

Anscombe on Sensations of Position

Wenqi Yin

Capital Normal University, Beijing 100048

Abstract

Anscombe introduces the notion of "non-observational knowledge" by taking the knowledge one usually has of the position of his limbs as an example. According to her definition two requirements need to be met when we speak of "observing something": first, we can speak of separately describable sensations (call it the SD condition); second, having such sensations is in some sense our criterion for saying something (call it the CS condition). The "sensations of position"-so called by Anscombe-play a central role in understanding the knowledge we usually have of our bodily position as *non-observational*. But, do we really have such sensations? If yes, how can we tell whether they are "separately describable" or not? In what sense can having a given sensation be or be not our criterion of saying something? And, why (and how) are the above question to be related to our understanding the knowledge that we usually have of our bodily position as non-observational knowledge? By clarifying the ambiguity in the possible meanings of "sensation of X", I'll try to defend my understanding of Anscombe's answers to the above questions, namely, that we do have sensations of position, and usually they are neither separately describable nor our criterion of saying something-in the sense that we usually don't identify our bodily position by identifying the sensations of position, and that

About the author

Yin Wenqi, Postdoctor, College of Political Science and Law, Capital Normal University. Research areas: Philosophy of Perception, Philosophy of Action. Email : yinwenqi1987@126.com

those sensations don't function as clues in our knowing our bodily position. That is why we know our bodily position without observation.

Keywords

Anscombe, Sensations of position, Non-observational knowledge, Separately describable

DOI: 10.47297/wspjhcWSP2515-469901.20200402

In *Intention* Anscombe introduces the notion of "non-observational knowledge" by taking the knowledge one usually has of the position of his limbs as an example.

E.g. a man usually knows the position of his limbs without observation. It is without observation, because nothing *shews* him the position of his limbs; it is not as if he were going by a tingle in his knee, which is the sign that it is bent and not straight. Where we can speak of separately describable sensations, having which is in some sense our criterion for saying something, then we can speak of observing that thing; but that is not generally so when we know the position of our limbs. (Anscombe 2000, p.13)

Here, Anscombe gives her definition of observation, according to which two requirements need to be met when we speak of "observing something": first, we can speak of separately describable sensations (call it the SD condition); second, having such sensations is in some sense our criterion for saying something (call it the CS condition). If, however, only in view of her definition of observation, it is still not clear, what exactly Anscombe means by saying that "a man usually knows the position of our limbs *without observation*": Which condition is not met here? The SD condition, or the CS condition, or neither of them? And, of course, there is still another possibility, namely, that we don't have any such sensations of our bodily positions in the first place! In any case, the "sensations of position" – so called by Anscombe – play a central role in understanding the knowledge we usually have of our bodily position as *non-observational*. The following questions need to be answered:

1, What does Anscombe mean by "sensations of position"? Are there any such sensations at all? If we do have such sensations, what sort of sensations are they?

2, How can we tell whether a given sensation is "separately describable" or not? Are the sensations of position – if there really are such sensations – "separately describable"?

3, In what sense can having a given sensation be or be not our *criterion* of saying something? Are the sensations of position to be regarded as such a criterion?

4, Why (and how) are the above questions to be related to our understanding the knowledge that we usually have of our bodily position as *non-observational* knowledge?

Preparatory Discussion: Intentional & Phenomenal Aspect of Sensations

Let us consider one possible conception first, namely, that there are no "sensations of position" at all. It is, as a matter of fact, the view held by e.g. P. F. Strawson in his *Individuals*. Strawson, like Anscombe, emphasizes that we can know about our bodily movements *without observation*, but, unlike Anscombe, equates "without observation" with "not indicating at all precisely any very definite sensation or experience" or "the marked absence of any distinctive experience". (Strawson 1959, p.111)

For the sake of closer examinations, a terminological ambiguity needs to be clarified. Consider the following dialogue:

- Can you *feel that* your leg is bent without observing it?
- Sure.
- What does it *feel like*?
- ... I don't know.

