PHILOSOPHY IS NOT A SCIENCE: MARGARET MACDONALD ON THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHICAL THEORIES

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Margaret Macdonald was at the institutional heart of analytic philosophy in Britain in the mid-twentieth century. However, her views on the nature of philosophical theories diverge quite considerably from those of many of her contemporaries. In this article, I focus on Macdonald's provocative 1953 paper, "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," in which she argues that the value of philosophical theories is more akin to that of poetry or art than science or mathematics. I do so for two reasons. First, it reveals just how far Macdonald's metaphilosophical views diverged from those of many of her contemporaries. Second, the discussion in her article preempts recent literature on the nature of philosophical inquiry and the efficacy of philosophical arguments. Indeed, Macdonald's paper is just as likely to provoke discussion today as it was in the 1950s.

1. Introduction

Margaret Macdonald was at the institutional heart of analytic philosophy in Britain in the mid-twentieth century (see, e.g., Kremer 2022; Vlasits 2022; Whiting 2022). However, her views on the nature of philosophical theories diverge quite considerably from those of many of her contemporaries.[1] In this

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1. Macdonald identifies A. J. Ayer and the logical positivists as adherents of the view that only empirically verifiable statements (and, in turn, empirical theories) are meaningful—a view she rejects in

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article, I focus on Macdonald's (1953a) provocative paper, "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," in which she argues that the value of philosophical theories is more akin to that of poetry or art than science or mathematics. I do so for two reasons. First, it reveals just how far Macdonald's metaphilosophical views diverged from those of many of her contemporaries. Second, the discussion in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" preempts recent literature on the nature of philosophical inquiry and the efficacy of philosophical arguments (e.g., Bright 2023; Dutilh Novaes 2023). Indeed, Macdonald's paper is just as likely to provoke discussion today as it was in the 1950s.

A further aim of this article is to situate Macdonald's account of philosophical theories in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" within the broader contours of her philosophical writing from the 1930s to the 1950s. I trace the development of Macdonald's account of philosophical theories from 1938 (specifically, her paper "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy" [Macdonald 1938a]) to 1953 and argue that over this period her view shifted from a reluctance to compare philosophy with poetry and art to a position that embraces this comparison. By the 1950s, Macdonald was willing to turn to the work of artists and poets as a model of the value of a philosophical theory, pitting her view against contemporaries in the analytic tradition such as Bertrand Russell. I provide evidence that this shift is a result of her engagement with the philosophy of art and art criticism between 1948 and 1953. In addition, I argue, her embrace of the comparison between philosophy and art is something that sets Macdonald apart from other thinkers, such as Wittgenstein, who similarly denied that philosophy is a science. Finally, I draw some connections among Macdonald, Susan Stebbing, and Elizabeth Anscombe. I provide evidence that, along with Wittgenstein (whom Macdonald [1953a, 312] cites as the "origin" of the linguistic approach she adopts), Stebbing (her doctoral supervisor) influenced Macdonald's views on the relation between philosophy and ordinary language.[2] I also draw some comparisons between

"Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" (Macdonald 1953a, 312–13). Her view is certainly inconsistent with the "scientific world-conception" of Otto Neurath and Rudolf Carnap in which "*there is no such thing as philosophy as a basic or universal science alongside or above the various fields of the one empirical science*" (Carnap et al. 1973). Macdonald's account of the relation between philosophical inquiry and the sciences or arts also diverges from Frege (1956), who contrasts the sciences which "have truth as their goal" (289) from aesthetics or ethics. These kinds of views about the nature of philosophical inquiry conform to the stereotype, articulated by Hans-Johann Glock (2004, 425), that "unlike traditional or Continental philosophy . . . analytic philosophy is a respectable science." Glock argues that if Wittgenstein is an analytic philosopher, that puts pressure on this stereotype. The same is true, we will find, of Macdonald.

2. Macdonald (1953a, 315) references Stebbing in a footnote. Thus it is not prima facie surprising that Stebbing influenced Macdonald. Having said that, the reference is to Stebbing's *A Modern Introduction to Logic*. I also suggest (in sec. 4) that Macdonald was influenced by Stebbing's views on language in *Thinking to Some Purpose*.

"Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" and Anscombe's 1965 paper, "The Intentionality of Sensation." In doing so, I distinguish between two historical attempts to apply linguistic analysis to the problem of perception: Anscombe's "first-level" analysis and Macdonald's "second-level" (meta-)analysis.

2. "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception"

This section provides an exposition of Macdonald's (1953a) paper "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception." First, I outline Macdonald's account of what it means to engage in what she calls "linguistic philosophy" (313) or metaphilosophy (320). Having thus explained what Macdonald's methodology looks like in her paper, I then reconstruct her argument for the conclusion that philosophical theories are more like poetry or art than scientific or mathematical theories.

2.1. Macdonald's Metaphilosophy

Macdonald was, as Justin Vlasits puts it, "a central figure in the *institutional* history of early analytic philosophy in Britain" (2022, 267). She edited (and is reported to have cofounded) the journal *Analysis* with Stebbing and Gilbert Ryle (Kremer 2022, 291–92), published many papers in the 1930s and 1950s in prominent venues like the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, and was an active member of the Moral Sciences Club in Cambridge.[3] The conclusion of Macdonald's paper, however—that philosophical theories are more akin to poetry or art than scientific or mathematical theories—stands in contrast to both historical claims about the differences between philosophy and poetry (e.g., Plato's famous criticisms of poetry) and views that were being expressed by early analytic philosophers shortly before the time that Macdonald was writing.[4]

Consider, for example, Russell's (1912) critique of Henri Bergson in "The Philosophy of Bergson." Russell claims that Bergson's writings do not really constitute philosophy precisely because they are too poetic (for similar criticisms of Bergson and "Bergsonism," see Williams [1951, 458–59; see also Stebbing 1914, 158; Moravec and West 2023]; for critique of the intuitive method that

3. See "Minutes and Other Papers of the Moral Sciences Club," 1878–2018, GBR/0265/UA/Min.IX.44, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge.

4. That is not to say that Macdonald's claims about philosophy are totally idiosyncratic. Rudolf Carnap, for example, suggests (similarly to Macdonald, as we will find) that although metaphysical theories may not have "theoretical content," they nonetheless "serve for the *expression of a general attitude of a person towards life*" (2005, 988). Thanks to Daniel Whiting for pointing me toward several points of convergence between Macdonald and Carnap, whose ideas may both be rooted in Wittgenstein (see, e.g., Wittgenstein 1922/2021, proposition 6.421).

Bergson adopts, see Carnap et al. [1973]).[5] The conclusions of Bergson's theorizing do not depend on argument, according to Russell, and "cannot be upset by argument" (1912, 346). In fact, "His imaginative picture of the world, regarded as poetic effort, is in the main not capable of either proof or disproof. Shakespeare says life's but a walking shadow, Shelley says it is like a dome of many-colored glass, Bergson says it is a shell which bursts into parts that are again shells. If you like Bergson's image better, it is just as legitimate" (346). Here, we find Russell disparagingly comparing Bergson's writing to the work of Shakespeare or Shelley. For Russell, the problem with Bergson is that his approach is too similar to that of these literary figures. And the idea that one's philosophical worldview might come down to which image one likes better is clearly anathema to Russell.[6] But in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," Macdonald arrives at the opposite conclusion. As I show, her view is that a good philosophical theory is like a "picture" or "stor[y]" (Macdonald 1953a, 323). Understanding how she arrives at this position requires understanding the methodology she employs in her paper.

"Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" is ostensibly about the so-called problem of perception: the problem of understanding the precise nature of the relation between a perceiver and things perceived—and, indeed, what the things we perceive actually are.[7] As Macdonald puts it, philosophers of perception are trying to answer the question, "What is the object perceived, and of what, if anything, does perception give knowledge?" (1953a, 312). Do we perceive mind-independent, external objects (as the naive realist would have it)? Do we perceive sense data (or ideas), which exist only in the mind and, somehow or other, represent a mind-independent reality to us (as indirect realists maintain)? Or is reality itself mind-dependent (as idealists argue)? What philosophical theories of perception all have in common is that they "take the form of trying to explain perceptual discrepancies by some quite general account of the nature of what is perceived, what externally exists and how the two are related" (311).

Macdonald does not set out to engage in this debate herself or defend a particular theory of perception. As she explains, her aim is not to offer a "rival philosophical theory"; instead, she is engaging in what she calls "linguistic philosophy" or "metaphilosophy" (Macdonald 1953a, 313–14). In "Linguistic Philosophy and

5. For evidence that Bergsonism lived on in analytic philosophy despite such criticisms, see Moravec (2022).

6. We find a similar critique of Bergson in Susan Stebbing's (1914) *Pragmatism and French Voluntarism*.

7. For an overview of the problem of perception, and responses to it, in contemporary philosophy of perception, see Crane and French (2005).

Perception," she does not offer a first-level answer to the problem of perception (320) but rather a "second-level" or meta-analysis of what is really going on when philosophers defend a theory of perception. Her aim is to examine what, exactly, first-level philosophers of perception are doing and, specifically, the kind of language they employ. This leads her to draw some conclusions about what putting forward a philosophical theory of perception, as a matter of fact, involves. Thus, there is a sense in which Macdonald's aims in this paper might even be thought of as anthropological. She is interested in making observations about what a particular subsection of philosophers are doing and providing a descriptive account of their activities.

What exactly does "linguistic philosophy" involve? In other words, how does Macdonald's second-level analysis of philosophy of perception work? She explains that linguistic philosophers "propound no new philosophical hypotheses" (Macdonald 1953a, 313) and that "their function is purely critical; to clarify, not compete with, philosophical problem and theories" (314).[8] The aim of Macdonald's second-level analysis is to help clarify what is at stake and what it means to offer a (first-level) solution to that problem. She goes on: "Their [i.e., linguistic philosophers'] activities are meta-philosophical; employed *about* philosophy, not themselves philosophical in the same sense" (314; emphasis added). By the end of "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," Macdonald arrives at some quite significant insights about philosophical theories. Identifying the precise nature of those insights and how Macdonald arrives at them is the aim of the next subsection.

2.2. Scientific and Mathematical "Theories"

Applying the linguistic methodology outlined above to the problem of perception, Macdonald sets out to address the following question in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception": In what sense are philosophical "theories" of perception theories*?* In other words, how is the word "theory" being used in the context of the philosophy of perception?

To address this question, Macdonald begins by looking at how the term "theory" is understood in the context of mathematical and scientific theories. She explains, "There are at least two fairly well defined uses of 'theory' which are relevant to philosophical theories of perception" (Macdonald 1953a, 314). She then proceeds to outline some features of both scientific and mathematical

8. This emphasis on language and clarification exhibits clear signs of Wittgenstein's influence on Macdonald. She attended his lectures in Cambridge in the 1930s and, along with Alice Ambrose, was responsible for the publication of his 1934–35 lectures (Ambrose 1980).

theories before examining whether philosophical theories of perception exhibit these features. In other words, the question she begins with is this: Are philosophical "theories" of perception scientific or mathematical theories—or even something like them? Her answer to this question is no.[9] And her case for this claim relies on appeals to the ways that scientists and mathematicians themselves use the word "theory" and a comparison with what philosophical theories look like.

Scientific theories, Macdonald writes, are used "in science and allied studies to explain empirical facts" (1953a, 315). She continues, "The object of this procedure is to eliminate rival theories and leave the correct or most probable explanation of the facts" (315). Thus, in ideal circumstances, according to Macdonald, a scientific theory will "eliminate" rival theories by best explaining certain empirical facts, leaving behind just one explanation (the true explanation) of a phenomenon. More specifically, the best scientific theory will eliminate rival theories by being confirmed (or verified) by experiment. Similarly, other theories will be eliminated because they have been falsified by experiment. As Macdonald puts it, "Confirmation and refutation by fact is an essential part of the meaning 'theory' in its empirical sense" (315).[10] In the unfortunate case that a debate between scientific theories cannot be settled by a "crucial experiment," Macdonald explains that other considerations may come into play, including "pragmatic or aesthetic considerations" (315). Such considerations include "ease of manipulation, internal coherence and logical simplicity, and perhaps, initial plausibility" (315). In other words, if the matter cannot be settled (for now) by an experiment, one theory might be preferred to another by virtue of its parsimony, coherence, or the degree to which it prima facie sounds plausible. But Macdonald notes that situations like this, where the matter cannot be settled by experiment, are seen as "embarrassing, and investigators always hope that it may be temporary" (315).

In this way, Macdonald provides an outline of how the term "theory" is used by scientists. However, the following claim is especially important when it comes to understanding Macdonald's wider argument, as it seems to identify an essential criterion for a theory being scientific: "But if neither factual, pragmatic or aesthetic considerations could conceivably determine the choice of a

9. Similarly, Wittgenstein writes, "Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency . . . leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything" (1958/2016, Ts-309,28).

10. One might contest Macdonald's claim that verification or falsification (or similar equivalents) are essential to scientific theories. Indeed, as Macdonald herself would acknowledge, the strength of her argument relies on her claims about how scientists use the term "theory" being correct. For the time being, I leave aside the question of whether Macdonald is right about this.

theory, the titles 'explanation' and 'theory' would be refused and the proposal dismissed as mere fantasy or wild speculation" (Macdonald 1953a, 315). Macdonald thinks this criterion, testability, has significant implications for the question of whether there is any sense in which philosophical theories are scientific.[11] Her view is that, in the case of philosophy of perception at least, we cannot decide between theories by appealing to experiment. This implies that so-called philosophical theories of perception would, in the context of science at least, be dismissed as "mere fantasy or wild speculation"—what we might be tempted to call "pseudoscience."[12]

Macdonald then describes mathematical theories. She writes, "Theories of numbers, functions, classes, continuity, infinity, etc., do not explain or lead to the discovery of empirical fact. They are neither confirmed nor refuted by observation. Explanation in them consists of connecting the notion to be explained with others in a deductive system. The criteria of its success are logical consistency and generality" (Macdonald 1953a, 315). Unlike scientific theories, mathematical theories are not tested by experiment or observation. This is because, Macdonald argues, mathematical theories are not concerned with empirical facts. Instead, they are concerned with analytic or tautological truths. Such truths are arrived at by deductive reasoning. Macdonald claims that the criteria of success for mathematical theories are "logical consistency and generality" (315). "Generality," here, can perhaps be taken to mean that mathematical theories do not concern concrete particulars in the physical world—they are either universal or are arrived at via a priori reasoning (e.g., the truth that '2' is a prime number).[13] These are the criteria that must be met, according to Macdonald, for a theory to be mathematical.

