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The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe: Virtue, Action, Language

Thèse de doctorat en philosophie

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Abstract

The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe: Virtue, Action, Language

Elizabeth Anscombe, one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th Century, has worked on many topics in philosophy. The purpose of this work is to study her moral philosophy, especially how it relates to her work on other topics. This work starts with the three theses presented in her paper “Modern Moral Philosophy”, her most well-known paper in moral philosophy, first presenting that Anscombe’s discussion of moral philosophy involves action theory, philosophy of language, virtue ethics, and so on, and suggesting that her moral philosophy should be studied in the historical context in which she writes. After introducing Truman’s case, the consequentialism prevalent among her contemporaries, and her friends during her studies and work at Oxford (Chapter 1), I discuss how Anscombe’s writings on Aristotelian virtue ethics (Chapter 2), action theory (Chapter 3), and philosophy of language (Chapter 4) shaped her moral philosophy from different perspectives. Then, I examine the role of “Modern Moral Philosophy” as a contemporary revival of virtue ethics, in order to show that neither Anscombe nor her followers have taken Aristotle exclusively as the resource for their ethics, and that only ethicists who devote themselves to explaining how intentional actions are linked to thoughts about good and bad have truly inherited Anscombe’s ideas. At last, I conclude that Anscombe’s work on moral philosophy does not form a system, but it represents a female perspective of doing philosophy (Chapter 5).

Key words: Elizabeth Anscombe, morality, virtue ethics, action theory, philosophy of language, Aristotle, Wittgenstein

Abstract in French

La philosophie morale d'Elizabeth Anscombe : vertu, action, langage

Elizabeth Anscombe, une des grandes philosophes du vingtième siècle, a travaillé sur de nombreux sujets philosophiques. L'objectif de cette recherche est d'étudier sa philosophie morale, en particulier la manière dont elle est liée à ses travaux sur d'autres sujets. Cette recherche commence par les trois thèses présentées dans son article « Philosophie morale moderne », son article le plus connu en philosophie morale, en présentant d'abord que la discussion d'Anscombe sur la philosophie morale implique la théorie de l'action, la philosophie du langage, l'éthique de la vertu, etc. et en suggérant que sa philosophie morale devrait être étudiée dans le contexte historique dans lequel elle écrit. Après avoir présenté le cas de Truman, le conséquentialisme qui prévalait parmi ses contemporains, et ses amis pendant ses études et son travail à Oxford (chapitre 1), je discute de la manière dont les écrits d'Anscombe sur l'éthique de la vertu aristotélicienne (chapitre 2), la théorie de l'action (chapitre 3), et la philosophie du langage (chapitre 4) ont façonné différents points de vue de sa philosophie morale. Ensuite, j'examine le rôle de son article « philosophie morale moderne » en tant que renouveau contemporain de l'éthique de la vertu, afin de montrer que ni Anscombe ni ses disciples n'ont pris exclusivement Aristote comme ressource pour leur éthique, et que seuls les éthiciens qui se consacrent à expliquer comment les actions intentionnelles sont liées aux pensées sur le bien et le mal ont véritablement hérité des idées d'Anscombe. Enfin, je conclus que le travail d'Anscombe sur la philosophie morale ne forme pas un système, mais qu'il représente une perspective féminine de la philosophie (chapitre 5).

Mots-clés : Elizabeth Anscombe, moralité, éthique de la vertu, théorie de l'action, philosophie du langage, Aristote, Wittgenstein

Résumé

Résumé de la problématique

Elizabeth Anscombe, l'une des philosophes les plus importantes du vingtième siècle, a eu de nombreux rôles dans sa vie. Roger Teichmann, l'auteur de *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe* et de nombreuses autres monographies sur Elizabeth Anscombe, cite l'affirmation suivante d'Anscombe dans *Intention* « an action can be intentional under several descriptions » (« une action peut être intentionnelle selon plusieurs descriptions »), et transpose cette affirmation à Anscombe elle-même en disant que « an individual can be significant under several descriptions » (« un individu peut être significatif sous plusieurs descriptions »). Les descriptions d'Anscombe sont les suivantes : pionnière de la théorie de l'action contemporaine, étudiante, amie et traductrice de Wittgenstein, instigatrice de l'éthique de la vertu, catholique romaine, femme philosophe, opposante à l'armement nucléaire, conservatrice en matière d'éthique sexuelle, etc. Derrière ces descriptions se cachent ses écrits dans divers domaines philosophiques : métaphysique, épistémologie, philosophie du langage, philosophie de l'esprit, philosophie de l'action, philosophie morale, philosophie politique, philosophie de la religion, etc.

Anscombe a en effet écrit dans de nombreux domaines de la philosophie, mais si nous mentionnons la philosophie morale, il est difficile d'ignorer son article « Modern Moral Philosophy » (« Philosophie morale moderne »). Dans cet article, Anscombe formule trois thèses directes critiquant la philosophie morale de l'époque : premièrement, nous manquons d'une « philosophie adéquate de la psychologie », sans laquelle la philosophie morale devient une étude stérile ; deuxièmement, les concepts d'obligation morale devraient être abandonnés, car ils ne sont pas pertinents pour la société laïque contemporaine ; troisièmement, il y a peu de différences entre les philosophes moraux britanniques contemporains, car ils sont tous conséquentialistes, c'est-à-dire qu'ils jugent la valeur morale d'une action en fonction de ses conséquences. Cet article est considéré comme ayant réformé la philosophie morale et revitalisé

l'éthique de la vertu, qui est une alternative au kantisme et au conséquentialisme. Il est considéré comme ayant eu un impact à long terme, car de nombreux philosophes moraux ont poursuivi et développé le problème conceptuel et moral soulevé dans cet article. Parmi ces philosophes moraux, on peut citer Philippa Foot dans *Natural Goodness* et *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays*, Alasdair MacIntyre dans *After Virtue* et Rosalind Hursthouse dans *On Virtue Ethics*.

En plus de ces commentaires positifs, Elizabeth Anscombe a fait l'objet de nombreuses critiques, et une catégorie particulière de ces critiques est l'accusation selon laquelle ses écrits ne sont pas faciles à comprendre. Roger Teichmann écrit dans l'introduction de son livre *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* que: « Elizabeth Anscombe was one of the giants of twentieth-century philosophy, a bold and original thinker who wrote on a huge variety of topics. But her work is often difficult or puzzling, and an impatient reader will not get far with it. » (« Elizabeth Anscombe était l'une des géants de la philosophie du vingtième siècle, une penseuse audacieuse et originale qui a écrit sur une grande variété de sujets. Mais son travail est souvent difficile ou déroutant, et un lecteur impatient n'ira pas bien loin. ») Candace Vogler écrit dans son livre *Reasonably Vicious* que: « Admittedly, although Anscombe is read and cited often enough, she is hard to understand. » (« Il faut admettre que, bien qu'Anscombe soit lue et citée assez souvent, elle est difficile à comprendre. ») Sur la quatrième de couverture d'*Intention*, J. David Velleman commente ce livre comme étant « often quoted, sometimes read, rarely understood... » (« souvent cité, parfois lu, rarement compris... ») Ces commentaires ne s'adressent pas uniquement à la philosophie morale d'Anscombe, mais celle-ci n'est pas à l'abri de telles critiques.

Je pense qu'il y a trois raisons pour lesquelles Anscombe est difficile à lire. La première raison concerne le ton d'Anscombe. En ce qui concerne l'écriture de « Philosophie morale moderne », Anscombe y adopte un ton dédaigneux et sarcastique. Ce ton attire l'attention sur ses attaques indiscriminées contre Butler, Hume, Kant, Bentham et Mill, et donne l'impression que ses attaques sont brusques. En même temps, ce ton fait ignorer que la véritable cible de la critique d'Anscombe est ses contemporains et la tradition philosophique dans laquelle ses

contemporains sont ancrés. Le même ton a été utilisé lors de sa conférence radiophonique à la BBC intitulée « Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt Youth ? » (« La philosophie morale d'Oxford corrompt-elle la jeunesse ? »). Lorsqu'on lui demande si la philosophie morale dans sa forme actuelle corrompt la jeunesse, elle refuse d'accepter cette accusation, mais pas pour une bonne raison, simplement parce qu'elle pense que la société anglaise est déjà corrompue et que la philosophie morale contemporaine ne fait que refléter cette turpitude. Ces tournures sarcastiques d'Anscombe peuvent dérouter ceux qui ne connaissent pas le contexte historique de ses écrits.

La deuxième raison est liée à la formation académique d'Anscombe. Après avoir dit qu'Anscombe est difficile à comprendre, Candace Vogler poursuit : « Why this should be so is, I suspect, partly because she draws on the kind of premodern work that I am urging us to take up again. » (« La raison pour laquelle il en est ainsi est, je pense, en partie parce qu'elle s'appuie sur le type de travaux prémodernes que je nous exhorte à reprendre. ») Comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné, Anscombe a une formation en lettres classiques et cite donc Aristote et Aquin sans mentionner leur nom tout au long de son article. Il est donc difficile pour les lecteurs qui ne connaissent pas ces textes anciens de suivre la pensée d'Anscombe et de se faire une idée claire de ses arguments.

La troisième raison est liée aux différents personnages d'Anscombe que nous avons mentionnés. Anscombe a effectivement plusieurs rôles et écrit sur différents sujets, mais pouvons-nous vraiment comprendre l'un de ses rôles à partir de ses écrits sur un sujet spécifique ? Roger Teichmann écrit que « People can be drawn to Anscombe for various reasons, corresponding to these different personae. An 'Anscombean' might be a Catholic bioethicist, a scholar of Wittgenstein, an action theorist, a philosophical feminist – or all of these at once. » (« Les gens peuvent être attirés par Anscombe pour diverses raisons, correspondant à ces différents rôles. Un.e « Anscombien.ne » peut être un.e bioéthicien.ne catholique, un.e spécialiste de Wittgenstein, un.e théoricien.e de l'action, un.e philosophe féministe - ou tout cela à la fois. ») Bien que Roger Teichmann dise qu'un.e Anscombien.ne pourrait simplement être influencé par une doctrine particulière d'Anscombe, je ne pense pas qu'il considérerait cela

comme très probable. Il écrit que « there is a connection, I think, between this versatility and the variety of personae I have referred to. Neither in the case of the personae nor in that of the philosophical topics do we have a mere medley; connections bind the items on the list. » (« Il y a un lien, je pense, entre cette polyvalence et la variété des rôles dont j'ai parlé. Ni dans le cas de ces rôles, ni dans celui des sujets philosophiques, nous n'avons affaire à un simple pot-pourri ; des liens unissent les éléments de la liste. »)

Dans son livre *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, Rachael Wiseman mentionne également les liens entre les écrits d'Anscombe sur différents sujets : « A distinction taken for granted in a paper on ethics becomes the object of enquiry in one on sensations. A concept that seemed unproblematic in a discussion of causation becomes deeply puzzling in a paper on the memory. An aside about a class of involuntary acts becomes central to a discussion of sin. When one is trying to get to grips with Anscombe's thought, often the question one can't answer in text A is addressed somewhere deep in text B, if only one knew to look there; but if one did one would find Anscombe there showing that something that seemed simple and clear in text C is, when viewed from a different angle, dreadfully puzzling. » (« Une distinction considérée comme acquise dans un article sur l'éthique devient l'objet d'une enquête dans un article sur les sensations. Un concept qui ne semblait pas poser de problème dans une discussion sur la causalité devient profondément déroutant dans un document sur la mémoire. Un aparté sur une catégorie d'actes involontaires devient central dans une discussion sur le péché. Lorsqu'on essaie de comprendre la pensée d'Anscombe, il arrive souvent que la question à laquelle on ne peut répondre dans le texte A soit traitée quelque part dans le texte B, si seulement on savait y regarder ; mais si on le faisait, on trouverait Anscombe en train de montrer que quelque chose qui semblait simple et clair dans le texte C est, lorsqu'on l'examine sous un angle différent, terriblement déroutant. ») Par conséquent, si nous ignorons les liens entre les différents rôles d'Anscombe, ainsi que ses écrits sur différents sujets, nous pourrions trouver qu'Anscombe n'est pas facile à comprendre.

Je pense que la troisième raison est la plus essentielle, parce que les deux premières raisons peuvent également être incluses, puisqu'elles représentent sa personnalité en tant qu'opposante

à la nomination de Truman et en tant que diplômée en lettres classiques, respectivement. Par conséquent, la méthodologie adoptée dans cette thèse consistera à étudier la philosophie morale d'Anscombe à travers ses écrits sur la philosophie morale, ainsi qu'à travers les écrits d'autres avatars d'Anscombe apparemment sans rapport. En d'autres termes, il s'agit d'étudier comment les autres personnalités d'Anscombe aident à comprendre son rôle de philosophe morale.

Comme l'indique le titre de cette thèse, celle-ci s'articulera autour de trois concepts : la vertu, l'action et le langage. Ils représentent trois domaines d'écriture d'Anscombe : l'éthique aristotélicienne, la théorie de l'action et la philosophie du langage de Wittgenstein. Ces trois concepts peuvent être considérés comme les pièces d'un puzzle. Chacune de ces pièces peut être considérée comme une partie distincte, et j'étudierai chacun de ces sujets dans un chapitre distinct. Mais comme les pièces d'un puzzle, elles ne sont pas séparées, elles s'interpénètrent et interagissent les unes avec les autres pour former un modèle complet. La rédaction de chaque chapitre ressemblera également au processus d'assemblage d'un puzzle, qui présentera les détails spécifiques de chaque pièce du puzzle ainsi que le schéma complet, à savoir la philosophie morale d'Anscombe.

Présentation des références

Les principales références de cette thèse seront les monographies et les collections d'articles d'Anscombe : sa monographie *Intention*, les trois volumes de son œuvre publiés en 1981, intitulés *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein : Collected Philosophical Papers Volume I*, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind : Collected Philosophical Papers Volume II*, et *Ethics, Religion and Politics : Collected Philosophical Papers Volume III*, ainsi que les quatre volumes de son œuvre édités par Mary Geach et Luke Gormally, intitulés *Human Life, Action, and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics by G.E.M. Anscombe*, *From Plato to Wittgenstein: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, et *Logic, Truth and Meaning: Writings by G. E. M. Anscombe*. Je m'inspirerai de ces volumes à des degrés divers et à différents moments de la rédaction de cette thèse.

Cette thèse fera également référence aux monographies et aux collections d'articles

relevant de la théorie de l'action d'Anscombe : *Intention and Intentionality : Essays in Honour of G. E. M. Anscombe* édité par Cora Diamond et Jenny Teichman, *Essays on Anscombe's Intention* édité par Anton Ford, Jennifer Hornsby et Frederick Stoutland, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention* par Rachael Wiseman ; en même temps, j'utiliserai des études sur la philosophie d'Anscombe dans son ensemble, ainsi que des études spécialisées sur sa philosophie morale : *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, par Roger Teichmann, *Anscombe's Moral Philosophy and Ethics After Anscombe : Post « Modern Moral Philosophy »* par Duncan Richter, et *The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* édité par Luke Gormally, David Albert Jones, et Roger Teichmann.

J'ai eu la chance de voir de plus en plus de travaux publiés au cours de mes recherches, notamment : *No Morality, No Self : Anscombe's Radical Skepticism* écrit par James Doyle, *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* édité par John Haldane, *The Anscombean Mind* édité par Adrian Haddock et Rachael Wiseman, et *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe* édité par Roger Teichmann, ainsi que quelques numéros spéciaux de revues publiés en l'honneur du 100^e anniversaire de la naissance d'Anscombe, dont *Philosophical News : On the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of G.E.M. Anscombe's Birth* , *Enrahonar. Revue internationale de la raison théorique et pratique, volume 64 : G. E. M. Anscombe : Reason, reasoning and action*, et *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements, Volume 87 : A Centenary Celebration : Anscombe, Foot, Midgley, Murdoch*.

Parmi ces publications récentes, je voudrais mentionner en particulier les livres sur le Quatuor d'Oxford : *Metaphysical Animals : How Four Women Brought Philosophy Back to Life* par Clare Mac Cuhaill et Rachael Wiseman et *The Women are up to Something : How Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch Revolutionized Ethics* de Benjamin Lipscomb. Ces études sur l'éducation, la vie universitaire et les amis universitaires d'Anscombe me permettent d'en savoir plus sur le parcours universitaire d'Anscombe et donc de mieux comprendre le développement de sa pensée philosophique ; ces études me fournissent également le contexte historique dans lequel Anscombe écrivait et l'impact du rôle d'Anscombe en tant que protestataire, sur sa philosophie morale.

Résumé des chapitres

Avec l'aide de ces volumes d'Anscombe et de ces monographies et collections qui étudient la philosophie d'Anscombe, cette thèse s'organise en cinq chapitres, ou cinq pièces d'un puzzle, pour étudier la philosophie morale d'Anscombe. Le chapitre 1 commencera par les trois thèses de « Philosophie morale moderne » et le contexte dans lequel elles ont été présentées, ce qui est le point de départ de beaucoup pour aborder la philosophie morale d'Anscombe. Le chapitre 2 remontera à l'éthique d'Aristote pour découvrir l'Anscombe qui a été influencée par Aristote et la façon dont cette influence se reflète dans sa philosophie morale. Le chapitre 3 étudie Anscombe en tant que pionnière de la théorie de l'action et montre comment sa théorie de l'action et sa philosophie morale sont liées. Le chapitre 4 étudie Anscombe en tant qu'étudiante, amie et traductrice de Wittgenstein et comment la philosophie du langage de Wittgenstein et la philosophie morale d'Anscombe sont liées. Le chapitre 5 revient sur le thème de la moralité et revisite le personnage d'Anscombe en tant que philosophe morale ainsi que ses écrits sur les questions morales.

Chapitre 1 « Philosophie morale moderne »

La section 1 du chapitre 1 commence par une analyse des trois thèses de « Philosophie morale moderne ». J'analyse d'abord le contenu de chaque thèse et la manière dont elles sont liées les unes aux autres à l'aide du résumé de Roger Crisp. Je présente ensuite l'argument de James Doyle sur l'importance de la thèse 2, qui tente de corriger le malentendu qui pourrait résulter du fait de ne voir dans « Philosophie morale moderne » qu'un renouveau de l'éthique de la vertu. Après avoir analysé le lien entre ces trois thèses, je suggère qu'il est difficile de prouver l'importance absolue d'une thèse particulière parmi trois thèses interdépendantes et je suggère que le point de départ de l'étude de la philosophie morale d'Anscombe devrait être le contexte historique dans lequel elle a écrit, et que le fait de placer « Philosophie morale moderne » dans son contexte historique affecte grandement notre compréhension de la philosophie morale d'Anscombe.

La section 2 du chapitre 1 traite de la doctrine du conséquentialisme, dans laquelle Anscombe traite Henry Sidgwick et ses successeurs de la même manière dans la thèse 3, précisément parce qu'elle considère ses contemporains comme des défenseurs de cette doctrine. Je présente l'argument défendu par le conséquentialisme, le représentant du conséquentialisme parmi les contemporains d'Anscombe, et l'évolution de cette doctrine. Anscombe explique que cette doctrine est née avec Jeremy Bentham et qu'elle est représentée à l'époque contemporaine par G. E. Moore et R. M. Hare. La raison pour laquelle elle critique Henry Sidgwick en particulier est qu'elle pense que sa définition de l'intention apporte un changement surprenant dans l'évolution de cette doctrine. Ce qui choque Anscombe, c'est que les idées absurdes selon lesquelles « il n'y a pas de différence entre les conséquences prévues et les conséquences voulues » et donc « tuer l'innocent pourrait être juste », qui sont déduites de cette définition erronée, étaient largement acceptées à l'époque.

La section 3 du chapitre 1 aborde le cas de Harry Truman, qui est l'événement à l'origine de l'insatisfaction radicale d'Anscombe. Je commence par la reformulation par Anscombe du contexte historique de la décision de Truman de larguer les bombes atomiques, par laquelle Anscombe soutient que la décision de Truman ne peut être justifiée. J'analyse également les attitudes d'Anscombe à l'égard de la guerre et du meurtre, afin de préciser que la critique d'Anscombe à l'égard de la décision de Truman n'est pas qu'elle est contre la guerre ou contre le meurtre, mais plutôt qu'elle est contre le choix de tuer des innocents comme moyen d'arriver à ses fins. Je présente ensuite l'opposition véhémement d'Anscombe à la nomination de Truman par Oxford pour un diplôme honorifique, ainsi que les positions très différentes de ses contemporains. Anscombe a d'abord été déconcertée par l'attitude de ses contemporains, mais elle a ensuite réalisé qu'il s'agissait d'un problème pour la philosophie morale d'Oxford. Je conclus en soulignant qu'Anscombe estime que la cause de ce problème réside dans l'absence d'une compréhension appropriée de l'action.

La section 4 du chapitre 1 présente le quatuor d'Oxford, un groupe de femmes philosophes qui ont soutenu Anscombe lors du cas Truman, notamment Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley et Iris Murdoch. Je présente le contexte de l'éducation de ces quatre femmes et

leur parcours universitaire commun à Oxford, le plus important étant l'atmosphère unique qui régnait pour ces femmes pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, alors que la plupart des étudiants masculins étaient appelés à s'engager dans la guerre. Je présente ensuite les nouvelles idées philosophiques que leurs contemporains masculins ont apportées avec eux lorsqu'ils sont revenus à Oxford après la guerre, ainsi que l'opposition de ces femmes philosophes à leurs pairs masculins. Toutes les quatre ont influencé et développé leurs idées philosophiques respectives pendant cette période, et leurs lectures et discussions communes nous fournissent des indices pour comprendre la philosophie morale d'Anscombe.

Chapitre 2 L'éthique aristotélicienne

Le chapitre 2 traite de l'influence de l'éthique d'Aristote sur la philosophie morale d'Anscombe. La première section poursuit l'analyse de la thèse 2 de la section 1.2 du chapitre 1, et commence par analyser la signification des concepts moraux mentionnés dans la thèse 2 et le contexte historique dont ces concepts moraux sont issus. Anscombe soutient que ces concepts partagent un sens particulier de « verdict absolu » qui découle de la conception de l'éthique de la loi du christianisme ; cependant, le christianisme s'est déjà estompé dans notre vie quotidienne, de sorte que ces concepts ont perdu leurs racines et ne sont donc plus applicables et devraient être abandonnés.

La section 2 du chapitre 2 présente le sens du terme « moral » chez Aristote, qui est le sens originel du terme « moral » auquel Anscombe affirme que nous devrions revenir après avoir abandonné la conception de l'éthique fondée sur la loi. Dans l'éthique aristotélicienne, le terme « moral » existe en tant que type de vertu, parallèlement à la vertu intellectuelle, et tant la vertu morale que la vertu intellectuelle sont définies en accord avec les différentes parties de l'âme. Je commence par présenter l'idée d'Aristote concernant ces deux types de vertu, la classification des âmes par Aristote et le lien entre ces deux types de vertu. Je présente ensuite, contrairement au sens d'Aristote, le sens moderne du mot « moral » qui confond les concepts de « moral », « intellectuel » et « vertu », ce qui entraîne une confusion inévitable dans

l'évaluation des actions humaines.

La section 3 du chapitre 2 passe de la critique de la thèse 2 à la philosophie de la psychologie proposée par Anscombe dans la thèse 1 de « Philosophie morale moderne » et tente d'analyser cette philosophie de la psychologie à l'aide de l'*Éthique à Nicomaque* d'Aristote. Je commence par analyser l'importance du concept de « vertu » dans la déclaration d'Anscombe sur la philosophie de la psychologie. Je présente ensuite la relation entre « vertu » et « bien » dans l'*Éthique à Nicomaque* afin d'expliquer l'affirmation d'Anscombe selon laquelle « la preuve qu'un homme injuste est un homme mauvais nécessiterait un compte rendu positif de la justice en tant que vertu ». Je présente ensuite la relation entre « vertu » et « action » dans l'*Éthique à Nicomaque* afin d'expliquer l'affirmation d'Anscombe selon laquelle « nous [devons] avoir un compte rendu du type de caractéristique qu'est une vertu [...] et de la manière dont elle est liée aux actions dans lesquelles elle s'incarne ». Ces deux affirmations sont des parties importantes de la philosophie de la psychologie d'Anscombe, et je tente de montrer que nous ne pouvons pas bien comprendre les affirmations d'Anscombe dans « Philosophie morale moderne » sans revenir à Aristote.

Chapitre 3 L'action humaine

Le chapitre 3 étudie la théorie de l'action d'Anscombe et ses liens avec sa philosophie morale. La première section revient d'abord sur le cas de Harry Truman discuté dans la section 3 du chapitre 1 et présente une justification alternative de la décision de Truman selon laquelle la mort d'innocents à Hiroshima et Nagasaki était un accident. Anscombe considère cette justification comme une mauvaise utilisation du principe du double effet, et la raison de cette mauvaise utilisation est la distinction floue entre les conséquences « intentionnelles », « prévues » et « accidentelles ». J'introduis ensuite le célèbre exemple du pompiste d'Anscombe dans *Intention* pour expliquer la distinction entre ces conséquences, ainsi que l'affirmation que nous avons mentionnée au tout début de ce résumé selon laquelle « une action peut être intentionnelle selon une description et non intentionnelle selon une autre ». Afin

d'aborder la difficulté de juger des conséquences causées par de telles descriptions multiples, je présente le type de description qui intéresse vraiment Anscombe, à savoir celles qui impliquent une « action humaine », et j'introduis trois concepts liés à l'action humaine : « action volontaire », « action morale », « action intentionnelle ».

La section 2 du chapitre 3 analyse l'équation « action humaine = action volontaire » en fonction des trois caractéristiques de l'action volontaire. Premièrement, j'explique que ce qu'Anscombe appelle « action volontaire » n'a pas un sens purement physiologique, ce qui signifie que son intérêt pour l'action humaine ne réside pas dans le mouvement corporel objectif qui intéresse les physiologistes, parce que ces mouvements ne peuvent pas présenter un certain type de responsabilité. Deuxièmement, je montre comment « l'action volontaire » d'Anscombe diffère du « volontaire (ἐκούσιον) » d'Aristote, qui inclut les bêtes et les bébés, car Anscombe s'intéresse aux agents humains dotés de la capacité de délibération et de choix. Troisièmement, je montre que « l'action volontaire » d'Anscombe diffère également de la « praxis » d'Aristote, car la première inclut l'omission non calculée et les actions impulsives soudaines. Anscombe tente de mettre l'accent sur un type de responsabilité qui inclut les conditions « ce que vous étiez capable de faire » et « il était nécessaire que vous fassiez » par l'analyse de l'omission volontaire.

La section 3 du chapitre 3 analyse l'équation « Toute action humaine est une action morale. Elle est soit bonne, soit mauvaise (elle peut être les deux) » sous trois angles. Premièrement, j'explique la signification du mot « moral » ici. Étant donné qu'Anscombe déclare que le mot « moral » ne présente pas un ingrédient supplémentaire que certaines actions humaines possèdent et d'autres pas, elle pense que « moral » est une propriété des actions humaines, à savoir un caractère bon ou mauvais des actions humaines. Deuxièmement, j'explique la contradiction apparente entre les deux affirmations d'Anscombe, à savoir que « toute action humaine est une action morale » et que « toutes les descriptions d'actions humaines ne sont pas des descriptions d'actions morales », en présentant la critique d'Anscombe de « l'équivalence extensionnelle ». Troisièmement, j'explique comment « Une action peut être à la fois bonne et mauvaise » est possible dans le jugement de l'action humaine.