"Sensation of position" is an ambiguous term. In one sense the "sensation" in that phrase can be understood as "*sensation that / sensing (feeling) that ...*" and the "position" (e.g. that my leg is bent) as the *intentional content* of that sensation, while in another sense the "sensation" can be understood as the *phenomenal state* that one has when one's limbs are in such and such "position", i.e., *what it is like* to be in such and such bodily position. Such a dual-aspect feature largely explains the paradoxical situation one is prone to fall into when one talks about "sensations of position": On the one hand, if what here is meant is that e.g. one can *tell* whether he is being standing or sitting, then no one would

object that surely every normal person has such "sensations" in their almost every waking moment. But on the other hand, if you further ask "what kind of sensation is that?" ("what does it feel like?"), most of us would not easily answer it, since the question brings us from *the intentional* to *the phenomenal aspect* of our sensations of position. Therefore, the so-called "sensations of position" are to us clear and distinct in one sense, while obscure and perplexing in another.

To make a clear distinction between these two kinds of aspect, it may be helpful to ask the question: "What is sensed in such a sensation?" Understood from the phenomenal aspect "what is sensed" always be the sensation itself – e.g. a sharp pain, which is not some object distinct from the sensation *per se*; while from the intentional aspect, "what is sensed" always be something other than that sensation itself and typically expressed in the form of proposition – e.g. a needle is pricking me. Those two aspects of sensations (or the intentional sensations and the phenomenal sensations, if you like) need not to be felt separately – when I feel a sharp needle pricking me, what I feel *is* just a sharp pain. They are only *described separately* – the former have a proposition as its intentional content, and the latter is qualitatively characterized by its phenomenal feature.

What I feel, in the intentional sense, can always be true or false in principle, i.e., it is always logically questionable if what I feel is true or false. While in the phenomenal sense, what I feel is logically unquestionable. That I *feel pain*, just means that I, as a matter of fact, *have pain*. (What can be possibly false is only the reports or descriptions of that sensation, e.g., a foreign speaker could use the wrong word when she attempts to express her painful feelings in English.)

The intentional aspect and the phenomenal aspect are both distinct and interrelated, in the following sense: A sensation, with its distinct phenomenal feature, can have no specific intentional content (e. g., a person can have a sensation of nausea, without feeling *about* any state of affairs of the external world). But on the other hand, any sensations in the full-blown sense cannot have intentional content without phenomenal features. – It would be, at least to some extent self-contradictory to speak of *feeling* something, *sensation* of something, if that feeling or sensation were in absence of any phenomenal features to be felt.

If this precisely is the reason why Strawson claims "the marked absence of any distinctive experience" (i.e., he thinks that there's no sensations of position *because* he thinks there's no relevant phenomenal states), then at least *in this*

point he is right.

Have sensations of position phenomenal features?

There would be no reason to talk about "sensations of position" (in the full-blown sense of sensation) *if* they had no phenomenal features at all. But the question is: Have they?

Some take Anscombe's answer to be "No". E. g., McDowell (2011), in his interpretation of Anscombe's view on "bodily self-knowledge", claims: "The presence to one of the position of a limb, when one knows it in the relevant way, has no sensuously qualitative character. " (p. 138) He calls it the "phenomenological point", and then says: "One might put the point like this: there are no sensations — affections of relevant sense-organs — that constitute those 'sensations'. " (p. 139) In this respect McDowell's view is very like Strawson's. Both of them claim (1) that the sensations of position lack the phenomenal features and (2) (maybe just because of that lackness) that there are, strictly speaking, no such "sensations" at all. Hao Tang (2017), following McDowell, denies that sensations of position have any "content", i. e., they have no "*qualia*" (I take it to be another name for "phenomenal features") ("'没有内容'实际上是指没有特定的内容,即没有所谓的'感受性质'(*qualia*)", p. 76), while at the same time against McDowell, refuses to reject immediately the possibility of speaking of "sensations" ("没有对第二性质的感觉并不意味着没有任何感觉", *ibid.*). According to him, "it would be a point of view worthy of serious consideration to maintain that there really be sensations of position in our limbs" ("认为我们的肢体中确实存在本体感觉,这至少是一种值得认真考虑的观点", *ibid.*).

My main concern here is, whether there is sufficient textual evidence for such interpretations of Anscombe as McDowell's and Hao Tang's. And I very much doubt it.

