

## G.E.M. ANSCOMBE ON THE ANALOGICAL UNITY OF INTENTION IN PERCEPTION AND ACTION

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Elizabeth Anscombe's *Intention* is a landmark text in action theory.<sup>1</sup> Even those who disagree strongly with *Intention*'s central theses recognize its monumental influence in shaping contemporary debates. Anscombe's work in the philosophy of perception, by contrast, has suffered a different fate. In the voluminous literature on perceptual intentionality, one strains to find even a modicum of enthusiasm for the details of her views.

This asymmetrical influence is not obviously problematic. Although everyone recognizes the shared etymology of 'intention' in the expressions 'intentional action' and 'intentional experience',<sup>2</sup> and while many are aware of the rich philosophical tradition that takes the conceptual ties between the intentionality of action and perception to be of paramount importance,<sup>3</sup> one is now more likely to find an emphasis on how the uses of 'intentionality' differ across philosophical domains than on any supposed commonality between them. So it is not surprising that most theorists now adopt a method that permits them to focus exclusively on the use of 'intentionality' in their preferred subdiscipline to the exclusion or ignorance of others.

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented at University College, Dublin and the University of Pittsburgh. We would like to thank the audiences of these talks for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> 'Intentionality' derives from the Latin '*intentio*' by way of the German '*intentionalität*'. '*Intentio*', in turn, derives from the verb '*intendere*' =<sub>af</sub> *being stretched toward something* ('*intendere arcum in*' means *to aim a bow at* \_\_\_). Both actions and intentional mental states such as perception and belief easily fall under this metaphor; each, in their own way, can be said to "aim at" or "be stretched toward" a circumscribed target that one might fail to hit. For example, when someone deliberates poorly, he "fails to hit or get what he shot at" (Plato, *Cratylus* 420c) and when someone believes falsely, he "is like a bad archer who shoots besides the mark and misses" (Plato, *Theaetetus* 194a).

<sup>3</sup> This commitment was commonplace among the Scholastics of the later Middle Ages. It is also a prominent feature of Augustine's philosophy (*De Trinitate*, XI) and has precedents among the Stoics (*Diogenes Laertius* VII 157) and in Plato (*Cratylus* 420b-c). Interestingly, however, neither of the texts primarily responsible for the present centrality of intentionality to analytic philosophy of mind, Brentano 1874/1973, 88–89 and Chisholm 1957, 168–185; discuss action, though they do, between them, discuss propositional attitudes expressed by the verbs 'to desire', 'to wish', and 'to seek'. We should also note that the classical understanding of intentionality does not precisely match the contemporary understanding. For example, in Aquinas' work, *esse intentionale* is not a "mark of the mental" (e.g., a perceptual medium, which is in no way mental, can possess a visible species that exists in *esse intentionali*; cf. Brock 2013 and Moser 2011).

Given this consensus, it is quite striking how assuredly Anscombe insists that intentionality's disparate uses realize an important underlying unity. In her principal discussion of perceptual intentionality, she writes:

'Intentional' in these contexts is often spelt with an s. This was an idea of Sir William Hamilton's; he wanted to turn the old logical word 'intention' into one that looked more like 'extension.' I prefer to keep the older spelling with two ts. *For the word is the same as the one in common use in connection with action.*<sup>4</sup>

Anscombe immediately goes on to argue that there are three salient aspects of intentionality that are central to its employment in all contexts and, in particular, are central to its occurrence in analyses of both action and perception. Indeed, when one looks to the substance of her remarks about perceptual intentionality, one cannot help but be struck by the obvious parallels to what she says elsewhere about the intentionality of action.

Paying attention to these parallels is important. First, it will help us better understand one of the most influential analytic philosophers of the twentieth century and arguably the most important woman in philosophy's long history of whom we are aware. Second, it will help to broaden our unduly narrow conception of the theoretical options available to us in both the philosophy of perception and action. In what follows, we will argue that Anscombe is neither a representationalist nor a relationalist about perceptual intentionality.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Anscombe is neither a cognitivist nor a non-cognitivist about intentions in the philosophy of action.<sup>6</sup> If we read Anscombe with these

<sup>4</sup> Anscombe 1965/1981, 4, emphasis added. In what follows, if there is a page number alone following a quote, it refers to this essay. We will occasionally change some of the single and double quotation marks in the passages we reproduce to aid comprehension.

<sup>5</sup> *Representationalism* and *relationalism* are the dominant contemporary positions concerning perceptual intentionality. (i) Representationalists maintain that a perceptual experience possesses intentionality in virtue of having one or more veridicality-assessable contents. 'Representationalism' is also the name for a related view according to which an experience's phenomenal features supervene on its representational features. It is the first, more limited claim, about perceptual intentionality's representational nature that many (falsely) attribute to Anscombe. (ii) Relationalists maintain that a perceptual experience possesses intentionality in virtue of its standing in a simple, non-representational relation to one or more entities. Relationalist views include sense-data theories and theories that analyze perceptual intentionality in terms of non-representational, perceptual relations that enable cognitive access to, and singular perceptual beliefs about, ordinary, worldly, material entities.

<sup>6</sup> That is, Anscombe does not want to analyze intentions to act in terms of mental states or propositional attitudes that serve as intentional actions' causes. This is so regardless of whether one understands these states as cognitive, non-cognitive, or, in relevant respects, *both* cognitive and non-cognitive.

dominant contemporary taxonomies in mind, we are bound to misunderstand her.

A major source of these interpretive difficulties is the fact that Anscombe's central influences—the analytic tradition represented by Frege and Wittgenstein and the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition—are not only challenging in their own right, but are especially difficult to hold together. Nevertheless, their respective contributions to Anscombe's thought are manifest in two principal commitments we seek to explore here: (i) intentionality calls for a *grammatical investigation*, and (ii) this grammatical account of intentionality entails that its diverse uses realize an *analogical unity*.

We will follow Anscombe's lead and use the three common aspects of intentionality she highlights to order our discussion. The first two parallels concern intentional descriptions: (i) intentional objects and intentional actions are given by expressions that employ “*a description under which*” (9) such that not every true description of an object or action is intentional, and (ii) intentional descriptions can be, and typically are, vague and indeterminate (§1.2). We then examine Anscombe's famous appeal to a special sense of the question ‘Why?’ to distinguish intentional from non-intentional descriptions of action and her lesser known appeal to a special sense of the question ‘What?’ to distinguish intentional from non-intentional descriptions of perceptual acts (§1.3).

Next, we introduce Anscombe's positive, *grammatical* account of perceptual intentionality (§1.4). We argue that when one competently answers the special sense of the question ‘What?’, one does not refer (or even purport to refer) to anything. Rather, to know how to ask and answer the question is to display or demonstrate one's grammatical understanding of perceptual intentionality's basic, formal structure. On this view, a perceptual act is an intentionally articulate unity of intentional subject and object in which an intentional object is that upon which a perceptual act's intentional subject is directed, and an intentional subject is, in turn, that which is directed upon a perceptual act's intentional object. What it is to be an intentional subject or object of perception is exhausted by the opposed grammatical positions or roles each occupies within this unified structure. When one competently answers the question, ‘What do you see?’, one's answer demonstrates one's grasp of this nexus of subject and object as it is realized by a particular perceptual act. This grammatical understanding is the common possession of those who can competently participate in the practice of asking and answering such questions. Indeed, we may go so far as to say that this grammatical understanding constitutes the practice itself and gives the questions and answers their unique senses.

We note that Anscombe explicitly compares her project to Frege's attempt to distinguish the logical categories *object* and *concept* (Frege 1892/1997b). For the way in which *intentional subject* and *intentional*

*object* mark positions within a perceptual act's intentional structure is analogous to the way in which *object* and *concept* mark positions within a thought's logical structure and the way in which *subject* and *predicate* mark positions within a sentence's grammatical structure.<sup>7</sup> To sharpen the parallel, we first describe the way Frege understands the logical categories *object* and *concept* (§2.1). We then show how the central grammatical distinction within Anscombe's account of perceptual intentionality mirrors Frege's categorial distinction (§2.2). In this subsection, we also show that Anscombe's grammatical account of intentionality is intimately connected to her controversial claim that 'I' is not a referring expression (Anscombe 1975/1981).

Finally, we extend these insights to the intentionality of action (§3). In doing so, we explore intentionality's third salient aspect: the descriptions under which intentional actions and intentional objects are given may be false. The possibilities that ground this final parallel raise some of the most deeply entrenched obstacles to understanding intentionality in either domain. We conclude with a brief discussion of analogical unity and explain the significance of attributing this variety of unity to intentionality's distinct senses (§4).

## 1. Intentionality and Description

### 1.1 Intentional Objects and Material Objects

Intentionality concerns our being directed upon something other than ourselves.<sup>8</sup> For Anscombe, this is equivalent to the claim that intentional acts are directed upon *intentional objects*. Intentional objects are necessarily "objects of"—objects of desire, objects of thought, objects of perception, objects of worship, etc. Anscombe

<sup>7</sup> Anscombe's use of the label 'grammatical' is inspired by Wittgenstein (cf. Anscombe 2000/2015). For Wittgenstein, grammar consists in rules that govern the uses of words and, given his view that a word's use is (in general) its meaning, grammar will "determine meaning (constitute it)" (Wittgenstein 1979; I #133). Grammar is what makes the use of words possible and also serves as the standard against which we adjudicate whether a word's use is legitimate or illegitimate (i.e., nonsense) (Wittgenstein 1982, 40–41). In this way, "[e]ssence is expressed by grammar [...] [g]rammar tells what kind of object anything is" (Wittgenstein 1953, §371, 373). Echoes of Wittgenstein's views about grammar and grammatical investigation occur throughout Anscombe's paper, e.g., her emphasis on the moves we make within well-prescribed practices of asking and answering various kinds of question and her frequent charge that many of the things we are inclined to say turn out to be nonsense. Given constraints of space, we will not be able to explore the extent to which Anscombe adopts the details of Wittgenstein's account of grammar.

<sup>8</sup> One can be intentionally directed upon oneself but only *qua* other, just as a doctor can heal herself but only *qua* patient (cf. Aristotle, *Phys.* II.1, 192b24–29). Self-directedness is essentially other directedness that is directed accidentally upon itself (though we should note that this does not entail that self-knowledge or self-consciousness consists in this form of intentional self-directedness; cf. §2.2).

explicitly contrasts intentional objects with another sense of ‘object.’ She writes, “objects of desire, objects of thought, are not objects in one common modern sense, not individual things, such as the *objects found in the accused man’s pockets*” (3). Anscombe calls objects in this second sense *material objects* (or, occasionally, *material entities*). A material object is “the thing itself as it is in reality—unprocessed by being conceived, as we might say” (3). That is, a material object can be understood adequately without an appeal to any particular intentional act’s being directed upon it.<sup>9</sup>

We must not conflate intentional objects and material objects (cf. 4, 9). If a man aims his bow at a stag, but is mistaken about what is before him and hits his father instead, we may say that two different reports of what he aimed at are true: ‘He aimed at a stag’ and ‘He aimed at his father’. The first report captures his aiming’s intentional object (what he intends to hit); the second report picks out its material object (what he actually hits).

Though intentionality necessarily involves being directed upon an intentional object, Anscombe denies that it always involves being directed upon a material object. For example, a totally hallucinated individual is directed upon an intentional object—say, a pink elephant. But this individual is not, by virtue of undergoing the hallucinatory experience, directed upon any *material* object at all.<sup>10</sup> So Anscombe can simultaneously endorse the Platonic dictum, “He who sees must see something,” and reject the claim, “Whenever anyone can rightly be said to see, there must be something there, which is what he sees” (15). The former claim concerns intentional objects and the latter material objects.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Anscombe recognizes that her choice of terminology, ‘material object’, is not an entirely happy one. For though she describes material objects as “what really—physically—exists” (18) she also explains that “by *material* objects I do not mean what are now called ‘material objects’—tables, planets, lumps of butter and so on” (11). That is, objects that many would reasonably classify as *immaterial* (or non-physical)—the number two, the Archangel Michael, a debt of five dollars (Anscombe’s example)—are nevertheless material objects in her sense. Despite its misleading connotations, we will preserve Anscombe’s terminology for the sake of consistency between our discussion and the text.

<sup>10</sup> This is so even if there is a material object in the vicinity of which the descriptions that give the hallucination’s intentional object are true (so-called veridical hallucinations). For in general “if I am totally hallucinated, then in no sense do I see what is before my eyes” (18) and, in particular, “[i]f a man were totally hallucinated, and, shooting at something in his hallucinatory scene, hit his father, that would not make his father the material object of his aiming” (10).