La section 4 du chapitre 3 aborde l'idée d'« action humaine intentionnelle ». Je commence par analyser que « l'action avec un type particulier de multiplicité de niveaux de description » dont il est question dans l'article « Practical Truth » (« Vérité pratique ») et « l'action intentionnelle » dans l'article « Action, Intention, and Double Effect » (« Action, Intention, et Double Effet ») sont le même type d'action, Anscombe affirmant que le but de la discussion de ces actions est d'expliquer la notion de « vérité pratique ». J'analyse ensuite l'argumentation d'Anscombe sur cette notion à l'aide de ses articles « Practical Truth » (« Vérité pratique ») et « Thought and Action in Aristotle : What is 'Practical Truth' ? » (« Pensée et action chez Aristote : Qu'est-ce que la 'vérité pratique' ? ») L'argumentation d'Anscombe commence par une analyse du « désir en action », puis elle suggère que la définition de la « vérité pratique » est « la vérité en accord avec le désir juste », car, pour qu'une bonne décision soit prise, deux conditions doivent être réunies : premièrement, les raisons doivent être vraies, deuxièmement, le désir doit être juste et poursuivre ce que la raison affirme. Anscombe introduit ensuite la notion de « décision » chez Aristote et la relation entre « bonne décision » et « vérité pratique » en répondant à une contestation de la cohérence d'Aristote. Anscombe souligne ensuite l'insuffisance d'Aristote dans l'analyse de la notion de « vérité pratique » et tente de montrer que sa notion d'« action intentionnelle » peut compléter cette insuffisance.

Chapitre 4 Jeux de langage

Le chapitre 4 étudie Anscombe en tant qu'étudiante, amie et traductrice de Wittgenstein, et la manière dont ce personnage est lié à sa philosophie morale. La première section commencera par une introduction à l'analyse conceptuelle d'Anscombe, soulignée à la fois dans *Intention* et dans « Philosophie morale moderne », qui est une approche linguistique héritée de Wittgenstein. Je présente ensuite l'influence de Wittgenstein sur la carrière académique d'Anscombe dans un contexte historique, à la fois en termes de contact direct avec Wittgenstein et en termes de discussions et de débats sur les idées de Wittgenstein à différentes époques avec ses amis et collègues.

La section 2 du chapitre 4 traite du lien entre l'utilisation du langage et l'action humaine. Je commence par rappeler que, dans sa discussion sur l'action humaine, Anscombe mentionne que l'action humaine qui l'intéresse n'est pas seulement celle des humains qui atteignent le stade de la délibération, mais aussi celle des humains qui possèdent le langage et sont bien avancés dans son utilisation ; par ailleurs, le fait qu'Anscombe lie la caractérisation de « l'action intentionnelle » et la question « Pourquoi ? » dans *Intention* montre aussi qu'elle voit dans « l'usage du langage » une condition importante pour la description d'un certain type d'action humaine. Nous pouvons donc constater que l'utilisation du langage est une condition importante pour l'étude de l'action humaine par Anscombe. J'introduis ensuite les fondements de l'utilisation du langage en présentant le point de départ de l'étude d'Anscombe sur le langage, à savoir les jeux de langage de Wittgenstein. Ensuite, je présente également la limite des jeux de langage en démontrant qu'ils ne peuvent pas résoudre les difficultés à comprendre le fonctionnement d'un mot. Je termine cette section en présentant la manière dont Anscombe explique le fonctionnement des mots par les règles grammaticales et le contexte linguistique, et comment cette compréhension des règles et des contextes implique que ceux qui sont bien avancés dans l'utilisation du langage ont également la capacité de comprendre et de délibérer.

La section 3 du chapitre 4 traitera des structures qui font que notre langue est imbriquée dans notre vie quotidienne. Je commence par expliquer que l'utilisation de la langue n'est jamais une simple capacité individuelle, mais plutôt une activité collective qui implique des personnes vivant au sein d'une société. En même temps, le fonctionnement de la langue est déterminé par l'accord des êtres humains, qui n'est pas un accord en termes d'opinions, mais en termes de forme de vie. Anscombe attribue cette idée au point de vue de Wittgenstein sur la conventionnalité de la vérité. Je présente ensuite l'argument d'Anscombe sur la « fiabilité d'un passant » dans *Intention* et l'argument de Wittgenstein sur « l'impossibilité d'un langage privé » pour montrer comment la compréhension du fonctionnement des langues se forme à l'intérieur d'un mot, c'est-à-dire d'un système partagé de langage et de conventions. Je conclus cette section en soutenant que cette utilisation du langage au sein de certaines sociétés construit également un fondement moral commun.

La section 4 du chapitre 4 étudie le lien entre l'utilisation du langage et la vie éthique à partir de la discussion d'Anscombe sur la promesse. Je commence par la poursuite par Anscombe de l'argument de David Hume en faveur de la conventionnalité des promesses, qui est cohérente avec les règles d'utilisation des promesses dans les jeux de langage. Je montre ensuite qu'Anscombe pense que les jeux de langage et la conventionnalité des promesses ne sont pas suffisants pour présenter la nécessité générée par les promesses, et qu'elle a donc recours à la nécessité aristotélicienne pour compléter cette nécessité. Dans la dernière partie de cette section, je propose une combinaison de la nécessité conventionnelle et de la nécessité aristotélicienne pour expliquer l'image complète de la nécessité générée par la promesse en tant que pratique linguistique humaine. Cette combinaison démontre l'importance, mais non le caractère unique, de l'utilisation du langage dans la vie éthique, et la raison pour laquelle la meilleure façon de comprendre la pratique linguistique humaine devrait être une combinaison de convention sociale et de naturalisme aristotélicien.

Chapitre 5 Moralité

Le chapitre 5 aborde des sujets directement liés à la philosophie morale. Lorsque nous parlons de la philosophie morale d'Anscombe, il est impossible d'éviter le sujet de la « Philosophie morale moderne » en tant que renouveau contemporain de l'éthique de la vertu. Par conséquent, la première section de ce chapitre commencera par les deux réponses d'Anscombe à la dichotomie fait-valeur dans « Philosophie morale moderne », afin de présenter ses deux approches éthiques différentes. Je présente également les différentes approches adoptées par les différents éthiciens qui suivent la pensée d'Anscombe, afin de montrer que ni Anscombe ni ses disciples n'ont pris Aristote exclusivement comme ressource intellectuelle pour leur éthique.

La section 2 du chapitre 5 tente de répondre à deux questions. Premièrement, dans quelle mesure « Philosophie morale moderne » peut-elle être considérée comme le renouveau contemporain de l'éthique de la vertu ? Deuxièmement, les éthiciens de la vertu qui poursuivent

la pensée d'Anscombe sur l'éthique de la vertu dans « Philosophie morale moderne » peuvent-ils être pleinement représentatifs de l'éthique de la vertu contemporaine, et quelles sont les caractéristiques qu'ils partagent ? Je présente d'abord l'analyse de Roger Crisp et Michael Slote qui prétendent que l'article d'Anscombe anticipe le développement récent de l'éthique de la vertu non pas vraiment par son propre argument mais parce qu'il a influencé de nombreux philosophes qui écrivent directement sur l'éthique de la vertu. Je présente ensuite l'idée de Candace Vogler d'une « éthique de la vertu analytique », qui se veut une réponse directe à l'appel d'Anscombe en faveur d'un retour à Aristote et à Aquin. Elle affirme que les éthiciens de la vertu analytiques se consacrent à expliquer comment l'action intentionnelle est liée aux pensées sur le bien et le mal, et qu'ils sont les éthiciens qui ont réellement hérité des pensées d'Anscombe. Mon but ici n'est pas d'étiqueter Anscombe de quelque manière que ce soit, mais de clarifier un point : l'éthique aristotélicienne n'est qu'une des ressources intellectuelles d'Anscombe.

La section 3 du chapitre 5 traite du véritable intérêt d'Anscombe pour la philosophie morale, à savoir les questions morales particulières plutôt que la méta-éthique. Je commence cette section par la discussion d'Anscombe sur la guerre, qui est un aspect très important de ces questions morales particulières. Compte tenu de notre discussion précédente sur le cas de Truman, je réaffirme ici qu'Anscombe se concentre sur le meurtre dans le cadre de la guerre. Je présente ensuite l'idée de « dignité humaine » d'Anscombe et j'analyse les différentes attitudes d'Anscombe à l'égard du meurtre d'innocents et du meurtre légitime du point de vue de la « dignité humaine ». Enfin, je présente la manière dont Anscombe utilise l'idée de dignité humaine pour expliquer ses attitudes à l'égard de questions morales particulières telles que l'euthanasie, l'avortement, etc.

La section 4 du chapitre 5 commencera par un défi possible, à savoir que nous ne semblons toujours pas en mesure de fournir une philosophie morale complète et exhaustive à la fin de la thèse. La réponse à ce défi est que fournir ce type de philosophie morale n'est pas du tout l'objectif d'Anscombe, elle utilise simplement la philosophie qu'elle a apprise et lue pour discuter des questions morales particulières qui l'intéressent. En outre, je soutiendrai que même

si Anscombe ne fournit pas une théorie complète de la philosophie morale, elle et ses amis offrent une perspective féminine, une perspective bienveillante, dans laquelle nous voyons les êtres humains concrets et les actions humaines derrière ces théories morales universelles et abstraites. Je présente ensuite l'analyse d'Annette Baier pour démontrer que la différence entre les perspectives masculines et féminines réside dans le fait que les femmes ne tiennent pas à proposer des théories morales complètes, ce qui est en fait une norme établie par les philosophes moraux masculins, mais qu'elles se concentrent plutôt sur des questions morales concrètes.

Résumé de notre conclusion

Comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné, les discussions d'Anscombe sur l'éthique de la vertu, la théorie de l'action et la philosophie du langage sont comme les différentes pièces d'un puzzle, et les cinq chapitres se déroulent comme le processus d'assemblage de ces pièces. Dans les différents chapitres, nous avons développé l'étude centrée sur différents concepts dans le contexte des différents personnages d'Anscombe en tant qu'instigatrice de l'éthique de la vertu, pionnière de la théorie de l'action contemporaine et étudiante/amie/traductrice de Wittgenstein, respectivement, en montrant non seulement le contenu de chaque pièce du puzzle, mais aussi en révélant progressivement la fusion entre les pièces du puzzle des différents concepts et en démêlant les liens entre les différentes théories philosophiques discutées sous les différents personnages d'Anscombe. Nous avons découvert que les pièces du puzzle ne sont pas simplement disposées côte à côte, mais qu'elles sont imbriquées. Nous avons aussi progressivement découvert le schéma de l'ensemble du puzzle.

Je conclus ma thèse en revenant une fois de plus sur les trois thèses de « Philosophie morale moderne », afin de terminer la discussion là où elle a commencé. Nous avons étudié au tout début de cette dissertation le sujet de chacune des trois thèses et la manière dont elles sont liées les unes aux autres, et les trois concepts du titre de cette dissertation sont en fait obtenus à l'intérieur de ces trois thèses. La connexion complexe de ces trois thèses implique en fait que les différentes personnalités d'Anscombe sont intrinsèquement interconnectées dans sa philosophie morale.

Morale et action

Nous avons discuté dans la section 2 du chapitre 1 que la critique d'Anscombe envers Henry Sidgwick dans la thèse 3 de « Philosophie morale moderne » réside dans sa définition erronée de l'intention, et cette définition est à l'origine de l'éthique conséquentialiste ridicule, qui croit que tuer l'innocent pourrait être juste. Dans la section 1 du chapitre 3, nous avons présenté une justification de la décision de Truman qui prétend que la mort des innocents à Hiroshima et Nagasaki était un accident, et nous avons présenté la réponse d'Anscombe selon laquelle cette justification est une mauvaise utilisation du principe du double effet, qui consiste à ignorer la différence entre l'intention, les conséquences prévues et les conséquences accidentelles. La négligence de la distinction entre les différentes conséquences fait ici exactement écho à la critique d'Anscombe à l'égard d'Henry Sidgwick. L'analyse du principe du double effet par Anscombe rend également plus évidente et plus claire la raison de sa critique de la philosophie morale contemporaine, à savoir l'absence d'une analyse de l'action humaine, nécessaire à l'étude de la philosophie morale.

Avec une telle analyse de l'action humaine, nous pouvons avoir une compréhension plus complète de l'attitude d'Anscombe envers la décision de Truman et de son insatisfaction envers la philosophie morale d'Oxford, qui sont discutées dans la section 3 du chapitre 1. Nous pouvons également comprendre pourquoi Anscombe, lorsqu'elle critique les philosophes moraux d'Oxford, explique que leur erreur réside dans l'absence d'une compréhension appropriée de l'action humaine. Ces liens démontrent le cheminement d'Anscombe des questions morales vers une investigation de la théorie de l'action et comment la théorie de l'action d'Anscombe sert de base à la résolution des problèmes moraux.

Vertu et action

Nous avons vu à la section 2 du chapitre 2, qu'Anscombe a introduit le concept de « morale » d'Aristote pour expliquer sa critique du sens moderne de « morale » dans la thèse 2 de « Philosophie morale moderne ». Par rapport au sens d'Aristote, il n'y a pas d'introduction des vertus intellectuelles ni de discussion sur la distinction et la connexion entre les vertus

morales et les vertus intellectuelles dans le sens moderne. Par conséquent, étant donné que les vertus sont liées à l'éloge et au blâme, et qu'il existe une différence entre l'éloge et le blâme moraux et non moraux, nous avons affirmé que l'absence des vertus intellectuelles nous amènerait à confondre l'éloge et le blâme avec l'éloge et le blâme moraux, puis à donner le sens de verdict absolu à tous les verbes modaux tels que « devoir » ; la conséquence inévitable est la négligence du rôle du « volontaire » dans les actions humaines. Plus loin dans la section 4 du chapitre 3, nous avons examiné comment cette absence des vertus intellectuelles affecterait la compréhension de la vérité pratique et du bon choix.

Par ailleurs, dans la section 3 du chapitre 2, nous avons montré qu'après avoir utilisé l'éthique d'Aristote pour expliquer sa philosophie de la psychologie, Anscombe suggère que la recherche d'Aristote sur « l'action humaine » est insuffisante. Cela fait écho à ce que nous avons discuté à la section 4 du chapitre 3, à savoir qu'après avoir utilisé la vérité pratique d'Aristote pour expliquer l'action humaine intentionnelle, Anscombe suggère que le concept de « décision » d'Aristote ne peut pas faire tout le travail qu'il veut lui faire faire, par exemple, il n'a pas de nom pour le type de « volontarisme » en tant que « choisi ». Selon Anscombe, cette insuffisance vient du fait qu'Aristote ne remarque pas qu'il utilise un concept clé de la théorie de l'action, à savoir « l'action intentionnelle », le concept original d'Anscombe. C'est le lien entre la vertu et l'action dans l'analyse de la moralité d'Anscombe.

De plus, lorsque nous avons présenté l'idée de Candace Vogler d'une « éthique de la vertu analytique » à la section 2 du chapitre 5, le lien entre l'action et l'éthique de la vertu a également été établi. Nous avons présenté Candace Vogler qui affirme que les éthiciens de la vertu analytiques sont les seuls à avoir réellement hérité de la pensée d'Anscombe, et qu'ils se caractérisent par l'idée selon laquelle le premier principe de la raison pratique montre que le bien doit être poursuivi et le mal évité. Leur argument sur la façon dont l'action intentionnelle est liée aux pensées sur le bien et le mal hérite précisément de l'argument d'Anscombe en faveur de la vérité pratique et du bon choix à la section 4 du chapitre 3. Cela montre l'importance du concept d'action dans la discussion d'Anscombe sur l'éthique de la vertu.

Morale et langage

Nous avons discuté dans la section 1 du chapitre 4 que la philosophie de la psychologie proposée par Anscombe dans la thèse 1 de « Philosophie morale moderne » n'est pas une description de l'état d'esprit ni un compte-rendu des processus ou mécanismes psychologiques, mais plutôt la grammaire d'un concept psychologique, qui est nécessaire à cause du besoin d'une analyse conceptuelle des vertus, pour fournir une solution à la philosophie morale. Cette philosophie de la psychologie n'est pas le concept original d'Anscombe, mais un concept introduit par Wittgenstein pour souligner une confusion dans la psychologie empirique.

De même, à la section 3 du chapitre 4, après avoir soutenu que l'utilisation de la langue n'est jamais seulement une capacité individuelle mais une activité collective qui implique des personnes vivant au sein d'une société, ainsi que des personnes vivant dans le même monde où elles partagent le même système de langue, joueraient aux mêmes jeux de langage et partageraient les mêmes conventions. Nous avons également démontré que lorsque nous pratiquons ces activités linguistiques mutuelles, que ce soit pour s'interroger, s'opposer, contester, expliquer, etc., ce n'est pas seulement par curiosité ou dans un but d'explication ou de prédiction, mais aussi par souci essentiellement moral, avec la responsabilité de nos actes les uns envers les autres, c'est-à-dire que la langue fournit la base de la préoccupation morale dans la vie mutuelle.

La discussion sur la promesse à la section 4 du chapitre 4, est un bon exemple pour montrer ce lien entre le langage et la moralité. En tant que pratique linguistique humaine, je m'impose une restriction morale lorsque je dis « je promets ». Cette obligation morale repose sur le fait que les parties impliquées dans les promesses sont parfaitement conscientes de la signification de l'énoncé « je promets », ce qui montre également la caractéristique essentielle de l'utilisation du langage, à savoir que les personnes d'un même milieu social partagent normalement une compréhension identique d'un même énoncé.

Par conséquent, pour Anscombe, le concept de langage, à la fois comme méthode d'analyse conceptuelle et comme activité linguistique humaine dans la vie sociale, est étroitement lié au concept de moralité.

Action et langage

Dans la section 1 du chapitre 4, nous avons non seulement mentionné l'utilisation de l'analyse conceptuelle en philosophie morale pour étudier le concept de vertu, mais aussi le fait qu'Anscombe utilise également l'analyse conceptuelle pour étudier le concept d'intention. En d'autres termes, l'approche linguistique apparaît non seulement dans l'étude des questions morales par Anscombe, mais aussi dans l'étude de l'action humaine.

Outre l'approche linguistique, nous avons également introduit la relation entre l'utilisation de la langue et l'action humaine à la section 1 du chapitre 4. Cette relation a commencé avec l'explication de l'action humaine par Anscombe à la section 1 du chapitre 3, selon laquelle l'action humaine qui l'intéresse n'est pas seulement celle des êtres humains qui atteignent le stade de la délibération, mais aussi celle des êtres humains qui possèdent le langage et qui sont bien avancés dans son utilisation. Cela signifie que l'utilisation du langage est une caractéristique importante des agents humains. Étant donné que le langage est le moyen d'expression et de communication le plus élémentaire dans la vie humaine, l'utilisation du langage repose sur la connaissance des règles de grammaire et la compréhension du contexte linguistique. Par conséquent, l'utilisation correcte du langage signifie que l'utilisateur du langage a atteint la capacité fondamentale de comprendre et de penser, ce qui signifie en fait que l'être humain est capable d'agir en tant qu'agent rationnel, c'est ce qu'Anscombe dit lorsqu'elle parle de l'agent de l'action humaine, qui atteint le stade de la délibération. On peut donc dire que l'utilisation correcte du langage est une caractéristique importante des agents humains.

En même temps, à la section 3 du chapitre 4, nous avons mentionné que l'analyse de l'équation « action humaine = action morale » faite par Anscombe à la section 3 du chapitre 3, pouvait également être expliquée par l'idée de langage. Dans la section 3 du chapitre 3, notre interprétation de cette équation est que toute action humaine implique des caractères humains bons et mauvais, et que ce caractère humain est lié à la bonne vie humaine ; par conséquent, l'action humaine peut être qualifiée de bonne ou de mauvaise en fonction de sa contribution à l'épanouissement de la vie humaine. Cependant, à la section 3 du chapitre 4, nous avons

présenté un point de vue selon lequel cette équation implique que le langage construit nos jugements moraux communs, à savoir que si nous voyons l'action particulière dans un contexte interpersonnel de préoccupation morale, le bien ou le mal signifié par cette action sera révélé.

Par conséquent, le concept de langage et le concept d'action, qui sont tous deux des concepts clés dans l'étude de la philosophie morale d'Anscombe, sont en outre l'un et l'autre étroitement liés au concept de moralité, et ils sont également étroitement liés l'un à l'autre.

La philosophie morale d'Anscombe

Enfin, une fois le puzzle complété par la combinaison des pièces individuelles, nous pouvons imaginer à quoi ressemblera ce puzzle dans son intégralité. À ce stade, certains peuvent s'attendre à ce que le puzzle présente un schéma clair et complet, en d'autres termes, ils s'attendent à ce que la philosophie morale d'Anscombe présente une théorie complète et exhaustive. Cependant, l'objectif et l'intérêt de la philosophie morale d'Anscombe n'est pas de fournir une théorie complète et exhaustive de la moralité. Au contraire, elle utilise simplement la philosophie qu'elle a apprise et lue pour discuter des questions morales particulières qui l'intéressent. Cela signifie qu'au lieu de regarder le puzzle d'un point de vue holistique, nous devrions nous concentrer sur la façon dont ses détails localisés relient des lignes apparemment sans rapport entre elles pour former des modèles entièrement nouveaux.

Je soutiens que cette façon de voir le puzzle, à savoir cette façon de faire de la philosophie morale, est une perspective féminine, et c'est également ce que j'ai essayé d'illustrer en rapportant l'histoire du Quatuor d'Oxford et d'Anscombe. Cette perspective se caractérise par une focalisation sur des problèmes moraux spécifiques plutôt que sur des théories systématiques. Il convient de noter que l'évaluation de la pensée philosophique en fonction de l'existence ou non d'une théorie systématique est intrinsèquement un critère d'évaluation dans une perspective traditionnellement masculine. Ainsi, les critiques de la lisibilité et de la systématisme d'Anscombe sont en fait des critiques de la perspective masculine, et ma discussion d'Anscombe est une tentative de sortir de cette perspective et de ces critères.

Si nous revisitons le personnage d'Anscombe à partir d'une telle perspective féminine, il

semble que nous puissions voir Anscombe différemment : elle a influencé le renouveau contemporain de l'éthique de la vertu, mais son objectif en écrivant « Philosophie morale moderne » n'était pas de faire revivre l'éthique de la vertu, et elle ne se considère probablement pas comme une éthicienne de la vertu ; elle est une pionnière de la théorie contemporaine de l'action, mais son objectif n'est pas de fournir une théorie de l'action complète et systématique ; elle est une étudiante, traductrice et amie de Wittgenstein, et elle reconnaît que Wittgenstein a eu une énorme influence sur elle, mais elle n'est pas une adepte aveugle, etc. Il se peut qu'elle n'apprécie pas d'être définie, et elle n'essaie pas de fournir une théorie complète et exhaustive de la philosophie morale. Elle se concentre simplement sur la discussion de questions morales particulières.

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Introduction

Introduction to Anscombe's Different Personae

In the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*,¹ Roger Teichmann writes that “one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, Elizabeth Anscombe had a variety of personae”. He quotes Anscombe’s claim in *Intention*² that “an action can be intentional under several descriptions” and applies this claim to Anscombe herself: “an individual can be significant under several descriptions”.³ These descriptions for Anscombe include pioneer of contemporary action theory, student/friend/translator of Wittgenstein, instigator of “virtue ethics”, Roman Catholic, female philosopher, protestor to nuclear arms, conservative on sexual ethics and other positions. Behind the titles is her work in many philosophical domains: metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, philosophy of action, moral philosophy, political philosophy, philosophy of religion and so on.

Anscombe has indeed written in many areas of philosophy, but if we mention moral philosophy, then we cannot ignore her “Modern Moral Philosophy”.⁴ Here, Anscombe makes three straightforward theses to criticize the moral philosophy of the time: first, we lack an “adequate philosophy of psychology”, without which, moral philosophy becomes a fruitless study; second, the concepts of moral obligation should be abandoned, because they are irrelevant to contemporary secular society; third, there is little difference among contemporary British moral philosophers, as they are all consequentialists who judge the moral value of an

¹ Roger Teichmann, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

² Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957; 2nd edition, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³ Roger Teichmann, introduction, in *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 1.

⁴ Elizabeth Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy” (henceforth MMP), in *Philosophy* 33, no.124 (1958): 1–19; reprinted in *Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers Volume III*, 26–42. Oxford: Blackwell, 1981; also reprinted in *Human Life, Action, and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, edited by Luke Gormally and Mary Reach, 169–194. Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005.

action from its consequences. This article is credited with reforming moral philosophy and revitalizing virtue ethics, which is an alternative to Kantianism and consequentialism. The arguments have had a long impact as many subsequent moral philosophers have continued and developed the conceptual and moral problems raised in the article. Some of these moral philosophers include Philippa Foot in *Natural Goodness*⁵ and *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays*,⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*⁷, and Rosalind Hursthouse in *On Virtue Ethics*.⁸

In addition to these positive comments, Anscombe has also encountered many criticisms, and a special category of these criticisms is the accusation that her writing is not easy to understand. Roger Teichmann writes, “Elizabeth Anscombe was one of the giants of twentieth-century philosophy, a bold and original thinker who wrote on a huge variety of topics. But her work is often difficult or puzzling, and an impatient reader will not get far with it”.⁹ Candace Vogler writes in her book *Reasonably Vicious* that “Admittedly, although Anscombe is read and cited often enough, she is hard to understand”.¹⁰ On the back cover of *Intention*, J. David Velleman comments this book as “often quoted, sometimes read, rarely understood...”¹¹ These comments are not directed only at Anscombe’s moral philosophy, but they do apply to it.

I think there are three reasons why Anscombe is difficult to read. The first relates to Anscombe’s tone. In the case of “Modern Moral Philosophy”, Anscombe is dismissive and sarcastic. The tone draws attention to her indiscriminate attacks on Butler, Hume, Kant, Bentham, and Mill, and makes her arguments seem brusque and uncharitable. Meanwhile, the tone also makes people ignore the fact that Anscombe’s real target for criticism is her

⁵ Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁶ Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

⁸ Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁹ Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

¹⁰ Candace Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 46.

¹¹ These three comments are quoted by Duncan Richter in *Anscombe’s Moral Philosophy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 3.

contemporaries and the philosophical tradition in which her contemporaries are grounded. The same tone appeared in her BBC radio lecture “Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt Youth?”.¹² When asked whether moral philosophy in its current fashion corrupts young people, she refused to accept the accusation, but it was not without reason – she thought that English society was already corrupt, and contemporary moral philosophy merely reflected that turpitude. These sarcastic tones in Anscombe’s writing may confuse those who do not know the historical background for her work.

The second reason relates to Anscombe’s own academic background. After saying that Anscombe is hard to understand, Candace Vogler adds, “Why this should be so is, I suspect, partly because she draws on the kind of premodern work that I am urging us to take up again”.¹³ As we noted earlier, Anscombe has a background in classics, and thus she cites Aristotle and Aquinas without always mentioning them. This makes it difficult for readers who are unfamiliar with these older texts to follow Anscombe’s train of thought and to get a clear picture of her arguments.

The third reason has to do with Anscombe’s different personae, as we mentioned. Anscombe does have a variety of personae and writes on various topics, but can we really understand one of them from her writing on one specific topic? Roger Teichmann writes that “People can be drawn to Anscombe for various reasons, corresponding to these different personae. An ‘Anscombean’ might be a Catholic bioethicist, a scholar of Wittgenstein, an action theorist, a philosophical feminist – or all of these at once”.¹⁴ Although Roger Teichmann says that an Anscombean might just be influenced by one particular doctrine of Anscombe, I do not think he would consider that very likely. He writes that “there is a connection, I think, between this versatility and the variety of personae I have referred to. Neither in the case of the personae nor in that of the philosophical topics do we have a mere medley; connections bind the items on the list”.¹⁵ In her book *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe’s Intention*, Rachael

¹² This was a talk given on BBC Third Programme and was published in *The Listener* Vol. 57 (14 February 1957): 266–7, 271.

¹³ Candace Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious*, 46.