In "On Sensations of Position" Anscombe actually gives a very explicit description of the sensation of giving a reflex kick:

I investigate, and find that when I give a reflex kick and attend to my sensations, I get a sensation starting behind the knee and running a little way down the back of the leg, like the sensation produced by an uncomfortable

degree of electrical stimulation of muscle. (Anscombe 1981, p.78)

It is, as far as I can see, evidently a description of *the phenomenal features* of the sensation of giving a reflex kick (or qualia, or qualitative experience, or what sensuously qualitative character, etc.). It is already a definite and sufficient textual evidence for rejecting McDowell&Tang's interpretation. The perplexity here is rather: Why, in the face of such evidence, would the critics still like to claim that there's no phenomenal features *according to Anscombe*?

An Unnoticed Sensation?

One source of misunderstanding is perhaps the following: Anscombe maintains, "That is a result of observation which I did not know before", and "If I want to imagine a sensation or feeling that I get when I give a reflex kick, ... then I may find I don't remember, or never noticed, what the feeling is or even where (in the knee? in the calf?)". That is to say, it is also true, according to Anscombe, that we usually never notice or don't remember what the phenomenal features of that sensation is. This is why Anscombe sometimes surrounds the word "sensation" in this use of "sensations of position" with the scare quotes.

We need to assess the issue here from two aspects. On the one hand, as long as we're not able to tell what the phenomenal feature is like or whether there is the phenomenal feature at all, we have a reason to call in question whether these "sensations" are sensations *in the full-blown sense* and (therefore) to surround the word "sensation" with the scare quotes.¹ On the other hand, there is still a sense in which these "sensations" are evidently to be called sensations, even in its full-blown sense, when I e. g., as Anscombe describes, "investigate" and "attend to" my sensations as I give a reflex kick, and "find" that "I get a sensation starting behind the knee ...".

One might demur: "How can you be sure that 'it is always there' even though you never noticed the phenomenal feature, or don't remember it? For what we are talking about is not an external physical object, but what your feel.

¹ It is exactly in this sense that Anscombe emphasizes: "But 'I am sitting cross-legged', 'I gave a reflex kick' are not thought to be couched in the language of sense-impressions, nor to be descriptions of sense-contents properly speaking, like 'blue patch', 'pressure', 'rustle', 'tingle', 'pain'; ..." (Anscombe 1981, p. 73)

An unfelt feeling, an unsensed sensation – does it make any sense to talk about such a curious thing?" My response would be: It is curious, but not absurd. There has been lots of work on the topic of "unconscious sensations". See e.g., Prinz (2015).

Besides, there still is a sense in which we can talk about the phenomenal features of the sensations of position *even when* we are not paying particular attentions to them. In "On Sensations of Position" Anscombe briefly mentions the case of "the anesthetic boy" from James' *Principle*. Here are some descriptions from the cited doctor report:

"Passive movements could be imprinted on all the extremities to the greatest extent, without attracting the patient's notice. Only in violent forced hyperextension of the joints, especially of the knees, there arose a dull vague feeling of strain, but this was seldom precisely localized. We have often, after bandaging the eyes of the patient, carried him about the room, laid him on a table, given to his arms and legs the most fantastic and apparently the most inconvenient attitudes, without his having a suspicion of it. The expression of astonishment in his face, when all at once the removal of the handkerchief revealed his situation, is indescribable in words. Only when his head was made to hang away down he immediately spoke of dizziness, but could not assign its ground. Later he sometimes inferred from the sounds connected with the manipulation that something special was being done with him ... He had no feelings of muscular fatigue. If, with his eyes shut, we told him to raise his arm and to keep it up, he did so without trouble. After one or two minutes, however, the arm began to tremble and sink without his being aware of it. He asserted still his ability to keep it up ..." (James 2007, II, pp. 489-490)

What the anesthetic boy lacks is not only the intentional but also in the phenomenal aspects of the sensations of position. *Compared with him*, we surely have both under ordinary circumstances.

"Locating" Sensations vs. "Located" Sensations

It is also possible that one admit the cited description ("I get a sensation starting behind the knee ...") *is* a description of the phenomenal feature of the sensation of position (e.g. of giving a reflex kick), but denies that is *the relevant*

kind of sensation we are interested in.

McDowell, e.g., distinguishes between "*locating*" and "*located*" sensations. According to him, the bodily sensations such as tingles and the like "are themselves located ... as opposed to locating items – instances of secondary qualities – that might be conceived as given by them". In contrast, perceptual (e.g., visual) sensations "are not located (except unspecifically, where their subject is), and they locate the instances of secondary qualities that they give". It is the *locating* sensations that we are interested in when we talk about "sensations of position", but what we can find is only the *located* sensations.