Having outlined how "theory" is understood in the context of both science and mathematics, Macdonald then asks, "Do any of these criteria apply to philosophical theories of perception?" (1953a, 316). Again, her answer is no. At this point in the paper, Macdonald goes on to detail four specific philosophical theories of perception: naive realism, indirect realism (what she calls "dualism" [316–17]), phenomenalism (which she construes as a kind of Berkeleian idealism [e.g.,

11. "Testability" might be too narrow as a criterion for what Macdonald thinks counts as scientific theory, as she also mentions "pragmatic and aesthetic considerations." But Macdonald goes on to suggest that pragmatic and aesthetic considerations are typically seen as important because they are connected to a theory's "predictive power" (1953a, 318). It seems reasonable to suggest that judgments about a theory's predictive power are arrived at through experiment. Thus, it looks like even pragmatic and aesthetic considerations are, for Macdonald, connected to testability. Thanks to an anonymous referee for both raising this concern and formulating this response to it.

12. Macdonald is more explicit about this in "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy," in which she describes philosophical theories as having "a pseudo-scientific air" (1938a, 299). I discuss this paper in detail in sec. 4.

13. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to clarify Macdonald's reference to "generality" here.

319]), and then a theory that she calls a "linguistic" (312) theory. She explains that the kind of linguistic theory she refers to here is distinct from the kind of second-level, "meta" theory that she herself in engaging in.[14] For the sake of brevity, I pass over Macdonald's remarks on these different theories of perception and move on to her next question: Are any of these philosophical theories of perception scientific or mathematical theories?

Macdonald is quick to dismiss the idea that philosophical theories of perception might be mathematical, as they are not "purely abstract elaborations or concepts or symbols" (1953a, 319).[15] Nor are they tautological. The key difference between a philosophical theory of perception and a mathematical theory, Macdonald argues, is that they are "much more closely connected with the experience which has caused the problem they try to solve" (319). A philosophical theory of perception is an attempt to better understand or explain a particular kind of experience, a perceptual experience. The same is not true, Macdonald argues, of mathematical problems, which are purely formal, abstract, or logical—and, thus, detached from experience.

Moving on to scientific theories, Macdonald suggests that there is a sense in which philosophical theories of perception might resemble scientific theories in that "they claim to explain certain empirical facts" (1953a, 318). She argues, however, that this resemblance is only surface level, as "[philosophical theories] differ in the characteristic which distinguishes empirical from other theories. They cannot be tested. Every philosophical theory of perception is compatible with all perceptual facts" (318). According to Macdonald, one cannot verify or falsify by means of a crucial experiment that a particular theory of perception is true. Indeed, one might be tempted to suggest that this is precisely what makes a debate like the one surrounding the problem of perception philosophical—and perhaps explains why philosophical debates are rarely settled. Precisely because no such experiments are available to test philosophical theories, this means that rival theories cannot be "eliminated" in the way that rival scientific theories are

14. Thus, there are two kinds of "linguistic" philosophy going on in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception." On one hand, there is the linguistic metaphilosophy that Macdonald herself is engaging in. As I showed earlier, this kind of linguistic approach is "second level" and about philosophy; it is not an attempt to defend a "rival" theory of perception (Macdonald 1953a, 313–14). The "linguistic theory" she refers to here is a first-level theory and *is* a rival explanation of what is going on when we have a perceptual experience. In this first-level view, Macdonald explains, "the philosophical problem of perception may be solved by inventing such a basic terminology and by correcting or, at least, exhibiting, the deficiencies of ordinary language in which the problem occurs" (1953a, 317). An example of the kind of linguistic theory of perception that Macdonald is outlining might be Anscombe's (1981) account of "The Intentionality of Sensation," which I discuss in sec. 5.

15. Although Macdonald is not explicit on this point, it seems likely that she thinks the theories drawn up by logicians (within philosophy departments) would be theories in the mathematical sense, as they are concerned with analytical truths (and not empirical facts).

(as I show, Macdonald thinks the unique nature of philosophical theories should be embraced, as attempts to compare them with scientific theories raise the possibility of their being deemed "nonsense").[16]

Macdonald has more to say about how philosophical theories of perception differ from scientific theories, arguing that they also do not serve the pragmatic, predictive purpose that a good scientific theory serves: "Philosophical theories of perception are neither formulated nor used to predict the course of sense experience nor has a philosopher with the help of such a theory discovered any perceptual fact or regularity unknown to plain men. From these considerations a meta-philosopher would suggest that the word 'theory' is not being used by philosophers of perception as it is in empirical explanation and discovery" (1953a, 318–19). Macdonald's point here is that, by comparing how scientists use the word "theory" with how philosophers of perception use the term, a metaphilosopher (e.g., herself) will observe that they are not using it the same way. As well as lacking the predictive power that a good scientific theory possesses, a philosophical theory of perception also, strictly speaking, does not allow one to discover new facts that were not already known.

It is worth pausing to consider what Macdonald has in mind when she says that philosophical theories of perception do not discover new facts and that all theories of perception agree on the same perceptual facts. At first glance, such claims might seem questionable. After all, one might object, surely different philosophers of perception disagree about the facts. Naive realists believe that we perceive mind-independent, external objects; indirect realists maintain that we do so indirectly; whereas phenomenalists (or idealists) deny that we perceive anything mind-independent. Macdonald's point seems to be that, in terms of the facts of one's own perceptual experience (what we might call the "phenomenological" facts), there is no real disagreement. The problem of perception arises in the first place because it is a feature of our everyday perceptual experience that not all our perceptions are veridical. This is not something that is "discovered" by any particular theory of perception, and it is not something that different theorists disagree on or deny. In addition, philosophical theories of perception do not provide us with more or new facts about our perception experiences—they simply attempt to help us understand the facts that we already know. This is in contrast to a scientific theory that, by being tested, can provide us with new data. Unlike a philosophical theory, according to Macdonald, a good scientific theory can help us discover new facts.

16. Macdonald identifies A. J. Ayer as a writer who "criticized traditional philosophes and condemned them as nonsense" on the basis of his commitment to "the verifiability principle of meaning" (1953a, 313). The verifiability principle dictates that if a proposition cannot be empirically verified (in principle) then it is meaningless.

Macdonald's preliminary conclusion is that philosophical theories, as they do not satisfy the criteria for either, are neither scientific nor mathematical theories. As she puts it, "These are certainly strange theories which are neither empirical nor purely formal" (1953a, 319). This raises the question, what kind of a theory is a philosophical theory of perception? And in light of Macdonald's claim that philosophical theories of perception agree on the relevant facts, what does philosophical disagreement consist of? I address these questions in the next section and say more about Macdonald's claim that a philosophical theory is closer to poetry or art than science or mathematics.