¹⁴ Roger Teichmann, *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Wiseman also mentions the connections in Anscombe's writing on different topics:

A distinction taken for granted in a paper on ethics becomes the object of enquiry in one on sensations. A concept that seemed unproblematic in a discussion of causation becomes deeply puzzling in a paper on the memory. An aside about a class of involuntary acts becomes central to a discussion of sin. When one is trying to get to grips with Anscombe's thought, often the question one can't answer in text A is addressed somewhere deep in text B, if only one knew to look there; but if one did one would find Anscombe there showing that something that seemed simple and clear in text C is, when viewed from a different angle, dreadfully puzzling."¹⁶

If we ignore the connections of Anscombe's different personae, therefore, as well as her writings on different topics, we might find Anscombe difficult to read.

I think the third reason is the most essential, because the first two can also be included in it, as they represent her persona as a protestor and as a graduate of classics respectively. Thus, the research methodology of this dissertation is to investigate Anscombe's moral philosophy through her writing on that topic but also through the writing of other seemingly unrelated personae. In other words, I will investigate how Anscombe's other personae help to understand her place as a moral philosopher.

As presented in the title of this dissertation, the argument will unfold with three concepts: virtue, action, and language. They represent three domains of Anscombe's writing: Aristotelian ethics, action theory, and Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. These three concepts can be seen as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Any of the pieces can be taken as a separate part, and I will investigate each of them in separate chapters. But as a part of the jigsaw puzzle, the pieces cannot be separate; they instead interpenetrate and interrelate with each other to form a complete pattern. The writing of each chapter will also resemble the process of putting together a jigsaw puzzle, which will present specific details of each piece of the puzzle along with the

¹⁶ Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

complete pattern: namely, Anscombe's moral philosophy.

Introduction to References

My interest in Anscombe's moral philosophy began with her article "Modern Moral Philosophy". I first read its Chinese translation in 2017, and it was included in a collection on virtue ethics. This was three years after I read her monograph *Intention* in 2014. During those three years, I did not know that Anscombe also had work on moral philosophy translated into Chinese. This is because, in the Chinese-speaking world, Anscombe's name is translated into two similar but differently pronounced Chinese versions. This can be seen as marking the separation of Anscombe's personae as a moral philosopher and as pioneer of action theory, at least in the Chinese-speaking world. Fortunately, with the translation and publication of *An Analysis of G. E. M. Anscombe's Modern Moral Philosophy*¹⁷ in 2020, Anscombe's name was standardized among Chinese speakers.

When I started reading Anscombe in English, my first references were her monograph *Intention*,¹⁸ the three volumes of her work published in 1981 (entitled *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein: Collected Philosophical Papers Volume I*,¹⁹ *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind: Collected Philosophical Papers Volume II*,²⁰ and *Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers Volume III*²¹) as well as the four volumes of her work edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally: *Human Life, Action, and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*,²² *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics by G.E.M.*

¹⁷ Jonny Blamey and Jon Thompson, *An Analysis of G.E.M. Anscombe's Modern Moral Philosophy* (The Macat Library) (London: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁸ Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957); 2nd edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Elizabeth Anscombe, *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein: Collected Philosophical Papers Volume I* (henceforth CPP1) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

²⁰ Elizabeth Anscombe, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind: Collected Philosophical Papers Volume II* (henceforth CPP2) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

²¹ Elizabeth Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers Volume III* (henceforth CPP3) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

²² Elizabeth Anscombe, *Human Life, Action, and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe* (henceforth

Anscombe,²³ *From Plato to Wittgenstein: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*,²⁴ and *Logic, Truth and Meaning: Writings by G. E. M. Anscombe*.²⁵ I will draw from these volumes to varying degrees and at varying moments in the writing of this work.

When I first started preparing this dissertation, the monographs and collections on Anscombe that I knew in the English-speaking world focused on interpreting her *Intention*, including but not limited to *Intention and Intentionality: Essays in Honour of G. E. M. Anscombe*,²⁶ edited by Cora Diamond and Jenny Teichman; *Essays on Anscombe's Intention*,²⁷ edited by Anton Ford, Jennifer Hornsby and Frederick Stoutland; and *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, written by Rachael Wiseman. Meanwhile, a small number of studies of Anscombe's philosophy as a whole exist, and even specialized studies of her moral philosophy – these include *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*²⁸ written by Roger Teichmann, *Anscombe's Moral Philosophy and Ethics After Anscombe: Post "Modern Moral Philosophy"*²⁹ written by Duncan Richter, and *The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*³⁰ edited by Luke Gormally, David Albert Jones, and Roger Teichmann.

GG1), edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005).

²³ Elizabeth Anscombe, *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics by G.E.M. Anscombe* (henceforth GG2), edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008).

²⁴ Elizabeth Anscombe, *From Plato to Wittgenstein: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe* (henceforth GG3), edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2011).

²⁵ Elizabeth Anscombe, *Logic, Truth and Meaning: Writings by G. E. M. Anscombe* (henceforth GG4), edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2015).

²⁶ Cora Diamond and Jenny Teichman, eds. *Intention and Intentionality: Essays in Honour of G. E. M. Anscombe* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1979).

²⁷ Anton Ford, Jennifer Hornsby, and Frederick Stoutland, eds. *Essays on Anscombe's Intention* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2011).

²⁸ Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Duncan Richter, *Ethics After Anscombe: Post "Modern Moral Philosophy"* (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 2000).

³⁰ Luke Gormally, David Albert Jones, and Roger Teichmann, eds. *The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2016).

As my dissertation progressed, more and more monographs and collections were being published, including *No Morality, No Self: Anscombe's Radical Skepticism*³¹ written by James Doyle, *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*³² edited by John Haldane, *The Anscombean Mind*³³ edited by Adrian Haddock and Rachael Wiseman, and *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe* edited by Roger Teichmann. There were also several special issues of journals published in honor of the one-hundredth anniversary of Anscombe's birth, including *Philosophical News: On the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of G.E.M. Anscombe's Birth*,³⁴ *Enrahonar. An International Journal of Theoretical and Practical Reason, Volume 64: G. E. M. Anscombe: Reason, reasoning and action Times New Roman Times New Roman*,³⁵ and *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements, Volume 87: A Centenary Celebration: Anscombe, Foot, Midgley, Murdoch*.³⁶

Among these recent publications, I would like to mention in particular the books on the Oxford Quartet – *Metaphysical Animals: How Four Women Brought Philosophy Back to Life*,³⁷ by Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman, and *The Women are up to Something: How Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch Revolutionized Ethics*,³⁸

³¹ James Doyle, *No Morality, No Self: Anscombe's Radical Skepticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018).

³² John Haldane, ed. *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2019).

³³ Adrian Haddock and Rachael Wiseman, eds. *The Anscombean Mind* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022).

³⁴ Elisa Grimi, ed. *Philosophical News: On the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of G.E.M. Anscombe's Birth* (Milan: Mimesis International, 2019).

³⁵ Dolores Garcia-Arnaldos and Sofia Miguens, eds. *Enrahonar. An International Journal of Theoretical and Practical Reason, Volume 64: G. E. M. Anscombe: Reason, reasoning and action* (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2020).

³⁶ Anthony O'Hear, ed. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements, Volume 87: A Centenary Celebration: Anscombe, Foot, Midgley, Murdoch*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

³⁷ Clare Mac Cuhail and Rachael Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals: How Four Women Brought Philosophy Back to Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2022).

³⁸ Benjamin J.B. Lipscomb, *The Women are up to Something: How Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch Revolutionized Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press,

by Benjamin Lipscomb. Those studies of Anscombe's upbringing, academic life, and academic friends allowed me to learn about Anscombe's academic background, and thus to understand better the development of her philosophical thought. They also provided me with the context for the historical background in which Anscombe was writing, and for the impact of Anscombe's persona as protestor on her moral philosophy.

Introduction to Chapters

With the help of these volumes of Anscombe's own papers, as well as these monographs and collections studying Anscombe's philosophy, this dissertation will unfold through five chapters, or five pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, in order to investigate Anscombe's moral philosophy. Chapter 1 will start with the three theses in "Modern Moral Philosophy" and the context in which they were presented, which is the starting point for many to recognize Anscombe's moral philosophy. Chapter 2 will go back to Aristotle's ethics to discover the Anscombe who was influenced by Aristotle, and how this influence is reflected in her moral philosophy. Chapter 3 will investigate Anscombe as the pioneer of action theory and how her action theory and moral philosophy are connected. Chapter 4 will investigate Anscombe as the student, friend, and translator of Wittgenstein, and how Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and Anscombe's moral philosophy are connected. Chapter 5 will then return to the topic of morality and revisit Anscombe's persona as a moral philosopher with her writing on moral issues.

Chapter 1 "Modern Moral Philosophy"

Chapter 1 Section 1 will start with an analysis of the three theses in "Modern Moral Philosophy" (MMP). I will first analyze the content of each thesis and how they relate to each other with the help of Roger Crisp's summary. I will then present James Doyle's argument about the importance of thesis 2, which attempts to correct the misunderstanding that might arise from seeing MMP just as a revival of virtue ethics. After analyzing the connection between these three theses, I suggest that it is difficult to prove the absolute importance of a particular thesis

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among three interrelated ones, and I suggest that the starting point for the study of Anscombe's moral philosophy should be the historical context in which she wrote. Whether we put MMP in the historical context greatly affects our understanding of Anscombe's moral philosophy.

Chapter 1 Section 2 will discuss the doctrine of consequentialism, where Anscombe treats Henry Sidgwick and his successors as the same in thesis 3 – precisely because she sees her contemporaries as advocates of this doctrine. Here I will present the argument advocated by consequentialism, the representatives of consequentialism among Anscombe's contemporaries, and the evolution of this doctrine. Anscombe notes that it first originated with Jeremy Bentham and is represented in contemporary times by G. E. Moore and R. M. Hare. The reason she criticizes Henry Sidgwick specifically is that she believes that his definition of intention brings startling change to the evolution of this doctrine. What is shocking to Anscombe is that the absurd ideas that “there is no difference between foreseen consequences and intended consequences” and thus “killing the innocent could be right” which is deduced from this erroneous definition, were widely accepted at the time.

Chapter 1 Section 3 will discuss the case of Harry Truman, which is the event that caused Anscombe's radical dissatisfaction. I will start with Anscombe's restatement of the historical context for Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs, by which Anscombe argues that Truman's decision cannot be justified. I will also analyze her attitudes toward war and toward killing, in order to clarify that Anscombe's criticism of Truman's decision is not that she is against war or against killing, but rather that she is against choosing to kill the innocent as a means to some end. I then present Anscombe's vehement opposition to Oxford's nomination of Truman for an honorary degree, as well as the very different positions her contemporaries took. Anscombe was initially confused by the attitude of these other philosophers, but then she realized that she was glimpsing a larger problem for Oxford moral philosophy. I conclude by pointing out that Anscombe believes that the cause of this problem lies in the lack of an appropriate understanding of action.

Chapter 1 Section 4 will introduce the Oxford Quartet, which is a group of female philosophers who stood with Anscombe during Truman's case – the other three are Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch. I will present the backgrounds of these four women's upbringing and shared academic contexts at Oxford, the most important of which was the

unique atmosphere for these women during the Second World War, when most of the male students were called to join the war. I then introduce the new philosophical ideas that their male contemporaries brought with them when they returned to Oxford after the war, and the opposition of these women philosophers to those men. All four of them influenced and developed each other's philosophical ideas during this period, and their shared reading and discussions give us clues to understand Anscombe's moral philosophy.

Chapter 2 Aristotelian Ethics

Chapter 2 will discuss the influence of Aristotle's ethics on Anscombe's moral philosophy. The first section will continue the analysis of thesis 2 in Chapter 1 Section 1.2 and will begin by analyzing the meaning of the moral concepts mentioned in thesis 2 and the historical context the moral concepts derive from. Anscombe argues that these concepts share a particular sense of "absolute verdict" coming from Christianity's law conception of ethics; however, Christianity has already faded from daily life, and so these concepts have lost their roots and thus are no longer applicable to life. They should be abandoned.

Chapter 2 Section 2 will present Aristotle's sense of "moral", which is the original meaning of "moral" that Anscombe argues we should return to after abandoning the law conception of ethics. In Aristotelian ethics, the term "moral" exists as a kind of virtue, in parallel with intellectual virtue, and both moral virtue and intellectual virtue are defined in accord with the different parts of the soul. I first introduce Aristotle's idea of these two kinds of virtue, Aristotle's classification of souls and the connection between these two kinds of virtue. I will then present, in contrast to Aristotle's sense, the modern sense of "moral", which confuses the concepts of "moral", "intellectual", and "virtue", which leads to the inevitable confusion in the evaluation of human action.

Chapter 2 Section 3 will shift the focus from the criticism in thesis 2 to the philosophy of psychology proposed by Anscombe in thesis 1; the goal is to analyze this philosophy of psychology with the help of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. I first discuss the importance of the concept of "virtue" in Anscombe's statement about the philosophy of psychology. I then present the relation between "virtue" and "good" in *Nicomachean Ethics* in order to explain Anscombe's claim that "for the proof that an unjust man is a bad man would require a positive

account of justice as a ‘virtue’”. I then present the relation between “virtue” and “action” in *Nicomachean Ethics* in order to explain Anscombe’s claim that “we [need to] have an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is [...] and how it relates to the actions in which it is instanced”. Both claims are important parts of Anscombe’s philosophy of psychology, and I attempt to show that we cannot well understand Anscombe’s claims in MMP without returning to Aristotle.

Chapter 3 Human Action

Chapter 3 will investigate Anscombe’s action theory and how it relates to her moral philosophy. The first section will return to Truman’s case discussed in Chapter 1 Section 3 to present an alternative justification for Truman’s decision that the death of the innocent in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was an accident. Anscombe regards this justification as a misuse of the principle of double effect, and the reason for this misuse is the unclear distinction between “intentional”, “foreseen” and “accidental” consequences. I will then introduce Anscombe’s famous example of the pumping man in *Intention* in order to explain the distinction between these consequences, as well as the claim we mentioned at the very beginning of this introduction, that “one action can be intentional under one description and not intentional under another”. In order to address the difficulty of judging consequences caused by such multiple descriptions, I will present the type of description that really interests Anscombe: those that involve “human action”, and introduce three concepts related to “human action”: “voluntary action”, “moral action”, and “intentional action”.

Chapter 3 Section 2 will then look at the equation “human action = voluntary action” by the three features of “voluntary action”. First, I show that what Anscombe calls “voluntary action” is not in a merely physiological sense, which means that her concern with human action does not lie in the objective bodily movement of interest to physiologists – because these movements cannot present a certain kind of responsibility. Second, I will show how Anscombe’s “voluntary action” differs from Aristotle’s “voluntary” (*ἐκούσιον*), which includes beasts and babies, as Anscombe is concerned with human agents that have the capacity of deliberation and choice. Third, I will argue that Anscombe’s “voluntary action” also differs from Aristotle’s *praxis*, because the former includes uncalculated omissions and sudden

impulsive actions. Anscombe attempts to emphasize a kind of responsibility that includes the conditions “what you were able to do” and “it was needful you should do” by the analysis of what is voluntary in omission.

Chapter 3 Section 3 will discuss the view that “All human action is moral action. It is all either good or bad. (It may be both)” in three perspectives. First, I will explain the meaning of the word “moral” here. Given that Anscombe says “the word ‘moral’ does not present an extra ingredient that some human actions have, and some do not”, she thinks that “moral” is a property of human actions, namely, a good or bad character in human actions. Second, I will explain the apparent contradiction between Anscombe’s two claims that “all human action is moral action” and “not all human-action descriptions are moral action-descriptions” by presenting Anscombe’s criticism of the “extensional equivalence”. Third, I will explain how “It may be both good and bad” is possible in the judgment of human action.

Chapter 3 Section 4 will then discuss the idea of “intentional human action”. I will start with the view that the “action with a special kind of multiplicity of levels of description” in Anscombe’s article “Practical Truth”, and the “intentional action” in Anscombe’s article “Action, Intention and Double Effect”, are the same type of action. Anscombe claims that the purpose in discussing such actions is to explain the notion of “practical truth”. I will then analyze Anscombe’s argument about this notion with the help of her articles “Practical Truth” and “Thought and Action in Aristotle: What is ‘Practical Truth?’”. Anscombe’s argument starts with an analysis of “desire in action”, and then she suggests that the definition of “practical truth” is “truth in agreement with right desire” – for a good decision to be made, two conditions must be met: first, the reasons must be true; and second, the desire must be right and pursue what reason asserts. Anscombe then introduces Aristotle’s notion of “decision” and the relation between “good decision” and “practical truth” by responding to a challenge to Aristotle’s consistency. Anscombe then points out Aristotle’s insufficiency in analyzing the notion of “practical truth” and attempts to show that her notion of “intentional action” can complement this insufficiency.

Chapter 4 Language Game

Chapter 4 will investigate Anscombe as the student, friend, and translator of Wittgenstein, and

how this persona relates to her moral philosophy. The first section will start with an introduction to Anscombe's conceptual analysis, emphasized in both *Intention* and MMP. This is a linguistic approach inherited from Wittgenstein. I then present Wittgenstein's influence on Anscombe's academic career in a historical context, both in terms of her direct contact with Wittgenstein and in terms of her discussions and debates of Wittgenstein's ideas at different times with her friends and colleagues.

Chapter 4 Section 2 then takes on the connection between language use and human action. I will start by recalling that, in her discussion of human action, Anscombe mentions that the human action that interests her is not only the actions of humans who reach the stage of deliberation, but also the actions of humans who have language and are well advanced in the use of it. Anscombe links the characterization of "intentional action", and the question "Why?" in *Intention* also shows that she sees "the use of language" as an important condition for the description of a certain type of human action. Thus, we can see that the use of language is an important condition for Anscombe's study of human action. I will then introduce the foundation of language use by presenting the starting point for Anscombe's investigation of language, i.e. Wittgenstein's language-games. Following this I will also present the limitation of language-games: they cannot resolve the difficulties in understanding a word's function. I will finish this section by presenting how Anscombe explains the functioning of words by grammatical rules and linguistic context, and how this understanding of rules and contexts implies that those who are well advanced in the use of language also have the capacity for comprehension and deliberation.

Chapter 4 Section 3 will discuss the structures that show our language is interwoven into our daily lives. I will first argue that the use of language is never just an individual capacity, but rather a collective activity involving people living within a society; meanwhile, the functioning of language is determined by human beings' agreement, which is agreement not in opinions, but in form of life. Anscombe attributes this idea to the later Wittgenstein's view of the conventionality of truth. I will then introduce Anscombe's argument of "the reliability of a passerby" in *Intention* and Wittgenstein's argument of "the impossibility of a private language" in order to demonstrate how the understanding of the functioning of languages is formed within a word, or a shared system of language and conventions. I will conclude this section by arguing

that this use of language within certain societies also builds a common moral foundation.

Chapter 4 Section 4 will investigate the connection between language use and ethical life with Anscombe's discussion of promising. I will start with Anscombe's continuation of David Hume's argument for the conventionality of promises, which is consistent with the rules for the use of promises in language-games. I will then show that Anscombe thinks that language-games and the conventionality of promises are not sufficient to ground the necessity generated from promises, and so she employs Aristotelian necessity as a supplement. In the last part of this section, I will propose a combination of conventional necessity and Aristotelian necessity to explain the full picture of the necessity generated from promising as a human linguistic practice. This combination will demonstrate the importance – but not the uniqueness – of language use in ethical life, and why the best way to understand human linguistic practice should be a combination of social convention and Aristotelian naturalism.

Chapter 5 Morality

Chapter 5 will discuss topics directly related to moral philosophy. When we talk about Anscombe's moral views, it is impossible to avoid the topic of MMP as the contemporary revival of virtue ethics. Therefore, the first section of this chapter will start with Anscombe's two responses to the fact-value dichotomy in MMP, in order to present her two different ethical approaches. I will also present the different approaches taken by other ethicists who follow Anscombe's thought, in order to show that neither Anscombe nor her followers have taken Aristotle as the exclusive intellectual resource for their ethics.

Chapter 5 Section 2 will try to answer two questions: first, to what extent can MMP be considered as the contemporary revival of virtue ethics? Second, can virtue ethicists who continue Anscombe's thought about virtue ethics in MMP be fully representative of contemporary virtue ethics – and what characteristics do they share? I will first introduce Roger Crisp and Michael Slote's analysis here, which claims that Anscombe's article anticipates the recent developments of virtue ethics not really by her own argument but by having influenced many philosophers who write specifically about virtue ethics. I will then introduce Candace Vogler's idea of "analytic virtue ethics", which understands itself as directly responsive to Anscombe's call for a return to both Aristotle and Aquinas. She claims that analytic virtue

ethicists devote themselves to explaining how intentional action is bound up with thoughts about good and bad, and they are the theorists who have really inherited Anscombe's thought. My goal here is not to label Anscombe but to clarify the point that Aristotelian ethics is just one of Anscombe's intellectual resources.

Chapter 5 Section 3 will discuss Anscombe's real interest in moral philosophy, which is particular moral questions rather than meta-ethics. I will start this section with Anscombe's discussion on warfare, which is a very important part of these particular moral questions. With our previous discussion of Truman's case, I will restate here that Anscombe's focus on warfare is killing. I will then introduce Anscombe's idea of "human dignity" in order to analyze Anscombe's different attitudes towards the killing of innocents and legitimate killing from the perspective of "human dignity". Finally, I will show how Anscombe uses the idea of human dignity to explain her attitudes towards particular moral issues such as euthanasia, abortion, and others.

As the dissertation nears a close, Chapter 5 Section 4 will start with a possible challenge: we still do not seem to be able to provide a complete and comprehensive moral philosophy. The response to this challenge is that providing this kind of moral philosophy is not Anscombe's goal at all; she is just using the philosophy she learned and read about to discuss those particular moral questions that interest her. Furthermore, I will argue that even though Anscombe does not provide a complete theory of moral philosophy, she and her friends offer a female perspective, a caring perspective, in which we see the concrete human beings and human actions behind the universal and abstract moral theories. I will then present Annette Baier's view in order to show that the difference between male and female perspectives is that women are not keen on offering complete moral theories – which is actually a standard set by men moral philosophers – rather, they wish to focus on concrete moral issues.

Chapter 1 “Modern Moral Philosophy”

“It is not profitable for us at present
to do moral philosophy”.³⁹
– – Elizabeth Anscombe

Section 1 Three Theses

1.1 Three Theses and Their Connection

At the beginning of “Modern Moral Philosophy”, Anscombe gives three theses:

The first is that it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking. The second is that the concepts of obligation, and duty - *moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say - and of what is *morally* right and wrong, and of the *moral* sense of “ought,” ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it. My third thesis is that the differences between the well-known English writers on moral philosophy from [Henry] Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance. (MMP, 1)

In “Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?”⁴⁰, Roger Crisp describes the theses this way. The first one is *the profitability claim*, which says that it is not profitable to do moral philosophy until we have a philosophy of psychology. The second is *the conceptual claim*,

³⁹ Anscombe, MMP, 1.

⁴⁰ Roger Crisp, “Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?”, in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements, Volume 54: Modern Moral Philosophy*, edited by Anthony O’Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 75–94.

which says that the moral sense of certain concepts, like “moral obligation”, “moral duty”, and “morally right and wrong”, should be abandoned. The third is *the triviality claim*, which says that the differences between English moral philosophers since Henry Sidgwick matter little. I shall elaborate on these theses more here.

The first concerns the philosophy of psychology. In later pages of MMP, Anscombe explains that the philosophy of psychology treats the concepts of virtue and research on human action.⁴¹ With this thesis, Anscombe indicates that, at that time, moral philosophers did not have sufficiently right concepts of virtue nor enough research about human action.

The second thesis concerns “moral concepts”. Anscombe claims that the moral concepts in moral philosophy of her time should be abandoned. Later paragraphs of MMP give reasons to support this criticism. Firstly, “moral” is originally an Aristotelian term, but the modern sense of the word does not fit into an account of Aristotelian ethics. Secondly, the mistake of “moral concept” is also manifest in moral value. Anscombe believes that the contemporary idea of “morally good and bad” is a doctrine claiming that “an action can be ‘morally good’ no matter how objectionable the thing done may be”; she also says that “it is impossible to have any quite general moral laws”, such as “It is wrong to lie” and “Never commit sodomy”. An experienced person, she believes, knows when to break these rules⁴². In fact, the second thesis leads us to the other two. The problem of moral concepts shows why current moral philosophy should be abandoned – and it hints at why Anscombe targets contemporary English moral philosophers.

The third thesis is about Henry Sidgwick and later English moral philosophers. Anscombe claims that the differences between them do not matter because they have shared common ground. These figures, she believes, are using an incorrect concept of what is “moral”, compared to Aristotelian ethics. Anscombe believes that the ideas of these philosophers should be abandoned, and a philosophy of psychology based on Aristotle’s idea of virtue and human action should be adopted in their place.

These theses are closely connected. We can put the connection like this: we should abandon moral concepts, including the special sense of “moral” (thesis 2); we should use the

⁴¹ See Anscombe, MMP, 4–5.

⁴² See Anscombe, “Mr Truman’s Degree” (henceforth TD), in CPP3, 70–71.

concept of virtue for the purpose of doing moral philosophy (thesis 1). Meanwhile, the concept of virtue in thesis 1 is an aspect of Aristotle's view that Anscombe borrows to prove the nonsense of moral concepts in thesis 2. Anscombe then takes Henry Sidgwick and his successors as consequentialists, and the problem of consequentialist ethics underlies the first two theses. Henry Sidgwick's issue is his incorrect definition of "intention", while research on ideas like "intention" is the starting point of the philosophy of psychology for thesis 1. The problem of consequentialism also appears in its connection and conflict with the law conception of ethics, which is the background of moral concepts in thesis 2.

Thus, the relation between the three theses is intricate. Though Crisp summarizes them clearly, as we saw, when discussing the relation between the three – perhaps because of his penchant for consequentialism – he omits the connection between the triviality claim and the other two theses.⁴³ For the same reason, when evaluating the positive significance of thesis 2, Crisp claims that "the application of [Anscombe's strategy of examining the moral concepts before using them in moral theory] supports something closer to the 'consequentialist' position she attacks in her paper than to her own".⁴⁴

1.2 The Importance of the Conceptual Claim

In his book *No Morality, No Self: Anscombe's Radical Skepticism*,⁴⁵ James Doyle notes the relation between these three theses.⁴⁶ The difference is that Doyle believes that the conceptual

⁴³ Crisp says that "The conceptual claim, I take it, is meant to provide some support for the profitability claim, the thought being that some preparatory work outside ethics will be needed to provide us with material for ethical thought, once the language of obligation has been discarded. The triviality claim, in essence, is that the most significant characteristic of the views of these modern philosophers is that they will permit the punishment of the innocent, in certain circumstances, and that this puts them at odds with the Hebrew-Christian ethics." See Roger Crisp, "Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", 76. In later pages of the same article, Roger Crisp argues for consequentialism.

⁴⁴ Roger Crisp, "Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", 75.