<sup>11</sup> Anscombe does not cite a particular passage when she invokes this “Platonic dictum” but the following claim, put forward by Socrates, expresses the sentiment well: “whenever I come to be perceiving, I necessarily come to be perceiving something; it is impossible to come to be perceiving, yet be perceiving nothing” (Plato, *Theaetetus* 160b).

These two senses of ‘object’ are critical to Anscombe’s view and we will deploy the distinction throughout our discussion, refining and clarifying it as our argument progresses.

### 1.2 Action and Perception Under a Description

With this distinction in hand, we can turn to the details of Anscombe’s discussion. The first parallel Anscombe highlights between the intentionality of action and perception is that “[a]n intentional object is given by a word or phrase which gives a *description under which*” (9). With respect to action, we can elaborate as follows:

**(A1)** There are numerous true descriptions of what happens when you act on an occasion, but “not any true description of what you do describes it as the action you intended: only under certain of its descriptions will it be intentional.” (4)

Only a subset of the true descriptions of what one causes to happen when one acts intentionally are intentional descriptions. For example, when a carpenter in the midst of building a house is sawing a plank intentionally, he may also be sawing an oak plank, sawing one of Smith’s planks, making an awful noise, creating a pile of sawdust, disturbing the cat, wearing down the blade, flexing various muscles, and so on ad infinitum. But while all of these descriptions of what happens when the carpenter acts may be true, they are not all true as intentional descriptions; this latter category reflects the agent’s essentially first-personal, practical point of view—the standpoint of what we call the practical subject. Non-intentional descriptions are typically offered from a third-personal perspective, and often pick out aspects of the performance of which the practical subject is either simply unaware or that are not practically salient to him. Given this, these non-intentional descriptions cannot be substituted, *salva veritate*, in sentences about the actions the carpenter performs intentionally.

As we should expect, Anscombe argues that the intentional objects of other mental states are also given “under a description.”

**(P1)** There are numerous true descriptions of what you believe/perceive/worship/etc. on an occasion, but not any true description of what you believe/perceive/worship/etc. describes it as the object upon which you are intentionally directed: only under certain of its descriptions will it be intentional. (4)

Only a subset of the true descriptions of what one perceives on an occasion are intentional descriptions. For example, when our carpenter undergoes a visual experience of a saw, what he sees may

also be a tool, a roughly triangular silver object, an alloy of iron and carbon, an object Smith lent him, an item forged by the oldest blacksmith in town, and so on ad infinitum. But even when all of these descriptions of what the carpenter sees are true, they are not all intentional descriptions; this latter category, for Anscombe, reflects the perceiver's essentially first-personal, experiential point of view, the standpoint of what we call the intentional subject. Non-intentional descriptions, by contrast, are typically offered from the third-person perspective, and often pick out aspects of what is perceived of which the intentional subject is unaware or that go beyond what is consciously appreciable in his particular circumstances, through the use of his limited perceptual capacities. Given this, these non-intentional descriptions cannot be substituted, *salva veritate*, in sentences about what a perceiver is intentionally directed upon.

The fact that many true descriptions of what one perceives and what one does fail to capture their intentionality is related to the second parallel Anscombe highlights.

(A2) “[T]he descriptions under which you intend what you do can be vague, indeterminate.” (4)

(P2) The descriptions under which you are intentionally directed upon an object can be vague, indeterminate (4).

Someone can intend to place a book on a table without also intending to place the book on a determinate location on the table. Of course, if she acts, she will in fact place the book upon some determinate location. But, whereas one must include a determinate location in an exhaustive description of the material happening that occurs when she acts, one need not include this determinate location in an exhaustive description of what she does intentionally.

Similarly, someone can think of a particular building without thinking of it as possessing a determinate number of stories, and someone can perceive an oak without perceiving it as having a determinate number of leaves. If the experiencing subject is not hallucinating, the perceptual experience will have a material object and there will be a true sentence that attributes a determinate number of leaves to this material object. But an adequate description of an experience's intentional object need not, and typically does not, include this determinate number.

Intentionality's second common aspect is among its first's grounds. For “the possibility of this indeterminacy makes it possible that when I am thinking of a particular man, not every true description of him is one under which I am thinking of him” (6).

### 1.3 *Intentional versus Non-intentional Descriptions*

Our initial characterizations of intentional and non-intentional descriptions only suffice to mark a distinction. Given the distinction's importance, we need to provide a principled way to demarcate intentional descriptions. Let us consider action first.

#### 1.3.1 *Action and the Question 'Why?'*

According to Anscombe, the key to distinguishing intentional descriptions of actions from non-intentional descriptions of actions is to be found in our shared linguistic practice of asking for and providing reasons that explain what we are up to. In what is arguably the most famous line of *Intention*, she writes:

(AI\*) "What distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not? The answer that I shall suggest is that they are the actions to which a certain sense of the question 'Why?' is given application." (1963/2000, 9)

This sense, Anscombe stipulates, is that "in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting" (*ibid.*, 9). Anscombe clearly thinks that asking the question 'Why?' in this "special sense" *presupposes* that there is an answer that supplies the agent's reason for doing what she does. Let us call this sense of the question 'Why?' *the rational use*.

There are two ways for an agent to deny the application of the Why-question's rational use. Each of these refusals involves a description of what the agent does that is non-intentional. First, one denies the question's application if one's answer states the *merely* causal etiology of what one does. The following exchange illustrates this first scenario (*ibid.*, 9):

Why did you knock the cup off the table?

I thought I saw a face at the window and it made me jump.

This answer does not reveal the agent's reasons for acting; she is not answering the rational use of the question 'Why?' at all. Her answer is intelligible as a response to a 'Why?' question, but one with a different sense. Let us call this second sense of the question 'Why?' *the merely causal use*. According to Anscombe, the description 'knocking the cup off the table', even if truly applicable to what the agent causes to happen, is not intentional.

The Why-question's rational use is also denied application when the agent does not know that she is acting under the description her

interlocutor employs. Consider the following exchange with our imagined carpenter:

Why are you disturbing poor Tibbles?

Tibbles? Oh, I didn't know he was here. Poor kitty!

This answer reveals that 'disturbing the cat' is not an intentional description of the carpenter's performance. For the carpenter does not know, from the first-personal practical perspective of action, that his performance falls under the description 'disturbing Tibbles.' This shows, Anscombe thinks, that there is a *knowledge requirement* on intentional descriptions of action.<sup>12</sup>

To understand this knowledge requirement, we should turn to Anscombe's famous example of a man who is operating a pump (*ibid.*, §23). It is here that Anscombe defends two of her central claims about the intentionality of action: (i) intentional actions are constituted by a specifically practical order of reason, and (ii) an agent's ability to answer the special sense of the question 'Why?' presupposes and reflects the agent's practical self-knowledge of this constitutive order.

Anscombe asks us to imagine a man who is performing the following actions: moving his arm up and down repeatedly (A-ing), operating the water pump (B-ing), replenishing the house water supply (C-ing), and poisoning the house's (Nazi) inhabitants (D-ing). These four actions, each intentional, form a series of nested practical rationalizations, such that the Why-question applies to each action as we move through the series:

Why are you moving your arm up and down on that pump? (A-ing)

In order to pump water.

Why are you pumping water? (B-ing)

In order to replenish the house supply.

Why are you replenishing the house supply? (C-ing)

In order to poison the Nazis inside.

Why are you poisoning the Nazis? (D-ing)

<sup>12</sup> For an extended analysis and defense of the knowledge requirement that goes beyond the discussion that follows, see Frey 2017 and Frey unpublished ms.

This example shows that the Why-question's rational use is a solicitation of what one's end or goal is in doing what one is presently up to.<sup>13</sup> In this case, we see that the agent's end in moving his arm is a poisoning. We will call the intelligible order that governs this explanatory series from A–D, *the order of intention*.

The series of Why-questions from A–D is the mirror image of a series of How-questions from D–A:

How are you poisoning the inhabitants? (D-ing)

By replenishing the house supply with poisoned water.

How are you replenishing the house supply? (C-ing)

By operating the water pump.

How are you operating the water pump? (B-ing)

By moving my arm up and down on the pump's handle.

How are you moving your arm up and down? (A-ing)

This second example shows that there is a question 'How?' that is a solicitation of the means one is taking to realize one's end. We will call the intelligible order that governs this second explanatory series from D–A, *the order of execution*.<sup>14</sup>

The pumper's ability to answer both questions—'Why?' and 'How?'—depends essentially upon his conceptually prior ability to answer the question, "What are you doing?" For an agent must know what he is currently doing—the intentional specification of the act type he is presently undertaking—in order to know why and how this action serves his other ends.

<sup>13</sup> Intentional actions are sometimes done for no particular reason or for the sake of no determinate further end beyond the act itself (thus, we may answer the question positively by saying things like, "I just felt like it" or "for the fun of it"). But these are secondary cases of acting intentionally—i.e., cases whose intelligibility depends upon the primary or paradigmatic case that is inscribed with what Anscombe calls the "A–D order." If no actions were inscribed with such an order, there would be no need for Why-questions in the special, rational sense she elucidates (cf. Anscombe 1963/2000, 25–27 and 33–34).

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that the last question in each of these series is not answered in the same way as are the series' preceding questions (if they receive answers at all). With respect to the order of intention, Anscombe says, "there is probably a further answer, other than 'just for fun', all the same this further description (e.g., to save the Jews, to put in the good men, to get the Kingdom of Heaven on earth) is not such that we can now say: he is saving the Jews, he is getting the Kingdom of Heaven, he is putting in the good ones" (*ibid.*, 40). With respect to the order of execution, she says "the description in 'Why [or How] are you contracting those muscles?' is ruled out if the only sort of answer to the question 'Why?' [or 'How?'] displays that that man's knowledge, if any, that he was contracting those muscles is an inference from his knowledge of anatomy" (*ibid.*, 38).

But what sort of knowledge is this? Anscombe argues that the knowledge required in order to answer the Why-question is first personal, and thus immediate, non-inferential, and non-evidential, but also distinctively *practical*.<sup>15</sup> It is this last feature that is paramount for Anscombe; furthermore she insists that “practical knowledge can only be understood if we first understand ‘practical reasoning’, [...] or ‘practical syllogism’, which means the same thing” (*ibid.*, 57–8).

On Anscombe’s view, an intentional action comes to be and is seen through to its completion through the exercises of our self-conscious capacities of practical reason and will.<sup>16</sup> As Anscombe suggests, we can represent the rational structure that governs these capacities and their exercises in the form of an argument or syllogism. Intentional actions are the material realizations or actualizations of an agent’s capacity to reason practically and to desire things accordingly, and the practical syllogism is nothing more than the representation of the agent’s reasons in the form of an explicit argument, in which (i) the syllogism’s major premise represents the end the agent seeks (the thing wanted in the rational sense), (ii) the syllogism’s minor premise represents the means the agent calculates to be appropriate to this end’s achievement or realization, and (iii) the syllogism’s conclusion represents the material realization or performance of this rational order. So an intentional action is the conclusion of a practical syllogism and it is only intelligible as such if it is a rational consequence of the relevant practical premises.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> To arrive at something evidentially is for there to be something that is identifiable independently of what one comes to know/believe/etc. that either shows one that something is the case, or is a sign that something is the case, or prompts one to believe that something is the case, or in some other sense serves as a criterion for saying that something is the case. One knows something non-evidentially, on the other hand, if the acquisition of that knowledge does not involve an epistemologically significant move or transition from something else that serves as the knowledge’s ground.

<sup>16</sup> Anscombe does not talk about “a capacity for willing” in *Intention*. But it is relatively clear from the view she puts forward that she thinks of the will in a traditionally Aristotelian-Thomist way, that is, as an intellectual appetite (i.e., a kind of desire that gets its object from practical judgment or reasoning).

<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that an agent’s practical reasoning need not be so represented; it must simply be capable of being so represented. In particular, Anscombe’s view involves no commitment to any form of psychologism; we do not syllogize before or while we act, the syllogism’s premises do not represent mental states that cause an action to occur, and, quite generally, the practical syllogism does not describe a mental or psychological process anymore than the theoretical syllogism does. Anscombe is quite clear about this: “if Aristotle’s account [sc., of the practical syllogism] were supposed to describe actual mental processes, it would in general be quite absurd” (*ibid.*, 80). A practical syllogism is simply a way to codify the rational order that has its source in our capacities of practical reason and will. She continues: “The interest of the account is that it describes an order which is there whenever actions are done with intentions; the same order as I arrived at in discussing what ‘the intentional action’ was, when the man was pumping water” (*ibid.*, 80; cf. Anscombe 1974/2005).