It is an interesting distinction indeed; but whatever its merits should be, it is not Anscombe's distinction. On the contrary, she says: "In fact the sensation of mutual contact of such and such parts of the body ... is itself a sensation of position". (Anscombe 1981, pp. 71-72) To repeat: For Anscombe, the real question is not *whether there are* the sensations of position or not, but what kind of role they play in our knowledge of bodily position – whether they are "separately describable" (the SD condition) and whether they are "in some sense our criterion for saying something" (the CS condition).

Besides, there seem to be some critical question about the "locating vs. located" distinction *per se*. It is rather doubtful that it be, as McDowell maintains, the mark of the "perceptual sensations" that they are *not located*. Tactile sensations (touch) and gustatory sensations (taste) are always located in certain bodily parts, *and* where their subjects' sense organs are. The reason is simple: Touch and taste are both typical short-distance perceptions. We touch or taste something always by direct contact with it. Therefore, it would sound more reasonable to say that these two kinds of sensations are *locating and located*. Olfactory sensations are somehow doubtful. The reason why visual and auditory sensations are *not located* is rather that they are, unlike touch and taste, both typical long-distance perceptions.

We still want to know *what makes* McDowell believe that it is the *locating* sensations that we should concern about. It is a much more serious problem that need to be dealt with and is entangled with, in my view, a much deeper misunderstanding of the concept of *observation*.

Without Observation = Without Clues

In the very beginning of "On Sensations of Position" Anscombe writes:

Wherever I spoke of 'knowledge without observation' in *Intention*, I should also speak of 'knowledge without clues'. (Anscombe 1981, p.71)

It can be viewed as a simplified explanation of "without-observation": It just means without clues. In many other places in *Intention* and "On Sensations of Position" Anscombe also uses similar words to make the same point:

E.g. a man usually knows the position of his limbs without observation. It is without observation, because *nothing shews* him the position of his limbs; it is not as if he were going by a tingle in his knee, which is *the sign* that it is bent and not straight. (Anscombe 2000, p.13; my italicization.)

It is not ordinarily possible to find anything that *shows* one that one's leg is bent. It may indeed be that it is because one has sensations that one knows this; but that does not mean that one knows it by *identifying* the sensations one has. (Anscombe 2000, p.49; my italicization.)

In other words, if what McDowell means by "locating sensations" is just that they should function as *clues* or *signs* that *show* or *give* (McDowell's word – "they locate the instances of secondary qualities that they *give*") us, or *by which we judge*, the position of our limbs, or that we know the position of our limbs by *identifying* such sensations, then Anscombe would also agree with McDowell *on this point*: namely that there are usually *no* sensations that are responsible for the "locating" job. This partly explains why we usually do not *notice* and cannot *remember* the phenomenal feature of the sensations of position – because we do not *need* judge our bodily position by *identifying* those sensations.

We *need not*, but it doesn't mean we *cannot*. Take note of the example Anscombe gives immediately after she introduced the concept of "knowing without observation":

E.g. a man usually knows the position of his limbs without observation. It is without observation, because nothing shews him the position of his limbs; *it is not as if he were going by a tingle in his knee, which is the sign that it is bent and not straight*. (Anscombe 2000, p.13; my italicization.)

That is to say, there can also be such not so usual cases, that e.g. a man is going by a tingle in his knee, which functions as a sign, and the man accordingly *observes* that his leg is bent and not straight.

In any case, Anscombe and McDowell go from that common point in opposite directions.

Anscombe: Because there are no locating sensations, our knowledge of bodily position is non-observational.

McDowell: Because there are no locating sensations, there are no sensations of position in the relevant sense.²

What makes McDowell think that only the "locating" sensations are the sensations of position in the relevant sense? One possible explanation: There is a preconception here, namely, the sensations of position (in the relevant sense) *must* function as clues for the knowledge of position. But as we shall see, this kind of requirement between "sensation of X" and "knowledge of X" consist only in *observational* knowledge.