⁴⁵ James Doyle, *No Morality, No Self: Anscombe's Radical Skepticism* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

⁴⁶ See James Doyle, *No Morality, No Self: Anscombe's Radical Skepticism*, 3–4. "The theses turn out to be related, in the following way: The concepts of distinctively moral obligation and so on are to

claim has not received enough attention – in fact, he thinks, it is the most important of the three. He says that “thesis (2), that the special category of the moral should be jettisoned as a pseudo-concept, is fundamental; it is presupposed by the arguments for theses (1) and (3)”; he also claims that “it is this claim that makes the paper [MMP] potentially very profound”.⁴⁷

Doyle’s argument about the fundamental nature of thesis 2 is that it shows the radical character of Anscombe’s moral thinking: what she criticizes is the crucial presupposition of all debates in moral philosophy. If Anscombe’s challenge cannot be answered, then no moral philosopher knows what they are talking about. According to Doyle, this presupposition is that “a huge amount of moral philosophy [...] takes the category of the moral as *given*, and typically as *sui generis*”,⁴⁸ in other words, “[they presuppose that] there is a preexistent category or concept of the moral”.⁴⁹ When he says “a huge amount of moral philosophy”, Doyle has in mind “the debates between so-called internalists and externalists about whether it is part of the meaning of moral proposition that it gives suitably situated agents a reason for acting in accordance with it”, “[the debates between] consequentialists [who] maintain that an action or policy derives its moral worth from its likely consequences [and] deontologists [who] maintain [...] that there can be moral evaluation of an action or policy that pays no heed to consequences”, and so on.⁵⁰ For Doyle, all these philosophers see themselves as making meaningful claims,

be jettisoned (as in [2]) in favor of the concept of a virtue, for the purposes of doing philosophical ethics. But it is because we don’t yet have the resources in philosophical psychology for understanding what kind of thing a virtue is that we should forget about ethics until we do have such resources (as in [1]). As for the third thesis, when Anscombe says that the differences between Sidgwick and his successors in ethics are of little importance, she mainly means that they are all consequentialists (and few ethicists before Sidgwick were consequentialists). Consequentialism, she thinks, is confused and otherwise bad. It is confused because it depends on taking seriously the special category of the moral, which, according to thesis (2), has, with the rise of secular culture in the West, degenerated into a pseudo-concept. Furthermore, the special badness that attaches to consequentialism has been made possible by our not having noticed that the category of the moral has degenerated into a pseudo-concept.”

⁴⁷ See James Doyle, *No Morality, No Self: Anscombe’s Radical Skepticism*, 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

because they believe they can rely on a category of what is “moral” that is pre-constituted in order to provide a subject matter. They do not exclude the possibility, however, that they might be radically mistaken over the very nature of the category. Doyle claims that “Anscombe’s main claim in MMP is that we don’t really understand such a *sui generis* concept of the moral, because there is nothing there to understand – there is nothing for the concept of the *moral* to be a concept of.”⁵¹ Therefore, MMP is profound because “a crucial presupposition of all the debates in moral philosophy [...] will turn out to have been false”.⁵² And thesis 2 accomplishes this work.

I agree with Doyle that thesis 2 deserves more attention. MMP is usually taken as an influential publication in the history of moral philosophy mainly because it is seen as the founding document for the revival of “virtue ethics”, or “the attempt to place the concepts of virtue, rather than that of rule, or of the best consequences, at the center of ethics – as it was, supposedly, in the ancient world”.⁵³ This role for MMP seems to be independent from the criticism in thesis 2, as it seems to be “an explication of the moral realm rather than an alternative to it”.⁵⁴ A modern virtue ethicist could leave the concept of what is moral untouched and interprets “virtue ethics” as a supplement for the moral realm, rather than as an alternative to it – the result would be a doctrine paralleling deontology and consequentialism. If this happens, this modern virtue ethicist would advance ethical theories not very different from those Anscombe purports to reject. Even though he might take himself to be responding to Anscombe’s call, he would actually be misunderstanding Anscombe’s point and thus committing the very problem Anscombe criticized.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Even though the concept of virtue sounds like an explication of the concept of the moral, Anscombe’s introduction of virtue is never an explication of the pre-existent category of the moral. Doyle explains that she calls for a return to the ancient conception of virtue partly because the concept of the moral rejected in thesis 2 does not exist in the ancient world.

⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, 11. Doyle’s example of these virtue ethicists is John McDowell, and he comments, “Some modern ‘virtue ethicists’ (for example, McDowell) who claim to be inspired by the Greek conception of virtue (and in many cases by Anscombe’s paper!) do seem to think of virtue as what we

Though I agree about the importance of thesis 2, I cannot see it as the most profound thesis. That is, I cannot agree with Doyle that Anscombe's "main claim" in MMP is thesis 2.⁵⁶ I have mentioned that the interpretation of Anscombe's return to the concept of virtue without her corresponding criticism of moral concepts would misrepresent her; and indeed, overemphasizing Anscombe's criticism of moral concepts at the expense of her constructive contribution in returning to the concept of virtue would similarly obscure her view.

Given the connection between the three theses, we cannot isolate any of them as the most important. Thesis 2 might be a good starting point to investigate them, however. For example, we can start with the sense of "moral" in Aristotelian ethics, and with the historical background where the concept acquires its special modern sense, in order to understand Anscombe's criticism of moral concepts. We could then continue our analysis of the philosophy of psychology in thesis 1, along with the criticism of consequentialism in thesis 3, in order to connect them to thesis 2. But this approach is not to say thesis 2 is the most important. It is only when we have a comprehensive understanding of the target of her criticism (thesis 2), the theoretical tools she uses (thesis 1), and the context in which she makes her criticisms (thesis 3), that we can understand Anscombe completely. To focus on determining which is most fundamental is to ignore or deny their connections and the resulting complexity. This we cannot do, since the moral philosophy of Anscombe is full of complexity.

1.3 The Importance of Historical Contextualization

Given the importance of thesis 2, it seems that we can begin our investigation of MMP with the sense of "moral" in both Aristotelian ethics and in its special modern sense; were we to proceed

would call 'moral virtue' 0 which is to say, a disposition to act in accordance with just what we call moral precepts and to further moral ideals [...] The point of virtue ethics [...] lies in its opposition to a 'law conception', and so its giving us a 'third way' alternative to the two dominant, warring families of law conception: deontology or absolutism, and consequentialism (on which more later). But this gives us an account of ethics that is not very interestingly different from a law conception; and insofar as it claims to appropriate the ancient conception of virtue, it misunderstands that".

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, 5. "Anscombe's main claim in MMP is that we don't really understand such a sui generis concept of the moral, rather than that of rule, or of the best consequences, at the center of ethics – as it was, supposedly, in the ancient world".

so, though, we might miss some important details and fail to understand Anscombe's idea correctly. At the beginning of MMP, Anscombe's third thesis says that there is little difference between Henry Sidgwick's moral philosophy and subsequent doctrines. This thesis indicates that the modern moral philosophy she rejects begins with him. We know that Anscombe calls modern moral philosophy a doctrine of consequentialism. According to her own view, this doctrine originated in the moral philosophy of G. E. Moore, and Anscombe criticizes Sidgwick for his definition on "intention". We might have doubts about the link between Sidgwick's definition of intention and Moore's consequentialism. Besides, when criticizing consequentialism, Anscombe gives an example about R. M. Hare, and a doctrine which would encourage a person to judge that killing the innocent would be what he ought to do. We might therefore wonder if Anscombe's example of "killing the innocent" is meant to insinuate anything.

Because of these seemingly unanswered questions, many people consider Anscombe's ethics as unsystematic and even unintelligible. In addition, others try to respond to this accusation by analyzing her writing style, proposing to place Anscombe's articles within their historical background and to read them in the context of other articles of her time. In other words, Anscombe does have her own system of ethics, but this systematicity and its coherence are reflected in several pieces of writing, rather than in any one article.⁵⁷ So if we wish to figure

⁵⁷ See Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1–2. Rachael Wiseman quotes Jonathan Dancy's words about Anscombe in *Times Literary Supplement*, that "Anscombe's thought is so idiosyncratic and so personal, she does things in quite her own way, she doesn't give the reader any help at all, she doesn't appear to have an overall position and she doesn't try to put things in any kind of order – all these things make the task of characterizing her philosophical output daunting". Wiseman responds to Dancy's accusation that "While Dancy is quite right that Anscombe gives her reader very little help, and that the task ahead is daunting, he also makes a mistake that is common in readers of Anscombe: that of thinking that her work is neither unified nor systematic". And Wiseman also describes Anscombe's writing style as: "A distinction taken for granted in a paper on ethics becomes the object of enquiry in one on sensations. A concept that seemed unproblematic in a discussion of causation becomes deeply puzzling in a paper on the memory. An aside about a class of involuntary acts becomes central to a discussion of sin. When one is trying to get to grips with Anscombe's thought, often the question one can't answer in text A is

out questions unanswered in MMP, reading articles written at the same time, and understanding the historical background of her era, gives us a helpful path.

Similarly, in the introduction of *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*,⁵⁸ Mary Geach, daughter of Anscombe and Peter Geach, mentions that the context in which Anscombe wrote MMP was her dissatisfaction with contemporary moral philosophy. A specific event caused Anscombe's radical dissatisfaction. It began on 1st May 1956. Oxford University's Congregation considered nominating Harry S. Truman for an honorary degree. Truman, a former US president, was notorious for having given the order to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki near the end of World War II. Anscombe, as a tutor at Somerville College, gave a speech to the Congregation where she compared a potential Truman nomination to honoring Hitler or Genghis Khan. Congregation did not change their mind, however, and showed overwhelming support⁵⁹ for the nomination.⁶⁰ On 20 June 1956, Truman was awarded his honorary degree. On 14 February 1957, Anscombe gave a talk on BBC about the topic "Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt Youth?".⁶¹ Anscombe said that Oxford moral philosophy does not "corrupt the youth", but not because it was not particularly harmful; rather, she said that Oxford moral philosophy made no difference to young people, who were already exposed to the corrupting social standards in their life before university.

addressed somewhere deep in text B, if only one knew to look there; but if one did one would find Anscombe there showing that something that seemed simple and clear in text C is, when viewed from a different angle, dreadfully puzzling".

⁵⁸ Mary Geach, "Introduction", in GG1, xiv.

⁵⁹ At that time, only Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Michael Foot, and Margaret Hubbard voted *non placet* ("it does not please").

⁶⁰ Anscombe believed it was not because her argument did not persuade them; she in fact thought they had already made up their minds. In "Mr Truman's Degree", a pamphlet published by Anscombe in 1957, Anscombe writes that the "The dons at St John's were simply told 'The women are up to something in Convocation; we have to go and vote them down'." This pamphlet is collected in CPP3, 62–71.

⁶¹ This talk was given on BBC Third Programme and was published in *The Listener* Vol. 57 (14 February 1957): 266–7, 271; this article, "Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt Youth?" (henceforth OMPCY), is later collected in GG1, 161–168.

This event led Anscombe to give a course of lectures at Oxford in the Hilary Term of 1957. Excerpts from this course formed an Aristotelian Society paper delivered on 3 June 1957. These were origins of the book *Intention*. In giving this course, Anscombe believed that, if people were capable of excusing Truman by saying he had only signed his name to a piece of paper, it was clear that there must be something she understood but others did not. As a result, she felt more precise research was called for on the interpretation of his action. Around the same time, Anscombe was covering Philippa Foot's teaching on an undergraduate ethics module in Somerville. When she settled down to read the standard modern ethicists, she was dismayed by what she discovered about contemporary moral philosophy. The moral thinking people had in common was exactly the philosophy taken to defend Truman's order to bomb Japan. Anscombe then came to write MMP and labelled this moral philosophy "consequentialism". This paper was published in January 1958, a few months after *Intention*.⁶²

In order to find answers to the questions I have raised here, then, we must also look at "Mr Truman's Degree" (1957), "Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt Youth?" (1957) and *Intention* (1957).

In the next sections of this chapter, I present three aspects of the historical context to Anscombe's writing of MMP. I will also show why an understanding of the historical context is important to understanding Anscombe's moral philosophy. Section 2 will discuss consequentialism, which Anscombe assigns to Henry Sidgwick and his successors as mentioned in thesis 3. Section 3 will discuss the case of Truman. Section 4 then takes on the Oxford Quartet, which is a group of female philosophers who stood with Anscombe during Truman's case.

⁶² For more information concerning this historical background, see the introduction of GG1, as well as Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, 26–27; Rachael Wiseman, "The Intended and Unintended Consequences of Intention", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 90(2): 207–227, collected in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, edited by John Haldane (Exeter: Imprint Academics, 2019), 148–172; and Anthony Kenny, "Elizabeth Anscombe at Oxford", in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 12–22.

Section 2 Henry Sidgwick and Consequentialism

2.1 Consequentialism

Anscombe's third thesis in MMP claims:

...the differences between the well-known English writers on moral philosophy from [Henry] Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance. (MMP, 1)

Anscombe regards Sidgwick as the pioneer of the English moral philosophers she criticized. This is because she thinks they all held a consequential idea, which would take it that “‘the right action’ is the action which produces the best possible consequences” and “a man does well, subjectively speaking, if he acts for the best in the particular circumstances according to this judgment of the total consequences of this particular action” (MMP, 9). Anscombe clarifies that she does not mean that all English moral philosophers have said precisely that: “[the related discussions] can of course get extremely complicated...[but] such discussions generate an appearance of significant diversity of views where what is really significant is an overall similarity” (MMP, 9).

What is the similarity? According to their consequential ethics, “it is not possible to hold that it cannot be right to kill the innocent as a means to any end whatsoever and that someone who thinks otherwise is in error” (MMP, 10).

She later says she must mention both points because of R. M. Hare. When teaching philosophy, Anscombe thought, R. M. Hare would “encourage a person to judge that killing the innocent would be what he ‘ought’ to choose for over-riding purposes”; this aspect echoes another, that “it is not possible to hold that it cannot be right to kill the innocent as a means to any end whatsoever”. Hare would also teach that “if a man chooses to make avoiding killing the innocent for any purpose his ‘supreme practical principle,’ he cannot be impugned for error: that just is his ‘principle.’” This latter point likewise echoes another: “[it is not possible to hold] that someone who thinks otherwise is in error” (MMP, 10).

Anscombe thinks that this overall similarity indicates a significant incompatibility between consequential ethics and a Hebrew-Christian ethic. Consequentialists encourage people to act based on presumed consequences, but Hebrew-Christian ethics teaches that “there

are certain things forbidden whatever consequences threaten, such as: choosing to kill the innocent for any purpose, however good...” (MMP, 10).⁶³

Anscombe claims that “the differences between the well-known English writers on moral philosophy from Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance”, mostly because every academic philosopher since Sidgwick has written in a way as to exclude the Hebrew-Christian ethic, and has not even shown “any consciousness that there is such an ethic” (MMP, 10). Based on this unanswered contradiction with a Hebrew-Christian point of view, any difference within consequentialism itself seems relatively unimportant.

In Anscombe’s opinion, this ridiculous conclusion of consequentialist ethics – that killing the innocent could be morally right – begins with Sidgwick. And the most obvious problem with Sidgwick is his definition of intention. Anscombe rephrases Sidgwick’s definition as follows: “one must be said to intend any foreseen consequences of one’s voluntary action” (MMP, 11). For Anscombe this definition is obviously incorrect, and no one would defend it. But Sidgwick’s thesis – derived from this definition – is accepted by many people.

Anscombe then gives again the thesis that “it does not make any difference to a man’s responsibility for an effect of his action which he can foresee, that he does not intend it” (MMP, 11). This version shows that, in terms of ethics, there is no difference between foreseen consequences and intended consequences. In other words, the intention in action is of little importance to consequentialist philosophers as Anscombe sees them.

She gives an example to highlight the resulting absurdity. Anscombe supposes that a man has a responsibility for taking care of a child; therefore, it would be a bad thing for him to deliberately withdraw his support. There could be many possible reasons for him to withdraw his support. For example, he may not wish to maintain it any longer; second, he may wish to use this withdrawal to compel someone else to do something good; third, he could be forced to choose between doing something disgraceful and going to prison, and so he chooses the latter

⁶³ Anscombe adds other items to this forbidden list, such as: vicarious punishment, treachery, idolatry, sodomy, adultery, making a false profession of faith and so on. She explains that “[t]he prohibition of certain things simply in virtue of their description as such-and-such identifiable kinds of action, regardless of any further consequences, is certainly not the whole of the Hebrew-Christian ethic; but it is a noteworthy feature of it.” (MMP, 10)

and withdraws the support for that reason. According to Sidgwick's doctrine, Anscombe says, "there is no difference in [the man's] responsibility for ceasing to maintain the child, between the case where he does it for its own sake or as a means to some other purpose, and when it happens as a foreseen and unavoidable consequences of his going to prison rather than do something disgraceful" (MMP, 11).

Anscombe believes that, once we start seeing things as Sidgwick does, "the only reasonable thing to consider will be the consequences and not the intrinsic badness of this or that action" (MMP, 12). It is evident that she maintains it unreasonable to judge things based only on consequences while ignoring what she considers to be intrinsic goodness and badness. What is worse is that, as Sidgwick's thesis focuses on foreseen consequences, "if [a man's] calculations turn out in fact wrong, it will appear that he was not responsible for the consequences, because he did not foresee them" (MMP, 12). Accordingly, if a man can show he did not foresee the consequences, he can exculpate himself from the actual consequences of even the most disgraceful actions. This is obviously a very unreasonable standard for establishing ethical doctrines.

As for the role of consequences in ethical judgments, Anscombe thinks that "a man is responsible for the bad consequences of his bad actions, but gets no credit for the good [consequences of his bad actions]; and contrariwise is not responsible for the bad consequences of good actions" (MMP, 12).

She concludes that "the denial of any distinction between foreseen and intended consequences, as far as responsibility is concerned, ... marks [Henry Sidgwick] and every English academic moral philosopher since him" (MMP, 12). Anscombe labels consequentialism as a shallow moral philosophy, because there will always be so many borderline cases in ethics that consequentialism cannot deal with. For example, Anscombe says that:

... the consequentialist has no footing on which to say "This would be permissible, this not"; because by his own hypothesis, it is the consequences that are to decide, and he has no business to pretend that he can lay it down what possible twists a man could give doing this or that; the most he can say is: a man must not bring about this and that; he has no right to say he will, in an actual case, bring about such-and-such unless he

does so-and-so. (MMP, 13)

Anscombe also has other criticisms for consequentialism, but the most important point has already emerged. The problem with Sidgwick and later English moral philosophers is the definition of intention. The point coheres with the philosophy of psychology proposed by Anscombe in thesis 1.

2.2 Anscombe's Rejection of Consequentialism

“Consequentialism” is a term first used by Anscombe. She divides moral philosophers into absolutists and consequentialists. Absolutists believe that there are some kinds of action that are intrinsically wrong and should never be done, irrespective of any consequence. Consequentialists, in contrast, believe that no kind of action is that bad, and that any action might be justified by its foreseen consequences or the likely consequences of not performing it.⁶⁴

Prior to Jeremy Bentham, most moral philosophers were absolutists. The reason is that they believed in a natural law or natural rights, and certain actions violated those rights or conflicted with those laws and so were wrong no matter the consequences. But Jeremy Bentham disliked the notion of natural law and natural rights, and so he offered the famous principle that underscores the primacy of pains and pleasures in utilitarian theory. John Stuart Mill then followed Bentham. Mill admired Bentham's view but disagreed with his claim on the nature of happiness. Unlike Bentham, who said that there are no qualitative differences between pleasures, only quantitative ones, Mill thinks there are qualitative differences between pleasures. Simple-minded pleasures, sensual pleasures were simply not as good as more sophisticated pleasures. Mill then argued that people desire happiness – the utilitarian end – and that the general happiness is “a good to the aggregate of all persons”. G. E. Moore criticizes Bentham and Mill's utilitarianism by accusing it of committing a “naturalistic fallacy”.⁶⁵ In the 1950s, Moore's

⁶⁴ See Anthony Kenny, “Elizabeth Anscombe at Oxford”, in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*: 14–15; Mary Geach, “Introduction”, in GG1, xvii.

⁶⁵ For the introduction of consequentialism, see Julia Driver, “The History of Utilitarianism”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). References

claim is further elaborated by Oxford moral philosophers including R. M. Hare's *The Language of Morals* (1952) and P. Nowell-Smith's *Ethics* (1954). Anscombe soon finds herself in public disagreement with both.

Anscombe claims there is a startling change between Mill and Moore, and the change is the moral philosophy of Sidgwick.⁶⁶ Sidgwick further developed Bentham and Mill's utilitarian theory. His *The Methods of Ethics* (1874) is one of the best-known works in utilitarian moral philosophy.

Anscombe claims to find an idea that does not exist in John Stuart Mill's philosophy, but that does in Moore's as well as in that of subsequent academic moralists of England.⁶⁷ The idea is that "the right action" is the one "which produces the best possible consequences", according to which it would be possible to say that a man does well "if he acts for the best in the particular circumstances according to his judgement of the total consequences of this particular action". More precisely, according to this idea "it is not possible to hold that it cannot be right to kill the innocent as a means to any end whatsoever and that someone who thinks otherwise is in error"⁶⁸.

Anscombe attributes this transition in utilitarian thinking to Sidgwick. In other words, Sidgwick develops utilitarian moral philosophy into consequentialism – and it is the latter that influences many subsequent philosophers. According to Anscombe, Sidgwick's most important mistake is to deny any distinction between foreseen and intended consequences, which he does by defining intention as "one must be said to intend any foreseen consequences of one's voluntary action". In addition, he gives an ethical thesis based on this definition that "it does

there include Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907); John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988).

⁶⁶ MMP, 9.

⁶⁷ When Anscombe uses words such as "the well-known English writers on moral philosophy", Anscombe does not mean that every one of the best-known English academic moralists have said the same thing. Instead, she claims that all of them share an overall similarity, which leads them to a similar moral doctrine. In "Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt Youth?", Anscombe says that "They might not like being lumped together, but their work looks roughly alike from the outside, and none of it stands above and part from the rest, marked out as original with the others as derivations." (OMPCY, 161)

⁶⁸ MMP, 10.

not make any difference to a man's responsibility for an effect of his action which he can foresee, that he does not intend it"⁶⁹.

According to Anscombe, if people support the award of Truman's honorary degree, they must think that Truman's action towards the Japan bombing can be justified. And the standpoint that could support the dropping of atomic bombs is consequentialism. People holding this idea may not think that the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is something to be advocated for, but they must believe that Truman's corresponding action is acceptable and understandable on the basis that "it pretty certainly saved a huge number of lives". If he had not done it, something even more serious might have been required. For example, some may think that "if those bombs had not been dropped the Allies would have had to invade Japan to achieve their aim [...]. Very many soldiers on both sides would have been killed; the Japanese [...] would have massacred the prisoners of war; and large number of their civilian population would have been killed by 'ordinary' bombing"⁷⁰. But Anscombe does not accept these descriptions as the real condition of the situation, and so the rationality of this justification vanishes, at least in her mind. She believes that the real condition is Truman's insistence on an unconditional surrender, which caused him to take the wrong approach. We will discuss this approach next.

⁶⁹ See MMP, 10–13, for the criticism of Sidgwick.

⁷⁰ TD, 65.

Section 3 Truman's Case

3.1 Anscombe's Objection to Truman's Degree

3.1.1 *The Historical Background of Truman's Decision*

Anscombe insists that Truman cannot be justified. She thinks that the consequentialist justification, which claims that Truman's order brings a good consequence relative to other options – it ended the war, after all, and prevented more massive injuries and deaths – ignored many of the facts behind the actual decision. In Anscombe's view, Truman's order is not an action that brings the best consequence, but involves “choosing to kill the innocent as a means to [his] ends”. Here, “his ends” is the insistence on an unconditional surrender, which Anscombe sees as “the root of all evil”. We should not consider the bomb command in the light of some possibly prevented mass invasion; we should instead look at the actual conditions behind the order.

According to Anscombe,⁷¹ at the Potsdam conference in July 1945, Stalin informed the American and British statesmen that he had received two requests from the Japanese to act as a mediator with a view to ending the war. Stalin had refused. The Allies sought an unconditional Japanese surrender.

One military option for achieving that end was a land invasion, but there were good reasons to think it would end in catastrophic consequences. A month earlier, at the battle of Okinawa, 90,000 soldiers and 150,000 civilians were killed. Expecting similar losses, Truman ruled out a land invasion to prevent another Okinawa from happening. Avoiding more consequences like these would be the main argument to justify Truman's action.

The second means to secure unconditional surrender was to issue an ultimatum to the Japanese government. The Potsdam Declaration laid it out: if the Japanese did not surrender unconditionally, the country would face prompt and utter destruction. Anscombe says that when issuing this declaration, the Allies agreed on the “general principle” of using the new type of weapon America now possessed.

⁷¹ For the introduction to this background, see TD, 62–64; and Rachael Wiseman, “The Intended and Unintended Consequences of Intention”, in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 159–160.

It seems to be generally agreed that the Japanese were desperate enough to have accepted the Potsdam Declaration. But from loyalty to their “Emperor” – a term which the Allies would certainly ban – Japan refused the Declaration. Then the threat became real. On 6 August Truman ordered an atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Still no surrender came. On 9 August, without any additional ultimatum, Truman ordered another atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki. These two bombs killed between 75,000 and 125,000 people. The same number died before the end of year from injuries and radiation effects. On 2 September 1945, the Japanese government surrendered unconditionally, and the Allies achieved their end.⁷²

In this context Anscombe claims that “It was the insistence on unconditional surrender that was the root of all evil”.⁷³ For her, this is why the justification that “atomic bombs prevented the injuries and death from land invasion” is invalid, because the comparison is based on the acknowledged end of “unconditional surrender”. If that end itself is questionable, then comparing the means used to achieve it is senseless. For Anscombe this end was not necessary, and so any means to achieve it would be wrong, whether they involved a bomb or a ground assault.

In Anscombe’s own words, Truman is a criminal for committing murder, because “for men to choose to kill the innocent as a means to their ends is always murder, and murder is one of the worst of human action”. Anscombe emphasizes that each term is necessary in this formulation of the morality of the situation.⁷⁴ In her formulation, we must clarify two points.

⁷² In his book *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, Jonathan Glover also discusses historical conditions surrounding the bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; see chapter 12, “Hiroshima”, and in particular section 2, “The use of the bomb against Japan”, 93–99. He shares Anscombe’s opinion: “Both these decisions, to reject a harmless demonstration and to insist on unconditional surrender, seem to have been taken by sleepwalkers. They were taken with one eye on other matters, and were not thought about with the necessary energy and clarity” (94). Glover also quotes General Dwight Eisenhower’s words that “First, the Japanese were ready to surrender and it wasn’t necessary to hit them with that awful thing. Second, I hated to see our country be the first to use such a weapon.” (95) Glover writes, however, that Eisenhower failed to persuade President Truman. See Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁷³ TD, 62.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

First, Anscombe did not oppose the war, nor war in general. She claimed that Truman made an *intentional choice* to order bombs in order to achieve his end of unconditional surrender, and that this choice amounts to murder. Second, Anscombe is not opposed to killing. She emphasizes that Truman's order caused the death of *the innocent*. Let us discuss each of these points further.

3.1.2 Anscombe's Attitude towards War

Anscombe did not generally oppose war, and her objection to awarding Truman a honorary degree was not his involvement in World War II.

In both her pieces "Mr Truman's Degree" and "War and Murder",⁷⁵ Anscombe claims that pacifism is a false moral doctrine – one that is not only wrong, but very harmful.⁷⁶ Normally, a wrong idea would not have particularly bad consequences and a false doctrine would not encourage people in anything bad. Pacifism is special, though. It involves a situation where evil things are already happening, and a good consequence would not be realized if we took no evil means. Hence, she argues that war can be necessary in certain circumstances and can be just under certain conditions; her objection to some wars and some forms of warfare is not that an objection to war itself. Her complaint is that certain actions do not meet those conditions.

Anscombe gives seven conditions that must all be fulfilled in order for a war to be just:

- (1) There must be a just occasion: that is, there must be violation of, or attack upon, strict rights.
- (2) The war must be made by a lawful authority: that is, when there is no higher authority, a sovereign state.
- (3) The warring state must have an upright intention in making war: it must not declare war in order to obtain, or inflict anything unjust.
- (4) Only right means must be used in the conduct of the war.

⁷⁵ Anscombe, "War and Murder" (henceforth WM), in *Nuclear Weapons: A Catholic Response*, edited by Walter Stein (London and New York, 1961); reprinted in CPP3, 51–61.

⁷⁶ See TD, 69–70 and WM, 55–58. WM's argument has a religious influence.