That is, a practical syllogism represents how the action an agent brings about preserves the good specified in its major premise; it thus represents a specifically practical form of rational necessity.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of the syllogism to Anscombe's account cannot be overstated. For the syllogism shows that no merely causal principle can explain the unity of an intentional action's parts and phases. An intentional action's parts or phases are a unity because they are given under descriptions that locate them within the means–end structure that underlies the practically rational orders of intention and execution.<sup>19</sup> The syllogism serves a heuristic purpose insofar as it makes this practically rational order especially clear.

The foregoing renders Anscombe's otherwise inscrutable remarks at the end of *Intention* pellucid. In an oft neglected passage, Anscombe writes:

In fact the term 'intentional' has reference to a *form of description of events*. What is essential to this form is displayed by the results of our enquiries into the question 'Why?' Events are typically described in this form when 'in order to' or 'because' (in one sense) is attached to their descriptions [...] Thus we can speak of the form of description of 'intentional actions', and of the descriptions which can occur in this form, and note that of these some are and some are not dependent on the existence of this form for their own sense. (*ibid.*, 84–85, emphasis added)

And also:

When we ordinarily speak of practical knowledge we have in mind a certain sort of general capacity in a particular field; but if we hear of a capacity, it is reasonable to ask what constitutes an exercise of it [...] In the case of practical knowledge the exercise of the capacity is nothing but the doing or supervising of the operations of which a man has practical knowledge; but this not *just* the coming about of certain effects [...] for what he effects is *formally characterized* as subject to our question 'Why?' whose application displays the A–D order which we discovered. (*ibid.*, 88)

For Anscombe, descriptions are not intentional because they have a special content and actions are not intentional because they possess some special feature or stand in some special relation to something else; rather, determinations of intentionality are made according to a

<sup>18</sup> See Anscombe 1974/2005; Mueller 1979, and Frey unpublished ms.

<sup>19</sup> For further discussion of this feature of Anscombe's account of action, see Rödl 2007; ch.2, Small 2012; Vogler 2001, and Frey 2017.

form—a form of description of events—and anything that falls under this form must be an object of the practical subject’s practical knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Insofar as one acts intentionally, one’s actions will occupy positions within the practically rational order the syllogism displays, the intentional descriptions under which they are given will be “dependent on the existence of this form for their own sense”, and one will have practical self-knowledge of what one does under these form-dependent descriptions. In short, an intentional action is an intentional object of the joint exercise of our capacities of practical reason and will.

Let us sum up the discussion thus far. We have identified two senses of the question ‘Why?’—*the rational* and *the merely causal*. The question’s rational use, that is, the “special” sense of the question ‘Why?’ associated with practical reasons, elicits the practically rational order internal to the intentional performance. The agent’s ability to answer this question appropriately presupposes that she possesses a distinctively practical knowledge of what she does under an intentional description and its status as an intentional description depends upon its having a location within this order. Contrast this with the Why-question’s merely causal use, in which the truth of the descriptions one offers in one’s answers can be determined from an essentially third-personal, non-practical point of view. From this perspective, the descriptions of what an agent does fall outside the purview of any possible practical syllogism and thus are not objects of a specifically practical form of knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.3.2 Perception and the Question ‘What?’

We will now argue that the way Anscombe delimits the descriptions that give a perceiver’s intentional objects parallels the way she delimits the descriptions that give an agent’s intentions to act.

(P1\*) Intentional objects are the objects to which a certain sense of the question ‘What?’ is given application.

Anscombe insists that “the intentional object is told in answer to a question ‘What?’” (7). But not *every* answer to a What-question reveals an experience’s intentional object. As Anscombe says, your answer can involve a description that,

<sup>20</sup> Anscombe’s arguments against intentionality being reduced to a special property or feature can be found in §19 of *Intention*. For accounts of Anscombe’s argument therein, see Ford 2011 and Vogler 2016.

<sup>21</sup> A merely causal description may be a description an agent knows, but this knowledge nevertheless fails to satisfy Anscombe’s knowledge requirement because it is not known first-personally and practically. The main fault line is not between third-personal knowledge and first-personal knowledge; it is between non-practical knowledge (which includes third-personal knowledge and non-practical, first-personal knowledge) and practical knowledge (which is always first-personal but not the only kind of first-personal knowledge).

though true of what you saw, in a sense does not give you what you saw. A description which is true of a material object of the verb 'to see', but which states something that absolutely or in the circumstances "you can't have *seen*" necessarily gives *only* a material object of seeing. (17)

The answer, 'I see a man whose great uncle died in a lunatic asylum' employs an "absolutely non-intentional description" (17). For the property the description employs is simply not among the properties we can experientially appreciate given our perceptual capacities. The answer 'I see a girl who has a mole between her shoulder blades' said when the girl's front faces the perceiver also employs a non-intentional description (17). For the description does not reflect the way the girl appears to the perceiver given his particular perspective.<sup>22</sup> We will call this first sense of the question 'What?', the sense that prescind from the perceiver's perspective, circumstances, and perceptual capacities, *the material use*.

Not just any reliance on the notion of a point of view or perspective in one's answers will suffice to characterize the special sense of the question 'What?' The descriptions a perceiver offers in response to material uses of the question 'What?' fail to be intentional descriptions because they fail to capture how the objects present in her phenomenally conscious perceptual experiences appear to her from the irreducibly first-personal point of view this variety of consciousness affords. "There is," says Anscombe, "such a thing as simply describing impressions, simply describing the sensible appearances that present

<sup>22</sup> Anscombe also discusses a case in which a perceiver in Oxford says 'Today I saw a man born in Jerusalem'. If said of a newborn child, the description cannot be true given the perceiver's circumstances (assuming the absence of video technology). But if it truly describes an adult, it is another instance of an answer that employs an absolutely non-intentional description since Anscombe maintains that, "there is no 'born-in-Jerusalem' look about a man" (18). These cases raise an obvious and important question: what properties can be included in intentional descriptions of perceptual experiences given the perceptual capacities with which we are typically endowed? As we will soon see, Anscombe claims that a seer can always offer an intentional description of her visual experience's intentional object that describes it *as colored*. In general, each sensory modality will be associated with a proprietary class of "proper sensibles" and these will fix the lower limit of our intentional descriptions. With respect to the upper limit of our intentional descriptions, Anscombe is relatively permissive. She says,

descriptions of visual impressions can be very rich and various. There can be impressions of depth and distance and relative positions and size; of kinds of things and kinds of stuff and texture and even temperature; of facial expression and emotion and mood and thought and character; of action and movement (in the *stationary* impression) and life and death. (16–17)

But even if we adopt a comparatively unstinting standard, there must be some upper bound to the appropriate descriptions one can give in response to the "special sense" of the question 'What?' Therefore, there will always be some true descriptions of a perceptual experience's *material* object that are not descriptions of the experience's *intentional* object.

themselves to one situated thus and thus—or to *myself* (15). It is descriptions of this sort, essentially first-personal descriptions of what is experientially present and phenomenally appreciable before one in experience, that give an experience's intentional object. We will call this second sense of the question 'What?' *the aspectual use*.<sup>23</sup>

According to Anscombe, one can always answer a What-question in its aspectual use. Anscombe concedes that if we ask someone "What do you see?" he can legitimately respond "I don't know." But we can press him further.

[W]e can say: well, at any rate, describe what colours, what variation of light and dark you see. He may say: 'It's frightfully difficult, it all changes so fast, so many colours shifting all the time, I can't describe it, it doesn't stay long enough'—and that's a description. But he cannot say: 'How do you mean, what I see? I only said I could see, I didn't say I could see something—there's no need of a "*what*" I see.' That would be unintelligible. (15)

It is not just wrong for a perceiver to deny completely the application of an aspectual use of the question 'What?'; it is *unintelligible*. To do so is to commit oneself to the nonsensical claim that there is an intentional act, a perceiving, that is not *of* anything at all; it is to say that an intentional act is not intentional. The analogous move, to deny completely the application of the Why-question's rational use to one's intentional actions, is similarly unintelligible. To do so is to commit oneself to the nonsensical claim that there is a practical syllogism (a rational argument) that lacks a conclusion.

The recognition that one must always be able to answer the What-question in its aspectual use places a formal requirement on descriptions of intentional objects that is similar to Anscombe's knowledge requirement on descriptions of intentional actions. We argued that if intentional actions are the material realizations of the practically rational order internal to the exercises of one's capacities of practical reason and will, then there can be no independent evidential ground for an answer to the Why-question in its practically rational sense; in order to act intentionally one must already know what one is doing in a first-personal, non-evidential, and essentially practical manner. Similarly, if a perceptual experience's intentional objects are consciously present in such a way that the subject can appreciate and describe them simply by virtue of undergoing the experience, then this appreciation of how the intentional objects appear is first-personal, non-evidential, and essentially experiential. As Anscombe says, if we pose the What-question in its aspectual use and the perceiver responds by

<sup>23</sup> Anscombe says that verbs like 'to perceive' "are intentional or essentially have an intentional aspect" (11). Searle employs the phrase, 'aspectual shape' to express something similar to what the aspectual use of 'What?' aims to capture at Searle 1992, 155.

saying “What I see is a rectangular, red patch”, then “[w]e don’t ask for a “how we tell” it’s red” (15). For there is no independent evidential ground for the perceiver’s answer; he can “tell” simply by undergoing the experience.

#### 1.4 Toward a Grammatical Account of Perceptual Intentionality

##### 1.4.1 Classificatory Concepts and the Sense-Data Error

At this point, one might worry that Anscombe’s discussion of intentional objects sounds dangerously similar to what proponents of sense-data advocate. If what Anscombe says is correct, then two claims, both hallmarks of almost all varieties of classical empiricism, including the sense-data theory, will be true.

**(CE1)** A perceiver can always answer an aspectual use of the question ‘What?’; she can always describe what her experience is of.

**(CE2)** The descriptions a perceiver employs in her answers to a What-question’s aspectual use are descriptions of what is first-personally and non-evidentially appreciable as present before her in her phenomenally conscious experience.

So does Anscombe break from the vast majority of her contemporaries who view sense-data as “objects of ridicule and contempt”(3)? Yes, at least to this extent: Anscombe is well aware that (CE1) and (CE2) are central commitments of the sense-data theory and chastises those who would “querulously dismiss” them (15). We can and should reject any theory that posits sense-data, but this does not mean that we must explain away or disregard every claim that motivates or guides their adoption. (CE1) and (CE2) are both intuitive and powerful and Anscombe insists that we ought not jettison them entirely.

But if we accept these claims, on what basis are we to reject the sense-data theory? Anscombe’s answer concerns the way proponents of the sense-data theory conceive the question ‘What?’ The only sense of the What-question sense-data theorists recognize is the sense associated with the question’s material use. When one answers such a What-question, one employs a *referential/classificatory concept*. That is, the answers one offers (purport to) pick out some individual, stuff, property, relation, event, etc. or (purport to) pick out a subset of such things as belonging to a kind or class by virtue of its members’ exemplification of some feature or their satisfaction of some criterion.<sup>24</sup> In

<sup>24</sup> In what follows, the distinction between reference and classification is of relatively low importance so we will, for ease of expression, most often use the label ‘classificatory concept’.

general, for a statement that employs a classificatory concept to be true as an answer to a What-question, the perceiver must stand in an appropriate relation to something of which the statement is true. Anscombe says that “the material use of ‘see’ is a use which demands a *material* object of the verb” (13) and goes on to claim that “there is a material object of  $\phi$ -ing if there is a phrase giving an intentional object of  $\phi$ -ing which is also a description of what exists in a *suitable relation* to the  $\phi$ -er” (18, emphasis added). The sense-data theorist agrees and maintains that every appropriate answer to the question “What do you perceive?” employs a classificatory concept and therefore relates the subject to something within that concept’s domain of application.