Location as Intentional Content vs. Clues by Which to Locate

We can also attempt to clarify McDowell's misunderstanding from another perspective. We've distinguished intentional and phenomenal aspects of sensations of position. Here we perhaps need to make a further distinction:

We *might* call sensations (with particular phenomenal features) "locating" sensations in the sense that they give us clues to locate our limbs, that we can locate our limbs by identifying such sensations.

We *might*, however, call sensations "locating" sensations in another sense, namely, that they have "my limbs are in such and such location" as its intentional content. But they need not function as *clues by which* we locate our limbs.

Only in the latter sense, we *might* call the sensations of position that Anscombe is talking about "locating" sensations – in doing so we simply emphasize the *intentional* aspect of those sensation. Meanwhile we need to keep in mind that Anscombe's main point is that we normally do not *locate* our limbs *by identifying* those sensations.

2 In McDowell's own words: "As I said, it is natural to talk of 'having sensation' in a limb. I think this idiom is best understood not as registering that one is actually feeling tingles and the like in the limb, but to acknowledge that one is susceptible to the 'sensations', so called, of its position that figure in Anscombe's discussion as 'inseparable'." (McDowell 2011, p.145)

"When I Say: 'The Sensation is not Separable' ..."

Let's back to SD and SC conditions of observation. Anscombe's view on non-observational knowledge is easily confused with Strawson's.³ But the latter denies the existence of the sensations of position, the former not. In Anscombe's approach, the real question to be asked is not, whether there are sensations of position, but rather, whether these sensations are "separately describable" (SD condition), and whether they are "in some sense our criterion for saying something" (CS condition).

Why is our knowledge of our bodily position non-observational knowledge? As mentioned earlier, we can also put the question in another way: Which condition (the SD condition, or the CS condition, or both) are *not* met in the sensations of position? In my view, Anscombe's answer to the question is: *Both conditions are not met*. In the following we discuss them one by one.

In "On Sensations of Position" Anscombe gives a fuller explanation of what she meant by "separately describable" (SD condition). There are two kinds of description in the form of "sensation of X" to be distinguished: *internal* description and *external* description. The question whether a given sensation is "separately describable" can be then transformed into the question: Is the internal description of that sensation separable from its external description?

When I say: "the sensation (e.g. of giving a reflex kick) is not separable" I mean that the internal description of the 'sensation' – the description of the sensation-content – is the very same as the description of the fact known; when that is so, I should deny that we can speak of observing *that* fact by means of the alleged sensation. (Anscombe 1981, p.72)

Here, again, we see how McDowell&Tang's interpretation deviates from Anscombe's idea. First, the reason why Anscombe denies that in usual cases the knowledge of our bodily position is observational consists in the "inseparability" of our sensations of position, not the "non-existence" of such sensations, which is maintained in McDowell's interpretation. Second, by the "inseparability" of the sensation Anscombe means actually the inseparability of the *internal description* of that sensation ("the description of the sensation-content"): They are inseparable from – are "the very same as" – the external description ("the

3 E.g. Martin (1971).

description of the fact known"). So, the most natural understanding would be that the sensations of position *do have* sensation-content, which is to be described by its *internal description*. *If*, as Hao Tang claims, the sensations of position have *no* (sensation-)content, then it would be no point to speak of its *internal description*, and still less, of the *inseparability* of its internal description from its external description. The "No-Sensation" interpretation by McDowell and the "No-Content" interpretation by Hao Tang both seem to be eisegesis.

Internal Description & External Description

Anscombe goes on to explain what she exactly means by "internal" and "external" description of a given sensation. For the sake of interpretative accuracy, allow me to cite the whole paragraph:

If we are considering an expression of the form "sensation of X", we need to ask whether the words "of X" are a description of the sensation content, or whether the sensation has some different content and X is what produces or always goes with it, etc. The sensation of going down in a lift is a sensation of sudden lightness and as it were of one's stomach's lurching upwards; "of going down in a lift" is not an internal description of the sensation. It is quite possible, as is suggested by a passage of Mr Braybrooke's, that we should not have any very specific internal description of a given sensation: in "the smell of onions" for example, "of onions" is an external description, but English contains no word for the content. If onions ceased to have that smell, but it were still to be smelt elsewhere, "of onions" might become an internal description, like "bitter". People sometimes speak of a 'sensation of flying', but it is not (not at all!) a sensation occasioned by flying, and it is very unlikely that it is one that would actually go with flying: "It's a sensation of flying" or "I feel as if I were flying" is just an internal description. (The special thing about *this* kind of internal description is that it uses a word taken from elsewhere; it is as it were a metaphor - only *that* this metaphor strikes one is part of the experience it expresses. 'Sensations' of position are quite unlike this.) (Anscombe 1981, p.72)