- (5) War must be the only possible means of righting the wrong done.
- (6) There must be a reasonable hope of victory.
- (7) The probable good must outweigh the probable evil effects of the war.⁷⁷

As Anscombe stands opposite consequentialism, some doubt her as an absolutist and accuse her of being “high-minded”.⁷⁸ Some say she would accept that you may not do evil in order for good to come, and so she must be against war and any kind of killing. But Anscombe does not see herself as “high-minded” or absolutist; she would just say, “it depends”. She admits that we must sometimes decide between two bad outcomes, and must accept the inevitable fact that our actions may lead to undesirable results.

Even though we may make the less-bad choice between two undesirable results, however, we cannot see this lesser bad as a good. In other words, it is impossible to change the nature of bad effects because they are better relative to other effects. This balance of evil and relatively-less-evil happens in war. War admittedly produces inevitable evil effects, including attacks on civilians. But these effects must be balanced against probable good effects, and if the evil effects are outweighed by the good, then the former can be discounted. Anscombe accepts these unavoidable choices, but says that we cannot directly call a not-so-bad result a good one, nor can we assume that an unavoidable bad result is a reasonable one. We also cannot ignore the injustice of a relatively good result.

Nevertheless, it is indeed true that we must sometimes strike a balance between evil and less evil. Anscombe says that “we cannot propose to sin, because that evil will be outweighed

⁷⁷ Anscombe, “The Justice of the Present War Examined” (henceforth JPW), collected in CPP3, 73. These conditions are not Anscombe’s original idea; she cites sources in a footnote. These conditions are based on the tradition of natural moral law. Anscombe also says that the natural moral law is what modern men have lost, and they cannot live in peace without it. This claim echoes Anscombe’s criticism in MMP. According to her the natural law is the law of man’s nature, and it shows how man should choose to act if he wants to use his functions and fulfill his nature, given that his will is free. When the issue concerns the relations between man and man, or between societies and nations, justice is the proper principle to respect. War, as one of those relations, also fits under this principle; for Anscombe, it is the only way for mankind to achieve happiness.

⁷⁸ TD, 65; JPW, 79.

by the good effects of the war”. In other words, this choice applies only to the situation of two bad effects. We cannot propose to bring about any evil action for its own sake – no matter how small the evil is, nor great the good it might bring.

Anscombe discusses unavoidable choice with an example: “if you had to choose between boiling one baby and letting some frightful disaster befall a thousand people – or a million people, if a thousand is not enough – what would you do? ... It pretty certainly saved a huge number of lives”.⁷⁹ Similarly, she admits that the choice to drop bombs *might* save many lives, given the condition that, if not, “the Allies would have had to invade Japan to achieve their aim, [...] many soldiers on both sides would have been killed; the Japanese [...] would have massacred the prisoners of war; and large number of their civilians population would have been killed by ‘ordinary’ bombing”.⁸⁰ She admits that, given all these conditions, dropping atomic bombs seems to have achieved a better result. But this was not the situation in Truman’s case. His was never an unavoidable choice between an atomic bomb and a large-scale land invasion.

According to the background mentioned before, Japan wished to negotiate peace, but the Allies insisted on unconditional surrender and so disregarded Japan’s desire. Anscombe thinks that aiming at any unlimited or unbound objective in war, such as unconditional surrender, is stupid and barbarous; it is this unrealistic objective that led to the seemingly “unavoidable” choice, and so to the decision to drop atomic bombs. Anscombe therefore objects to awarding Truman a honorary degree: not because of his involvement in the Second World War, but because of his decision to order the killings of the people in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Anscombe believes that, when Truman signed the order to drop the bombs, the death of the people were means to achieve the end of Japan’s unconditional surrender. And Truman made this choice – which, for Anscombe, is murder.

3.1.3 Anscombe’s Attitude towards Killing

Anscombe does not oppose killing, either. Indeed, President Truman caused the death of many people, but this is not the point Anscombe opposes. Her focus is the intentional killing of the

⁷⁹ TD, 65.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

innocent. David Goodill, in “Elizabeth Anscombe on Just War”,⁸¹ comments that Anscombe published three articles about the war,⁸² and they all addressed the same moral questions. One of those questions is that of legitimate killing, including both the justification for killings and any limitations on the killings.⁸³

Anscombe argues that the objects of legitimate wartime killing can only be combatants, and that the distinction between combatants and non-combatants in war is consistent with non-innocence and innocence in a moral sense.

To understand this position, we must first discuss whether there are innocent people in war – this is the definition of combatants and non-combatants. Supporters of the indivisibility view in modern warfare theory argue that civilians and fighting forces are equally important in war because a country’s military strength is realized by its overall economic and social strength. Thus, every member of a country shares a collective responsibility; it would then be pointless to draw any line between combatants and non-combatants, and so impossible to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate objects of attack. For Anscombe this view is ridiculous. She says with mockery that this theory has a certain implication: anyone who bought a taxed article, grew a potato, or cooked a meal, has contributed to the war effort, and she finds cannot see how children and those of old age would fit into this view – perhaps they cheered the soldiers and munitions workers up?⁸⁴

Anscombe admits that the line between combatants and non-combatants might be difficult to draw, but it does not follow that we should not try, especially because “wherever the line is,

⁸¹ David Goodill, “Elizabeth Anscombe on Just War”, in *The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, edited by Luke Gormally, David Albert Jones, and Roger Teichmann (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2016), 154–171.

⁸² These three are TD, JPW, and WM. JPW was originally a pamphlet Anscombe co-authored with Norman Daniel in response to British’s entry into the war against Germany for the restoration of Poland’s frontiers and independence. WM was published in a collection *Nuclear Weapons: A Catholic Response*, where Anscombe expresses the same general moral opinions as the other two pamphlets but clearly with Catholic readers in mind.

⁸³ See Goodill, “Elizabeth Anscombe on Just War”, 169–170.

⁸⁴ See JPW, 76–77; TD, 63.

certain things are certainly well to one side or the others of it”⁸⁵. In Anscombe’s view, combatants, or the non-innocent, are those engaged in an objectively unjust proceeding that causes harm; for instance, they are wrongfully attacking the rights of others or retaining what they have wrongfully gained. These individuals can be targets of legitimate killing, because killing them is stopping the harm. Similarly, supply lines and armament factories may be targets too, because they provide combatants with a direct means of harming others. In this sense, the killing of combatants is a means to defend or restore rights. Therefore, the most important condition for legitimate killing is that its purpose ought to be to stop harm. That is to say, an army after having surrendered cannot be killed, because they are no longer harming; they are not legitimate objects of killing. Punitive killings are not legitimate killings either, because the purpose of the punitive killing is not to stop something.⁸⁶

Another important point in Anscombe’s arguments is that the state that “has the authority to order deliberate killing in order to protect its people or to put frightful injustice right”.⁸⁷ In her review of just war conditions, she mentions that the war must be carried out by a lawful authority. This means that, even though specific individuals fight, they are fighting on behalf of their respective states. The identity of an individual actually disappears in war and is abstracted into a representation of the state. Those who can conduct legitimate killing, therefore, and those who can legitimately be killed, should all be combatants who fight on behalf of their states, and should not just be each individual in the state.

Concerning the meaning of “the unjust proceeding that causes harm”, Anscombe poses a question. On her theory, would it follow that a soldier can only be killed when he is actually attacking? If so, it would be impossible to sneak-attack a sleeping camp. Anscombe’s answer is that “what someone is doing” can refer either to “what he is doing at the moment” or to “his role in a situation”. Therefore, a soldier under arms is “harming” in the latter sense, even though he is asleep; the sneak-attack therefore constitutes a legitimate killing. Anscombe sees “innocent” not as “a term referring to personal responsibility”, but a term meaning “not

⁸⁵ TD, 67.

⁸⁶ See JPW, 77; WM, 53; TD, 67.

⁸⁷ TD, 68.

harming”. People who fight are harming, so they are not innocent and can be attacked. But if they surrender, they are no longer harming, and so become in this sense. They may not be killed.⁸⁸

On the other hand, civilians do not fulfill the conditions for objects of legitimate killing in warfare, because they neither carry out any wrongful actions against those defending or restoring rights, nor do they provide supplies to those with the means to fight. Therefore, they are non-combatants and innocent. The civilian population who supports the economic and social strength of a nation in the theory of indivisibility are not combatants. Even though these strengths so support a war unjustly, it is by means of a state’s action and so has nothing to do with the civilians. Anscombe gives an example: a farmer growing wheat is not supplying troops with the means of fighting, and so he cannot be considered a combatant.⁸⁹

Anscombe does not bring her opposition because Truman caused the death of innocent people, however. In fact, she regards some death as inevitable. In her own words, “killing the innocent, even if you know as a matter of statistical certainty that the things you do involve it, is not necessarily murder”.⁹⁰ For example, when attacking many military targets like munitions factories and naval dockyards, even when done as carefully as possible, we may not be able to avoid killing some innocent people. And this is not murder.

The key to distinguishing this inevitable killing of innocents from murder is whether the killing of the innocent is an aim or an accident. In Anscombe’s example of self-defense, if a person accidentally kills the man attacking him, it is not a murder; if a person believes that only by killing the attacker could he protect himself and then kills this man, it is a murder. The crucial element is not the killing itself, but whether the action is accidental or conducted intentionally as an “aim” or a “tool”. Therefore, she objects to awarding Truman’s honorary degree not because he caused death, since targeting soldiers would be a legitimate cause, nor because he hurt the innocent, since accidental killing would be forgiven. She objects because he aims at killing the innocent by ordering the bombs, in order to achieve the end of unconditional

⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁹ See JPW, 78; WM, 53; TD, 67.

⁹⁰ TD, 66.

surrender.⁹¹

Hence, Anscombe thinks that Truman's action is not a borderline case. There is no unavoidable choice between an atomic bomb and a large-scale land invasion, and the civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are evidently innocent. For her, Truman's action is an obvious, deliberate choice to kill the innocent as a means to achieve his end of unconditional surrender, which is inevitably wrong. Anscombe claims that "choos[ing] to kill the innocent as a means to their ends is always murder, and murder is one of the worst of human actions".⁹²

3.2 Anscombe's Rejection of Oxford's Moral Philosophy

Because of Anscombe's attitude to Truman's decision, she objected to Oxford's action in offering Truman the honorary degree. She claimed that an honorary degree is "a reward for being a very distinguished person", and so in making the offer Oxford apparently explains its own value of "distinguished person" as "a notorious criminal". Therefore, "[Oxford] can share in the guilt of a bad action by praise and flattery, as also by defending it".⁹³

At first, Anscombe is confused by Oxford's attitude that "It would be wrong to try to punish Truman". She writes, "When I puzzle myself over the attitude of the Vice-Chancellor and the Hebdomadal Council, I look round to see if any explanation is available why so many Oxford people should be willing to flatter such a man".⁹⁴ In order to share this consensus, people must accept that "several massacres do not affect a man's honour". In Anscombe's mind, this would be an odious task.

It would not take long for Anscombe to resolve her confusion, however. During her

⁹¹ See also Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, 106–109. In the section "The Moral Debate", Glover discusses the justice of ending the war with the atomic bomb and cites Anscombe's moral claim that killing innocent people as means to an end is always murder. There he also mentions the importance of the doctrine of double effect in deciding which consequences of an act are intended and which are merely foreseen. I take up that same discussion in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

⁹² TD, 64.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

teaching in an undergraduate ethics module in Somerville, she read the standard modern ethicists, and from them, she gets insight into the issue after considering Oxford's decision and the productions of Oxford moral philosophy since the First World War. For her, the character of Oxford moral philosophy perfectly explains its decision in offering Truman an honorary degree. In her own words, "[u]p to the Second World War the prevailing moral philosophy in Oxford taught that an action can be 'morally good' no matter how objectionable the thing done may be".⁹⁵ These words echo the second thesis at the beginning of MMP, and they identify the specific objects behind the term "morally good", which in MMP appear to be contextless. The link between MMP and TD is not surprising, as they were written around the same time.

Anscombe gives as an example Heinrich Himmler's effort to exterminate Jews. In her view, Oxford philosophers could explain that Himmler did so from the "motive of duty" with "supreme value". She adds that, in the same moral philosophy, "it is also held that it might be right to kill the innocent for the good of the people, since the 'prima facie duty' of securing some advantage might outweigh the 'prima facie duty' of not killing the innocent".⁹⁶

Behind these examples, Anscombe thinks, is a doctrine⁹⁷ claiming it is impossible to have

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ In "The Intended and Unintended Consequences of Intention", Rachael Wiseman summarizes Anscombe's six ideas as the accusation against Oxford moral doctrine: "(1) An anti-Platonic view of justice, according to which a just society is one which is well-arranged, rather than one in which individuals act justly. (2) A "high" conception of responsibility for the future, limited only by our capacity to calculate the consequences of our action or inaction. So, a person is responsible for all the foreseen consequences of what she does. (3) A "gentle" conception of responsibility for the past, in which it is unfair to hold someone wholly responsible for what she did, given that it had all sorts of causes. So, causal factors which contributed to her doing what she did, or which were necessary to it having the results that it had, must be taken into account when assessing the extent of her responsibility. (4) A horror of suffering. (5) A flexibility about principles, which allows that one may choose the principles by which one wishes to live, and may change those principles in accord with circumstance. (6) A feeling that the changing nature of the world makes it wrong to impose a rigid moral code on children, who must be allowed to develop their own principles." And Wiseman thinks that, when we follow these six points, we can understand Oxford's defense for Truman's action. "Truman does not act justly, in the Platonic sense, when he orders the killing of Japanese civilians; however, if justice is a

any general moral laws, such as “It is wrong to lie” and “Never commit sodomy”; and an experienced person knows when to break those rules. This expression of “knowing when to break” sounds like the principle of consequentialism. This doctrine rejects the idea that some kinds of action may be absolutely excluded. When good results can be produced, the means towards those ends may be justified, even if they contravene general moral laws.

Even worse is that this situation does not only take place in Oxford. In her talk on the *BBC Third Programme*, Anscombe was asked whether moral philosophy in its current fashions corrupts the youth. She denied that it did. In fact, she thinks it an entirely unfair and absurd accusation that Oxford moral philosophy corrupts the youth; instead, Oxford moral philosophy is perfectly in tune with the highest and best ideals of the country – a situation she deplored. It is not only Oxford, but the trend of all current society that corrupts the youth.

After Anscombe’s talk on television, some of her Oxford colleagues and other

matter of the arrangement of society, we may think that insofar as the unconditional surrender that Truman’s act brings about is one which is better arranged – peaceful and democratic, for example – we may evaluate his action as promoting justice [1]. It might be said that Truman would have been neglecting his responsibilities if he had refrained from murdering Japanese civilians, given that he was able to predict the relative consequences of dropping the bomb and not dropping it, and to calculate that the former state of affairs was better [2]. However, as the Censor indicated, we cannot hold him wholly responsible for those murders, given that his order was just one of the many causal antecedents; his order alone did not bring about those deaths – he was just one tiny cog in a complex causal machine [3]. One of the reasons why we may think of his action as necessary – though obviously regrettable – is that he prevented even worse suffering than the suffering he caused; anything which decreases suffering is to be admired [4]. Thus, though it is clearly a good rule of thumb that murder is morally wrong, given certain circumstances, other principles, like the principle that one has a moral duty to do what is best for one’s country, may replace them [5]. Finally, given that young people are growing into an increasingly complex world, in which the consequences of actions are ever more wide-reaching and interconnected, children should be taught to be flexible in their moral outlook, and to recognize that moral laws are like the Queensbury rules [6].” See Rachael Wiseman, “The Intended and the Unintended Consequences of Intention”, in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 161–164. For further discussion of these six points, see also WM; Anscombe, “Murder and the Morality of Euthanasia”, in GG1; Anscombe, “The Moral Environment of the Child”, in GG2; Anscombe, “Authority in Morals”, in GG2; and Anscombe, “Sins of Omission? The Non Treatment of Controls in Criminal Trials”, in GG1.

philosophers wrote to the BBC's *The Listener* magazine to respond to her criticism.⁹⁸ These letters show a startling misapprehension of Anscombe's talk, however. She may have misjudged the extent to which Oxford moral philosophy rooted in people's minds. Many actions she finds shocking fail to shock others. We may suspect, then, that her colleagues' misapprehensions of her view were s more or less willful.

In his book *The Women Are up to Something*,⁹⁹ Benjamin Lipscombe describes the debate between Anscombe and R. M. Hare. Lipscombe's summary of Hare's moral thought is that "moral judgements are what he called 'universal prescriptions'", which indicates "command (of a sort) issued to oneself and everyone else to behave in certain ways. If one says that someone 'ought' not to steal, then one is committed not to steal, oneself. But on Hare's view, our prescriptions cannot be judged against any criteria other than consistency. They cannot be judged, particularly, against factual criteria. There are no right or wrong answers in ethics, only consistent or inconsistent ones."¹⁰⁰ Lipscombe quotes Hare: "We are free to form our own moral opinions in a much stronger sense than we are free to form our own opinions as to what the fact are",¹⁰¹ and "To become morally adult is to learn to use 'ought'-sentences in the realization that they can only be verified by reference to a standard or set of principles which we have by our own decision accepted and made our own. This is what our present generation

⁹⁸ There are fifteen letters in total, four of which are from Anscombe. These include R. M. Hare, "Oxford Moral Philosophy", *The Listener*, 21 February 1957; Nowell-Smith, "Oxford Moral Philosophy", *The Listener*, 21 February 1957 and 14 March 1957; Anscombe, "Oxford Moral Philosophy", *The Listener*, 28 February 1957 and 4 April 1957; Anthony Flew, "Oxford Moral Philosophy", *The Listener*, 28 February 1957 and 21 March 1957. More detailed discussion is found in Rachael Wiseman, "The Intended and Unintended Consequences of Intention", in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 164–166.

⁹⁹ Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something: How Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch Revolutionized Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, 160.

¹⁰¹ R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 2; quoted by Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, 160.

is so painfully trying to do”.¹⁰²

Lipscombe says that the word “free” is important, and it is also the target of Anscombe and her friend Iris Murdoch’s critique. He says that the problem with the idea of “free” is that, if we are free to form an opinion, people like Anscombe would say that “we ought never to deliberately kill the innocent”; but at the same time, other people are equally “free” to form the opinion that “we ought to kill the innocent if it would serve our strategic aims”. Hare then summarizes their critique in this way: “With no objective criteria for moral judgments, we human beings – reflective creatures that we are – can only evaluate our options and make decisions in a condition of lonely freedom”.¹⁰³

In Anscombe’s speech “Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt Youth?”, Anscombe also answers the suggestion that Hare cannot be a corrupt because of his obvious moral earnestness. Anscombe argues the opposite: anyone who wishes to corrupt people would find “an important item of equipment”. She mocks Hare’s view on moral education: “Everybody knows that we have long since discarded the hideous conception of parental authority. [...] In a change world, with changing conditions, standards must change; and you must cut your morals according to your purposes”.¹⁰⁴

Lipscombe also deals with the debates in *The Listener*.¹⁰⁵ He writes that T. S. Gregory, Anscombe’s producer, thought at first that Anscombe’s manuscript was “a vigorous defense of Oxford morals and moralists”. But when it was broadcast on 5 February and then later appeared in the magazine, the manuscript’s targets understood its true meaning well. Two of the target, Hare and P. H. Nowell-Smith, began writing letters to the editor of *The Listener*, and their letters appeared the next week. Anscombe then wrote to the editor again and said that “I was glad to read [R. M. Hare’s] letter and Mr. Nowell-Smith’s. They show that what I want to go for is really there”.

Lipscombe thinks that Anscombe’s interlocutors, especially Hare, did not understand her

¹⁰² R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 78; quoted by Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, 160.

¹⁰³ Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, 160.

¹⁰⁴ OMPCY, 166–167.

¹⁰⁵ See Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, 161–162.

complaint because her rhetoric distracted them. Hare's letter argues that it is outrageous that Anscombe would associate him with various forms of cruelty, which he had never defended. Anscombe replied that she did not say Hare had defended them; she said that "no one believing [Hare's] philosophy can hold that there is any solid certainty as to their badness". It is hard to deny Anscombe's critique, as Hare himself says that "we are free to form our moral opinions". Lipscombe's introduction supports what I said before. The letter-writers buried Anscombe's point beneath her "tortuous sarcasms", and seem to have done so willfully.

3.3 The Path to Human Action

Anscombe thought that the letters, with their defense of Oxford moral philosophy and the justification for Truman's action, showed exactly the misunderstandings she was so concerned with in moral philosophy.

Regarding Truman's bomb order, some people see it in that event the action of signing and some the action of murder. The difference illustrates the possibility of different descriptions. And regarding the deaths of innocent people, there is disagreement over whether to define that outcome as an accidental consequence, a foreseen consequence, or an intended consequence. And this disagreement requires investigation into the principle of double effect. All these issues call for more analysis on Truman's action and intention. The research on "intention" will help to differentiate "an expression of intention and an expression of prediction", "a voluntary action and an intentional action", "cause and reason", and other important distinctions. Anscombe claims that it is the failure to understand the nature of action that causes the mistakes in moral evaluation. As Mary Geach puts it, "Anscombe's study of action and intention was an important part of her opposition to consequentialism".¹⁰⁶

We therefore have reason enough to argue that the goal of *Intention* is not a novel account of action, but a foundation for ethics. The basic question of *Intention* is to identify the nature of an action, a category without which moral philosophy cannot proceed. We should thus abandon the expectation that *Intention* provides a complete account of human action. With this limitation

¹⁰⁶ Mary Geach, "introduction", GG1, xviii.

in mind, we can avoid many unnecessary discussions about action.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Rachael Wiseman shares this idea and says that “*Intention* provides that piece of ‘conceptual analysis’. Anscombe’s intention in doing that work was to provide ethics with a starting point from which it could give an explanation of “how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one”, not a starting point from which philosophers of mind and action could fill out technical details in a metaphysics of action.” See “The Intended and Unintended Consequences of Intention”, in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 172.

Section 4 The Oxford Quartet and Their Ethics

4.1 The Background to the Oxford Quartet

4.1.1 *The Quartet's Support for Anscombe in Truman's Case*

In her evaluation of Truman's case, Anscombe was not alone at Oxford. When she opposed the nomination for an honorary degree, dons from St John's, New College and Worcester gathered in the courtyard outside Convocation House, and the rumor was spreading that "The women are up to something in Convocation; we have to ... vote them down".¹⁰⁸ Supporters of the nomination saw Anscombe and other women standing with her as a unit and designated them by their gender. Indeed, they were united in their opposition, and were some of the few opponents. Only Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Michael Foot – from loyalty, not conviction – and Murdoch's lover Margaret Hubbard voted *non placet* ("it does not please.") in this decision.¹⁰⁹

This gendered label does not exist in the Convocation only. When Anscombe's protest became an international news, the US press was most interested in the fact that Anscombe was a woman and wrote two headlines as "Woman Opposes Truman Degree" and "Oxford Honors Truman Over Woman's Protest".¹¹⁰

4.1.2 *The Backgrounds of These Four Women*

The gendered label in the Truman case denominates the group of Oxford female philosophers we now call the Oxford Quartet. They are Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch.

Among these four women, Elizabeth Anscombe, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch were born in 1919, with Philippa Foot born the following year. Philippa Foot, Midgley and Murdoch were undergraduates together at Somerville College, while Anscombe studied at St. Hugh's; she and Foot were later academic colleagues at Somerville for almost twenty-five years.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ TD, 65; see also Anthony Kenny, "Elizabeth Anscombe at Oxford", in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 12–13; and Clare Mac Cuhaill and Rachael Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals: How Four Women Brought Philosophy Back to Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2022), 2.

¹⁰⁹ See Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, 156–157.

¹¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 156.

¹¹¹ See John Haldane, "Elizabeth Anscombe: Life and Work", in *The Life and Philosophy of*

Women were not formally admitted to Oxford as members of the University until 1920, and at the time these four emerged (between 1937 and 1939), female undergraduates were still somewhat of a novelty.

When they began studying at Oxford, the university had been admitting women for only fifty years and awarding them degrees for fewer than twenty. In 1939, compulsory military service was introduced with another World War expected. Many academic men were called up, and Anscombe's contemporaries were no exception. By 1940, the number of men at Oxford was twice that of women, while the number was five times in 1936. Humanities faculties were most affected by conscription, because their research did not contribute to the war effort by means of medicine or science, and so fewer were reserved. This context gave female students a unique opportunity to develop.¹¹²

Mary Midgley described this time as the "Golden Age of female philosophy":

As a survivor from the wartime group, I can only say: sorry, but the reason [why so many well-known female philosophers emerged from Oxford soon after the war] was indeed that there were fewer men about then. The trouble is not, of course, men as such – men have done good enough philosophy in the past. What is wrong is a particular style of philosophizing that results from encouraging a lot of clever young men to compete in winning arguments. These people then quickly build up a set of games out of simple oppositions and elaborate them until, in the end, nobody else can see what they are talking about. [...]

It was clear that we were all more interested in understanding this deeply puzzling world than in putting each other down. That was how Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Iris Murdoch, Mary Warnock and I, in our various ways, all came to think out alternatives to the brash, unreal style of philosophizing – based essentially on logical positivism – that was current at the time. And these were the ideas that we later

Elizabeth Anscombe, 1–11.

¹¹² For the gender situation at Oxford during the war, see Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, 11.

expressed in our own writings.¹¹³

4.1.3 The Return of Male Students after the War

When the war ended in 1945, their surviving male colleagues returned from their services to Oxford. Stuart Hampshire and J. L. Austin came from interrogating enemy prisoners on behalf of the British Intelligence Corps; Hare returned after three years in a Japanese prison camp; P. F. Strawson came back from Italy, where he served with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers; A. J. Ayer returned from Welsh Guards as a Special Operations Executive and MI6 agent.¹¹⁴

Among the young people who returned to Oxford, one deserves special mention: Alfred Jules Ayer.¹¹⁵ A. J. Ayer was a student of Gilbert Ryle, who encouraged him to explore a new philosophical school, the Vienna Circle.¹¹⁶ Ayer published his famous book *Language, Truth*

¹¹³ See Mary Midgely's letter to *The Guardian*, Tuesday 28 November 2013, quoted in Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, 12.

¹¹⁴ For the return of Oxford male philosophers, see Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, 13; Mac Cuhail and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 4 "Park Town" Section 1 "The Men Return to Oxford", 138–141.

¹¹⁵ For Ayer, see Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, Chapter 2 "Oxford in Wartime", 40–44; and Mac Cuhail and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 4 "Park Town" Section 2 "Philippa Determines to Show that Ayer is Wrong", 144 and Chapter 5 "A Joint 'No!'" Section 1 "The Quartet Unite Against Ayer & Hare", 183–186; see also Thomas Nagel, "What is rude?", a review of *The Women Are up to Something: How Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley and Iris Murdoch Revolutionized Ethics*, by Benjamin J. B. Lipscombe, and *Metaphysical Animals: How Four Women Brought Philosophy Back to Life*, by Clare Mac Cumhail and Rachael Wiseman, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 44, No. 3, February 10, 2022.

¹¹⁶ For Vienna Circle, see Thomas Uebel, "Vienna Circle", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.). "The Vienna Circle was a group of early twentieth-century philosophers who sought to reconceptualize empiricism by means of their interpretation of then recent advances in the physical and formal sciences. Their radically anti-metaphysical stance was supported by an empiricist criterion of meaningfulness and a broadly logicist conception of mathematics. They denied that any principle or claim was synthetic *a priori*. Moreover, they sought to account for the presuppositions of scientific theories by regimenting such theories within a logical framework so that the important role played by conventions, either in the form of definitions

and Logic in 1936. After returning, he began to connect what he had seen and heard in Vienna with his earlier reading of the British empiricist tradition. During the war, he had been sent from Sandown to London to New York to Ghana to Algiers and returned to Oxford from Paris, where he had witnessed the liberation from a brothel café.