These commitments lead the sense-data theorist down a familiar and widely excoriated path. When someone asks a totally hallucinated subject “What do you see?” the subject cannot deny the question’s application. They must be able to offer an answer that is true of something and, if it is true of something, the subject must stand in a suitable relation to it. But the hallucinated subject stands in no suitable relation to anything belonging to the domain of experience-independent, physical objects. So there must be something that belongs to a distinct domain of objects (viz., experience-dependent, non-physical objects) that the subject is related to simply by virtue of undergoing the experience.<sup>25</sup> That is, the subject must be related to sense-data. But, given that there is no first-personally appreciable difference in the way hallucinatory, illusory, and veridical experiences present their objects to an experiencing subject, there is no good reason to deny that the domain of objects one is suitably related to whenever one undergoes an experience comprises only sense-data.<sup>26</sup>

According to Anscombe, the sense-data theorist’s cardinal error is his refusal to countenance more than a single sense in which one can ask the question ‘What?’ of a perceiver. To be sure, the sense-data theorist can *approximate* the What-question’s aspectual use. That is, he can secure a use of the What-question that (i) cannot be denied application, (ii) aims to reveal an experience’s intentional object, (iii) can be answered by “simply describing impressions, simply describing the sensible appearances that present themselves to one” (15), and (iv) need not advert to any experience-independent physical object. But, as we have shown, this approximation is still made within a broader framework that recognizes only one sense of the What-

<sup>25</sup> Given Anscombe’s understanding of ‘material object’, sense-data, which are, in one important sense, immaterial, are nevertheless the material objects upon which one is directed in perceptual experience (cf. fn.9).

<sup>26</sup> Answers to What-questions that relate perceivers to experience-independent, physical entities are still intelligible on the sense-data theory, but they will at best be secondary to the kind of answer that gives an experience’s intentional object, namely, that which captures what is first-personally and non-essentially appreciable as present before one in one’s phenomenally conscious experiences.

question—the sense associated with its material use. Although answers to such What-questions can pick out objects from mutually exclusive domains, all of the answers will still employ classificatory (i.e., referential) concepts. This, thinks Anscombe, is to misconstrue entirely the What-question's aspectual use.

An appropriate answer to the question "What do you see?" in its aspectual use involves a description that gives the perceptual act's intentional object, but, Anscombe insists, this answer need not *refer* or even *purport to refer* to *any* object, be it material or intentional. And though all intentional acts are necessarily *of* intentional objects, an intentional act need not place its subject in *any relation* to an object, be it material or intentional. Perceptual intentionality is neither representational nor relational in nature and answers to the What-question's aspectual use do not employ classificatory concepts *at all*. Instead, answers to the aspectual use of 'What?' employ *grammatical concepts*. When I ask someone "What do you see?" in its aspectual use, "[t]he interest of the question and answer," says Anscombe, "is the rather special interest of getting grammatical understanding" (8).<sup>27</sup>

#### 1.4.2 Grammatical Concepts and Direct Objects

Anscombe's use of 'grammatical', like Wittgenstein's, is rooted in an analysis of ordinary grammar. Take, for instance, a sentence's direct object.<sup>28</sup> According to Anscombe, when we ask the question "What is the direct object?" of a sentence, we employ the same special sense of the question 'What?' that we also employ when we ask of an intentional act "What is the act's intentional object?" or "What is it *of*?"

Consider the sentence 'John sent Mary a book'. The question "What is the direct object of the verb in this sentence?" is identical to the question "What does the sentence say John sent Mary?" The answer to both questions is 'a book.' But is this description, *a book*, being used or mentioned when given as an answer? That is, is a direct object a bit of language or something a bit of language refers to, or names, or stands for?

Now if these are the only viable alternatives, it is plain that neither will do. On the one hand, the direct object cannot be a bit of language. John did not send Mary a bit of language. And, except in extraordinarily rare scenarios, a bit of language would be equally inappropriate as an answer to the questions "What do they worship?" or "What do you believe?"<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the direct object

<sup>27</sup> In Anscombe 2000/2015, Anscombe compares grammatical understanding to the grasp of "structure" or "general form."

<sup>28</sup> Teichmann 2008, 129–137 contains a nice discussion of Anscombe's account of direct objects.

<sup>29</sup> Anscombe attempts to allay an obvious response when she insists that "I am not opposing the practice of grammarians and linguists for whom the expression 'direct object' is defined as an expression for a phrase; they use that as I use the expression 'direct-object phrase'" (8).

cannot be what a bit of language refers to either. For the description, *a book*, remains a correct answer to the question “What is the direct object?” even when the sentence is false or when it is, as it is in the present case, merely made up so as to illustrate a point. If the truth value of the sentence is not being considered, then “one can’t sensibly ask ‘Which book?’” in response to the answer ‘a book’ (8). And if the sentence is false, then there simply is no book that John sent Mary. So “[w]e must conclude of ‘objects’ (direct, indirect and likewise intentional) that the object is neither the phrase nor what the phrase stands for” (8).

It is natural to respond to this impasse by asking: “If a direct object is neither a bit of language nor what a bit of language stands for, *what is it?*” Though natural, Anscombe boldly asserts that “this question is based on a mistake” (8). For the sense of ‘what’ the question “What is a direct object?” employs is the material use. One persists in asking the question only if one is blind to the What-question’s aspectual use; one insists on an answer only if one thinks that *direct object* must be a classificatory concept. But this is the same mistake that leads the sense-data theorist to his regrettable conclusions.<sup>30</sup> And Anscombe responds to this mistake in the same way. She says,

though the question is answered (like many questions) by uttering a phrase—in this case ‘a book’—the phrase has a *special use* in answer to that question “What does the sentence say John gave?” *It* can name neither a piece of language, nor anything the piece of language names or otherwise relates to, **nor indeed anything else**. The interest of the question and answer is the rather special interest of getting grammatical understanding. (8, emphasis added)

In this passage, Anscombe denies that *direct object* is a classificatory concept. Direct objects are not a special kind or class of object; understanding direct objects does not involve an ability to pick them out from among the many things that are. According to Anscombe, *direct object* is, rather, a grammatical concept. There is a shared linguistic practice of asking and answering questions such as “What does the sentence ‘John sent Mary a book’ say John sent Mary?” Anscombe claims that “[t]he grammatical concept of a direct object is acquired by one who can answer any such question” (6). What it is to be a direct object is exhausted by its grammatical position within the well-formed sentences that serve as appropriate moves within this practice. To possess grammatical understanding of the concept *direct object* is to be able to demonstrate one’s knowledge of this grammatical position

<sup>30</sup> Anscombe says that the sense-data theorist “takes the expression ‘what do you see’ materially. ‘The visual impression is what you see’ which is a proposition like ‘The direct object is what he sent’, is misconstrued so as to lead to ‘You see an impression’, as the other never would be misconstrued so as to lead to ‘He sent her a direct object’” (13).

and one can do so if one is able to competently ask and appropriately answer the questions this practice comprises.

Anscombe is well aware that the positive characterization of grammatical concepts this initial illustration provides is liable to misunderstanding. She even suggests that all such explanations will in some way be lacking because “the explanations of grammatical terms are only hints at what is really grasped by examples” (8–9). Fortunately, Anscombe does not face these explanatory obstacles alone. She notes that Frege’s claims about *objects* and *concepts* are “based on the same sort of trouble” that besets her own claims about intentional objects (9).<sup>31</sup> We agree with Anscombe, and consider Frege’s essay, “On Concept and Object,” to be a paradigmatic introduction of what Anscombe refers to as grammatical concepts (Frege 1892/1997b). Although we will not offer an exhaustive interpretation of Frege’s object/concept distinction, familiarity with “the sort of trouble” Frege faces will aid us greatly in our attempt to understand Anscombe’s grammatical account of intentionality. So let us now turn briefly to Frege’s discussion.

## 2. Categories: Logical and Intentional

### 2.1 Frege on Logical Categories<sup>32</sup>

According to Frege, it is “a basic logical fact (*logische Urtatsache*)” that a sentence’s grammatical decomposition into subject and predicate mirrors a thought’s logical decomposition into object and concept (Frege 1902/1976, 218). Just as *subject* and *predicate* occupy a grammatically basic nexus of predication in a sentence, so *object* and *concept* occupy a logically basic nexus of subsumption in a thought. And just as predication is an intrinsic feature of predicates that renders them incomplete (*unvollständig*) when considered in isolation from a subject, so subsumption is an intrinsic feature of concepts that renders them unsaturated (*ungesättigt*) when considered in isolation from an object.

These claims, and many other claims that Frege makes, e.g., ‘an object is an integral whole’ and ‘concepts are functions that map objects to truth-values,’ encourage a radically incorrect interpretation of Frege’s view. If we take them at face value, they describe a non-vacuous ontological division of the logical entities that thoughts

<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere, Anscombe claims that Frege’s essays “*Function and Concept*” and “*What is a Function?*” contain “the egg” that Wittgenstein hatches when he develops the idea that “essence is expressed in grammar” (Anscombe 2000/2015, 216; Wittgenstein 1953, §371, 373).

<sup>32</sup> We have, in this section, been greatly influenced by Geach 1976; Diamond 1984, 1988; and Ricketts 2010.

comprise into two mutually exclusive kinds. If we could survey the “third realm,” as it were, we would be able to discern in some of its occupants the exemplification of a characteristic, say, the property of being unsaturated, in virtue of which they belong to the logical kind *concept*. So on this first interpretation, the expressions ‘\_\_ is an object’ and ‘\_\_ is a concept’ signify what we earlier called *classificatory concepts*.<sup>33</sup>

But there is an alternative interpretation according to which *object* and *concept* are not classificatory concepts that determine *logical kinds*; Frege’s descriptions are an oblique communication of thought’s logical articulation and *object* and *concept* are what we, following Geach, will call *logical categories*.<sup>34</sup> This second interpretation comprises three main claims.

- (i) Neither ordinary languages nor properly constructed logical languages can be used to make true (or even sensible) statements about the object/concept distinction.
- (ii) Ordinary language sentences can nevertheless play a heuristic role; they can facilitate the mastery of a properly constructed logical language.
- (iii) We can discern the object/concept distinction in the syntax of a properly constructed logical language’s well-formed formulas.

Frege appears to agree with this interpretation’s guiding thought. “If I want to speak of a concept,” says Frege, “language, with an almost irresistible force, compels me to use an inappropriate expression which obscures—I might almost say falsifies—the thought.”<sup>35</sup> So Frege’s initial descriptions of objects and concepts are, by his own admission, at best misleading and at worst nonsensical.

For example, when Frege says, ‘The concept *horse* is a function with one argument place’, he appears to be making a claim about a concept. But, says Frege, this is not so. For a “concept cannot play [the

<sup>33</sup> Many advance interpretations of Frege along these lines. A particularly clear example is Parsons 1986.

<sup>34</sup> According to Geach: “Frege already held, and his philosophy of logic would oblige him to hold, that there are logical category distinctions which will clearly show themselves in a well-constructed formalized language, but which cannot properly be asserted in language: the sentences in which we seek to convey them in the vernacular are logically improper and admit of no translation into well-formed formulas of symbolic logic. All the same, there is a test for these sentences’ having conveyed the intended distinctions—namely, that by their aid mastery of the formalized language is attainable” (Geach 1976, 55).

<sup>35</sup> Frege 1892/1997a, 174. Frege asserts slight variations in this claim on many occasions. For example: “I admit that there is a quite peculiar obstacle in the way of an understanding with my reader. By a kind of necessity of language, my expressions, taken literally, sometimes miss my thought; I mention an object, when what I intend is a concept” (Frege 1892/1997b, 192; cf. Frege 1906/1969, 192ff. and Frege 1906/1997, 295–6).

part of grammatical subject], in view of its predicative nature” (Frege 1892/1997b, 185). So the grammatical subject ‘the concept *horse*’ cannot signify a concept and, in general, we cannot truthfully (or sensibly) say of a concept that it is a concept.<sup>36</sup>

Although his initial claims are necessarily misleading and possibly nonsensical, Frege maintains that they nevertheless provide hints (*Anspeilung*) that can lead us to understand the object/concept distinction.<sup>37</sup> They can do so because they facilitate the mastery of his *Begriffsschrift*. While this logical language is no better than ordinary languages for making statements about distinctions of logical category, these distinctions are nevertheless reflected in the language’s syntactical segmentation and in the structurally determined ways in which we can use the language to express thoughts, in particular, thoughts that employ two logically distinct varieties of quantificational generalization: first-order and higher-order universal/existential generalization.<sup>38</sup>

The point is not that there is some independently grounded, ontological classification of entities into two logical kinds—objects and concepts—that serve as the respective domains of the two varieties of quantificational generality we can employ. The point is rather that these distinct quantificational abilities determine thought’s logical articulation. This articulation is reflected in the syntactic segmentation of a properly constructed logical language’s well-formed formulas and consists in the language’s regimentation of two logically distinct varieties of quantificational generality. If one has mastered such a language, one has mastered the basic quantificational abilities it allows one to exercise. And if one has mastered these basic varieties of

<sup>36</sup> Another example (from Ricketts 2010, 182): when Frege says ‘No object is a concept’, the terms ‘object’ and ‘concept’ signify, according to his own initial construal of such terms, first-level concepts that take objects as arguments. This statement is therefore equivalent to a generalization, namely, that no object that falls under the concept signified by ‘object’ falls under the concept signified by ‘concept’. But *every* object falls under ‘\_\_ is an object’ and *no* object falls under ‘\_\_ is a concept’. This generalization is far from capturing a “distinction of the highest importance” (Frege 1892/1997b, 192). It is a vacuous triviality equivalent to the claim that no object is a non-object.