3. Philosophical Theories as "Good Stories"

Macdonald's claim is that philosophical theories are neither mathematical nor scientific. They cannot be scientific, she argues, because scientific theories are intended to discover new data and eliminate rival theories. But, as she puts it, philosophical theories of perception "give no new knowledge of perceptual facts" (Macdonald 1953a, 321). They cannot be mathematical because they are not tautological. So what is it that philosophical theories do? Macdonald claims that "what they do suggest are new forms of expression for familiar facts" (321).

It is at this point that Macdonald turns to the arts for a model of what the value of philosophical theories might be:

> This may not be information in a scientific sense, but, as poetry shows, it is far from worthless. That is why to suggest that philosophical theories are nonsense is rightly resented. No doubt this meant only that they are not verifiable, which is correct, but it suggests that they are silly, which is not. Poets and novelists tell us nothing that we do not know or could not learn from history or other text-books, but the difference between Shakespeare and Plutarch is tremendous even though both relate the same story. So in a philosopher we meet the facts about which we discourse continuously in daily life but, as it were, in a play, staged, detached from their normal context of knowledge and action. . . . In this slightly distorted medium the familiar appears strangely transmuted. It may excite or repel but can never again be commonplace. For the first time, perhaps, we realize how very remarkable are the facts always taken for granted, the primary condition of life, the facts of sense experience. (1953a, 321)[17]

17. I leave aside the question of whether Macdonald's claim is true or plausible that "poets and novelists tell us nothing that we do not know or could not learn." One might argue that we certainly can learn things we would not otherwise learn (e.g., from history) from poets and novelists. But Macdonald's

Macdonald here considers the reply that, if philosophical theories are not scientific—if they do not produce new data and are not verifiable—then they are meaningless, or "nonsense." In part, then, Macdonald's aim in this passage is to undermine the claim that only empirically verifiable propositions are meaningful. But the way she does that takes her account of philosophical theories in quite the opposite direction, for she turns to the work of poets and novelists as a model for what philosophical theories actually do and where their value lies. Consider, again, Russell's claim that Bergson's writings are not really philosophical precisely because they are too poetic (and his disparaging comparison with Shakespeare or Shelley). Macdonald's view is the polar opposite: philosophical theories are valuable in much the same way that poetry or literature are.

Poetry and art inform us that "language has many uses besides that of giving factual information or drawing deductive conclusions" (Macdonald 1953a, 322–23). Works of poetry or fiction, she suggests, "enlarge" specific aspects of human life to help us see and think about them differently. Shakespeare's *Othello*, for example, encourages us to think about human jealously by enlarging it and making it the centerpiece of the narrative of the play (321). Similarly, a philosophical theory of perception "enlarges one aspect of perception." Precisely which aspect of perception is enlarged will depend on the theory. Macdonald claims, for instance, that realists focus on the fact that we are not responsible for many of our perceptual experiences (i.e., they are nonvoluntary). Indirect realists, on the other hand, focus on how much is hidden from us in perception. Disagreement between these two "theories" is a result of the fact that they enlarge different features of perceptual experience.

As a result, Macdonald argues, rival philosophical theories of perception end up telling different stories. Leaning into the comparison with arts, she claims that "philosophical theories are much more like good stories than scientific explanations" (Macdonald 1953a, 322). Using the case of Platonic distrust of the senses, Macdonald explains, "[Plato] never denied the facts of sense perception and change about which one could have opinion if not knowledge. What he did was to make them the villains and outcasts of his story, to spatter them with mire, throw them into lurid contrast with the dignified effigies contemplated by the Intellect" (322). Macdonald's point is that Plato never actually denied the facts of perceptual (or sense) experience. He did not deny that we experience the world in such-and-such a way or that things appear a certain way through

point seems to be that we do not learn new empirical facts—matters of fact about what the world around us is really like. Again, this is not an uncontentious claim, but I leave aside further questions about it for my present purposes.

the senses. What Plato did, instead, was cast the senses in a negative light. In the Platonic story, the senses are villains, and the intellect is the hero. In contrast, a more Aristotelian (or empiricist) story would cast the senses—or experience and observation more generally—as the heroes of the story.[18] Thus, philosophical disagreement, according to Macdonald, is disagreement about how the familiar facts (of experience) are presented or displayed.

If that is the case, one might wonder, how and why do those engaged in first-level philosophical discussion opt for one theory instead of another? We have seen already that Macdonald does not think the matter can be settled by appeal to experiment or further empirical observation. Are our philosophical preferences, then, completely arbitrary? Not quite. Macdonald explains, "Everyone, it is sometimes said, is born either a little platonist or a little aristotelian. Whatever be the truth of this aphorism has little to do with the truth or falsity of these doctrines. It refers rather to temperamental differences" (1953a, 322). Macdonald's claim is that our philosophical preferences are the consequence of temperament. In the case of philosophical theories of perception, Macdonald explains, realists are likely to exhibit a "cheerful hospitality" and "sunny assurance" (323). This explains their "robust confidence" in the perceptual experience's ability to provide us with knowledge about the external world. In contrast, an indirect realist is more likely to have a "melancholy turn of mind" and is "haunted by fears of a 'malicious demon' who mocks his most careful observations" (323). The prevailing influence of Descartes's evil demon thought experiment, Macdonald seems to think, can be put down to the pessimistic and suspicious temperament of those persuaded by it. Going further, the temperament of different audiences will depend on various factors outside philosophy. Macdonald claims, for example, that indirect realist (what she calls "dualist") theories of perception tend to be more popular at times when "scientists are probing beyond facts open to daily observation" (321).[19]

By this point in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," Macdonald is no longer confining her metaphilosophical observations to the philosophy of perception. She begins to make claims about the nature of philosophical inquiry more widely. "Philosophy," she writes, "is too often compared with science,

18. This is a crude characterisation of both thinkers' view that most likely wouldn't be accepted by contemporary scholars of Plato and Aristotle. But in the context of Macdonald's meta-philosophical argument, it simply serves as a toy example of what philosophical disagreement, in her view, consists in.

19. It seems likely that Macdonald has in mind the work of physicists like Arthur Eddington, prominent in the 1920s and 1930s as a public scientist whose own scientific views led him to accept an indirect theory of perception (e.g., in *The Nature of the Physical World* [1928]). Eddington's popular science writing was critiqued by Macdonald's supervisor, Stebbing, in her *Philosophy and the Physicists* (1937). For more on Macdonald's and Eddington's (and Stebbing's) views on science, see Vlasits (2022).

history, theology which contain natural laws, theories and factual statements" (1953a, 324). But these comparisons, according to Macdonald, are both inaccurate and likely to obfuscate the value of philosophical theories. They play into the logical positivist's challenge of identifying what kinds of verifiable propositions a philosophical theory puts forward. When thought of as akin to a science, Macdonald argues, a philosophical theory is constantly in danger of being seen as "nonsense" (324). But if philosophical theories are thought of as something closer to poetry, literature, or art, then their real value can be appreciated. For, in the arts, "what does not instruct or explain," in the way that a scientific theory is supposed to do, need not be "contemptible" (324). While Macdonald emphasizes that "I do not *identify* philosophy with art or literature," she maintains that "a *comparison* with the arts may more effectively exhibit features which modern critics often overlook" (324; emphasis added). Her view is that one such feature is a philosophical theory's capacity to show the familiar in a new light. To use Macdonald's own example of perception, philosophy encourages us to look again at the kinds of experiences we have all the time, every day. We might not typically doubt the fact that we are directly perceiving things in the world around us (thus the idea that direct realism is "naive"). But philosophy of perception encourages us to dwell on unusual cases like illusions or hallucinations. We are not perceiving the world as it really is in those cases, so the argument goes, so what grounds do we have to assume we are the rest of the time? Thus, we see the familiar—our perception of the world—in a new light.