In an external description of the sensation, the words "of X" describe "the fact known" (as cited in the previous section); more specifically, they describe the fact known as what "produces or always goes with" that sensation. The

external description describes a factual, external relation, i. e., a causal or concurrent relation between the known fact and the described sensation. In "sensation of going down in a lift" e. g., "of going down in a lift" is such an external description; while "of flying" in "sensation of flying" is not. The latter cannot mean: when I am, as a matter of fact, flying, I've got that sensation. Out of the same reason, while the sensation of going down in a lift *is* a sensation of sudden lightness, "of sudden lightness" is not an *external*, but *internal* description of that sensation. It is a description of the sensation content – or, in our current term, of the *phenomenal feature* of that sensation, of *what it feels like* when one is going down in a lift. It is called "internal" description, because it can be said that it describes the internal character of the sensation *itself*: One could have felt the same sort of sudden lightness without having any knowledge about what was going on in the external world and, therefore, without being able to give any appropriate external descriptions of that sensation.

"Separately Describable"

Now, it seems clear why in the case of going down in a lift, the internal description is, as Anscombe claims, *separable* from the external description, or in other words, why the sensation of going down in a lift is a *separately describable* sensation. For one can identify the sensation content ("sudden lightness") of that sensation and accordingly describe it as "sensation of sudden lightness" separately from the identification and description of what produces or goes with that sensation.

Why are the sensations of position, e. g., of giving a reflex kick, *not* separately describable? Based on the previous discussion, the reason seems not hard to grasp either. We do not usually know we're in such a bodily posture *by identifying* such sensations. Of course, those sensations are familiar to us. But:

If I imagine something when asked if I know the sensation of giving a reflex kick, I imagine giving a kick, not a sensation. If I want to imagine a sensation or feeling that I get when I give a reflex kick, and don't simply mean imagining what it is like to give a reflex kick, then I may find that I don't remember, or never noticed, what the feeling is or even where (in the knee? in the calf?). (Anscombe 1981, p.73)

Without further "investigations", we can describe the sensation of giving a reflex kick only by description of giving a reflex kick, that is, the concurrent bodily movement that produces or goes with those sensations. In that sense, the sensations of position, such as giving a kick, are not separately describable.

Two points need to be noted here. First, the "inseparableness" of sensations of position is only in view of usual situations, where no extra investigations have been conducted yet. But as mentioned before, I can then try to "investigate", and attend to my sensations when I give a reflex kick, and I can find, that "I get a sensation starting behind the knee and running a little way down the back of the leg, like the sensation produced by an uncomfortable degree of electrical stimulation of muscle". (Anscombe 1981, p. 73) That is surely an internal description of the sensation and is separable from its external description. But what still remains true is that "without experiment, most people would not know what sensations to expect", and therefore would not know how to describe that sensation except saying that it's the "sensation of giving a reflex kick".

Second, the "separableness" of the internal descriptions from the external descriptions should not be understood in a too superficial, literal sense. Rachael Wiseman (2016) complains, that in the descriptions like "It felt as if there were fur", the internal description can be completely coincident with the external description, although it is obviously a case of observation. So, in Wiseman's view, the SD condition cannot be applied to make a sound distinction between observation and non-observation cases. But, according to my understanding, Wiseman's criticism is apparently based on a sort of misconception of "internal" and "external" description. Anscombe herself actually has discussed a similar example – "the smell of onions" (cited in the previous section). Her basic idea is: "of onions" can be and ought to be understood in different ways according to the different situations. It *can* mean that it is the onions that produce or go with that olfactory sensation. – When *so* understood, it is to be regarded as an *external* description. But it *can* also be used to describe merely the phenomenal character of the sensation, "[i]f onions ceased to have that smell, but it were still to be smelt elsewhere". – When *so* understood, it is then no longer an external, but an *internal* description of the sensation, despite of the superficial sameness of the words. In the case of "It felt as if there were fur" it is of the same token as well. For Anscombe, the key point here is not whether the internal description can be formulated *in literally different words* from the external description, but whether

what is described by the internal description – the internal, phenomenal feature of the sensation – can be *identified in separable ways* from what is described by the external description, i. e., the causal or concurrent relation between the sensation and the known fact.