<sup>37</sup> Two relevant quotes: (i) “On the introduction of a name for something logically simple, a definition is not possible. There is nothing for it but to lead the reader or hearer, by means of hints, to understand the words as is intended” (Frege 1892/1997b, 182). (ii) “‘Complete’ and ‘unsaturated’ are of course only figures of speech; but all that I wish or am able to do here is to give hints” (*ibid.*, 193).

<sup>38</sup> *Begriffsschrift* has two syntactically distinct argument positions: (i) an argument position determined by proper names and (ii) an argument position determined by predicates. The placement of variables in the former allows the expression of first-level generalizations (i.e., object-level generalizations) and the placement of variables in the latter allows the expression of higher-level generalizations (i.e., concept-level generalizations). In the notation of *Begriffsschrift*’s present-day descendants, these uses are captured, respectively, in the sentences  $(\forall x)Fx$  and  $(\forall F)F\bar{x}$ . *Begriffsschrift* contains no variable that would allow one to generalize simultaneously over both types of argument position.

quantificational generalization, one appreciates the roles or positions ‘object’ and ‘concept’ indicate within thought’s logical structure. Such an individual will also recognize that Frege’s initial discussion of objects and concepts is inadequate. But these inadequacies do not strip the logical categories they aim to illuminate of their significance. For the significance of these categories does not stem from the contents of sentences or thoughts; it derives from the logical structure of thought itself.

## 2.2 Anscombe on Intentional Categories

The way in which a thought is, for Frege, a logically articulate unity—a categorial nexus of *object* and *concept*—mirrors the way in which a perceptual act is, for Anscombe, an intentionally articulate unity—a grammatical nexus of *intentional object* and *intentional subject*.<sup>39</sup> Or so we will now argue.

There are numerous respects in which Anscombe’s grammatical account of perceptual acts parallels Frege’s categorial account of thoughts, but two features deserve special consideration. First, according to Frege, thoughts are not “constructed” from logically prior objects and concepts by means of some third element. Objects and concepts are not *relata*; they mark positions within the logical articulation of logically unitary thoughts. The categorial nexus of *object* and *concept* in which thought’s logical unity consists is prior to the logical categories themselves, for it is “essential for a concept that the question whether something falls under it have a sense.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, according to Anscombe, there is no third element in virtue of which a perceptual act’s subject is intentionally directed upon an object. Intentional subjects and intentional objects are not *relata*; instead, they mark positions within the intentional articulation of intentionally unitary perceptual acts. The grammatical nexus of *intentional subject* and *intentional object* in which a perceptual act’s intentional unity consists is prior to the grammatical concepts themselves, for it is essential for an intentional subject that the question whether it is *of* something have a sense.

Second, we cannot understand objects, concepts, intentional objects, or intentional subjects referentially or classificatorily. As we

<sup>39</sup> C. Frey 2013 defends an account of perceptual intentionality that resonates in many ways with the account we attribute to Anscombe.

<sup>40</sup> Frege 1882/1997, 81. As Frege says, the imprecision of ordinary language “creates the impression that the relation of subsumption is a third element supervenient upon the object and the concept. This isn’t the case: the unsaturatedness of the concept brings it about that the object, in effecting the saturation, engages immediately with the concept, without need of any special cement. Concept and object are fundamentally dependent on each other, and in subsumption we have their fundamental connection” (Frege 1906a/1969, 193, cf. Frege 1892/1997b, 193).

have just seen, the distinction between *object* and *concept* does not divide those entities relevant to thought into exclusive ontological kinds. To be an object or a concept is not to exemplify some property or satisfy some criterion that would mark them off or differentiate them from the members of some broader kind. For ‘object’ and ‘concept’ do not signify classificatory concepts, they signify logical categories. And we have argued that, for Anscombe, to be an intentional object is not to exemplify some property or satisfy some criterion that would mark it off or differentiate it from some broader kind. ‘Intentional object’ does not signify a classificatory but a grammatical concept.

Are *intentional subjects* similarly non-classificatory? The expression that gives a perceptual act’s intentional subject is the first-person pronoun, ‘I’, and Anscombe famously maintains that ‘I’ “is neither a name nor another kind of expression whose logical role is to make a reference, *at all*” (1975/1981, 32).<sup>41</sup>

What Anscombe means by this claim is especially clear in the case that presently concerns us, namely, ‘I’ statements about one’s perceptual acts. Anscombe recognizes the temptation to treat ‘I’ or ‘the subject’ referentially. She says, “if one speaks of ‘the subject’ in that philosophic usage, it is difficult to avoid the idea that one has introduced an extraordinary sort of object: something that is indeed not present, because it is what presentations are made *to*” (1976/1981, 56). But to submit to this temptation, to treat subjects as a special class of objects whose *differentia* is the peculiar property that the description ‘not itself present but what presentations are made to’ picks out, is to eliminate what is essential to being a perceptual act’s intentional subject.<sup>42</sup> It is to fail to countenance the distinctive variety of self-awareness that intentional acts afford. For just as the logical categories *object* and *concept* reflect the basic varieties of quantificationally general thought in which we engage, so *intentional object* and *intentional subject* reflect the basic varieties of first-personal, non-evidential, and essentially experiential awareness available in an intentional perceptual act: *other-consciousness* and *self-consciousness*. The former is what allows us to have “unmediated agent-or-patient conceptions of actions, happenings and states” (1975/1981, 36). It is what is involved when we are “simply

<sup>41</sup> To call it infamous is to be kind. Anscombe’s discussions on the first person have received the epithets “barely credible”, “extraordinary”, “incredible, difficult to understand at all”, and “so counter-intuitive that everything possible should be done to avoid it” (Cassam 1997, 135; Evans 1982, 214; Kripke 2011, 312; and Peacocke 2008, 81, respectively).

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Anscombe claims that “[t]his is the principal root of the philosophic idea of ‘the subject’—that ‘I’ does not stand for any object, not for anything presented” (Anscombe 1976/1981, 55).

describing impressions, simply describing the sensible appearances that present themselves to one situated thus and thus—or to *myself*” (15). The latter is a variety of awareness “which only ‘I’-users have” and Anscombe contrasts it explicitly with “consciousness of a self” (1975/1981, 26 and 25). Its occurrence is what explains many peculiar features of sentences that involve ‘I’, for example, that self-ascriptive reports are *immune to error through misidentification*.<sup>43</sup>

Anscombe agrees that to whom one ascribes something in a self-ascriptive report is not something about which one can err. But, Anscombe says:

Getting hold of the wrong object is excluded, and that makes us think that getting hold of the right object is guaranteed. But the reason is that there is no object at all. With names, or denoting expressions (in Russell’s sense) there are two things to grasp: the kind of use, and what to apply them to from time to time. With ‘I’ there is only the use. (*ibid.*, 32)

To construe ‘I’ referentially is to eliminate the variety of self-consciousness that Anscombe thinks is absolutely central to the first-person perspective our perceptual acts manifest. If one cannot avail oneself of this variety of self-consciousness, one must “explain ‘self’ in ‘self-consciousness’ either by explaining what sort of object that accompanying self was, or by explaining [...] that special “way of being given” of an object” that leads to, among other things, ‘I’ statements being immune to error through misidentification (*ibid.*, 26). But if one embarks upon this path, if one replaces self-consciousness with consciousness-of-self and takes ‘I’ to refer to a (very special) object—the self—which is the object of such consciousness, then one will be disappointed by their final destination. For, argues Anscombe, “if ‘I’ is a referring expression, then Descartes was right about what the referent was” (*ibid.*, 31). That is, the only way to guarantee that ‘I’ refers is to identify its referent, the self, with a Cartesian Ego. This position, Anscombe contends, is beset with “intolerable difficulty” and commitment to it constitutes a “a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea of ‘I’ as a word whose role is to “make a singular reference”” (*ibid.*, 31).

Anscombe is happy to characterize a perceptual act’s intentional subject as “that to which an intentional object is present” and to characterize a perceptual act’s intentional object as “that which is present to an intentional subject.” But these characterizations do not effect an ontological division between two classes of entity. Rather, like Frege’s characterizations of concepts and objects, these characterizations are an oblique communication of a perceptual act’s intentional structure

<sup>43</sup> On this notion, see Shoemaker 1968, Evans 1982, and Pryor 1999.

and the grammatical positions *intentional subject* and *intentional object* occupy within it.<sup>44</sup> One uses ‘I’, in statements like “I see a red chair” to express one’s grammatical understanding of the position intentional subjects occupy within intentional acts.

This is not to deny that what makes an ‘I’ statement true or false is how things stand with a particular human being. Nor is it to deny that sentences like ‘I am a human being’ are true. As Anscombe explains,

‘I am this thing here’ is, then, a real proposition, but not a proposition of identity. It means: this thing here is the thing, the person (in the ‘offences against the person’ sense) of whose action *this* idea of action is an idea, of whose movements *these* ideas of movement are ideas, of whose posture *this* idea of posture is the idea. And also, of which these intended actions, if carried out, will be the actions. (*ibid.*, 33)

The thesis is meant, however, to deny that these semantic connections hold in virtue of ‘I’ *referring* to a particular human being and it is to deny that sentences like ‘I am this this living body’ or ‘I am E. A.’ express numerical identities between the referents of singular expressions.<sup>45</sup> For neither the descriptions that give us an act’s intentional object nor the expressions that give us an act’s intentional subject do so by referring to or describing an entity.

But can we move beyond this negative characterization? Can we say something positive about the semantic, epistemic, and metaphysical connections between the objects and subjects we describe intentionally and the material objects we describe non-intentionally? In the next section, we will extend to action the grammatical account of intentionality which will help to resolve these outstanding questions.

### 3. The Grammatical Account’s Analogical Extension and the Possibility of Failure

We will orient the discussion of Anscombe’s grammatical account of the intentionality of action around the third aspect of intentionality that Anscombe highlights: the possibility of failure.

<sup>44</sup> It is this very situation that pitches Anscombe into “the same sort of trouble” that afflicted Frege. Discussions of logical categories surpass language’s expressive limits. These limits force Frege to affirm the seemingly contradictory sentence “The concept *horse* is not a concept”. Discussions of grammatical concepts surpass the very same expressive limits. For example, Anscombe must, and *does* (!), assert that “there is a way of taking ‘The direct object is not a direct object’ which makes this true” (7). It is no surprise, then, that Anscombe adopts a Fregean idiom when she admits that “the explanations of grammatical terms are only *hints* at what is really grasped in examples” (8–9, emphasis added).

<sup>45</sup> Anscombe says that “[i]f I am right in my general thesis, there is an important consequence—namely, that ‘I am E. A.’ is after all not an identity proposition” (*ibid.*, 33).

(A3) The “description under which you intend to do what you do may not come true [...] You act, but your intended act does not happen” (4).

(P3) The description under which a perceptual experience’s intentional object is given may not be true of any material object. You undergo an experience, but it is illusory or hallucinatory (4–5).

Everyone agrees that neither perceptual nor practical success is guaranteed. Two pairs of possibilities ensure that this is so. With respect to perception, one can perceive an object but perceive it incorrectly (illusion) or one can simply fail to perceive an object altogether (hallucination). With respect to action, one can fail to do what one intended to do or one can simply fail to do anything at all.

It is difficult to reconcile these possibilities with other plausible commitments about action and perception. In fact, these possibilities confront both philosophers of perception and action with an inconsistent triad of propositions.

### **Perception’s Inconsistent Triad:**

[T1] A veridical experience’s intentional object = a material object

When one’s experience is veridical, there are both intentional and non-intentional descriptions of what one perceives. We would like to say that, in these successful cases, the material object one describes non-intentionally is identical to the intentional object. Anscombe seems to agree; she is adamant that “[w]hen it is beyond question that the phrase giving an intentional object does describe and indicate a material object in this sense, then the question as to the identity of the intentional object reduces to the question as to the identity of the material object” (11).

[T2] A hallucinatory experience’s intentional object  $\neq$  a material object

Even though the aspectual use of the question ‘What?’ is typically posed in response to veridical perceivings, it can be posed when a subject undergoes a hallucinatory experience in order to elicit a description of its intentional object. But the descriptions that give a hallucinatory experience’s intentional object will not be true of any relevant material object. For “if I am totally hallucinated, then in no sense do I see what is before my eyes” (18).