This insight (that philosophy's value lies in getting us to see the ordinary in a new light), she claims, is something that metaphilosophical, second-level analysis—"a technique of question and comparison" (Macdonald 1953a, 320)—uniquely brings to the table. And it is something that critics of "unscientific" philosophy have failed to appreciate about the value of philosophical theories.

Macdonald is clearly aware that her metaphilosophical findings are likely to be met with hostility. We can imagine someone like Russell objecting to the suggestion that our philosophical preferences are a matter of temperament. Consider, for instance, his criticism of the fact that "if you like Bergson's image better [than Shakespeare or Shelley], it is just as legitimate" (Russell 1912, 346). Macdonald herself envisions a critic who asks, "Ought not philosophy to be impersonal, unemotional and strictly rational?" Her reply is unequivocal: "The point is that it isn't, and this cannot be ignored by a meta-philosopher . . . since the facts are the same for each and empirical confirmation of their explanatory hypotheses impossible, one can account for different philosophical theories only as differences of presentation, language and attitude" (Macdonald 1953a, 322). Macdonald's argument seems to proceed by a process of elimination: either philosophical theories can be decided between on empirical grounds (by experiment)

or they are simply differences of "presentation, language and attitude"—that is, different stories. Because Macdonald thinks the former option can be ruled out, it follows that they must boil down to differences in presentation, language, or attitude. On that basis, she concludes that philosophical theories are "pictures, stories having social and personal causes and conveying emotional and quasi-emotional attitudes" (323). As far as Macdonald is concerned, one cannot plausibly hold onto the notion that philosophical inquiry is akin to science.

At this point, one might raise philosophical worries with Macdonald's position. Specifically, there is a legitimate case to be made that her account of philosophical theories leads to a kind of relativism or subjectivism. If philosophical theories are like pieces of art or literature, one might argue, then it seems like our philosophical preferences are just a matter of taste. I think it is helpful, at this point, to turn to the question of why Macdonald might have held this view—and why it might not have struck her as problematic to compare philosophy with the arts (and, in turn, why she might not have thought relativism follows from her position). This question requires examining the historical context in which "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" was written and the development of Macdonald's views prior to its publication.

Macdonald clearly saw attempts to align philosophy with the sciences as generating the risk that philosophy be "revealed" to be pseudoscience. One way of understanding her push toward a more poetic conception of philosophy's value is as avoiding that risk. On the other hand, evidence also suggests that Macdonald did not think that artistic, poetic, or literary judgments were entirely relativistic. In her paper, "Natural Rights," for example, Macdonald argues that art criticism is not a simple matter of subjective preferences. Critical responses to works of art can be defended and justified, even if they cannot be tested in an empirical, scientific manner (Macdonald 1946–47, 247–48). There are reasons to think that she construes our preferences for various philosophical theories as defensible in the same kind of way. I explore further connections between "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" and "Natural Rights" and other writings in the next section.

4. The Development of Macdonald's Metaphilosophy

Having outlined Macdonald's argument for the view that philosophical theories are closer to an art than a science (or mathematics), in this section, I provide evidence of this view playing a role elsewhere in her writing and chart the development of her account of philosophical theories from 1938 to 1953.

In his recent paper on Macdonald's philosophy of science, Justin Vlasits writes, "Macdonald's uniqueness in her methodology comes out most clearly

in her careful attention to the language that scientists actually use. . . . [For example] we saw how she dissected 'verification' and 'hypothesis' to solve philosophical problems" (2022, 276). Vlasits is referring to Macdonald's discussion of the contrast between how scientists, on the one hand, and philosophers, on the other, use the terms "verification" (in her 1934 paper, "Verification and Understanding" [Macdonald 1933–34]) and "hypothesis" (in her contribution to the symposium, "Induction and Hypothesis" [Macdonald 1937]). In both cases, as she does with the term "theory" in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," Macdonald demonstrates that there is discrepancy between the way that scientists and philosophers use the terms in question. As I showed in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," Macdonald argues that even if philosophers of perception think they are putting forward something like a scientific theory—as she puts it, "even [if] their authors do not realize their true nature" (1953a, 320)—they are not.

In many places in her writing, we find Macdonald questioning or outright rejecting comparisons between philosophy and science. Working backward chronologically, in the same year that "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" was published (1953), Macdonald published "Sleeping and Waking," which challenges Descartes's claim, in the *Meditations*, that when we are dreaming, we are guilty of having made some kind of error (i.e., we trust our senses when they inform us that what we are dreaming is real) (see Macdonald 1953b; for discussion, including an evaluation of several responses to Macdonald's paper, see Spinney 2024). Macdonald's contention is that the term "error" is incorrectly applied to dreaming scenarios as there is no test for veridicality in dreams. We might, for example, pinch ourselves, but that neither verifies nor falsifies that what we are experiencing is real. Unlike a scientific theory, the hypothesis "this is a dream," when put forward in a dream, cannot be tested.

Looking further back, in the previously mentioned 1946–47 paper "Natural Rights," Macdonald identifies three kinds of proposition: empirical propositions, analytic propositions, and expressions of value before raising the question, Which of these categories do ethical judgments fall into? Her claim is that ethical judgments cannot be either empirical (because they cannot be subjected to experiment) or analytical (because they are not tautologically true), so they must be expressions of value. But in a manner reminiscent of "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," she argues that this does not render ethical judgments meaningless. In support of this claim, Macdonald draws a comparison between ethical judgments and art criticism and argues that, like the judgments of an art critic, even if an ethical judgment cannot be empirically tested, it can nonetheless be defended or justified. Judgments in both art criticism and ethics, she argues, are certainly not meaningless. Here too, then, we find Macdonald turning

to the arts for a model of what a meaningful, but nonscientific, theory might look like.

Much earlier, in her 1938 paper "Things and Processes" (Macdonald 1938b), we again find Macdonald drawing a distinction between philosophical hypotheses and empirical, scientific statements. In this paper, Macdonald examines the meaning of the statement, "There are no things, only processes" (which she takes to encapsulate the process philosophy of thinkers like A. N. Whitehead). Her conclusion is very similar to her assessment of what philosophical theories of perception amount to in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception." She argues that this statement cannot be empirical because it can neither be tested nor revised, unlike a scientific hypothesis (Macdonald 1938b, 3–4). Instead, Macdonald concludes, it must simply be a particular way of presenting facts that we are already familiar with.