To borrow Wittgenstein's example – we may not be able to tell either the height of Mont Blanc or the timbre of clarinet, but there are differences between them: with regard to the latter, we may say 'we know it clearly, but we can't tell it', but we won't say so with regard to the former. (cf. Wittgenstein 2009, §78) Similarly, we may find that we can neither fully describe "what the smell of onions is", nor "the sensation of giving a reflex kick", but the difference is still there: We know what the smell of onions is, the difficulty lies in how to describe it; but the primary difficulty in the case of giving a reflex kick, as Anscombe put it, is that "I don't remember, or never noticed what the feeling is or even where". That is why the smell of onion (or the touch of fur, or the timbre of clarinet) belongs to the case of observation, while the sensation of giving a reflex kick not.

Variety of Possible Meanings of "Sensation of X"

To get a clearer view of the whole things, a more nuanced distinction need be drawn here regarding to the possible meanings of "*sensation of X*". Take "sensation of going down in a lift" as the example, then it might be understood in a variety of ways:

1) I have a sensation that I'm going down in a lift, and my attitude towards it is affirmative. (I feel that I'm going down in a lift, in the sense of "I can assert that", "I can tell that".)

2) I have a sensation that I'm going down in a lift, and my attitude towards it is noncommittal. (I feel as though it is the case, but I'm not sure whether it is really so or not.)

3) I have a sensation that I'm going down in a lift, and my attitude towards it is negative. (I *merely* feel as though it were the case, but I know that it is not.)

4) I have a sensation, and it is being produced by or is going with a concurrent fact, namely, the going down of the lift that I am in. (The token-token relation between the sensation and the concurrent fact (what happens now), which produces or goes with that sensation.)

5) I have a sensation, and it is typically produced or going with such a kind of events as going down of a lift. (The type-type relation between the sensations and such a kind of events, which produces or goes with that sensation.)

6) I have a sensation, that usually serves as a clue by which I judge the external situation I'm in, namely that I'm going down in a lift.

7) I have a sensation, whose "content" or phenomenal character can be typically described as "going down in a lift". By saying so I do not have to mean that I am really going down in a lift.

1), 2) and 3) are all the descriptions from the intentional perspective, which are not to be equated with the external descriptions to which 4) and 5) belong. The straw in a glass of water, e.g., appears to be broken when we watch it from the side. How do we describe such an optical illusion? From the *intentional* perspective, we may reasonably describe it as "broken straw illusion", for we take it as a such one when we are bewildered by that illusion. Nonetheless, it cannot be regarded as an *external* description of that visual sensation, since the sensation are certainly not *produced* by an actually broken straw. In normal cases, of course, there are no big differences between the external description and the description of the intentional aspect of a sensation: I feel that I'm going down in a lift, and this sensation is produced by and goes with a going down lift. Among them, 1) and 4) are even more closely related: I can tell, positively, that I'm going down in a lift, *because* the sensation I have now is typically caused or accompanied by such a kind of state of affairs.⁴

6) is a description of the functional role of the sensation in the *observation*: it serves as a clue by which we can tell the situation that I'm in. As mentioned above, we ought not to confuse it with the descriptions of the internal aspect of a sensation. Name the phrase "sensations of position" as an example: the phrase is normally understood in the *intentional* sense (such as 1), 2) and 3)), perhaps also

4 The issues here, when fully unfolded, would be much more complicated and manifold. Anscombe (1962) e. g. explores one possible understanding of the "sensations of position" specifically in the sense of 3). She says: "A strong reason why it is natural to call them 'sensations' is that, though this is enormously rare, it can happen that one wrongly thinks one's leg is stretched out, or one has given a reflex kick or the like. Then one would say 'it felt like just as if ...' or 'I had a sensation of ...'" But this kind of understanding suggested by Anscombe is closely related to the fact that we usually lack the full-blown awareness of "the sensations of position" in the sense of 5), 6) and 7). See also footnote 3.

in the *external* sense (such as 4) and 5)), what does not in any case mean the same as 6). McDowell apparently takes 6) as the only relevant sense in which "sensations of position" should be understood, and accordingly asserts that there are no such sensations at all. I think it is a big misconception of both Anscombe's idea and the meaning of the phrase. And I'm highly doubt that he is the only one who falls prey to that misconception.