[T3] A veridical experience's intentional object = a hallucinatory experience's intentional object

It is answers to the What-question's aspectual use that give an experience's intentional object, and the intentional descriptions a subject could offer when she undergoes a hallucinatory experience would be the same intentional descriptions she could offer if she were to undergo a subjectively indistinguishable, veridical experience.

**Action's Inconsistent Triad:**

[T4] An executed intention = a material happening

When one acts intentionally there are both intentional and non-intentional descriptions of one's performance. We would like to say, if everything goes well, that the material happening one describes non-intentionally is identical to the intentional action one describes. Anscombe seems to agree when she endorses the slogan "I *do* what *happens*" (1963/2000, 52).

[T5] An unexecuted intention  $\neq$  a material happening

Even though the rational use of the question 'Why?' is typically posed in response to the performance of an action, it can be posed before an agent does anything or while an agent is being prevented from doing something in order to elicit a description of the agent's intentions. But the intentional descriptions the agent's answers reveal will not be true of any relevant material happening.

[T6] An executed intention to act = an unexecuted intention to act

It is answers to the Why-question's rational use that give an agent's intentions in action, and the intentional descriptions a subject could offer of her unexecuted intentions would be the same intentional descriptions she could offer of her executed intentions.

These inconsistent sets of propositions raise numerous questions. What is it to identify what we describe intentionally with what we describe non-intentionally? What is going on when we offer intentional descriptions in the absence of relevant material objects or happenings? In what sense, if any, are our non-intentional descriptions independent from what is or occurs in our external environment?

### 3.1 Failure in Perception

Let us first focus on perception. There have been many attempts to eliminate the inconsistency we have described. Sense-data theorists abandon [T2]. The intentional objects of veridical and hallucinatory experiences are the same; both are directed upon amalgams of inner, mind-dependent sense-data and these sense-data are, in Anscombe's sense, the experiences' material objects. Representationists offer consistent versions of [T1]—[T3] by reinterpreting them in terms of representational contents. Veridical experiences and hallucinatory experiences can have the same contents and these contents determine veridicality conditions. In a veridical experience, a relevant material object satisfies these conditions; in a hallucinatory experience, no relevant material object satisfies these conditions.<sup>46</sup>

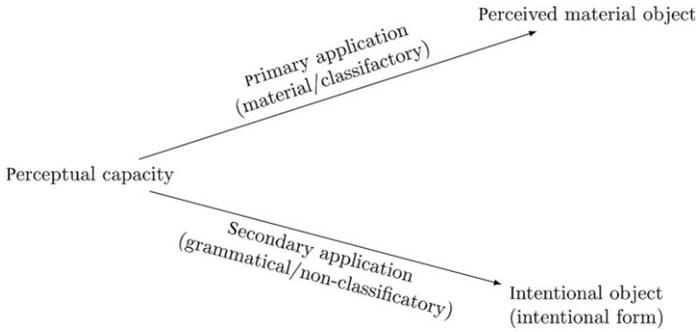
Anscombe takes a different path. We have already discussed her rejection of the sense-data theory (in §1.4). “No one”, says Anscombe, “will be tempted to think that direct objects as such are a special type of entity” and “no one would think that if a sentence says John sent Mary a book, what it immediately and directly says he sent her was a direct object, and only in some indirect fashion, via this immediate object, does it say he sent her a book” (9). The fact that “this temptation exists very strongly for objects of thought and sensation” (9) is due to the sense-data theorist's inability to countenance any use of the question ‘What?’ other than material uses that employ classificatory concepts.

Anscombe also clearly rejects representationalist theories of perceptual intentionality. Although the descriptions one gives in response to the What-question's aspectual use can be true or false of a material object, when one gives such a description, one is not putting it forward as a description that represents, or purports to represent, that any material object is some way or other. In fact, if you answer the aspectual use of the question ‘What?’ when you believe yourself to be hallucinating, it would come “as a surprise to you that you would have had the right to intend the words materially” (19).<sup>47</sup>

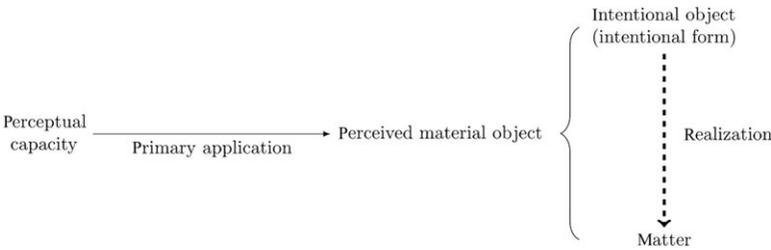
Given her grammatical account, Anscombe cannot endorse [T1]—[T3]. But she can reinterpret them so that they are all unproblematically true. According to Anscombe, we possess a unitary perceptual capacity that can be exercised in two ways (see Figure 1). Its “primary

<sup>46</sup> These two responses do not exhaust the available options. For example, relationalists that eschew sense-data abandon [T3]. This commitment, namely, *disjunctivism*, holds that subjectively indistinguishable experiences need not have the same intentional objects.

<sup>47</sup> Given this, we find it surprising that some contemporary representationalists, e.g., Harman 1990, consider Anscombe to be among representationalism's early proponents.



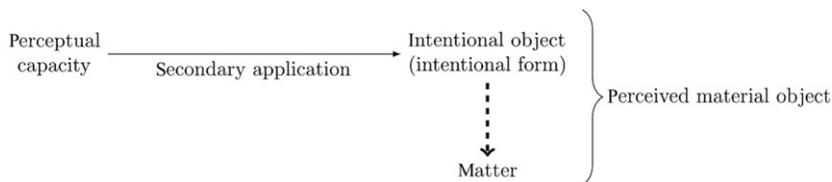
**Figure 1: Perception.**



**Figure 2: Perception's Primary Application.**

application” directs a subject upon perceived material objects; for “the words giving the object of a verb of sense are necessarily most often intended as giving *material* objects of sense: for this is their primary application” (13). But there is a “secondary application” that directs a subject upon a “*merely* intentional object” (13); for when you say “I see’—believing that the objects were quite illusory—you *intended* your description purely as an intentional one; you were giving the words [...] a secondary application” (19).

Although Anscombe cannot claim, as [T1] does, that a veridical experience’s intentional object is numerically identical to a material object, she can say that what we perceive, when everything goes well, is a *materially realized intentional object* (see Figure 2). We can, on such occasions, offer both intentional and non-intentional descriptions of what we see. Hence, we are inclined to speak of an intentional object and a material object even though there is, strictly speaking, only one object seen. It might be less confusing, given this inclination, to replace talk of intentional objects with that of intentional forms. On



**Figure 3: Perception's Secondary Application.**

this broadly hylomorphic account, what we perceive in a veridical experience is an intentional form realized materially.<sup>48</sup>

In the primary case where we successfully perceive something, we can answer the aspectual use of the question 'What?' (see Figure 3). Our intentional descriptions will, in fact, be true of a relevant material object. But in offering them we do not intend to describe a material object *as such*. Intentional objects are not material objects bearing a special feature that makes them intentional. Rather, intentional objects are such because they are subject to "a form of description of objects." We acquire the grammatical concept of an intentional object by mastering a practice of asking and answering a special sense of the question 'What?', viz., the aspectual use, just the same as we acquire the grammatical concept of direct object by mastering a natural language. Our correct moves within this social-linguistic practice demonstrate our grammatical understanding of perceptual experience's intentional structure and the positions *intentional object* and *intentional subject* occupy within it.<sup>49</sup> When we respond to the special sense of the question 'What?' we provide intentional descriptions of objects, and these descriptions express our understanding of what is formally constitutive of what we perceive *qua* experientially present to us as intentional subjects.

<sup>48</sup> This hylomorphic account of perceived material objects does not entail that intentional objects/forms are, say, uninstantiated universals or "visible species" (cf. Johnston 2004). This would simply be another case of conceiving 'intentional object' classificatorily. 'Intentional form' like 'intentional object' is to be construed grammatically.

<sup>49</sup> The understanding does not go beyond the ability to make a correct move in the practice. In this way, grammatical understanding is like the possession of a skill. It is enough to possess the skill of tying shoelaces that one can do it without thinking about it; one's ability to do it straightaway is compatible with one's inability to explain it clearly to another. The same is true of grammatical understanding; there is no expectation that a person with grammatical understanding of the concepts *intentional subject* and *intentional object* could articulate this understanding to someone else.

With respect to [T2], “merely” intentional objects are not a class of entity; and thus all “questions as to the kind of existence—the ontological status—of intentional objects as such [...] are nonsensical” (11).<sup>50</sup> Intentional descriptions of what hallucinatory experiences are of are neither failed attempts to describe material objects nor successful attempts to describe a different kind of entity. They are descriptions of an entirely different sort insofar as they do not (purport to) refer to anything and thus do not employ classificatory concepts at all. When we offer these descriptions in our answers to the What-question’s aspectual use, we demonstrate our grammatical understanding of the positional intentional objects and intentional subjects occupy within conscious experience’s bipartite formal articulation.

Finally, we should conceive the identity [T3] expresses not numerically but *formally*.<sup>51</sup> The intentional descriptions a perceiver is able to offer when undergoing a veridical experience are the very same descriptions the perceiver would be able to offer when undergoing a subjectively indistinguishable hallucinatory experience.<sup>52</sup> Neither set of intentional descriptions purports to refer to or classify an object, be it intentional or material. But each of these intentional descriptions captures the formally identical manner in which the intentional perceptual acts that occasion them present a phenomenally appreciable scene to an intentional subject’s essentially first-personal and experientially conscious perspective.

### 3.2 *Failure in Action*

Let us now turn to action. We sometimes fail to do what we intend to do. That is, sometimes an agent reports “what he is at present doing” but “what he says is not true” (1963/2000, 56). There are several

<sup>50</sup> Anscombe goes on to claim that “[i]t is evident nonsense to ask about the mode of existence or ontological status of the direct object as such: or to ask what kind of thing *a book* is, as it is thought of in answer to the question about the direct object” (11).

<sup>51</sup> We will elaborate further upon this notion of formal identity (and the notion of formal cause it presupposes) in the next subsection.

<sup>52</sup> Given the imprecise and messy nature of our linguistic practices, there will often be limits to what we can determinately conclude about particular cases. “It is important to notice,” says Anscombe, “that very often there is no answer to the question whether people intend the word ‘see’ in its *material* use or not” (19). For “we need not have determinately meant the word ‘see’ one way or the other” (20). So if someone informs you that what you took to be a veridical experience was actually hallucinatory, they might then ask: “would you claim that you mean ‘see’ in such a way that all you have to do is alter your intentions for the description of the object, from intending it in its *primary* application as a description of the *material* object of sight to intending it in a *secondary* application as a description of a mere *impression*?” (19). Anscombe says that “we have in general the right to reject” this question, and “even if we have not this right, we generally entertain no such supposition and *therefore* are unprepared with an answer” (19–20, cf. 23–4).

possible sources of this discrepancy. For example, it may arise because the agent is ignorant of the action's immediate circumstances—unknownst to the man pumping, there is a hole in the pipe, and so he is not replenishing the house supply as he says. But this explanation does not impute a “direct contradiction” to what he says he is doing—his report of practical knowledge—according to Anscombe, since he could presumably fix the pipe once he notices the water is not getting to the cistern and continue his pumping until he executes his intention successfully.<sup>53</sup> It is perfectly consistent with an agent's practical knowledge that he change course in light of how he sees things progressing.

But Anscombe entertains at least two types of total failure to do what one intends, failures that involve a direct contradiction and falsification of an agent's intentional descriptions of what she is doing—i.e., her purported practical knowledge. The first type of failure involves an error in performance; in such a case the agent does something but it is not what she intended to do. Anscombe imagines the following case:

As when I say to myself ‘Now I press Button A’—pressing Button B—a thing which can certainly happen. This I will call the *direct* falsification of what I say. And here, to use Theophrastus' expression again, the mistake is not one of judgment but of performance. That is, we do not say: What you *said* was a mistake, because it was supposed to describe what you did and did not describe it, but: What you *did* was a mistake, because it was not in accordance with what you said. (*ibid.*, 57)

In this example, the button pusher acts intentionally—i.e., on purpose in pursuit of an end arrived at by practical reason—but does not do what she intends. Her will is not realized in her action. This is a mistake in the performance rather than in intention.

In the second type of failure, the agent simply fails to do anything relevant *at all* (*ibid.*, 9). In cases like this (e.g., sudden paralysis, forgetfulness, external constraint, etc.) there is no material happening for the agent's intentional descriptions to describe, truly or otherwise. The agent has no knowledge of what she does because she doesn't do anything.