In all these cases, Macdonald appeals to the way that terms like "scientific," "empirical," "experiment," or "test" are used (by scientists) to arrive at metaphilosophical conclusions about what certain philosophical theories or hypotheses amount to. One of Macdonald's core, recurring, metaphilosophical insights is that philosophical theories are often not as "scientific" as might be thought. To that extent, Macdonald's findings in these earlier papers are consistent with her conclusions in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception."

In the same year that "Things and Processes" was published, Macdonald published "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy." In this paper, published 15 years earlier, we again find Macdonald addressing questions that are central to "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception": Do philosophers discover any new facts? And what kind of theory is a philosophical theory? I want to consider this paper in more depth because it allows us to track some developments in Macdonald's thinking from 1938 to 1953. On the one hand, as with the papers mentioned earlier, several of the claims Macdonald makes in "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy" are consistent with those defended in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception." However, it is also possible to identify a shift in her thinking from an earlier reluctance to compare philosophy with the arts to the position she arrives in 1953, which embraces this comparison.

"The Philosopher's Use of Analogy," like "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," is an exercise in using linguistic metaphilosophy to arrive at conclusions about the nature of philosophy itself. And right from the start, Macdonald's aim is to draw a line between scientific and philosophical theories. She writes, for instance, "The method of science is justified in practice. The scientist shows that he has the correct method for discovering new facts by indisputably presenting more and more of them. No one would dispute that we know more about physics, chemistry and psychology than we did a hundred years ago.

The philosopher has no such means of conviction" (Macdonald 1938a, 291). Macdonald's point is that the method of empirical science justifies itself by bearing fruit. If we practice the scientific method successfully, we discover new facts about the world. Because that is precisely what scientific inquiry is intended to do, the method is justified. But for philosophy, there is no such proof of concept. Macdonald continues, noting the philosopher "may *recommend* a philosophical method but whether he convinces will depend as much on his audience and the general climate of opinion as on his own reasoning" (291; emphasis added). Note that there are signs of the later Macdonald's view that it is ultimately temperament that determines our philosophical preferences.

Macdonald explains that it is hard (if not impossible) to justify a particular philosophical method because "there seems to be no accepted criterion of when a philosophical question has been answered" (1938a, 291). A scientific theory sets itself the task of discovering new information about the world and justifies its approach to doing so by succeeding in that endeavor. Macdonald's point is that there is no such consensus about what a successful philosophical theory would look like: "We have not decided what sort of questions they [philosophical questions] are" (291).

Macdonald denies that philosophical theories discover any new entities or facts about the world in the way that scientific theories do. Although a theory of universals, for example, might sound like it has uncovered a new feature of the world (whatever the term "universals" picks out), Macdonald (1938a, 292) points out that it would be implausible to suggest that any new entity has really been discovered. "Discovering" that universals exist is not like discovering a new species of animal or a new law of nature.

So, what is it that philosophical theories do? The earlier Macdonald writes, "The informative air, the plausibility and paradoxes of most philosophical theories may not be due to any astonishing information acquired by the philosopher but to a curious practice of using words by analogy without giving the analogy any intelligible application" (1938a, 293). A little later, she continues, "[Philosophical theories] depend for their understanding, as scientific theories do not, *entirely* upon the known uses of ordinary words. They do not extend the use of these words but generally only misuse them. It is for this reason that such philosophical propositions have been called senseless" (294).[20] Macdonald's claim is that philosophical theories can seem to be genuinely informative—that is, can seem to provide us with new information—because of the way that they (mis)use words familiar to us in ordinary language. To use one of Macdonald's

20. We find a similar claim in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," where Macdonald explains that philosophers "change ordinary language" (1953a, 320).

own examples, a process philosopher might inform us that "there are no things, only processes" (Macdonald 1938a) and, in doing so, give off the air of informing us of something new. But Macdonald's metaphilosophical claim in "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy" is that this is really a claim about the use of language. The process philosopher's theory ultimately boils down to the claim that when we say "thing," what we really mean is "process."

Just as we found in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," Macdonald anticipates hostility toward such metaphilosophical claims. "This conclusion," she writes, "certainly disgusts many philosophers" who hold that "to be concerned 'merely with words' seems trivial and unimportant" (Macdonald 1938a, 294).[21] And yet, she argues, a proper comparison between scientists and philosophers supports her conclusion. Specifically, she argues, scientists and philosophers use language in different ways: "Scientists use words to state facts. They do not consider, except in special circumstances, their uses. Philosophers use words entirely in order to make propositions about their uses however much their propositions seem to resemble statements of facts" (295).

Stating facts cannot be what philosophers do with words, Macdonald argues, because if that were what they were doing, "there would no longer be a dispute" (1938a, 296). Macdonald is making a point that she would pick up on once again in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception": philosophical disagreements cannot be settled by observation and experiment. As she explained later in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" (Macdonald 1953a), all first-level philosophical theories of perception, for instance, are compatible with the facts of perceptual experience. This renders such theories categorically unscientific. She concludes in "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy," "If this is to be called a 'theory,' very well, but it must be noticed that this is a very different use of 'theory' from that employed by science . . . or even in ordinary life when we contrast 'theory' and 'practice'" (Macdonald 1938a, 307). Just as she would 15 years later, Macdonald concludes that philosophical theories are not scientific because they do not discover new facts and they cannot be empirically tested.

There are clear similarities between Macdonald's argument in "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy" and her argument in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception." But I want to conclude this section by making the case for thinking that between 1938 and 1954, her account of philosophical theories shifted. Specifically, my contention is that it was only later that Macdonald embraced the idea that philosophical theories are closer to art than science. On my reading, in 1953 in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," Macdonald is solving a

21. For anticipation of a similar objection in Wittgenstein, see, e.g., Wittgenstein (1958, 118, 199).

problem (by appealing to the arts) that had occurred to her 15 years earlier in "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy."

In "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy," Macdonald's focus is on establishing that philosophical theories are not scientific, with less attention paid to explaining how we ought to think of them instead. There is also a more straightforwardly Wittgensteinian bent to Macdonald's metaphilosophical analysis in 1938—her contention in "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy" is that philosophers are (whether or not they appreciate it) really defending accounts of how we use (or ought to use) certain words. For example, there are clear signs of Wittgenstein's influence in Macdonald's claim that "philosophical propositions are linguistic" (1938a, 308) or the claim that "philosophers use words entirely in order to make propositions about their uses" (295). In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1958) had also argued that the subject matter of philosophy is primarily linguistic. He claims, for instance, that "philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (109).[22] Moreover, unlike "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," Macdonald's (1938a, 294) earlier paper does not offer a robust defense of philosophy against the charge of senselessness, nor does she offer many positive insights into what exactly it is that philosophical theories can do for us.

It is worth noting that there is, in "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy," one brief hint of the comparison between philosophy and poetry that Macdonald would embrace in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception," but it is tentative. She explains that because metaphilosophical analysis reveals that philosophical propositions are linguistic, the onus is on philosophers (or metaphilosophers) to show how philosophical propositions differ from "grammatical propositions and the statements of philologists, and, one might add, from the utterances of poets" (Macdonald 1938a, 312). There is a hint of a suggestion, then, that philosophy might have something in common with poetry. But poetry is presented as something that a philosopher would want to distance themselves from rather than an alternative model of what the value of philosophical inquiry might look like.

