very Cartesian; but it is always hard to disentangle what Anscombe herself believes from what she thinks one *must* believe on the mistaken assumption that 'I' refers.

Obvious Cartesian consequences follow. The responses to this argument are (i) to deny the doubt about embodiment, as I have already attempted; and (ii) to show that 'guaranteed reference' is empty, like 'no unnoticed substitution'. In a way, of course, Anscombe does try to demonstrate (ii), since guarantees about the reference of 'I' fuel Cartesian illusions about the self and so she is concerned to discredit them. Guaranteed reference is empty, she argues, because it is conditional and the condition does not obtain ('I' does not refer). Opponents of Anscombe's standpoint will want to show that it is empty in some other way. These are interesting tasks; indeed, it is the central task of a philosophical account of self-consciousness to diagnose such apparent Cartesian guarantees.

In contrast to 'no unnoticed substitution', however, 'guaranteed reference' will not be a 'mere artefact of one's way of describing the situation'. The guarantee states that the intended and actual referent of 'I' must coincide. As I noted at the outset, Anscombe claims that *irrespective of any Fregean requirement* that 'I' must have a sense (minimally, that there is an appropriate sortal term associated with it), guaranteed reference results in incoherence. However, on closer inspection it is apparent that her very formulation of the guarantee incorporates the Fregean requirement; and so, *pace* its progenitor, the Argument from Sensory Deprivation is about sense as well as reference. In specifying the 'intended referent', one is surely attributing a conception to the thinker; the Fregean requirement is especially apparent in the fallacious sceptical argument above (premisses (7) and (8)).

The guarantee therefore consists in the way that the reference of 'I' seems to survive almost complete attrition of the associated conception or sortal; so that only a Cartesian conception remains. I am guaranteed success in referring to myself by means of 'I', even if I have no information about myself or recollection of my identity. The reference of 'Hamilton' does not survive similar attrition; in the case of a proper name there is no necessary coincidence between intended and actual referent. (On being hauled out of the Tank, for instance, it might become apparent that I had forgotten my name, and that I was using 'Hamilton' wrongly, intending to refer to someone else.)²¹ It is this feature of 'I' that forms the basis for the Argument from Sensory Deprivation – and since Anscombe fails to give her argument a non-referential direction, pressure towards Cartesianism is the result.

Guaranteed reference therefore expresses the obverse of Anscombe's important claims about the indirect reflexive and the circularity of the

²¹ However full a conception of 'Hamilton' I may be required to have in order to use to term correctly, I can still misidentify someone as Hamilton.

self-reference principle – claims which are not tautological. Possession of a conception of oneself as a person is not *necessary* to guarantee self-conscious self-reference; nor is it *sufficient* to guarantee it on any particular occasion, as Anscombe's arguments about the self-reference principle showed. I can know an indefinite number of properties of the person who is AH without it being guaranteed that my reference to that person will constitute self-conscious rather than fortuitous self-reference (i.e., involving the knowledge that *I* am AH); and I can self-consciously self-refer without knowing *any* particular properties of the person who is AH (as the example of sensory deprivation shows).²² So the conception of the person AH seems irrelevant to self-reference. Resisting this Cartesian-tending line of thought involves showing that this appearance is mistaken, and that the conception must be of something embodied; or that the purely thinking conception associated with 'I' fails to reveal the full nature of the referent (the arguments of section VI above are important here). More radically, one may reject the Fregean model, as Gareth Evans does in assimilating self-reference to demonstrative reference; the question of whether he is correct I leave for a later occasion.

Anscombe is clearly influenced by Wittgenstein's realization that the standard, robust 'no-nonsense' account of the first person fails to allay insidious Cartesian promptings. But Cartesianism is a pervasive disease of the intellect, and in the course of trying to develop a vaccine against it, the author of 'The First Person' appears to have contracted the disease herself. Wittgenstein's ambivalence towards solipsism shows how apparently diametrically opposed viewpoints can have much in common, but Anscombe fails to recognize this ambivalence and so does not realize the proximity of her position to Cartesian solipsism. Her article shows how easy it is to succumb to Cartesianism; but it does not consequently show that the right way to escape its dangers must be to adopt Gareth Evans' pose of sublime indifference.²³

University of Stirling

²² See note 3. Oedipus could know an indefinite number of truths about 'the person who brought trouble to Thebes', and thus fortuitously about himself, without knowing 'I am that person'; conversely, I can believe an indefinite number of falsehoods about AH (e.g., as a result of seeing someone else's reflection in a mirror and taking it to be myself) yet still self-consciously self-refer when I express them.

²³ I am indebted to Crispin Wright, David Bell, John Skorupski and Lucy O'Brien for their incisive comments on earlier drafts of this article.