Ayer thought that the traditional philosophers have not policed their language to make sure their statements are meaningful. According to him, only two kinds of statement are meaningful: (1) statements about the world that can be confirmed or disconfirmed by experience; and (2) statements about the logic of our language. The result is a view that excludes all theological and metaphysical statements from meaningful discourse, as well as all moral judgments. Ayer believes that reality is the world of facts described by the natural sciences, and that such a world has no place for value.

Ayer also argues that moral judgements cannot be translated into non-ethical terms, and thus cannot be verified. He therefore agrees with ethical intuitionists and concludes that ethical concepts are mere “pseudo-concepts”. Ayer held to Moore’s open question argument against cognitivism. He said that moral judgements express only our beliefs or emotions, and not any factual content, and so there are no moral truths or moral disagreements. There are only emotional disagreements. If I say to someone, “You acted wrongly in stealing that money”, I am saying nothing more than I would if I had said “You stole that money”. In adding that the action is wrong, I simply express my moral disapproval. And If I try to generalize my statement and say that “Stealing money is wrong”, I produce a sentence with no factual meaning; it expresses no proposition that can be either true or false. I am merely expressing sentiments.

Another male philosopher deserving of greater mention is Hare, one of Anscombe’s opponents in the Truman case. His moral theory was famously shaped by his experience as a prisoner of war in Japan.¹¹⁷ He writes: “Up to the War, if there hadn’t been a war, I might have

or of other analytical framework principles, became evident.”

¹¹⁷ For Hare’s experience in the war, see R. M. Hare, “A Philosophical Autobiography”, *Utilitas*, 14 (2002), 269–305; see also Mac Cuhaill and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 5 “A Joint ‘No!’” Section 1 “The Quartet Unite Against Ayer & Hare”, 183–186. The following passage from *Metaphysical Animal* introduces two experiences that were crucial to Hare’s moral philosophy:

“The first took place in February 1942, at the moment when Lieutenant Hare’s unit surrendered.

gone back to the classics and become a classical scholar. The War raised so many moral problems and philosophical problems that after that I couldn't be anything but a philosopher".

Hare's wartime experiences made him stop believing in a universal objective moral standard that could be known by intuition without reasoning; he took the existence of different moral certainties as fatal to the idea of universal and objective moral standards. Instead, he began to think that intuitions and emotions cannot be ways of perceiving an independent moral reality – they are merely the upshot of one's upbringing. This would be the beginning of his "universal prescriptivism", later presented in his book *The Language of Morals* (1952), *Freedom and Reason* (1963) and *Moral Thinking* (1981). According to this view, moral terms have two logical properties: universalizability and prescriptivity. Universalizability means that moral judgments must identify the situation they describe according to a finite set of universal terms. Prescriptivity means that moral agents must perform those acts they consider themselves to have an obligation to perform whenever they are physically and psychologically able to do so.

Losing faith in objective moral reality led Hare to accept Ayer's picture of a value-free

They had taken only two Japanese prisoners during the entire Malayan campaign, and after the surrender the pair were freed. 'When they were released [...] they did what they thought they ought to do: they at once went to their units, saluted their commanding officers, and then committed harakiri' in order 'to expunge the disgrace of being taken prisoner.' For Richard Hare, this became the moment that made him 'stop believing in a universal objective moral standard known by intuition without reasoning, such as is posited by Sir David Ross'.

The second scene occurred in the latter part of his captivity, after the long and terrible march up the River Kwai to work on the Thailand-Burma railway. Each morning, the camp commander ordered the prisoners out to work on the railway. All were starving and some were terribly sick with malaria, cholera and dysentery. Richard told the story of the camp interpreter (who may well have been himself), who tried as far as he could to persuade the commander not to send out the sickest prisoners, from whom the exertion would be fatal. But the commander seemed unmoved by the fact that the men would die. The commander's attitude and actions were for Hare further evidence that Ross and Prichard must be wrong. While Hare was certain that men ought not to be sent to their death, the commander 'had an equally clear intuition, in all respects as indubitable', that he ought to magnify their emperor and their country'. If moral intuition was attuned to an objective moral reality, then such a stark and insurmountable clash of intuition ought not to be possible, Hare thought."

world. Instead of going Ayer's emotivism route, though, Hare wishes to prove that moral questions could be answered rationally. To do so he claimed a certain form of consequentialism called "preference utilitarianism", which says that we should act in such a way as to maximize the satisfaction of people's preferences. In this sense, moral statements are a special type of imperative, and are neither true or false; this point has the consequence that there are no restrictions on morality's content, because as a matter of logic, a universal prescription or imperative could be issued for or against anything. Someone who does not care to issue universal imperatives, therefore, would have no use for moral language; if they did decide to use it, they would have to decide which moral principles to endorse, because each person can form their own moral commitments by choosing what universal prescriptions to make. On this view, any preference or approving attitude could serve as a moral principle.

4.2 A Joint "No!" to the Fact-Value Dichotomy

4.2.1 The Joint Opposition to Oxford Male Peers

Although these four women are different in many ways, their shared historical background and ethical outlook united them against their male Oxford peers. Midgley tells a story about the four in October 1947.¹¹⁸ At that time she returned to Oxford from Paris and was about to begin work on her thesis about Plotinus; Murdoch was the "experienced woman" she had dreamt of being, who knew more about the new French and European existentialist philosophy than almost anyone in England; Foot had a lectureship at Oxford; and Anscombe was a research fellow at Somerville College.

The same year, Murdoch took a stand against Ayer's assault on objective moral judgement. She proposed that, with the war over, there was an urgent need to find a way back to moral truth, objective value, and an ethics that connected to what really matters. Anscombe proposed to work out her doubts about what is now called analytical philosophy. Foot wanted to show that it is not a personal decision or an expression of disapproval when people say there is something

¹¹⁸ See Mac Cuhaill and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 5 "A Joint 'No!'" Section 1 "The Quartet Unite Against Ayer & Hare", 182–183; the story appears originally in Mary Midgley, *The Owl of Minerva: A Memoir* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), Chapter 6 "In Oxford Again, 1945–9", 142–166.

objective wicked about the Holocaust. Midgley's philosophical aim was to make sense of the relation between older and newer ways of dealing with the subject. At the end of that academic year, Murdoch recorded in her journal: "Back from Oxford. A world of women. I reflected, talking with Mary, Pip & Elizabeth, how much I love them."

According to Midgley's version of the story, the union between her and her friends involved a joint "No!" to the great cleavage, celebrated by Ayer and accepted by Hare, between fact and value. That is, these women wished to *bring fact and value back together*. John Haldane describes that "they came to prominence within professional philosophy and are seen individually and collectively as having reoriented ethics away from the *emotivism and subjectivism* that had begun to take hold at Oxford during their student days through the influence of *A. J. Ayer* and been developed in the decade following the end of Second World War by *R. M. Hare*."¹¹⁹

4.2.2 Anscombe's Argument in MMP

In her article "Mr Truman's Degree", Anscombe says that the essential principle of postwar moral philosophy teaches people that "good" is not a "descriptive" term. But she thinks that once value is separated from fact, people can easily choose their moral principles and so can act "their best". In this context, moral laws such as "do not murder" can only be personal principles dressed up to look like Kantian moral laws. This is the sort of moral philosophy Anscombe associates with Ayer and Hare, and that is "perfectly in the spirit of the time and might be called the philosophy of the flattery of that spirit".¹²⁰

In response, Anscombe argues that fact and value cannot be separated, because facts are the foundation of moral evaluation. In other words, facts are included in the descriptions of values, given that statements about what ought to be are based solely on statements about what is.

In MMP, Anscombe begins her argument on the fact-value dichotomy with David Hume's theory. She says that "Hume defines 'truth' in such a way as to exclude ethical judgments from

¹¹⁹ John Haldane, "Elizabeth Anscombe: Life and Work", 1.

¹²⁰ OMPCY, 167.

it...” (MMP, 2) Hare calls this fact-value dichotomy “Hume’s Law”: one cannot infer evaluative statements from non-evaluative statements. Hume notes a significant difference between “is” (positive statements) and “ought” (prescriptive or normative statements); it is not obvious how one can coherently move from the former to the latter.¹²¹ In general, this apparent dichotomy seems to show an unbridgeable logical gap between facts and values, suggesting that statements of value or morality are neither true nor false, but are just expressions of the subjective attitudes or feelings of the speaker.¹²²

Anscombe’s argument against Hume’s Law begins by equating “the passing from ‘is’ to ‘ought’” with “the passing from ‘is’ to ‘owes’” and “the passing from ‘is’ to ‘needs’”.¹²³ This equation also shows that Anscombe’s argument will be twofold: it will involve the link between “is” and “owes”, and that between “is” and “needs”.

MMP first deal with the transition from “is” to “owes”. Anscombe starts with an example about a grocer. She has us imagine that we say to our grocer that “I ordered potatoes, you supplied them, and you sent me a bill. So it doesn’t apply to such a proposition as that ‘I owe you such-and-such a sum’”, because “truth consists in either relations of ideas [...] or matters

¹²¹ Hume’s discussion about the fact-value dichotomy comes from *A Treatise of Human Nature*. “In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason.” (T 3.1.1)

¹²² The fact-value dichotomy is similar to Moore’s open question argument. Moore intends to refute any identification of moral properties with natural properties.

¹²³ See MMP, 2. “[Hume’s] objection to passing from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ would apply equally to passing from ‘is’ to ‘owes’ or from ‘is’ to ‘needs.’”

of facts” (MMP, 3). Intuitively, we would not consider such a claim to be justified. We must therefore rethink the relation between the facts, such as “X ordered potatoes” or “Y supplied potatoes”, and the description “X owes Y so much money”.

Anscombe explains this relation with her idea of “brute facts”. Anscombe calls these facts “brute relative to” a description (MMP, 3–4). Here, “The grocer supplied potatoes” is a brute fact; at the same time, it is also a description, and there are other facts that are brute relative to this description. For example, “the grocer had potatoes carted to my house” and “potatoes were left at my house” are brute facts relative to this description. Accordingly, “X owes Y money” could be a brute fact relative to the description “X is solvent.”

So far, the relation of “relative bruteness” is still complicated. Anscombe elaborates:

[I]f xyz is a set of facts brute relative to a description A, then xyz is a set out of a range some set among which holds if A holds; but the holding of some set among these does not necessarily entail A, because exceptional circumstances can always make a difference; and what are exceptional circumstances relatively to A can generally only be explained by giving a few diverse examples, and no theoretically adequate provision can be made for exceptional circumstances, since a further special context can theoretically always be imagined that would reinterpret any special context. (MMP, 4)

Now in the grocer example, “I owe the grocer money” would be one of a set of facts that would be brute in relation to the description “I am a bilker.” “Bilker” is a species of “dishonesty” or “injustice”, which is definitely an evaluative description. In this way, just as we can conceive “bilking”, “dishonesty”, and “injustice” in merely “factual” ways, it is ludicrous to pretend that there can be no such thing as a transition from “is” and “owes”.

The second aspect about the fact-value dichotomy is the transition from “is” to “needs”. Here, Anscombe uses the example of the transition from “the characteristics of an organism” to “the environment that it needs” (MMP, 7). For her, in the case of plants, their needing of a particular kind of environment is surely grounded in facts about those plants – the “needing” is a truth. If there is insufficient iron in the soil, for example, blueberries will first rust and then die; we can therefore say that “blueberries need soil with sufficient iron in it”.

We must clarify the meaning of “need” here. Anscombe says that “to say an organism needs certain environment” is not to say that “this organism wants to have that environment” but that “this organism won’t flourish unless it has that environment”. In other words, there is a difference between “need” and “want”. Anscombe thinks Hume would say in response that “it all depends on whether you want it to flourish!” Anscombe does not accept that challenge. She thinks that if “want” is involved in the consideration of “need”, this “need” would influence our actions, perhaps just slightly. But no truth, Hume would say, could possibly have a logical claim to influence our actions. It would then be impossible to prove the transition from “is” to “need” or “ought”.

Anscombe thinks the case of plants could solve this problem. There is always some necessary connection between “what you think you need” and “what you want”, so it is difficult to discuss “need” without “want”. But there is no such connection between “what you can judge the plant needs” and “what you want”. Therefore, the inference from “is” to “needs” is not at dubious.

Both parts of Anscombe’s argument against the fact-value dichotomy attempt to prove that facts belong in the descriptions of values. Rachael Wiseman summarizes in this way: “Hume says that you can’t get an ought from an is; the deontologist, accepting this, looks for a source of ‘ought’; Anscombe says: if you describe the facts using certain concepts then the ‘ought’ is, as it were, already in them”.¹²⁴ We must note here that these two parts of the argument reflect different aspects of Anscombe’s moral philosophy. The first “is – owes” argument emphasizes the importance of the social circumstance and how we respect social conventions; the second “is – need” argument emphasizes the intrinsic nature of all beings and how we should best develop in accordance with it. I will discuss these aspects in detail later.

4.2.3 The Influence of Foot and Murdoch on Anscombe

Anscombe’s ethical thought, especially on the fact-value dichotomy, was encouraged by Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch. In a prewar letter to Foot, Murdoch showed that the effect of Ayer’s work was essentially destructive. Murdoch and Foot find that Ayer’s philosophy is

¹²⁴ Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe’s Intention*, 44.

unhelpful, unsettling, even baffling, rather than constructive. It does not help people think about their most urgent questions, such as what to do with their lives.

Murdoch is one of the first British philosophers to encounter French existentialism. In 1945, she heard Jean-Paul Sartre deliver a version of his book in Brussels. Murdoch found the similarity between Sartre's view of value and that of Ayer: both believe that values are human projections onto a value-free reality. Murdoch had no interest in this superficial, heroic self-image, in either its French or British form; she believed instead that value requires us to turn our attention away from ourselves towards others and towards whatever demands recognition as good in itself. She later developed this view in her 1970 book *The Sovereignty of Good*.¹²⁵

Foot was also unwilling to accept the elimination of truth from morality, along with its replacement by subjectivity. In 1945, she was shattered by images of the concentration camps in Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen: well-fed SS girls, hair nicely set; starved men and women lifted into trucks; children playing beside trenches filled with naked bodies; skeletal blank-faced survivors who looked like corpses. At this time, Ayer's prewar attack on ethics had left moral philosophy speechless before the new reality. Foot refused to accept the Ayer's thought, as according to him, it was impossible to legitimately tell a Nazi that "We are right, and you are wrong". Foot believed that any conception of morality that would deem the response to such horror a mere personal reaction could not be correct. She was convinced that Ayer's moral subjectivism must be wrong, and she formed the question that would drive her for the rest of her life: could there exist a secular philosophy using the language of morals, and speaking of objective moral truth?¹²⁶

Meanwhile, in the graduate class "Analysis in Moral Philosophy", taught together by Murdoch and Foot in 1954, the major theme was the inseparability of description and evaluation

¹²⁵ For more on Murdoch here, see Mac Cuhail and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 4 "Park Town" Section 3 "Iris Meets Jean-Paul Sartre", 148–152; Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, Chapter 2 "Oxford in Wartime", 43–44; and Thomas Nagel, "What is rude?"

¹²⁶ For the story of Foot, see Mac Cuhail and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 4 "Park Town" Section 2 "Philippa Determines to Show that Ayer is Wrong", 143–145; see also Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, Chapter 1 "Facts and Values", 21; Alex Voorhoeve, *Conversations on Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 91–92; and Thomas Nagel, "What is rude?"

in ordinary human discourse. Their main example was the word “rude”, but they argue that, even for the words preferred by Ayer and Hare, such as “good” and “ought”, this inseparability of description and evaluation is still true.¹²⁷ In Foot’s 1958 talk “Moral Belief”,¹²⁸ she countered Ayer’s emotivism and Hare’s subjectivism by saying that “It would not be an exaggeration to say that the whole of moral philosophy, as it is now widely taught, rests on a contrast between statements of fact and evaluations”.¹²⁹ This is a question Foot began to think about in response to the images from 1945, but she only answered in two essays published in 1958. Foot claims that much of our language is both evaluative and descriptive, which echoes Anscombe’s arguments in MMP.

4.2.4 The Mixed Reading of Aristotle and Wittgenstein

It is not surprising that Anscombe and Foot shared ideas. Since Anscombe took up her Mary Somerville Research Fellowship in October 1946, she spent much time with Foot, walking slowly up the Woodstock Road towards Somerville. In those early days, Anscombe was still experimenting with Wittgenstein’s philosophy of psychology, and she explained Wittgenstein’s work to Foot. Anscombe explained, for example, that “I have pain” and “Elizabeth has pain” are radically different statements, even though the same fact, regarding Elizabeth’s headache, makes both true. We say “Elizabeth has pain” when we recognize a particular person by her

¹²⁷ For Murdoch and Foot’s seminar, see Benjamin Lipscombe, *The Women Are up to Something*, Chapter 5 “Murdoch’s Diagnosis”, 121. An introduction to Foot’s analysis of the word “rude” is given in Mac Cuhail and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 5 “A Joint ‘No!’” Section 3 “Philippa Reconnects Facts & Values”, 196: “So much of our language, she pointed out, is both evaluative and descriptive. ‘Take the word “rude”’, [Philippa Foot] said. To call someone ‘rude’ is to express disapproval: if I say: ‘Putting your head on the table is rude’, I mean that it ought not to be done. So, calling someone ‘rude’ is an evaluation. ‘But’, she continues, ‘the meaning of “rude” is connected with the factual statement on which it is based. I cannot just call walking up to a front door slowly or sitting on a pile of hay, “rude”.’” If I try, what I say won’t make sense. For the evaluation to make sense I would need to make a connection between the facts and the evaluation by pointing to some conditions of offence that we all recognize.”

¹²⁸ Philippa Foot, “Moral Beliefs”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59 (1958): 83–104.

¹²⁹ Philippa Foot, “Moral Beliefs”, 83.

bodily characteristics and notice her behavior. But “I have pain” is not like this: it is more like moaning. We do not recognize anyone when we say it; we do not look for any behavior. Instead, saying “I have pain” *is* pain behavior. Anscombe also read Wittgenstein’s notes to Foot: “Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behavior.”¹³⁰

Not only that, but Foot and Murdoch’s ethical thought was influenced by Anscombe’s teaching all her friends what she had learned from Wittgenstein’s project. In the 1940s, they began to talk about “language” and agreed on the view that language use is a complex, many-sided form of behavior, namely, a “form of life”. As Midgley later wrote,

I now began to pick up some idea of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. [...] I think it was Elizabeth Anscombe who really made this new approach visible to me. [...] The special importance of language does not, then, flow from its being a particularly grand isolated phenomenon. It arises because language is rooted, in way that mathematics is not, in the wider structure of our lives. So it leads on to an investigation of our whole nature.¹³¹

Anscombe’s introduction of Wittgenstein invited the Quartet to a different direction for linguistic philosophy. It gave these women the resources to start their joint “No!” to the fact-value dichotomy.

At the same time, Anscombe and Foot also began to read Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* together. Anscombe absorbed and rearticulated Aquinas’ thought without mentioning his name. Anscombe’s daughter, Mary Geach, writes that “Anscombe drew upon [Aquinas] to an unknowable extent: she said to me that it aroused prejudice in people to tell them that a thought came from him; to my sister she said that to a scribe a thought to him made people boringly

¹³⁰ See Mac Cuhail and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 4 “Park Town” Section 4 “Elizabeth & Philippa Begin a Philosophical Conversation”, 158–161. The note from Wittgenstein is in *Philosophical Investigations*, §244.

¹³¹ Mary Midgley, *The Owl of Minerva: A Memoir*, 159.

ignore the interest of it, whether they were for Aquinas or against him.” Foot found that even though the most systematic account of virtues is still in Aristotle, Aquinas uses an Aristotelian framework to work things out in far more detail than Aristotle did; it is possible, therefore, to learn a great deal from Aquinas that one could not have learned from Aristotle. As an atheist, Foot says that “the *Summa Theologica* is one of the best sources we have for moral philosophy, and moreover that St. Thomas’s ethical writings are as useful to the atheist as to the Catholic or other Christian believer.” And it was by reading Aquinas on virtues, Foot writes, that first made her “suspicious of contemporary theories about the relation between ‘fact’ and ‘value’.”¹³²

In her memoir *The Owl of Minerva*, Midgley describes Oxford during this period as full of people with different views and backgrounds, and their discussion was a mix of Aquinas, Wittgenstein, and Aristotle. She recalls Anscombe’s patient explanation about the order she had found in human action; by using Wittgenstein’s method, it turned out to be the same order described by Aristotle. This is the very method used by the Quartet in claiming their joint “No” to the fact-value dichotomy: they knitted together different ideas of what they were studying at Oxford, and they took Wittgenstein’s linguistic method as a tool to address the Aristotelian question of how one ought to live.¹³³ We must also be aware of this intertwining of various perspectives and backgrounds in examining Anscombe’s moral philosophy. In later chapters we will discuss the influence of these various ideas on Anscombe’s moral philosophy.

¹³² The reference of the reading of Aquinas is Mac Cuhail and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 4 “Park Town” Section 4 “Elizabeth & Philippa Begin a Philosophical Conversation”, 161; for Philippa Foot’s original statement, see Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), xi, 1–2; see also Mary Geach, “Introduction”, in *From Plato to Wittgenstein: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2011), xix.

¹³³ The reference of the mix influence of Wittgenstein and Aristotle is Mac Cuhail and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 5 Section 5 “Aristotle Comes to Life”, 203–209; Mary Midgley, *The Owl of Minerva: A Memoir*, 159.

Chapter 2 Aristotelian Ethics

“Anyone who has read Aristotle’s *Ethics* and has also read modern moral philosophy must have been struck by the great contrasts between them”.¹³⁴

– – Elizabeth Anscombe

Section 1 The Law Conception of Ethics

1.1 The Analysis of Thesis 2

At the end of Chapter 1 Section 1.2, “The Importance of the Conceptual Claim”, we argued the importance of Anscombe’s second thesis in MMP and the strategy of investigating the three theses. We should first start with the sense of “moral” in Aristotelian ethics, and with the historical background where it grows its special modern sense, in order to understand Anscombe’s criticism of moral concepts in that thesis. Then we can continue the analysis of the philosophy of psychology in thesis 1 and the criticism of consequentialism in thesis 3. In Chapter 1, we temporarily put aside this strategy in order to prepare the historical context in which Anscombe wrote MMP. In this chapter, we return to the strategy in order to analyze the special modern sense of the term “moral” and its original Aristotelian sense.

Thesis 2 in MMP says:

[T]he concepts of obligation, and duty – *moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say – and of what is *morally* right and wrong, and of the *moral* sense of “ought”, ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it. (MMP, 1, emphasis in original)

This thesis shows that certain moral concepts must be jettisoned, because they have a special

¹³⁴ Anscombe, MMP, 1.

sense of the term “moral”, which sense survives though its background is now lost. Anscombe explains this “special sense” a few pages later:

The ordinary (and quite indispensable) terms “should”, “needs”, “ought”, “must” – acquired this special sense by being equated in the relevant context with “is obliged”, or “is bound”, or “is required to”, in the sense in which one can be obliged or bound by law, or something can be required by law. (MMP, 5)

Regarding the question of how this came about – that is, what does Anscombe mean by “survivals of abandoned background” – she answers: “The answer is in history: between Aristotle and us came Christianity, with its law conception of ethics” (MMP, 5). Anscombe explains that, just as the Christian ethical notion derives from the Torah, there is always a legal meaning in ethical notion.¹³⁵ Under the extended dominance of Christianity, the law conception of ethics – namely, the concepts of being “bound”, “permitted”, or “excused” – are deeply embedded in our language and thought, and the original meaning of some concepts has been replaced.

Anscombe gives an example. The original meaning of the Greek word ἀμαρτάνειν (*hamartanein*) was “to make a mistake”, “to miss the mark”, or “to go wrong”, but it acquired the sense of “sin” in modern moral philosophy. The Latin word *peccatum*, roughly corresponding to ἀμαρτάνειν, shows the same change, as it is already associated with juridical notions like “culpa” and “guilt”. Anscombe similarly claims that Aristotle has terms relevant to virtue such as “disgraceful”, “impious” and “unjust”, but he has “no terms corresponding to ‘illicit’”.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Cora Diamond discusses the law conception of ethics in her paper “The Dog that Gave Himself the Moral Law”. Diamond observes that there are various notions of divine law, and some may be quite unlike the particular ones Anscombe has in mind. Diamond then focuses on the notion of divine law in the Pentateuch and tries to refer to the idea of Yahweh’s law, in order to give a more specific analysis for Anscombe’s idea of divine law. See Cora Diamond, “The Dog that Gave Himself the Moral Law”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 13 (1988): 161–179.

¹³⁶ See MMP, 5–6. There are different arguments about Anscombe’s explanation of the Greek word

Rachael Wiseman analyzes this “earlier conception”. She writes: “The ‘Hebrew-Christian Ethics’ necessitates a form of moral absolutism; it says that certain kinds of acts are prohibited ‘in virtue of their description as such-and-such identifiable kinds of action’, no matter what the cost of inaction, nor what the benefits of action”.¹³⁷ She quotes Anscombe’s description of the Hebrew-Christian Ethic:

[I]t has been characteristic of that ethic to teach that there are certain things forbidden whatever consequences threaten, such as: choosing to kill the innocent for any purpose, however good; vicarious punishment; treachery (by which I mean obtaining a man’s confidence in a grave matter by promises of trustworthy friendship and then betraying him to his enemies); idolatry; sodomy; adultery; making a false profession of faith. (MMP, 10)¹³⁸

hamartanein. For example, Roger Crisp does not agree with Anscombe’s ideas. He admits that “Anscombe is of course right that Aristotle does not claim that we must be virtuous because it is required by divine law” (81), but he does not think that the law conception of ethics led to a change in sense of “ought” such that “the word became equated in the relevant contexts with ‘is obliged’, or ‘is bound’, or ‘is required to’, in the sense in which one can be obliged or bound by law, or something can be required by law is less plausible” (82). Because this sense can be found in Aristotle. Crisp explains that when analyzing the Greek word *hamartanein*, which means “to miss the mark”, “Anscombe fails to consider whether Aristotle may have had in mind the sense of ‘missing the moral mark’, that is, ‘being bound to hit a moral target but failing’” (82). On the contrary, Doyle defends Anscombe’s ideas that the conception of morality is not to be found among the Greeks. He claims that there are various attempts to show that the Greeks did have the notion, and this is because “[t]here is circumstantial evidence here [...] for what I say about the distortively conditioning effect of the moral notions’ being so deeply embedded in our own thinking. [...] Anscombe wanted to dislodge this kind of attitude, but seriously underestimated the difficulty of the task...” (16). Doyle claims that “this distorted thinking about the inescapability of the moral concept” is also the reason why Anscombe’s article is widely and deeply misinterpreted. Doyle then defends Anscombe by introducing the idea of “egoist-eudaimonism”. See Roger Crisp, “Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?”, 79–87, and Doyle, *No Morality, No Self*, 16–23.

¹³⁷ Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe’s Intention*, 33.

¹³⁸ In this paragraph, Anscombe writes about the criticism that consequentialists such as Sidgwick would make of Christian ethics. Here she does not consider the consequentialists to be her comrades

Wiseman adds that this moral absolutism stems from the Ten Commandments, which “are categorical: thou shalt not murder. No ifs, no buts. This ethic does indeed say, ‘You may not do evil that good may come’ (Romans 3:8)”.¹³⁹

Normally, Anscombe says, “to have a law conception of ethics is to hold that what is needed for conformity with the virtue failure in which is the mark of being bad *qua* man (and not merely, say, *qua* craftsman or logician) – that what is needed for *this*, is required by divine law”; she adds that “naturally it is not possible to have such a conception unless you believe in God as a law-giver; like Jews, Stoics, and Christians” (MMP, 6). But as this law conception of ethics has long been dominant, and so is embedded in our language and thought – even though Christianity may be fading from daily life – the concepts of “obligation”, of being bound or required as by a law according to the law conception of ethics, would *remain* in our life. Anscombe gives an example of the word “ought”, that “[it] has become invested in certain contexts with the sense of ‘obligation’, it too will remain to be spoken with a special emphasis and a special feeling in these contexts” (MMP, 6).