These differences indicate that there was shift in Macdonald's thinking between 1938 and 1953, from a more negative account of philosophical theories

22. Similarly, Wittgenstein writes that "the results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language" (1958, 119). Some of Wittgenstein's remarks suggest that, unlike Macdonald, he does not think of linguistic analysis as a second-level or meta approach to philosophy. He writes, for instance, "One might think: if philosophy speaks of the use of the word 'philosophy' there must be a second-order philosophy. But it is not so: it is, rather, like the case of orthography, which deals with the word "orthography" among others without then being second-order" (121).

and their failure to meet the standards of scientific theories to a more positive account that embraces the comparison with the arts. What might have prompted this shift in Macdonald's account of philosophical theories? One plausible explanation is her increased engagement in the philosophy of art, aesthetics, and art criticism toward the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. From 1948 to 1953, Macdonald published several papers and book reviews on art and art criticism (e.g., Macdonald 1949, 1952, 1953a) and she would continue to engage with such issues (and related issues such as the philosophy of fiction) later in the 1950s (e.g., Macdonald 1954). Even in papers that are not ostensibly about art or art criticism, in this period, we find Macdonald turning to the arts as a useful model of what meaningful but nonscientific inquiry might look like. As I noted earlier, in "Natural Rights" (1946–47), Macdonald argues that an ethical theory (even if it is not empirical) can be meaningful in the same way that a piece of art criticism might be—because it can be justified and defended.

It thus seems plausible to suggest that a greater appreciation of the value of art and art criticism, for Macdonald, gave rise to the notion that drawing comparisons between philosophy and art could provide positive insights into the value of developing a philosophical theory—and provide a satisfying answer to the question (initially raised in 1938) of what exactly it is that a philosophical theory does if it does not discover new facts. While Vlasits (2022, 276) is right to suggest that Macdonald's focus on the language of scientists is unique to Macdonald's linguistic methodology, I think this is only half the picture. In her later work at least, Macdonald's linguistic metaphilosophy draws not only on the language of scientists but also on the language of the arts. For the later Macdonald, philosophical theories are situated somewhere between science and the arts but ultimately are much closer to the latter. The value of a philosophical theory is not its ability to discover new facts about the world but rather its ability to see what we are already familiar with in a new light.

5. Macdonald, Stebbing, and Anscombe

Before concluding, I want to draw some connections between Macdonald's linguistic metaphilosophy and the ideas of two other thinkers: Susan Stebbing and Elizabeth Anscombe. I focus primarily on similarities between Macdonald's metaphilosophy and the views of her supervisor, Stebbing, as the connection between them is well established. Aside from their both having attended Wittgenstein's lectures, the connection between Macdonald and Anscombe is more tenuous. Nonetheless, I will point out some places of overlap between "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" and Anscombe's (1981) "The Intentionality of

Sensation" (published in 1965). Doing so will help clarify a distinction between the first-level linguistic philosophy that Anscombe is practicing and the second-level (meta) linguistic philosophy that Macdonald herself is engaged in.

There is no doubt that Wittgenstein was an important influence on Macdonald's linguistic metaphilosophy, especially in her earlier 1938 paper, "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy", as I have noted at various points so far. As other scholars have noted (Kremer 2022; Vlasits 2022; Whiting 2022), Macdonald attended Wittgenstein's lectures when she held a research fellowship in Cambridge in the 1930s and, along with Alice Ambrose, was responsible for the publication of *Wittgenstein's Lectures* (Ambrose 1980). But I also want to look beyond Wittgenstein and identify evidence that Stebbing's views on the use of language may also have influenced Macdonald's metaphilosophy. Note that this is prima facie plausible, given that Stebbing supervised Macdonald at Bedford College, the two worked together as editors of *Analysis*, and Stebbing played a wider role as a source of (academic and personal) support in Macdonald's life (Addis 2005; Kremer 2022).

First, Macdonald's comparisons between the value of philosophy and the arts, including poetry and literature, demonstrate an awareness of the fact that words do more than simply communicate facts. She writes, for instance, that "language has many uses besides that of giving factual information or drawing deductive conclusions" (Macdonald 1953a, 322–23). "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" was published two years (and "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy" 17 years) before J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1955), in which he emphasized the performative value of certain kinds of language and defended (against logical positivism) the idea that language need not be descriptive to be meaningful. But in *Thinking to Some Purpose*, published in 1939, Stebbing had already argued that there are more uses to language than just descriptive uses.[23] There Stebbing claims that while all (or most) language is used to "[convey] something that the user of the language wants to convey" (2022, 53), this can be done in different ways. On one hand, there is what Stebbing calls "scientific" language, which conveys facts or descriptions in a "non-personal or objective" (54) way. On the other, there is "emotive" language, which is used to evoke "emotional attitudes in our hearers" (55). Stebbing claims that "bad language" involves using ostensibly "scientific" language for "emotive" ends. A scientist who uses language to evoke emotions in their reader, for example, is using bad language (something Stebbing accuses popular scientists of doing in *Philosophy and the Physicists* [1937]). But unlike in science, "In poetry and

23. Of course, Wittgenstein, too, emphasizes that language has myriad uses (e.g., Wittgenstein 1958, 23).

in oratory the use of emotionally toned language may be essential for the purpose the speaker wishes to achieve. It is, then, good language" (Stebbing 1939/2022, 55). Like Macdonald, Stebbing thus acknowledges that in the arts (unlike in science), language can have uses other than conveying facts. Such language is by no means senseless.

Another similarity between Macdonald and Stebbing is their shared rejection of the notion that philosophical inquiry ought to be impartial and unemotional. We saw, in section 4, how Macdonald responds to the objection that philosophy ought to be "impersonal, unemotional and strictly rational." And we encountered her blunt reply: "The point is that it isn't, and this cannot be ignored by a meta-philosopher" (1953a, 322). Similarly, in *Thinking to Some Purpose*, Stebbing emphasizes that when we think—when we engage in reasoning or reflection—we do so not in isolation from the rest of our lives. As she puts it, "It is, we need to remember, persons who think, not purely rational spirits. . . . There is no thinking in a vacuum" (Stebbing 1939/2022, 18). Macdonald's claim in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" that our philosophical attitudes are affected by temperament and convey "emotional or quasi-emotional attitudes" (1953a, 323) is, I suggest, a sign of her having been influenced by Stebbing's attitude toward inquiry.

In Stebbing's and Macdonald's work, we find a shared rejection of the austere conception of the philosopher as impersonal, unemotional, and purely rational being that can be found in, for example, Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*.[24] Russell claims that "[a philosophical inquirer] will see as God might see, without a *here* and *now*, without hopes and fears, without the trammels of customary beliefs and traditional prejudices, calmly, dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire of knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for man to attain" (Russell 1967, 93). This is clearly not a conception of philosophical inquiry that Macdonald or Stebbing accept. For both, the idea that philosophy can happen in isolation from the rest of one's life is simply implausible.