7), the internal description (description of the "sensation content"), is not to be confused with any other ones. But for our present purpose, the first thing we must keep clear about is the distinction between the question whether a sensation deserves any internal description at all (whether it has any "sensuously qualitative character" or "content"), and the question whether its internal description (when there really is a such one) is separable from its external description. What Anscombe is concerned about is the latter question, but that is misinterpreted as the former by McDowell&Tang.

CS Condition

Finally, the CS Condition. In Anscombe's account of observation and non-observation, the SD condition is closely related to the CS condition. In what sense then, having a sensation can serve as criterion for saying something? Generally speaking, two conditions need to be met.

1, Relevance: I can say X, because I have a sensation of X.

However, only this condition being met is not enough. Suppose someone says: "The reason why I can say that I have pain is that I have a sensation of pain". It sounds pointless, since "I have pain" is just another way of saying "I have sensation of pain". Wittgenstein once said:

... I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct'.

In the same sense, the sensation of pain cannot be reasonably taken as *criterion* of having pain, because here are no differences between "I feel that I have pain" and "I do have pain" – what seems correct to me *is* correct. And it cannot be reasonably said that I *observe* I have pain either. There ought to be another condition to be met –

2, Independence: The sensation of X is separately describable from X (i.e., the SD condition being met).

E.g., I can say that I'm going down in a lift, because I have a sensation of going down in a lift, *and* because the sensation of going down in a lift can be described as a sensation of sudden lightness – that is to say, that sensation is describable separately from the fact which produces or goes with it. Only with both of the conditions being met, that sensation of going down in a lift can be rightly called as a "criterion". The sensation needs to be *identified separately* from the thing to be observed in order to be taken as a *clue to identify* that thing. Only in that sense, I can accordingly speak of *observing* that I'm going down in a lift (with the sensation of sudden lightness I'm having as a clue).

In short, the SD condition and the CS condition are closely related in that the former is a *necessary condition* of the latter. No surprise, in the discussions of our knowledge of our own bodily position as *non-observational* knowledge, the SD condition has played a central role – whether it not being met, why not being met, in what sense it should be understood, etc. Based on the previous examination, the answer to those questions can be given as following:

We know that, e.g., we are giving a reflex kick just in that we are having sensation of giving a reflex kick. But it does not give us reason to speak of observing that we're giving a reflex kick, for the SD condition is not met here: Being asked to describe the "content" or the phenomenal feature of that sensation, we'll find ourselves not being able to describe it unless by means of describing the concurrent bodily movement, i.e., that we're giving a reflex kick. That sort of inseparableness makes the fact manifest, namely, that we usually don't identify our bodily position *by identifying* the sensations of bodily position we have – that those sensations don't function as *clues* in our knowing our bodily position. In that sense, we know our bodily position without observation.

References

- [1] Anscombe, G. E. M. Intention[M]. Harvard University Press, 2000.
- [2] Anscombe, G. E. M. On Sensations of Position[J]. Analysis, 22(3). Reprinted in Anscombe, G. E. M. Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind[C]. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981, 2 :71-74.

- [3] Anscombe, G. E. M. Substance[J]. Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society. Reprinted in Anscombe G. E. M. Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind[C]. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981, 2: 37-43.
- [4] Braybrooke, D. Some Question for Miss Anscombe About Intention[J]. Analysis, 1962, 22(3): 49-54.
- [5] Harcourt, E. Wittgenstein and Bodily Self-Knowledge[J]. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 2008, 77(2): 299-333.
- [6] Martin, C. B. Knowledge Without Observation[J]. Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 1971,1(1).
- [7] McDowell, J. Anscombe on Bodily Self-Knowledge[A]. Essays on Anscombe's Intention[C]. Harvard University Press, 2011:128-146.
- [8] Strawson, P. Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics[M]. London: Methuen ,1959.
- [9] Wiseman, R. Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention[M]. Routledge, 2016.
- [10] Wittgenstein, L. Philosophical Investigations, 4th Edition[M]. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- [11] 唐浩. 身体性自我知识初探[J]. 哲学动态, 2017(4): 73-79.