In Anscombe’s idea, though, the root of this special “moral” sense has disappeared, so the concepts of “obligation”, of being bound or required as by a law, are now just empty. They are no longer intelligible. Anscombe thinks this emptiness resembles a case where “the notion ‘criminal’ were to remain when criminal law and criminal courts had been abolished and forgotten” (MMP, 6).¹⁴⁰

just because they share the criticism of Christian ethics. Instead, they are using the criticism to promote their theory, which would support the view that “a prohibition such as that on murder does not operate in the face of some consequences”. Anscombe cannot accept this theory either. What she proposes is a third way, distinct from consequentialism and deontology.

¹³⁹ Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe’s Intention*, 33.

¹⁴⁰ Diamond has some additional notes on the Anscombe’s argument. She says that Anscombe’s reference to “survivals” should be understood as survivals of concepts or notion, and not as survivals of words or expression. In Cora Diamond’s own words, “If we are concerned with the survival of a word, there can be no problem about its surviving the disappearance of a framework of thought necessary for the concept it once expressed; for the conclusion then would simply be that it had come to express something else”. See Cora Diamond, “The Dog that Gave Himself the Moral Law”, 161–162.

In general, Anscombe's criticism of these concepts in thesis 2 is that they originate in Christian ethics – and so when Christianity gradually disappears from secular life, the concepts become empty and unintelligible. But these concepts, the law conception of ethics, have been retained in modern moral philosophy. Many philosophers still use them, but when these users are asked to explain the foundation behind the concepts, no one thinks about their role in secular society. Anselm Winfried Müller analyzes different meanings of “ought” in his article “Anscombe on *Ought*”.¹⁴¹ One of them is “ought” by “chimerical law”, because “ought” has “become a word of mere mesmeric force” and “[contains] no intelligible thought: a word retaining the suggestion of force, and apt to have a strong psychological effect, but which no longer signifies a real concept at all”.¹⁴² Anscombe therefore claims that the research on ethics should abandon these moral concepts, because *it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy* based on them. Our work should instead find another foundation – the original sense of “moral” terms, which comes from Aristotelian ethics.¹⁴³

1.2 The Concept without Background

We have concluded that “moral concepts”, criticized in thesis 2, have lost their foundation. But this conclusion requires a presupposition: a concept would become unintelligible when the background in which it originated disappears. We must justify this point. In particular, we must answer the question of the connection between a concept's intelligibility and the background in which the concept originated. A concept originates with a certain background and can be used independently of it; or, perhaps, it must always be understood in the light of that background.

Many philosophers, wishing to prove the independence of a concept from its background, try to justify the rationality of the existence of moral concepts without a Christian background.

¹⁴¹ Anselm Winfried Müller, “Anscombe on *Ought*”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, edited by Roger Teichmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 196–221.

¹⁴² Anselm Winfried Müller, “Anscombe on *Ought*”, 198; quoting MMP, 8.

¹⁴³ See also Duncan Richter, “The Conception of the Architectonic Good in Anscombe's Moral Philosophy”, in *The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 33–50. Richter talks about Anscombe's objection to concepts such as moral obligation and the role of an architectonic good as an alternative to those concepts.

Roger Crisp, for example, says that “It is a little surprising to find the Wittgensteinian Anscombe looking not to use but to etymology”.¹⁴⁴ Crisp means that Anscombe should find the rationality of the modern sense of “ought” according to Wittgenstein’s language-game, and agree to keep the law conception of ethics in a secular society, rather than going back to Aristotle to find the meaning of “moral” in ancient Greek.

In fact, it is reasonable to believe that Anscombe considered the Wittgensteinian solution. She mentions that the Christian law conception of ethics has become deeply embedded in our language and thought, and she thinks that the search to retain a law conception without a divine legislator still holds some interest. This is why Anscombe also notes that can we retain a law conception of ethics when the idea of God has disappeared, or after we have rejected the idea of God. She writes, “[o]ne might be inclined to think that a law conception of ethics could arise only among people who accepted an allegedly divine positive law; that this is not so is shown by the example of the Stoics, who also thought that whatever was involved in conformity to human virtues was required by divine law” (MMP, 5).

Rachael Wiseman claims that, for Anscombe’s, deontological ethical theory must contain the idea of a divine legislator. Wiseman points out that deontology is the main competitor to consequentialism at the time Anscombe writes MMP. Deontology holds that “the rightness or wrongness of an action is conformity or conflict with a moral norm”, and so “Divine Law theory is just one species of deontological theory”. “Other examples are Contractualism and Kantianism.”¹⁴⁵

In fact, in her article “Good and Bad Human Action”,¹⁴⁶ Anscombe confirms that, in writing thesis 2 of MMP, she had Kant in mind. She claims that “the idea of the *morally* good, *morally* bad or *morally* neutral plays a great part at least in middle-class thinking and some philosophical thought in what I’ll call the modern era.” (Emphasis in original) She adds that by “the modern era”, she means “from the late eighteenth century onwards”, because she wants to highlight the influence of Immanuel Kant. Anscombe concludes that Kant’s major influence is

¹⁴⁴ Roger Crisp, “Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?”, 80.

¹⁴⁵ See Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe’s Intention*, 34–35.

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Anscombe, “Good and Bad Human Action” (henceforth GBHA), in GG1, 195–206.

in “emphasizing the motive of duty”. “Duty” here is the idea that “what ought to be done or ought not to be done is somehow derivable from the categorical imperative”, which is “always act so that you can consistently universalize the maxim on which you act”. The categorical imperative, therefore, “connects up the idea of duty and the moral *ought* as a motive with *rational will*.”¹⁴⁷

Anscombe concludes that this Kantian idea leads to two contrasts. The first is that between duty and interest, where “doing something for the motive of duty” and “doing something with enjoyment” are contradictory. The more you enjoy doing something, the less of a pure moral agent you are. The second is the contrast between “doing something for the motive of duty” and “doing something because you are the sort of creature to whose form of life it belongs to do that in that sort of way”. Anscombe’s example here is “to engage in sexual intercourse only in marriage”, which she believes to be the good, wholesome and advantageous form that is the human form of life in respect of sexual activity.¹⁴⁸

All deontological theories other than the Divine Law theory, though, lack a certain idea: the divine law giver, “a Being who is the source of the norms and of their binding force”. Anscombe says that “Kant himself doesn’t think [the categorical imperative] applies to a holy will, that is it doesn’t apply to the will of immaterial spirits or of God.”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, all other deontological theories face the challenge of explaining “how a moral norm can be absolutely binding in the absence of such a Being”, according to Wiseman.¹⁵⁰

Anselm Winfried Müller agrees that these theories that lack a divine law giver, and he summarizes Anscombe’s criticism of alternative sources for the requisite legislation:

The dictates of conscience as well as “the ‘norms’ of a society” are ruled out because they will often allow or even decree atrocities (MMP, 13). The Kantian idea of “legislating for oneself” is incoherent and “absurd,” *inter alia*, because “the concept of legislation requires superior power in the legislator” (MMP, 2 and 13). Deference to

¹⁴⁷ See Anscombe, GBHA, 195. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 195–196.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁵⁰ Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe’s Intention*, 35.

the universe “might lead one to eat the weaker according to the laws of nature.” Contract is given a chance; but “you cannot be in a contract without having contracted” (MMP, 14).¹⁵¹

Not surprisingly, these theories all take moral norms as laws without a lawgiver, and so they are all either nonsense or dangerous, says Anscombe.¹⁵²

After criticizing these theories, Müller writes that it is more plausible to look for “norms” in human virtues, where “norm” has ceased to be roughly equivalent to “a law conception of ethics”, and has arrived instead at an Aristotelian conception.

1.3 The Role of Religion

Another point to note is that Anscombe herself is a Catholic. How, then, in her opposition to the Christian law conception of ethics, does she address the issue of religion and secularism? In opposing moral absolutism in Christian ethics, does Anscombe abandon moral absolutism entirely? Mary Geach mentions this challenge regarding Anscombe’s religious position:

In one of the papers here, Elizabeth Anscombe argues that since analytical philosophy is more a matter of styles of argument and investigation than of doctrine, it ought not to surprise anyone that a practitioner of that philosophy should be a Catholic Christian. Some people, however, have found it surprising that Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe (my parents) should have been distinguished members of the analytic school, while at the same time believing and practicing the Catholic religion. I was told of one American philosopher who belonged to that school saying “They’re good philosophers, aren’t they? But they’re Catholics. They must compartmentalize.” On

¹⁵¹ Anselm Winfried Müller, “Anscombe on *Ought*”, 197. The original reference page numbers for MMP provided by Müller are to the reprinted version in CPP3. I have changed them to the page numbers for MMP when it was first published in *Philosophy* in 1958, for the sake of the uniformity of page numbers in this dissertation.

¹⁵² See also Cora Diamond, “The Dog that Gave Himself the Moral Law”. She discusses “self-legislation” and Vicki Herne’s story about “a dog’s giving himself the moral law”.

the other hand, a graduate student at an English university told me that her supervisor had said that Anscombe's philosophy was narrowly concerned with arguments to support her Catholic positions.¹⁵³

Geach disagrees with those who say that Anscombe's philosophical ideas were meant only to support some Catholic position. According to Geach, sometimes Anscombe would do just the opposite, as "she devised a method, which she recommended [...] of mining Aquinas for helpful philosophical points: this was to prospect for philosophically usable bits in the *Summa theologiae* by considering to what Catholic doctrine her particular philosophical problem was relevant".¹⁵⁴ As for how to study ethics without a religious context, Geach says that, for Anscombe, it can be explained by Aristotelian ethics:

Anscombe maintains that the class of actions which are illicit (i.e., contrary to divine law) is the same class as the class of actions which are contrary to the virtues which one has to have in order to be a good human being. She did not think one needed a divine law conception of ethics to know what a good human being was, or what virtues he had. Aristotle did not speak of divine law, and she saw in him a figure to whom atheists (as well as Christians) could look as an example of how to think about vice and virtue.¹⁵⁵

Geach's explanation for Anscombe echoes Anscombe's own proposal to return to Aristotelian ethics in MMP. Wiseman quotes the same passage to respond to Simon Blackburn's challenge to Anscombe. In his view of *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, Blackburn writes that Anscombe offers "a version of the Dostoyevskian claim that if God is dead everything is permitted".¹⁵⁶ Wiseman summarizes Blackburn's criticism as follow: "If

¹⁵³ Mary Geach, "Introduction", in GG2, xiii.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁵⁵ Mary Geach, "Letter to the Editor", *Times Literary Supplement* (Oct 7, 2005).

¹⁵⁶ Simon Blackburn, "Simply Wrong", *Times Literary Supplement* (Sept 20, 2005); quoted by Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, 35.

one takes it that a commitment to moral absolutism just is a commitment to deontological ethics (of which the Hebrew-Christian ethic is a species) then Anscombe's claim that Divine Law theory is the only respectable deontological theory, is equivalent to the claim: if you don't believe in God then there is no such thing as an ethics of prohibition".¹⁵⁷ Given that Anscombe is Catholic, Blackburn complains that "[she] had no intention of jettisoning the concepts of moral obligation and duty, which are needed to frame her other principle claim, which is that certain things are forbidden, whatever the consequences".¹⁵⁸

Wiseman notes that Blackburn's reading of Anscombe is quite wrong, because he does not see something about the way Anscombe frames the ethics of prohibition. She does so not with the moral sense of "ought", but with Aristotelian ethics, thus making herself able to "generate a version of moral absolutism which was not deontological in character".¹⁵⁹

Wiseman also comments on Geach's explanation that "the claim that 'the class of actions which are illicit ... is the same class as the class of actions which are contrary to the virtues' is an exciting one, and holds out the promise of a *secular* absolutist ethics which marches in step with one which is Christian".¹⁶⁰ At the same time, according to Wiseman, by the time of MMP, Anscombe precipitates the revival of virtue ethics and its sibling, moral psychology, as part of the search for the answer to the value and purpose of human life.

¹⁵⁷ Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, 35.

¹⁵⁸ Simon Blackburn, "Simply Wrong"; quoted by Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, 35.

¹⁵⁹ Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, 35.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

Section 2 Two Kinds of “Moral”

Besides the criticism of the law conception of ethics, Anscombe presents a contradiction between the modern sense of “moral” and its original sense:

Anyone who has read Aristotle’s *Ethics* and has also read modern moral philosophy must have been struck by the great contrasts between them. The concept which are prominent among the moderns seem to be lacking, or at any rate buried or far in the background, in Aristotle. Most noticeably, the term “moral” itself, which we have by direct inheritance from Aristotle, just doesn’t seem to fit, in its modern sense, into an account of Aristotelian ethics. Aristotle distinguishes virtues as moral and intellectual. (MMP, 1)

According to Anscombe, there are two kinds of “moral”, and they are not compatible. One is Aristotle’s sense, and the other is the modern sense. I begin here with the analysis of Aristotle’s sense, and then discuss how the modern sense deviates from it.

2.1 Aristotle’s Term of Moral

2.1.1 Two Kinds of Virtues

In MMP, Anscombe’s analysis of the term “moral” in Aristotelian ethics starts with the idea that “Aristotle distinguishes virtues as moral and intellectual” (MMP, 1). This distinction indicates that the term “moral” exists as a kind of virtue; and in parallel with the *moral virtue*, then, there is also the *intellectual virtue*.¹⁶¹ In her article “Good and Bad Human Action”, Anscombe

¹⁶¹ Anscombe says that “Aristotle distinguishes virtues as moral and intellectual.” And Aristotle’s words in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1 Chapter 13 seem to confirm this distinction. But these two kinds are not the complete categories of virtues, but only the categories of human virtue. In the same chapter, Aristotle also says that “It is also clear that the virtue we must investigate is human virtue. For it is in fact the human good we are looking for, as well as human happiness. By human virtue though, we mean not that *of the body* but that *of the soul*; and happiness, we say, is an activity of the soul” (*NE*, 1102a15–19). Therefore, we can be sure that what Aristotle is talking about here is human virtue. Certainly, since there is human virtue, there must also be non-human virtue. For example, the virtue of body is non-human virtue.

discusses these two senses of “moral”, where she starts with the original form of the term “moral” in ancient Greek. She writes that “the idea of what is *morally* good, bad or neutral goes back at least to Aristotle” (emphasis in original), and “moral” is a translation of $\eta\theta\iota\kappa\eta$.

Anscombe points out that the translation of $\eta\theta\iota\kappa\eta$, *etymologically* speaking, is the English word “ethical”, and Aristotle calls some virtues “ethical” virtues. But she finds it odd in English, so she prefers to use “moral” virtues, because it has a more familiar ring.¹⁶² We ought to note a translation problem here. In various English translations of Aristotle’s works, “moral virtues” are also known as “virtues of character”, and “intellectual virtues” as “virtues of thought”, among other monikers. Here and below, I continue to use Anscombe’s translation, “moral virtues” and “intellectual virtues”.

In “Good and Bad Human Action”, Anscombe goes on to say that “a great part of Aristotle’s point is to distinguish between ‘*moral*’ and ‘*intellectual*’ virtues” (GBHA, 196, emphasis in original), where “moral virtues” are virtues of actions and feelings, such as justice, courage, and temperance; while “intellectual virtues” are things like habitual soundness of practical judgement, skill in production and philosophical wisdom. This view is consistent with Aristotle’s distinction in *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he classifies “theoretical wisdom, comprehension, and practical wisdom” as intellectual virtues, and “generosity and temperance” as moral virtues.

2.2.2 Three Kinds of Soul

In addition to these specific examples, Aristotle says that “Virtues are defined in accord with [the different parts of the soul]” (*NE*, 1103a4). In order to understand the difference between intellectual virtues and moral virtues, then, we must first look at the soul.

According to Aristotle, the soul has three parts: the *vegetative soul* (the part without reason), the *desiring soul* (the part sharing reason), and the *rational soul* (the part fully equipped with reason).

The first and third parts are easier to understand. The *vegetative soul* is the cause of nutrition and growth, and it is called “vegetative” because humans share it with other beings,

¹⁶² See GBHA, 196.

including “vegetables” or plants. Because of this commonality, Aristotle thinks that this soul relates to non-human virtue, and so it cannot be the part of the soul we wish to discuss in ethics, because it is least concerned with the evaluation of a good person and a bad one (*NE*, 1102a32–1102b12).¹⁶³ It is the *rational soul* that is related to human virtue. As the fully rational part, “it exhorts [people] correctly towards what is best” (*NE*, 1102b16). In other words, the rational soul guides people in the right direction for action.

The *desiring soul* is more complicated. In this part we find something fighting against reason and resisting it; as Aristotle says, “they also have by nature something else within them besides reason, apparently, which fights against reason and resists it” (*NE*, 1102b15–17). But people cannot and will not be guided absolutely by those things – because it has a share of reason, reason will fight against them. As Aristotle puts it, “this part apparently also has a share of reason, as we said at any rate, it is obedient to the reason of a self-controlled person. Furthermore, that of a temperate and courageous person, presumably, listens still better, since there it chimes with reason in everything” (*NE*, 1102b24–28). Therefore, “it is able to listen to reason and obey it” (*NE*, 1102b30).

Aristotle uses the example of obeying the rule of fathers to express the function of reason in the desiring soul. He says that this part “has reason, then, in the way we are said to have the reason of our fathers and friends and not in the way we are said to have of mathematics. The fact, though, that the non-rational part is persuaded in some way by reason is revealed by the practice of warning people and of all the different practice of admonishing and exhorting them” (*NE*, 1102b30).

In short, this part of the soul is jointly affected by two different forces that push in opposite

¹⁶³ About the vegetative soul, Aristotle writes: “The virtue of this capacity is apparently something shared and not distinctively human. For this sort of capacity of soul is one that we suppose is present in all things that take in nourishment, even embryos, and that this same one is also present in completely grown animals, since that is more reasonable than to suppose a different one to be present in them” (*NE*, 1102a33–1102b2). Aristotle also uses an example involving “sleep”: “this part and this capacity seem to be most active in sleep, and a good person and a bad one are least clearly distinguished during sleep...” (*NE*, 1102b4–5) and “we should leave the nutritive part aside, since by nature it has no share in human virtue” (*NE*, 1102b10–11).

directions. In the entanglement of these forces, Aristotle says, when the force of reason prevails, the person is a self-controlled one; when the force of resistance exceeds reason, the person is without self-control.¹⁶⁴ No matter the situation, we praise the soul's rational part.

I wish to note one other thing about the categorization of the soul. Originally, Aristotle classifies the soul into two parts, "one part of the soul is non-rational whereas another part has reason" (*NE*, 1102a27). In this classification, the desiring soul, sharing reason but not fully equipped with it, is neither completely non-rational nor completely rational. If we classify the soul's parts simply as rational and non-rational, then, no matter which category we put the desiring soul in, that category will be doubled. As Aristotle says, "If we should say that it too has reason, however, then the part has reason will be double as well – one part having it fully and within itself, the other as something able to listen to it as to a father" (*NE*, 1103a1–3). Thus, if we classify the soul based on whether or not it has a share of what is rational, we could end up doing one of two things. First, there is one kind of soul in the rational part and two kinds of soul in the non-rational part – the desiring part belongs to the non-rational part, because it is not fully controlled by reason. Second, there are two kinds of soul in the rational part and one kind of soul in the non-rational part – the desiring part belongs to the rational part, because it shares in reason to some extent. In this way, the issue is a problem only for how we organize our language; the core feature of the desiring soul does not change whichever way we go, and this distinction is consistent with the classification of virtues. The part of the soul that shares reason and obeys it as listening to a father, corresponds to moral virtues; the fully rational part of the soul corresponds to intellectual virtues.

¹⁶⁴ To explain, Aristotle uses the example of limbs: "exactly as with paralyzed limbs (when their owners deliberately choose to move them to the right, they do the contrary and move off to the left), so it is in the case of the soul as well, since the impulses of people who lack self-control are in contrary directions" (*NE*, 1102b17–20). One apparent difference is that we could just not be seeing the moving of soul, but only the motion of limbs; as Aristotle says, "In the case of the body, to be sure, we see the part that is moving in the wrong direction, whereas in the case of the soul we do not see it. But presumably we should nonetheless acknowledge that in the soul as well there is something besides reason, countering it and going against it" (*NE*, 1102b22–25).

2.2.3 The Relation between Two Kinds of Virtue

We therefore see that, in Aristotelian ethics, intellectual virtue and moral virtue are two separated parts of virtue. But they are not unrelated. In GBHA, Anscombe writes “it is impossible to have a moral virtue without any intellectual virtue, most generally without the first one mentioned” (GBHA, 196). The reason why is that the habitual soundness of practical judgement is part of a moral virtue in the exercise of using judgement. The moral virtue “courage”, for example, is not merely boldness in the face of *any* danger, it requires sound judgement about the danger and whether it is worth facing. This judgment would include an assessment of what kind of risk we will face, what we might lose by facing such a risk, what consequences we might cause, and so on. Anscombe sees the moral virtue “justice” in the same way – we need a sound judgement “about fair division, or about the balance of different creditors’ more or less urgent needs, also bringing in other things, such as size of a debt and time proposed to be spent in paying it” (GBHA, 197). This is why she says that “a fool can hardly be either just or brave” (GBHA, 197).

2.2 The Modern Sense of Moral

2.2.1 The Absence of Intellectual Virtues

In modern moral philosophy, though, Anscombe says that the relation between “moral”, “intellectual” and “virtue” have been confused:

Have some of what [Aristotle] calls “intellectual” virtues what *we* should call a “moral” aspect? It would seem so; the criterion is presumably that a failure in an “intellectual” virtue – like that of having good judgement in calculating how to bring about something useful, say in municipal government – may be *blameworthy*. But – it may reasonably be asked – cannot *any* failure be made a matter of blame or reproach? Any derogatory criticism, say of the workmanship of a product or the design of a machine, can be called blame or reproach. So we want to put in the word “morally” again: sometimes such a failure may be *morally* blameworthy, sometimes not. (MMP, 1–2, emphasis in original)

For Anscombe, modern philosophers take the moral part as the entire content of virtue. She claims that “some of what [Aristotle] calls ‘intellectual’ virtues” have “what we should call a ‘moral’ aspect”. This phenomenon is strange from the perspective of Aristotle’s ethics, because intellectual virtues and moral virtues are two disjoint kinds of virtue. If there is an overlap between the two kinds of virtue, how is the overlap possible? Anscombe answers that “a failure in an ‘intellectual’ virtue – like that of having good judgment in calculating how to bring about something useful, say in municipal government – may be blameworthy”. In the modern context, she thinks, the term “blame” expresses an exclusively moral aspect.

The resulting situation is tricky. Anscombe continues to ask, “cannot any failure [not only moral ones] be made of a matter of blame or reproach?” (MMP, 1). The answer seems to be oblivious, because “the workmanship of a product or the design of a machine can be called blame or reproach” (MMP, 1), and those things clearly have nothing to do with morals. For that reason, she says that “sometimes such a failure may be morally blameworthy, sometimes not” (MMP, 2). Anscombe thinks the reason for the strange phenomenon mentioned above, therefore, is that, in the context of modern moral philosophy, the term “praise” and “blame” are wrongly tied to the term “moral”. In fact, in Aristotelian ethics, “praise” and “blame” relates to virtues. (*NE*, 1101b10–1102a4)¹⁶⁵ Compared with Aristotle’s meaning of “moral”, then, the mistake of modern moral philosophy is to give the term “moral” some meaning which does not belong to it exclusively.

In GBHA, Anscombe also discusses the confusing use of “intellectual” and “moral” in modern times. In her own words, “In the way in which moderns use the word ‘moral’ ... there is a *moral* obligation to have good judgement, hence a *moral* obligation to have intellectual virtue. Thus, ... our modern use of the term ‘moral’ departs from the Aristotelian use of it” (GBHA, 197, emphasis in original). Thus, this passage confirms the analysis we

¹⁶⁵ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a4–10. “Virtues are also defined in accord with this difference, since we say that some are intellectual virtues, others are moral virtues. Theoretical wisdom, comprehension, and practical wisdom are intellectual virtues; generosity and temperance moral virtues. For when we talk about someone’s character, we do not say that he is theoretically wise or has comprehension but that he is mild-mannered or temperate. But we do also praise a theoretically wise person with reference to his state, and it is the praiseworthy ones that we call virtues”.

have been giving of MMP.

2.2.2 The Absence of Intellectual Virtues and the “Ought” in Thesis 2

The misuse of the term “moral”, namely the extra meaning of “intellectual” imposed on it, exists not only in uses of “praise” and “blame”, but also in the use of modal verbs. As previously discussed, the second thesis of MMP shows that we should abandon the moral sense of “ought”. Anscombe explains that the term “ought”, along with the terms “should” and “need”, relate to good and bad. (MMP, 5) As in their Aristotelian senses, good and bad concern not only moral evaluations; for example, it is often said that “machinery needs oil, or should or ought to be oiled, in that running without oil is bad for it, or it runs badly without oil” (MMP, 5). Here, the term “ought” is not used in some special “moral” sense.

In the context of modern moral philosophy, though, the modal verbs, such as “ought”, “should”, and “need” receive a special “moral” sense. In this special sense, the terms “imply some absolute verdict (like one of guilty/ not guilty on a man) on what is described in the ‘ought’ sentences used in certain types of context: not merely the contexts that Aristotle would call ‘moral’ but also some of the context that he would call ‘intellectual’” (MMP, 5).

Anscombe’s comments in GBHA underscore inconsistency between the modern and the ancient Greek senses of modal verbs. She says that “you can’t even formulate those propositions about *moral* obligation to have good judgment or intellectual virtue in Aristotle’s language” (GBHA, 197, emphasis in original). She explains why: when we say “a human being *needs* to have the intellectual virtue of good sense in order to have any moral virtue”, the term “needs”, which in the Aristotelian lexicon has no moral sense, would be understood in modern times as a *moral* need, or a *moral* obligation.

2.2.3 The Consequence of the Absence of Intellectual Virtues

What is the consequence of ignoring the distinction between intellectual virtues and moral virtues? Given that virtues are associated with good and bad, and given that virtues are related to praise and blame, there is a difference between moral and non-moral praise and blame.

In GBHA, Anscombe discusses the difference between “blame” and “moral blame”. She says that we do not praise a brain-damaged spastic cripple who can neither speak nor move,

and we count life in that state as highly defective. If we were to blame it, we would not be using the term “blame” in a moral sense. This defect is not voluntary, after all. Thus, Anscombe says that “when the defect is voluntary, *then* we call the blame with which it is blamed *moral* blame; otherwise not.” (GBHA, 197–198, emphasis in original)

The standard is the same for “praise”. As Anscombe note, “you have now given a sense to ‘moral’ as an adjective attached to ‘blame’ and ‘praise’. *Moral* blame is blame of some defect that is, or is supposed to be, voluntary; moral praise, likewise, praise of something good and advantageous that is or is supposed to be voluntary” (GBHA, 198, emphasis in original).¹⁶⁶

Modern moral philosophy misuses the sense of “moral”, therefore, and has ignored the distinction between intellectual and moral virtues, with the result that it conflates all praise and blame as moral praise and blame. It also gives the meaning of an absolute moral verdict to all modal verbs, such as “should”, “ought” and “need”. The inevitable consequence is that modern moral philosophy would ignore the role of the “voluntary” in human actions, as well as the importance of “intellectual virtues”. Nevertheless, in my view, the concept of “voluntary action” is essential in Anscombe’s action theory; and in addition, intellectual virtues, especially practical wisdom, play a fundamental role in Anscombe’s ethics. I give more detailed discussion of these points in Chapter 3.