Turning to Anscombe (1981), readers familiar with "The Intentionality of Sensation" will note at least a superficial similarity with "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" (Macdonald 1953a). Both Macdonald and Anscombe, in their respective papers, apply a linguistic approach to the specific topic of the problem of perception. This is likely to be more than a coincidence, given that both were students of Wittgenstein involved in publishing the notes of lectures they attended and who subsequently adopted a "linguistic" approach to philosophy

24. This alternative conception of the philosopher can also be found in the work of thinkers such as Iris Murdoch (2001) or Mary Midgley. Midgley (1996) writes, for example, "*We think as whole people*, not as disembodied minds, not as computers" (10).

inquiry—for example, Macdonald describes her linguistic approach as having originated in "Wittgenstein's later lectures and unpublished lecture notes circulated in typescript" (1953a, 312). Perhaps, then, we might construe "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" as a precursor to Anscombe's better-known paper.

A closer look at the aims of each paper, however, reveals that something more nuanced is going on—and a key difference. Anscombe's paper is linguistic but not in the second-level, metaphilosophical way that Macdonald's paper is. Responding to naive realist and indirect realist theories of perception, for example, Anscombe claims that both theories "make the same mistake, that of failing to recognize the intentionality of sensation" (1981, 13) and, she explains, "I wish to say that both these positions are wrong" (11). Already, it looks as though Anscombe is doing something different than Macdonald (1953a). Macdonald's paper is not concerned with the rightness or wrongness of the theories of perception that she discusses (realism, dualism, and phenomenalism). In fact, there are no indications in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" of what her own first-level views on perception look like at all; the paper is neither endorsement nor critique of any theories she discusses. Rather, they simply serve as a case study in support of her second-level, metaphilosophical conclusions.

In contrast, Anscombe (1981) argues that both theories of perception that she discusses are wrong. The first, indirect realism, she claims, "misconstrues intentional objects as material objects of sensation", while the second, naïve realism, "allows only *material* objects of sensation" (11). Her diagnosis of why these two positions are wrong is linguistic: "Both misunderstand verbs of sense-perception," she writes. More specifically, they fail to acknowledge that the language used to describe sense-perception is intentional. Anscombe argues that both parties have been led to a particular account of what the objects of perception are—either material objects or mind-dependent sense data—on the basis of the assumption that if something is perceived, there must be some thing that is being perceived. Philosophers of perception, according to Anscombe, have thus derived ontological views from the way we report or talk about our perceptual experiences. But, according to Anscombe, an analysis of the grammar of sense-perception will reveal that we ought not to infer ontological conclusions from our verbal reports. She points out that while we might perceive "a shiny blur" in the distance, for example, "the description 'a shiny blur' is not true of anything that physically exists" (18).

Further discussion of the precise nature of Anscombe's (1981) paper would take us beyond what is necessary for present concerns. What is important to note for now is that Anscombe is engaging in first-level debate. Her linguistic analysis of philosophy of perception is intended to serve as a criticism of other theories and to set up her own rival position—what Clare MacCumhaill and

Rachael Wiseman describe as a "switch from an ontological to a grammatical understanding of intentionality" (2021, 276–94). What this tells us is that although Anscombe's "The Intentionality of Sensation" and Macdonald's "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" are both linguistic, they are operating on different levels. While Macdonald is developing a second-level, metaphilosophical account of what is going on in debates about the philosophy of perception, Anscombe is (in Macdonald's [1953a] words) putting forward a "rival" (313–14), "first level" (32) theory of perception.

These two papers that treat the problem of perception linguistically are perhaps deserving of more thorough comparison, but at least for now we can observe that in two students of Wittgenstein, there is a forking off in terms of how that problem ought to be dealt with linguistically—something that Macdonald had herself noted in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" (1953a, 312). On one hand, we have Anscombe's (1981) first-level, linguistic solution to the problem of perception; on the other is Macdonald's second-level, metaphilosophical observations about what a philosophical theory of perception actually is. Thus, one thing that this comparison does achieve is clarifying the distinction between different levels of linguistic philosophy that Macdonald herself draws. What is clear, in other words, is that there is more than one way of applying linguistic analysis to the problem of perception.

6. Conclusion

In my view, "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" (Macdonald 1953a) is deserving of much greater scholarly attention—not only as a counterpart to Anscombe's (1981) better-known "The Intentionality of Sensation" but also as a historically significant mid-twentieth-century account of the value of philosophy that diverges from the once-prevailing view that good philosophy is akin to good empirical science. For Macdonald, philosophy is categorically not a science for it does not discover new facts, and philosophers who attempt to construe it as something like a science risk rendering philosophical theories nonsensical or pseudoscientific. For Macdonald, the real value of a philosophical theory is its ability to help us see the familiar in a new light. In that sense, a good philosophical theory is more appropriately comparable to work of poetry or art.

Macdonald anticipated a hostile reception for her metaphilosophical views—and Russell's (1912) comments in "The Philosophy of Bergson," for example, suggest she was right. But some recent discussions about the nature of philosophical inquiry suggest that she may simply have been ahead of her time. One topic that has received some attention in contemporary metaphilosophical literature is whether (philosophical) arguments are capable of changing people's minds, with

some scholars reaching the surprising conclusion that they are not particularly effective in doing so (see, e.g., Bright 2023; Dutilh Novaes 2023). It is important to note that this is not the same claim that Macdonald (1953a) is making in "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception." Nonetheless, there are similarities. The idea is that, even in philosophy, our views are not determined exclusively by reasons or rational justification. Other factors, such as our personal values, implicit biases, or past experiences are just as likely to play a role (perhaps even a significant role) in determining what positions we are willing to adopt and which we reject. This is consistent with Stebbing's claim that "it is persons who think, not purely rational spirits" (1939/2022, 18). Similarly, if Macdonald is right, then what determines where our philosophical allegiances lie (e.g., whether we are "a little platonist or a little aristotelian" [1953a, 322]) is our temperament. It is the story that most appeals to us, Macdonald argues, that will win us over in the end. She is not explicit about this, but it is plausible to assume that the story we prefer is going to be settled (at least in part) by, again, our personal values, our biases, and our past experiences. To use a crude example, someone who has experienced a lot of illusions in their life (perhaps they have spent time in hot places and seen mirages) is more likely to adopt a philosophical position that emphasizes the fallibility of the senses—because that is the theory, the "story," that best captures their experience of the world. Whether or not Macdonald is right, her metaphilosophical position seems to cast doubt on the view (held by many philosophers) that reason or rational argument is what leads us to form our philosophical beliefs.

This might sound like a pessimistic conclusion to arrive at about the nature of philosophical inquiry and the efficacy of philosophical arguments. But Macdonald's metaphilosophical approach encourages us not to consider how we want philosophy to work but rather to pay attention to how it does work. In addition, Macdonald herself does not think of this as a denial of the value of philosophy but instead a reassessment of why it is valuable. Poetry and art are not sciences, but they are certainly not senseless—and a good story can have a profound impact on one's life or even society at large. Indeed, scholars engaged in this metaphilosophical debate today might stand to learn something about where the value of philosophical inquiry does lie by consulting Macdonald's comparison between philosophy and the arts.

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