That Anscombe's account is supposedly incompatible with total practical failure is among its most persistent criticisms. For if one must always know what one intends to do, and if what one intends to do is what one causes to happen, then, her critics insist, this obliterates an obvious distinction upon which the possibility of practical

<sup>53</sup> Anscombe 1963/2000, 56–7. Michael Thompson develops this line of defense in Thompson 2011. While this account fits the case where there is time for correction, it does not fit the cases of radical failure that Anscombe discusses.

failure depends: the distinction between *intending to do something* and *actually doing what one intends*.<sup>54</sup> To be fair, some Anscombeans appear to bite this bullet and deny the possibility of meaningful practical failure.<sup>55</sup> We think it is obvious, however, that Anscombe herself not only accepts this possibility but also points us in the direction of its proper explanation.

Before we explain how Anscombe deals with these types of practical failure, we first want to describe a kind of explanation that she emphatically rejects, which we will, following convention, call *the standard account of action*.<sup>56</sup> According to the standard account, intentions to act and intentional actions are ontologically distinct. An intention to act is a mental state, act, or event—for instance, a propositional attitude with a content that specifies a relevant act type—and an intentional action of that type is a material event/process that is caused “in the right way” by the prior mental phenomenon. Agents first personally and immediately know the contents of their intentions with the authority that generally characterizes the self-knowledge we have of our own propositional attitudes. When what an agent does is not what she says she intends, the intention’s content does not truly describe what the agent does, and so we deny that she knows what she is doing but only what she intends. Even when an agent causes nothing to happen, when she fails to do anything at all, she can still be said to know her own mind, what she intends.<sup>57</sup>

Anscombe rejects the standard account of action for the same reasons she rejects the sense-data and representationalist accounts of perception.<sup>58</sup> To see why, we must first note three parallels between the accounts of perceptual intentionality Anscombe rejects and the standard account of action.

First, the sense-data theory claims that we are first-personally and non-evidentially aware of certain internal, mind-dependent objects; these mind-dependent objects are ontologically distinct from the

<sup>54</sup> See Setiya 2008 and Paul 2009.

<sup>55</sup> See Marcus 2012 and Small 2012. We think the claim is wrong both as a matter of Anscombe interpretation and as a philosophical position.

<sup>56</sup> For a nice description of the standard account, see the introduction to Velleman 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Anscombe describes this last feature of the standard account as follows: “a man can form an intention which he then does nothing to carry out, either because he is prevented or because he changes his mind: but the intention itself can be complete, although it remains a purely interior thing” (*ibid.*, 9). If the standard account is correct, it dissolves action’s inconsistent triad: [T6] is false because (unexecuted) intentions to act are not identical to, but are rather the causes of, executed intentions to act (i.e., intentional actions).

<sup>58</sup> That the reasoning that leads to the introduction of practical attitudes of intending to act parallels the reasoning that leads to the introduction of sense-data is noted by Blackburn 1998, 250–256 and Korsgaard 2009, 124–125. For an attempt to block the idea that the standard account is committed to a practical analogue of the veil of perception, see Paul 2013.

mind-independent objects that regularly cause them and, at best, we are aware of these mind-independent objects indirectly and evidentially. Similarly, the standard account of action claims that we first-personally and non-evidentially know the contents of certain internal, mental states; these states are ontologically distinct from the intentional actions they cause and, at best, we know these intentional actions only indirectly or evidentially. The mind-independent, external world's existential uncertainties compel both of these inward retreats.

Second, the standard account of action provides a positive answer to Wittgenstein's famous question, "What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?" (Wittgenstein 1953, §621). Since an intentional arm raising is, on the standard account, simply a bodily movement with an appropriate etiology, the difference of Wittgenstein's proposed subtraction would be the bodily movement's independent and autonomous mental cause. Similarly, the representationalist account of perceptual intentionality provides a positive answer to the corresponding question, "What is left over if I subtract the fact that there is a tree before me from the fact that I perceive a tree?" Since to perceive a tree is, on the representationalist account, simply to stand in a suitable relation to a tree that satisfies the perceptual experience's content-determined veridicality conditions, if we subtract the tree, we render the experience hallucinatory. What remains is the experience's independent and autonomous representational content and having contents of this sort exhausts what it is for an experience to possess intentionality.

Third, (and most important since it grounds the previous similarities), sense-data theorists, representationalists, and advocates of the standard account of action only countenance answers to What-questions that employ classificatory concepts. Inclusion in a classificatory concept's domain is determined by the exemplification of one or more *differentiae*. So, according to the standard account of action, bodily movements are a subclass of material events or processes that exemplify some feature *F*, activities are a subclass of bodily movements that exemplify some feature *G*, and intentional actions are a subclass of activities that exemplify some feature *H*.<sup>59</sup>

It is this final similarity that motivates Anscombe's principal objection to the standard account of action. No classificatory concept, according to Anscombe, captures that in virtue of which intentional actions are intentional. Anscombe insists that, "an action is not called 'intentional' in virtue of any extra feature which exists when it is performed" (1963/2000, 28). She argues that,

<sup>59</sup> These nestings are additive; it is equally correct to say that intentional actions are a subclass of material events or processes that exemplify *F*, *G*, and *H*. Of course, different versions of the standard account will privilege some *differentiae* and classes over others. Again, for a nice description of this aspect of the standard account of action, see Velleman 2000.

in describing intentional actions as such, it will be a mistake to look for the fundamental description of what occurs—such as the movements of muscles or molecules—and then think of intention as something, perhaps very complicated, which qualifies this. The only events considered are intentional actions themselves, and to call an action intentional is to say it is intentional under some description that we give (or could give) of it. (*ibid.*, 29; cf. 84, 88)

In particular, it is not by virtue of standing in causal relations to members of some other class of entity, whatever these relations or entities end up being, that bodily movements gain membership in the comparatively exalted class of intentional actions.<sup>60</sup>

In order to arrive at a satisfactory account of intentionality, we must reject all appeals to classificatory concepts. Anscombe makes this move explicitly. She writes:

If one simply attends to the fact that many actions can be either intentional or unintentional, it can be quite natural to think that events which are characterizable as intentional or unintentional are a certain natural class, 'intentional' being an extra property which a philosopher must try to describe. In fact the term 'intentional' has reference to a *form* of description of events. What is essential to this form is displayed by the results of our enquiries into the question 'Why?' (*ibid.*, 84)

We have already argued (§1.3.1) that this form of description of events is characterized by a specifically practical order (the A–D order, or the order of intention) that must be known by the agent in a peculiarly practical way. This intentional order is realized in the performance (it is then the D–A order, or the order of execution), which is why Anscombe says that “the form of description of events” she is after is one that can be characterized as “executed intentions” (*ibid.*, 87). One comes to understand “what is essential to this form” by mastering the practice of asking and answering the rational use of the question ‘Why?’ On this account, the distinction between doing and intending is not ontological but grammatical; for in making the distinction we are not distinguishing (physical) effects and their prior (mental) causes; we are rather marking two different perspectives

<sup>60</sup> The following quote expresses this commitment well: “I conjecture that a cause of this failure of percipience is the standard approach by which we first distinguish between ‘action’ and what merely happens, and then specify that we are talking about ‘actions.’ So what we are considering is already given as—in a special sense—an action, and not just any old thing which we do, such as making an involuntary gesture. Such a gesture might be caused, for example, by realizing something (the ‘onset of a belief’) when we are in a certain state of desire. Something I do is not made into an intentional action by being caused by a belief and desire, even if the descriptions fit” (Anscombe 1974/2005; 111). Ford 2015 and Vogler 2016 offer different arguments to this same conclusion.

upon one and the same rational order (the perspective of rational deliberation that determines means and the perspective of material execution that realizes those means).

To better understand these claims, it is useful to return to the practical syllogism and, in particular, to Anscombe's claim that the practical syllogism's conclusion represents an intentional performance or doing—a material realization or execution of the practical order outlined in the syllogism's premises. Neither a practical syllogism's conclusion (the performance) nor its premises (the practical reasons) are intelligible as such when considered in isolation from the other: the syllogism is a representation of the unity of an agent's practical thought, desire, and bodily movement.<sup>61</sup> In particular, a practical syllogism's conclusion is unintelligible *qua* intentional action when considered in isolation from the reasoning specified in its premises. For the rational order inscribed in the performance, the order of execution, is the mirror image of the rational order outlined in the premises, the order of intention. In the order of intention, one begins with the end one rationally desires and then determines through rational deliberation the means appropriate to this end's achievement. Conversely, in the order of execution, one begins by realizing the means one has determined through rational deliberation, starting with the means furthest removed from the end one rationally desires, and continuing until one realizes one's end successfully.

So, when an agent acts intentionally, she causes things to happen in accordance with the order of execution and what she does, when so ordered, is the material realization of the order of intention that characterizes her practical reasoning. This is why Anscombe is able to endorse the Thomistic maxim that “[p]ractical knowledge is ‘the cause of what it understands’” (*ibid.*, 87). The sense of cause at issue here is that of a *formal cause*. In the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition in which appeals to such causes are commonplace, a form is “the *logos* of the essence” or, more literally, “the *logos* of the what it is to be” (*ho logos, ho tou ti ēn einai*).<sup>62</sup> In this context, ‘*logos*’ means something like *order* or *ratio*. A “form according to the *logos*” (Aristotle, *Phys.* II.1 193b1–2) is that by which we say what something is when defining it and a form is something's cause if it is both the principle by virtue of which it comes to be what it is and the principle by virtue of which it is what it is. That is, a form *qua* cause is both (i) the principle by virtue of which something comes to realize (through the movement of an efficient cause and for the sake of a final cause) the order its essence instantiates, and (ii) the principle by virtue of which something continues to realize the order its essence instantiates once it has come to be.

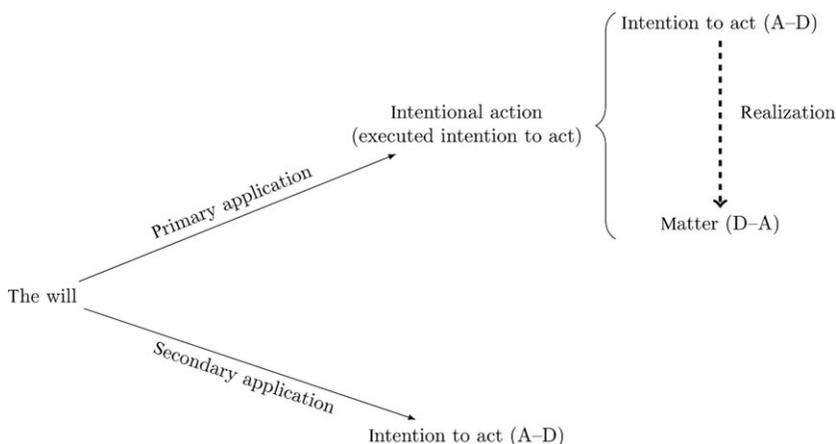
<sup>61</sup> For a recent and philosophically rich discussion of the practical syllogism in Aristotle, see Fernandez 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Aristotle, *Phys.* II.7, 194b27.

Practical knowledge is a formal cause of what it understands because what we practically know constitutes what it is for our intentions to act—in the primary case, our intentional actions—to be what they are. For the intentional descriptions we know practically are “dependent on the existence of the form [viz. the A–D/D–A order] for their own sense” and “without it [sc. this practical knowledge] what happens does not come under the description—execution of intentions” (*ibid.*, 85 and 88).

So Anscombe cannot claim, as [T4] does, that an executed intention to act is numerically identical to a material happening; but she can say that what we cause when we act intentionally is a *materially realized intentional form* (see Figure 4). That is, when successful, the order of intention and the order of execution are united hylomorphically: an executed intention to act—an intentional action—is a practically rational form (A–D) realized materially (D–A). An intentional action is, just like a perceived material object, a hylomorphic unity.

This is what Anscombe attempts to capture in her slogan “I *do* what happens.” She elaborates upon the slogan as follows: “when the description of what happens is the very thing which I should say I was doing, then there is no distinction between my doing and the thing’s happening” (*ibid.*, 52–3). We can, on such occasions, offer both intentional and non-intentional descriptions of what we cause to happen, and the descriptions in both cases can be true. But it does not follow that are two things done, an intentional action and a material happening, or that the descriptions correspond to two different kinds of object. An intentional action is just an intentional order that has been materially realized or executed. In this way, Anscombe is able to avoid the worry that she claims leads many to regard her account “extremely paradoxical and obscure,” namely, “how can I say: I do what



**Figure 4: Action.**

happens? If there are two ways of knowing there must be two different things known" (*ibid.*, 53). But there are not two different things known. There is only one action, but this single action can be described both intentionally and non-intentionally. Similarly, there are not two objects perceived—an intentional object and a material object—and there are not two subjects who perceive/act—an intentional/practical subject and a human being.

When we act intentionally, we can answer the Why-question's rational use. The intentional descriptions of what we do when we act intentionally will, in fact, be true of a relevant material happening we cause. But in offering them, we do not intend to describe a merely material happening. Intentional actions are not merely material happenings (bodily movements) that have a special feature added to them that makes them intentional. Rather, we acquire the concept of an intentional action by mastering a practice of asking and answering a special sense of the question 'Why?' Our moves within this practice demonstrate our grammatical understanding of intentional action's formal, rationally articulate structure and the positions *practical subject* and *practical object* occupy within it. To report what we do under intentional descriptions is to demonstrate our understanding of what is formally constitutive of an object of practical reason and will, and of what it is to be a subject that brings about such an object—it is to bring descriptions of what we do under a general "form of description of events."

It is a mistake, therefore, to think of intentions to act and intentional actions as ontologically distinct classes of things, as the standard account does. That is, the broadly hylomorphic account Anscombe endorses is not a two-stage account, according to which something inner and mental (and thus within the scope of self-knowledge) causes something outer and physical (and thus outside that scope). Rather, our capacities of practical reason and will are capacities to realize practically rational forms in material reality; intentional actions come to be through the self-conscious exercises of these capacities.

So in the primary case of acting intentionally, we have no need to make recourse to the distinction between intending and doing; for in this case, our practical knowledge is self-knowledge of the practical form our performance realizes. In cases of practical failure, however, the distinction between intending and doing is salient. But we are now well-positioned to explain how Anscombe understands radical practical failure.

In our first example of total practical failure, the agent pushes button B while intending to push button A and there is no opportunity for the agent to correct her performance. 'Pushing button B' is not connected to the agent's practical reasoning and cannot be represented as the conclusion of any practical syllogism she would endorse. If one were to ask her the question 'Why did you push button B?' in its rational sense, she would deny its application. Thus, she has no

practical knowledge of what she does under the description ‘pushing button B’, and so her performance is the “direct falsification” of what she says her intentions are. Of course, given Anscombe’s grammatical account, it is not only false, but unintelligible, for a practical subject who exercises her capacities of practical reason and will not to intend to act under a description—to be directed upon a practical object. But the button pusher’s mistake is not “in the judgment” but “in the performance” (*ibid.*, 5, 36). That is, the error’s ground is not in what she intends to do but in what she actually does. She does not bring about what she intends; as we would put it, she does not materially realize the practical order internal to the exercises of her capacities of practical reason and will. In this way, her claim to knowledge of what she is doing is falsified.<sup>63</sup>

In our second example of total failure, the agent does not realize her intention to act because she fails to do anything at all. Take the case of sudden paralysis. In such a case, an agent might intend to raise her arm in order to make a bid, but never raises her arm because unbeknownst to her, her arm is temporarily paralyzed and she is simply unable to move it at all. Before she attempts to move her arm, she knows what she intends to do, and she could make a report about this if queried (e.g., “Why are you sitting here?” “I’m going to raise my arm to make a bid when item #12 comes up.”) But this report would not be a case of practical knowledge in Anscombe’s sense of knowing what one is doing—one’s action—because in this case one does nothing to realize one’s intention when #12 appears. Here, the agent’s exercise of her capacities of practical reason and will is cut off or impeded at a crucial stage because she is unable to rely upon the use of the other powers necessary to bring them to their completion in the material realization of her practical object.

It is a mistake to inquire into the existence or ontological status of unexecuted intentions to act, such as in [T5]. Just because a discrepancy can arise between the descriptions of what one intends and the descriptions of what happens does not mean that we have to posit the existence of intentions as prior, metaphysically distinct existences. That is, just because an agent is directed upon a practical object before she attempts to act does not mean that we need to inquire into what sort of object this is (an object of the mind, say).

<sup>63</sup> There is a temptation here to say that the agent still has practical knowledge of the movement she causes under some intentional description; so, she still knows that she is, say, *moving her arm* intentionally. While this is no doubt true, it does not disprove Anscombe’s point, which is that the report ‘Now I push button A’, which the agent takes to be a description of what she practically knows, is *directly falsified* by what the agent does, namely, pressing button B. So while she may still have some practical knowledge of what she is doing, her own report of what she is doing remains false and it is still the case that she simply fails to do what she intends to do.

For in these cases of practical failure we have surveyed, though one's intentional descriptions are not true of anything one does, one does not, in giving them, fail to describe the material happenings one causes nor does one succeed in describing a different kind of purely interior object. Intentional descriptions are grammatical rather than classificatory, which means that our correct employment of them reflects our grammatical understanding of the position our intentions occupy within the practically rational order that governs the exercises of our capacities of practical reason and will. This is not an understanding of a special kind of interior object but an understanding of the formal structure of practical intentionality, of the way that practical subjects are directed upon and realize their practical objects in matter. Such an understanding is possible even when the necessary material conditions of fully realizing a practical object in the world do not hold.

Finally, Anscombe's account of practical failure shows that there is an important sense in which an unexecuted intention to act is identical to an executed intention to act. This identity is not numerical but formal. We can think of formal identity along the following lines:

x is formally identical to y if and only if the formal cause of x is the formal cause of y. That is, x is formally identical to y if and only if that in virtue of which x is (and comes to be) what it is that in virtue of why y is (and comes to be) what it is.

The intentional descriptions an agent is able to offer when acting intentionally are the very same descriptions the agent could offer even when she does not act intentionally (i.e., if asked why she is sitting there, an agent could say that she intends to be making a bid, even though she is prevented from doing so by sudden paralysis). The reason this is possible is that what we practically know constitutes what it is for our unexecuted intentions to act to be intelligible as intentions to act (of a particular type), and it also constitutes what it is for our materially realized intentions to act to be intelligible as intentional actions (of a particular type). That is, what we practically know in these cases captures the formally identical manner in which our intentions to act come to be within the practically rational order internal to the exercises of our capacities of practical reason and will. And these capacities, when unimpeded, cause material events in the world to happen under intentional descriptions.

### *3.3 Summary of the Analogy*

We have now completed our interpretation of Anscombe's grammatical account of intentionality. The following five points of analogy are central to Anscombe's grammatical account and suffice to ground

intentionality's analogical unity. We offer them without comment, as they synopsise much of the preceding.

- Just as a perceptual act is an articulate formal unity of *intentional subject* and *intentional object*, so an action (i.e., an exercise of our capacities of practical reason and will) is an articulate formal unity of *practical subject* and *practical object*.
- Just as a perceiver cannot deny the application of the What-question's aspectual use completely, so an agent cannot deny the application of the Why-question's rational use completely.
- Just as it is not only false, but unintelligible, for a perceptual act's intentional subject not to be directed upon an intentional object under a description the perceiver first-personally, non-evidentially, and experientially appreciates, it is not only false, but unintelligible, for a practical subject not to be directed upon a practical object under a description the agent first-personally, non-evidentially, and practically knows.
- Just as the practice of asking and answering the aspectual use of the question 'What?' rests upon a grammatical understanding of a perceptual act's intentional structure, so the practice of asking and answering the rational use of the question 'Why?' rests upon a grammatical understanding of an intentional act's practically rational structure.
- Just as *intentional object* and *intentional subject* are not classificatory concepts but are rather grammatical concepts whose significance is exhausted by the positions they occupy within a perceptual act's formal articulation, so *practical subject* and *practical object* are not classificatory concepts but rather grammatical concepts whose significance is exhausted by the positions they occupy within an intentional action's formal articulation.

#### 4. Analogical Unity

We would like to conclude with a brief discussion of the variety of unity Anscombe attributes to intentionality. For even those inclined to agree that there is *something* common to the various ways philosophers employ the notion may fail to appreciate the full significance of these distinct uses being united analogically.

The origins of this variety of unity lie in Aristotle's metaphysics. Aristotle often makes claims of the form '*x* is said in many ways.' A quick survey reveals numerous substitutions for *x* and these include many of philosophy's central concepts: being, goodness, life, justice, cause, necessity, etc. If something is not said in many ways, its instances are *synonyms*. Synonyms realize the strongest variety of unity—they fall under a well-defined genus. But if something is said in

many ways, instances of these different ways of being said are *homonyms*. Homonyms are picked out by a single word but differ, either partially or completely, in their essence or account.<sup>64</sup>

Some homonyms manifest no important unity and only “chance to have a name in common” (*EN* I.6, 1096b26). For example, ‘bank’ can signify either a river’s side or a financial institution and there is no unity that underlies these homonyms—it is an accident that language developed in such a way that the word has these two different meanings. Given that the class of homonyms includes so many important concepts, it would be problematic if all homonyms were like ‘bank’. For a subject matter must have some sort of unity if it is to be the proper topic of a serious philosophical or scientific investigation. So Aristotle introduces other varieties of unity that are weaker than the unity synonyms realize but nevertheless make the many ways something is said more than chance homonyms.

Homonyms can be united through relations of *focal meaning*. For example, *to be* is said in many ways and there is no genus of *being* that subsumes them all. But one of these ways, *to be* in the sense of substance, is prior in account to the other ways it is said. That is, the account of substance occurs in the accounts of all other ways *to be* is said (e.g., quality, quantity, etc.) but not *vice versa*.<sup>65</sup> The unity these asymmetric relations effects enables a scientific investigation into being *qua* being despite the irreducible multiplicity of ways *to be* is said.

Homonyms can also be united by being ordered in a properly grounded hierarchy. For example, *life* is said in many ways and there is no genus of *life* that subsumes them all. But there is a hierarchy of souls that begins with the principles of nutritive lives, continues with the principles of perceptual/locomotive lives, and terminates with the principles of rational lives. The unity that membership in this hierarchy effects enables a scientific investigation into *life* and *soul* despite the irreducible multiplicity of ways each is said.<sup>66</sup>

Analogical unity is a third variety of unity that can underlie homonyms. Like all homonyms, analogues share no single definition. But analogues manifest an “equality of proportions” (*EN* V.3, 1131a30-b4) and these similarities, if sufficiently numerous and significant, make their common name no accident. To understand analogous homonyms, we must “not seek a definition”; we must instead consider the homonymous manifestations, appreciate the ways in which these cases are similar and the ways they are different and, as Aristotle puts it, “be content to grasp the analogy” (*Metaph.* IX.6 1048a35–36).

<sup>64</sup> For Aristotle, synonymy and homonymy are not linguistic properties, they are metaphysical properties. The many things that are, not the words that signify them, are synonyms and homonyms.

<sup>65</sup> See *Metaph.* IV.2 and VII.1, 1028a31–32.

<sup>66</sup> See *DA* II.2, 413a20–26 and II.3, 414b25–415a13.

If one fails to grasp the similarities by virtue of which the different ways something is said are analogous, one does not completely understand *any* of its homonymous uses. In particular, if one does not grasp intentionality's analogical unity, one understands neither the intentionality of action nor the intentionality of perception. To focus only on the way intentionality is present in a single philosophical subdiscipline is tantamount to studying life itself by looking only at the lives of dogs or to studying being *qua* being by looking only at what it is for quantities to be.

Without the unity that an analogical account affords, intentionality will be neither a proper nor a worthy subject of philosophical inquiry. Moran and Stone remark upon this need in their discussion of Anscombe's *Intention*. They ask "why [does] the concept of 'intention' call for philosophy at all?" "The answer" they say, "evidently refers to a submerged unity in our otherwise familiar employments of 'intention.' What makes these all cases of (non-equivocal) 'intention' does not immediately appear."<sup>67</sup>

If this is correct, the value of Anscombe's account goes beyond the details of the analogies she argues are present among intentionality's homonyms. Perhaps the details of Anscombe's grammatical account of intentionality are wrong. Even so, attempts to offer an alternative will not succeed if they prescind from the many ways *intentionality* is said and if they fail to seek the principle that unites these irreducibly different senses.

As Anscombe warns us, "[w]here we are tempted to speak of "different senses" of a word which is clearly not equivocal, we may infer that we are in fact pretty much in the dark about the character of the concept which it represents" (1963/2000, 1). *Intentionality* is just such a concept. The path out of the darkness in which we find ourselves traverses many philosophical domains.

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<sup>67</sup> Moran and Stone 2011, 34 fn.3. We should note, however, that Moran and Stone restrict their attention to the many ways 'intention' is said within discourse about action and seem to think that the "hidden" unity consists in subsumption under a common, well-defined genus.

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