¹⁶⁶ Anscombe says that this standard is not entirely satisfactory, because defects in skill may be voluntary but do not concern any moral aspect. For example, someone may know he writes rotten verses, and he does not wish to do any better; someone may spell badly and does not care to do it correctly; like for cooking or other activities. These are all cases where people act badly voluntarily. They are blameworthy, but they have not reached a reasonable account of “moral” as an adjective of “praise” and “blame”. See GBHA, 198. Here, Anscombe also presents a comment arguing that Aristotle offers an idea very similar to one of Kant’s. It would be “an Aristotelian analogue to a sort of Kantian duty-for-duty’s sake is to be seen in Aristotle’s statement of a certain *condition* of virtuous action: namely, that virtuous acts must be chosen and chosen for themselves (*NE*, 1105a33).” But Anscombe thinks Aristotle and Kant are very different in spirit, because “the Aristotelian passage about virtuous acts being chosen *for themselves* means that to be an act of the virtue of justice an act has to be *chosen* precisely *qua* just. That is not the only condition given: there is a prior condition of knowledge – i.e. you have not only to *think* that what you propose doing is just, but your understanding has to be correct; and there is a subsequent condition, namely that you act out of a settled disposition to act justly.” On the other hand, “Kant has a loftiness of thought on these subjects quite unlike Aristotle”. See GBHA, 198–199.

Section 3 Understanding the Philosophy of Psychology with *Nicomachean Ethics*

3.1 The Importance of Virtue

Many people see Anscombe as a critic and not a constructor. In thesis 1, though, at the beginning of MMP, she gives the constructive aspect of her view – the philosophy of psychology. She writes:

In present-day philosophy an explanation is required how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one; to give such an explanation belongs to ethics; but it cannot even be begun until we are equipped with a sound philosophy of psychology. For the proof that an unjust man is a bad man would require a positive account of justice as a “virtue”. This part of the subject-matter of ethics is, however, completely closed to us until we have an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is – a problem, not of ethics, but of conceptual analysis – and how it relates to the actions in which it is instanced: a matter which I think Aristotle did not succeed in really making clear. For this we certainly need an account at least of what a human action is at all, and how its description as “doing such-and-such” is affected by its motive and by the intention or intentions in it; and for this an account of such concepts is required. (MMP, 4–5)

This quotation shows that present-day ethics must explain “how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one”. For Anscombe, this explanation requires a sound philosophy of psychology. This philosophy of psychology investigates “virtue” and “human action”. Later in MMP, Anscombe says the same thing. The philosophy of psychology “begin[s] with ‘action’, ‘intention’, ‘pleasure’, ‘wanting’”; then “it might be possible to advance to considering the concepts ‘virtue’”; finally, with the investigation of “action”, “intention” and “virtue”, “we should be beginning some sort of a study of ethics” (MMP, 15).

The philosophy of psychology would start with an investigation into “human action”, and then would give a conceptual analysis of “virtue”. Finally, it would arrive at research on “ethics”. But Anscombe does not specifically illustrate the transition from “human action” to “virtue”, and from “virtue” to “ethics”.

Apparently Anscombe presumes that all her readers are familiar with Aristotelian ethics. For this reason, she notes only briefly that “Aristotle did not succeed in really making clear [how an account of virtue relates to the actions in which it is instanced]” (MMP, 5). If we wish to see Anscombe’s complete thinking on the philosophy of psychology, we must understand the connection between these concepts in Aristotelian ethics.

3.2 Virtue and Good

3.2.1 *Good, End, and Happiness*

First, Anscombe says that “In present-day philosophy an explanation is required how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one; to give such an explanation belongs to ethics” (MMP, 4). Here we see that Anscombe would have us use terms such as “good” and “bad” with non-specifically moral senses in ethical research. She is not alone here. Aristotle talks about “good” at the very beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Aristotle says that “Every craft and every method of inquiry and likewise every action and deliberate choice seems to seek some good. That is why they correctly declare that the good is ‘that which all seek’” (*NE*, 1094a1–3). Aristotle also calls the target that everything aims for the “end”, for example, “health is the end of medicine, a ship of shipbuilding, victory of generalship, and wealth of household management” (*NE*, 1094a6–9). Among all these ends, there is some final ends, some chief good. Aristotle defines the “chief good” as the end we choose for itself, or for its own sake; on the contrary, other ends we choose for the sake of something else cannot be the final and chief one.¹⁶⁷

There is another name for this chief good: happiness. Happiness has special characteristics. Aristotle says, “Since there are evidently many ends, and we choose some of them because of something else, as we do wealth, flutes, and instruments generally, it is clear that not all ends are complete. But the best one is apparently something complete” (*NE*, 1097a25–28). In other words, we choose most ends for the sake of something else; therefore, those ends so chosen are

¹⁶⁷ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1094a19–23: “If, then, there is some end of things doable in action that we wish for because of itself, and the others because of it, and we do not choose everything because of something else, it is clear that this will be the good – that is, the best good”.

incomplete. The final end should be something we choose not for the sake of anything else but for its own sake; it would therefore be complete. Aristotle thinks that this complete end is “happiness”: “Happiness seems to be most like [the chief good], since it we always choose because of itself and never because of something else” (*NE*, 1097a35).

There arises here a question about whether we do in fact choose honor, pleasure and many other virtues for their own sake. Aristotle claims that we do choose them for themselves, but we could also choose them for the sake of happiness; happiness, on the other hand, cannot be chosen for the sake of other things. In Aristotle’s view, happiness is the only thing people choose for itself but not for something else; therefore, with respect to completeness, happiness is the final end and chief good. Another feature of the final end is “self-sufficiency”. As Aristotle says, “The same conclusion also apparently follows from self-sufficiency, since the complete good seems to be self-sufficient” (*NE*, 1097b6–7). The meaning of “self-sufficiency” here is that which makes a life choiceworthy¹⁶⁸ and lacking in nothing – and this is exactly what happiness does.¹⁶⁹

3.2.2 Virtue and the Good State of Things

After understanding the relationship between ethics and “good”, we must explain why “an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is” is beneficial for our research on ethics. The answer lies in Aristotelian ethics.

Aristotle says that “every virtue, regardless of what thing it is the virtue of, both completes the good state of that thing and makes it perform its function well”. He also gives an example involving the body: “the virtue of an eye makes both the eye and its function excellent, since it

¹⁶⁸ For “choiceworthy”, see Aristotle, *NE*, 1097b14–16: “In any case, we posit that what is self-sufficient is what, on its own, makes a life choiceworthy and lacking in nothing, and this, we think, is what happiness is like”; and Aristotle, *NE*, 1097a30–35: “We say that what is intrinsically worth pursuing is more complete than what is worth pursuing because of something else, that what is never choiceworthy because of something else is more complete than things that are both intrinsically choiceworthy and choiceworthy because of it, and that what is unconditionally complete, then, is what is always intrinsically choiceworthy and never choiceworthy because of something else.”

¹⁶⁹ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1097b20–21: “Happiness is apparently something complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of what is doable in action”.

is by dint of the eye's virtue that we see well" (*NE*, 1106b14–19).

Aristotle clarifies with other examples as well. He says, "Similarly, the virtue of a horse makes the horse excellent – that is, good at running, carrying its rider, and standing firm against enemies" (*NE*, 1106b19–20). Furthermore, he believes that if this explanation applies to the case of eyes and of horses, it should also work for the virtue of human beings in general: "If, then, this holds in every case, the virtue of a human being will also be the state by dint of which he becomes a good human being and will perform his own function well" (*NE*, 1106b20–23).

We can now understand Anscombe's statement that ethics is "completely closed to us until we have an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is". It is because of virtue's dual function: first, it completes the good state of things; second, it makes things perform their function well.¹⁷⁰

Aristotle says that "the good state of things" and "the well performance of their function" are examples. For instance, the good a flute player aims at is "playing the flute well"; similarly, a sculptor aims at sculpting something well. Playing flute, sculpting or other crafts are exactly the functions of these craftsmen. If we want to know about the special kind of good for human beings, we must therefore find the functions of human beings in general.¹⁷¹

So then, what is the connection between "virtue" and "function"? Aristotle says that "the virtue of a horse makes the horse excellent – that is, good at running, carrying its rider, and standing firm against enemies" (*NE*, 1106b19–20). As running, carrying a rider, and standing firm against enemies are functions of a horse, so also it is the virtue of the horse to perform those functions well. If this explanation applies to horses, Aristotle thinks, it should also work for human beings: "If, then, this holds in every case, the virtue of a human being will also be

¹⁷⁰ The "virtue" we talk about here means all kinds of virtue as Aristotle says, "every virtue". Therefore, it includes not only human virtue but also non-human virtue. This is also the reason why Aristotle uses horses and eyes as examples. What Anscombe cares about, though, is human virtue. From this universally applicable explanation about virtues, we could know that the crucial feature of human virtue is "making a good human being and perform human being's function well".

¹⁷¹ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1197b25–28: "For just as for a flute player, a sculptor, every craftsman, and in general for whatever has some function and action, the good – the doing well – seems to lie in the function, the same also seems to hold of a human being, if indeed there is some functions that is his."

the state by dint of which he becomes a good human being and will perform his own function well” (*NE*, 1106b20–23).

3.2.3 Different Lives, Souls, and Human Good

Human good is not the good related to humans, but the good unique *to* humans. Beginning with human life, therefore, Aristotle tries to find what is unique to it. He classifies life into three kinds: the life of nutrition and growth (plants), the life of perception (animals), the active life of rational principle (human beings). The first category humans share with plants, and the second with animals. The third category, some practical living by means of reason, is the special human good.¹⁷²

Aristotle concludes that “the function of a human being is activity of the soul in accord with reason or not without reason...” (*NE*, 1098a8–9). We have already said that, for Aristotle, the soul has three parts: the vegetative, the desiring, and the rational parts. We have also said that the desiring soul and the rational soul are, respectively, partially rational and completely rational. So when Aristotle says “activity of the soul in accord with reason”, he means activities *of the rational soul*; “activity of the soul not without reason” means activities of the desiring soul.

The connection exists not only between the function of human beings and the activity of the soul. Because the distinction of virtues relates to different soul-activities, the function of human beings also stems from the soul: “This is unconditionally so in all cases when we add to the function the superiority that is in accord with the virtue...” (*NE*, 1098a10–11). Here we see that, when we talk about the best performance of the human function, it must be performance in accord with virtue. The word “virtue” here means “moral” virtue when we talk about activities of the desiring soul, and “intellectual virtue” when talking about activities of the

¹⁷² See Aristotle, *NE*, 1097b35–1098a4: “For living is evidently shared with plants as well, but we are looking for what is special. Hence we must set aside the living that consists in nutrition and growth. Next in order is some sort of perceptual living. But this too is evidently shared with horse and ox and every animal. There remains, then, some sort of practical living of the part that has reason. And of what has reason, one part has it by dint of obeying reason, the other by dint of actually having it and exercising thought”.

rational soul.

We can now understand what “human life” and “human function” are – as Aristotle says, “a human being’s function is supposed to be a sort of living, and this living is supposed to be activity of soul and actions that involve reason” (*NE*, 1098a14–16). A good or an excellent man, then, is a person who, under the guidance of virtues, can maximize his function as a human being: that is, who can maximize his ability to live a rational life. In Aristotle’s own words, “it is characteristic of an excellent man to do these well and nobly, and each is completed well when it is in accord with the virtue that properly belongs to it – if all this is so, the human good turns out to be activity of the soul in accord with virtue and, if there are more virtues than one, then in accord with the best and most complete” (*NE*, 1098a16–19).

If we look back to Anscombe’s words, we see that she says similar things: “In present-day philosophy an explanation is required how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one ...” (MMP, 4). Her words are “bad man” and “bad action”, with the corresponding “good man” and “good action”. Therefore, Anscombe uses the narrow meaning of what is good – namely, the human good. At the same time, we should also understand that the background of Anscombe’s criticism of “moral obligation” in MMP is rooted in Aristotle. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that “the good lies in the function”, and “human good” is that human beings live the rational life through rational activities of the soul and thus achieve happiness. Achieving happiness relies on virtues, and there are two kinds of virtues leading to different but equally praiseworthy rational life. It is correct to claim, then, that a just man is a good man; but if the sequence of reasoning is reversed, and the claim then becomes that a good man is a man of moral virtues, then the connotation for the term “good” narrows. Anscombe believes that many moral concepts are misused in this way, because people overlook the original and complete meaning of the good.

3.3 Virtue and Human Action

3.3.1 Virtue and Action

Anscombe also discusses “human action”. She says that “For this we certainly need an account at least of what a *human action* is at all, and how its description as “doing such-and-such” is affected by its motive and by the intention or intentions in it; and for this an account of such

concepts is required” (MMP, 4–5, emphasis in original). In this quotation, the “for this” refers to “an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is”. We can therefore see that, for Anscombe, we must understand “human action” in order to understand virtues well. When discussing virtues, Anscombe opines that it is “a matter which I think Aristotle did not succeed in really making clear”. I claim here, though, that even if Anscombe thinks Aristotle did not succeed in making their connection clear, we still need to know Aristotle’s idea in order to understand Anscombe. I wish to add that not only the idea of “virtue”, but also Anscombe’s idea of “human action” comes from Aristotle. In some respects, Anscombe has gone beyond Aristotle, but the resources she uses are still Aristotelian.

When talking about the investigation of virtue, Aristotle also says the following:

The branch of philosophy we are dealing with at present is not purely theoretical like the others, because it is not in order to acquire knowledge that we are considering what virtues is, but to become good people – otherwise they would be no point in it. So we must consider the matter of our actions, and in particular how they should be performed, since, as we have said, they are responsible for our states developing in one way or another. (*NE*, 1103b27–33)

Here we see that, for Aristotle, research on “virtue” is not purely theoretical; this is because our goal is not just to acquire knowledge about what virtue is. The goal is also to become good people, and so we must also attend to human actions.

Additionally, when explaining how to obtain virtues and how to become a virtuous person, Aristotle says that virtue is something we achieve by action: “It is also clear that none of the virtues of character comes about in us naturally” (*NE*, 1103a19). What is obtained from nature is first the capacity, and then the ability to show the capacity in actions. For non-natural things it is the opposite, as “in all cases where something arises in us by nature, we first acquire the capacities and later exhibit the activities” (*NE*, 1103a27–28).

Aristotle gives a few examples to explain the distinction between things gained by nature and those acquired by habits. For example, senses are things acquired by nature, because they are capacities owned by humans before they are ever used; in other words, people do not acquire

vision by seeing often, nor audition by hearing.¹⁷³

On the contrary, since we acquire virtues with behaviors and activities, it is our actions that determine whether we gain or lose them. Aristotle starts his explanation for this point from the familiar example of skills. It is from playing the lyre that people become good and bad lyre-players; it is from building well that people become good builders, and from building badly that they become bad builders.¹⁷⁴ It is the same with virtues, “by acting as we do in our dealings with other men, some of us become just, others unjust; and by acting as we do in the face of danger, and by becoming habituated to feeling fear or confidence, some of us become courageous, others cowardly. The same goes for cases of appetites and anger; by conducting themselves in one way or the other in such circumstances, some become temperate and even-tempered, others intemperate and bad-temperate” (*NE*, 1103b14–20). After listing specific virtues, Aristotle concludes that different states come from corresponding activities. We must therefore pay attention to our actions, especially the character behind those actions. That is the difference in action that leads to states – to either virtues or vices.¹⁷⁵

3.3.2 *Voluntary Action and Deliberate Choice*

Apart from “human action”, Anscombe also mentions “wanting”, “pleasure” and “intention”. Including them shows that the object of our research is not all actions but some of them, at least or some elements of them. When Anscombe speaks of “intention” and “action”, she seems to have Aristotle’s idea of “voluntary action” in her mind. In Book 3 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, we

¹⁷³ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1103a 27–31: “This is clear in the case of the senses, since we did not acquire them by seeing often or hearing often; we had them before we used them, and did not acquire them by using them”.

¹⁷⁴ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1103a31–1103b3: “Virtues, however, we acquire by first exercising them. The same is true with skills, since what we need to learn before doing, we learn by doing; for example, we become builders by building, and lyre-players by playing the lyre. So too we become just by doing just actions, temperate by temperate actions, and courageous by courageous action”.

¹⁷⁵ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1103b20–26: “In a word, then, like states arise from like activities. This is why we must give a certain character to our activities, since it is on the differences between them that the resulting states depend. So it is not unimportant how we are habituated from our early days; indeed, it makes a huge difference – or rather all the difference”.

can see that, for Aristotle, “virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, (...) and it is the voluntary ones that are praised and blamed (...)” (*NE*, 1109b30–31).

What is a voluntary action? Aristotle thinks it is the kind of actions where “the starting point of [the agent’s] moving his instrumental parts in actions of this sort is in fact internal to himself.” (*NE*, 1110a15–18) It is therefore up to the agent whether to do an action or not.

In order to understand voluntary actions more clearly, Aristotle presents their opposite, the involuntary ones. There are two kinds of involuntary actions: one comes about by force, one by ignorance. The first kind is any action driven by external forces;¹⁷⁶ the second kind involves a situation where the agent does not know what he is doing.¹⁷⁷ For both voluntary and involuntary actions, Aristotle mentions many situations in which making the distinction is not very easy. He thinks these situations should not be rashly distinguished, because many differences lie in the particulars. Here, though, we need only know that actions related to virtues are voluntary ones, where the starting point is internal to the agent.

Aristotle then introduces the idea of “deliberate choice” and explains that “[it] is apparently something voluntary, although not the same as what is voluntary, which extends more broadly. For children and other animals share in what is voluntary but not in deliberate choice, and sudden actions are voluntary, we say, but are not in accord with deliberate choice” (*NE*, 1111b7–10).

By comparing it with “appetite”, “wish”, and “belief”, Aristotle then outlines the characteristics of “deliberate choice”. Compared with “appetite” and “spirit”, “deliberate choice” is not something shared by non-rational creatures. Compared with “wish”, which could be about

¹⁷⁶ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1109b1–3: “Also, what is forced is what has an external starting-point, that is, the sort of starting-point where the agent, or the one being affected, contributes nothing as, for example, if the wind or human beings with control over him took him off somewhere”.

¹⁷⁷ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1110b17–21 and 1110b25–27: “All of what is done because of ignorance, however, is not voluntary, although it is contra-voluntary when involving pain and regret. For a person who has done whatever it is because of ignorance, but sees nothing repulsive in his action, has not acted voluntarily, because he did not know what he was doing.” “Acting because of ignorance, however, seems to be different from acting in ignorance. For the person who is drunk or angry does not seem to act because of ignorance but because of one of the aforementioned conditions, although he does not act knowingly but in ignorance”.

impossible things, “deliberate choice” is only about things that can come about, and “wish” is more for the end, while “deliberate choice” is of the things that further the end. Compared with “beliefs”, while they are divided into false and true, “deliberate choices” divided into bad and good. As it is not appetite, spirit, wish, nor belief, Aristotle indicates that “deliberate choice involves reason and thought and even its name seems to indicate something’s being chosen before other things” (*NE*, 1112a14–18). In these categories we seem to see the traces of “wanting”, “pleasure”, and “intention” that Anscombe said.

Before a deliberate choice, there is always deliberation. As Aristotle says, the object of deliberate choice is always decided upon as the result of deliberation.¹⁷⁸ As we know that deliberate choice is something rational beings possess – and so humans possess it – and concerns something that can actually come about, Aristotle then asks about the proper object of deliberation.

Just as the object of a wish can be impossible things, and the object of deliberate choice is something that can be realized, Aristotle believes that the object of deliberation cannot be eternal things; rather, and it is what is in our power and what we can do. In his words, “No one deliberates about eternal things, such as the universe, or the fact that the diagonal is incommensurable with the side...” (*NE*, 1112a23–24). He also says, “We do deliberate about things that are up to us and doable in action” (*NE*, 1112a30–31).

Because the object of deliberation is what is in our power and what we can do, Aristotle notes that “if people encounter something impossible, they give up, and whereas if it appears possible, they set about doing the action. But possible things are ones that could come about through ourselves” (*NE*, 1112b25–27). In other words, when they encounter impossible things, people give up; when they encounter things they can achieve with their own power, people will act.

We could conclude, therefore, that the object of deliberate choice is something doable under human power, and deliberated about in the sense of being not about the end but about

¹⁷⁸ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1113a4–6: “The objects of deliberation and of rational choice are the same, except that the object of rational choice has already been determined, since it is what has been decided upon as the result of deliberation that is the object of rational choice”.

things furthering ends. Accordingly, actions concerning what furthers the end will be in accordance with deliberate choice, and will also be voluntary. Here, Aristotle adds that “the activities of the virtues are concerned with what conduces to the end; virtue, then, is in our power, and so is vice” (*NE*, 1113b6–7). For Aristotle, the activities of virtues are about actions concerning what furthers the end, so virtues share the characteristics of deliberate choice, in that both are within the power of human beings. We can also say that it is because that virtues and vices are in our power that it becomes our choice to be good or bad.¹⁷⁹

According to Aristotle, then, there are various connections between human actions and virtues. First, the goal of the research on virtues is to become good people; second, the way to become virtuous people is to conduct virtuous actions; third, in activities of virtues, people are agents with deliberate choice, which means their actions are both voluntary and deliberated. This is the reason why we say that a person who does just actions is a just man. It is not because we see his just behavior – it is because just actions, as human actions, include the agent’s deliberate choice about things within the agent’s power. This is also why Anscombe says that we need to understand “human actions” in order to understand “virtues”. If we have no idea of “human action”, nor any of “voluntary” or “deliberate choice”, then we cannot exclude the influence of external forces or ignorance, and we cannot make any judgment concerning virtues and vices.

3.4 Summary

In general, the philosophy of psychology – without which it is not profitable to do moral

¹⁷⁹ See Aristotle, *NE*, 1113b3–14: “Since the object of wish is the end, and the object of wish and of rational choice is what conduces to the end, actions concerning what conduces to the end will be in accordance with rational choice and voluntary. The activities of the virtues are concerned with what conduces to the end; virtue, then, is in our power, and so is vice. Where it is in our power to act, it is also in our power not to act, and where saying ‘No’ is in our power, so is saying ‘Yes’; so that if it is in our power to act when it would be noble, it will also be in our power not to act when it would be shameful, and if it is in our power not to act when it would be noble, it will also be in our power to act when it would be shameful. Now if it is in our power to do noble and shameful actions, and the same goes for not doing them, and if, as we saw, being good and bad consists in this, then it is in our power to be good and bad”.

philosophy – plays an important role in Anscombe’s constructive thought. It also belongs to MMP in a way closely related to Aristotelian ethics. As we noted above, this relation includes two aspects: first, the connection between “good” and “virtue”; second; the connection between “virtue” and “action”. We have also treated Anscombe’s introduction of the definition of “moral” in Aristotle’s sense, and the distinction among virtues; both matter for the mistake surrounding “moral concepts”. These are all ideas from Aristotle’s ethics, and this is why we cannot understand Anscombe’s MMP without returning to Aristotle.

Anscombe also believes there is a matter Aristotle did not make sufficiently clear. One of our tasks, then, is to figure out to what extent Anscombe’s revival of virtue ethics has inherited Aristotle’s view as sufficient, and to what extent it considers them insufficient. This discussion will make us re-think the influence of MMP; and it will shed light on the contemporary revival of virtue ethics and cause us to re-evaluate the virtue ethicists after Anscombe. Did they truly understand her call?

According to Anscombe, it is Aristotle’s research on “human action” that is insufficient. I believe that, if we wish to grab a single idea in order to understand Anscombe’s constructive view in MMP, it would be “intention”. Research on “intention” is the starting point for the philosophy of psychology; a correct and reasonable definition of “intention” is what consequentialism lacks. The practical knowledge and practical reasoning in intentional actions are related to intellectual virtues, which are the ignored parts of virtue in Christian law conceptions of ethics.

In order to better understand Anscombe’s philosophy of psychology, therefore, we must further investigate Aristotle and Anscombe’s philosophy of action. Only this way can we know what Anscombe is referring to in thinking about what Aristotle does not say clearly, and whether Anscombe’s evaluation of Aristotle is reasonable. Here, the study of “action” and “intention” coincides with incorrect definition of “intention” and “intended consequences”, as proposed by consequentialists. In any case, we must now turn to Anscombe’s theory of action to understand her constructive ethics in MMP.

Chapter 3 Human Action

“So far as general questions of moral theory have interested me, I have thought them closely tied up with problems of action-discerption ...”¹⁸⁰

– – Elizabeth Anscombe

Section 1 From Truman’s Case to Action Theory

1.1 The Principle of Double Effect

1.1.1 The Justification for Truman by the Principle of Double Effect

We mentioned in Chapter 1 Section 3, on the case of Truman, that one justification for the bomb approval was that the death of the people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was an accident.¹⁸¹ In other words, the purpose of Truman’s order to drop bombs was to end the war, and not to kill innocent people; thus the deaths of civilians was not intentional but only accidental, and Truman did not need to take any responsibility for any consequence that was not part of his purpose. Anscombe regards this view as a misuse of the principle of double effect, and the reason for this misuse is the unclear distinction between “intentional”, “foreseen” and “accidental” consequences.

The principle of double effect¹⁸² is often invoked to explain the permissibility of an action that causes a serious harm as a side effect, when side effect is brought about in addition to the

¹⁸⁰ CPP3, viii.

¹⁸¹ WM, 59.

¹⁸² For the principle of double effect, see WM, 58–59; see also Anscombe, “Action, Intention and Double-Effect” (henceforth AIDE), in GG1, 207–226; Cyrille Michon, “Anscombe et la doctrine du double effet”, in *Klesis – 2016 : 35 – Lectures contemporaines de Elisabeth Anscombe*; and Cyrille Michon, “Anscombe on Double Effect and Intended Consequences”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Elisabeth Anscombe*, edited by Roger Teichmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 173–195; Duncan Richter, *Anscombe’s Moral Philosophy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), especially Chapter 1, “War”. Richter starts his analysis of Anscombe’s moral philosophy with war. In Chapter 1, he uses the doctrine of double effect to explain Anscombe’s discussion of the war.

effect being aimed at originally. In other words, a “double” effect is indeed the result of the action, but the actual harm should be neither the aim nor the chosen means for the action.¹⁸³ The harm is not intentional, not foreseeable, but purely accidental. It would not be permissible to cause such a harm as a means to bringing about the same good result.

Anscombe describes scenarios where this principle applies, such as in extreme situations like dangerous surgery, the closings of doors to contain fire or water, and others. In these moments, “we are helped by thinking of the deaths as either remote or uncertain”. The words “remote” and “uncertain” mean that the death should be neither intended nor foreseeable prior to the action taking place.¹⁸⁴

Anscombe also gives an example of a potholer to explain the principle of double effect. A potholer is stuck with people behind him, and water is rising to drown them. There are two options: first, this potholer can be blown up, so that the people behind him could escape directly; second, a rock can be moved to open another escape route, but the rock will crush the potholer’s head, and he will die.¹⁸⁵ In this example, Anscombe thinks, the principle of double effect is supposed to say that people could move the rock but must not blow the man up. This is because, in the first option, the death of the potholer is the means to escape, while in the second – even though he still dies – his death is neither the end nor the means, but some side effect of moving a rock.

Anscombe thinks, however, that “[we] cannot deduce the permissibility of moving the rock from the principle of side-effects”.¹⁸⁶ According to her, and as described in the example, the condition is given that “moving the rock will crush the potholer’s head”, and so the death of the

¹⁸³ See WM, 58: “If someone innocent will die unless I do a wicked thing, then on this view I am his murderer in refusing: so all that is left to me is to weigh up evils. Here the theologian steps in with the principle of double effect and says: No, you are no murderer, if the man’s death was neither your aim nor your chosen means, and if you had to act in the way that led to it or else do something absolutely forbidden”.

¹⁸⁴ See AIDE, 220.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 221. See also Luke Gormally, “On Killing Human Beings”, in *The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 145–153. Gormally talks about the example of the potholer and the principle of double effect when talking about intentional killing of the innocent.

¹⁸⁶ AIDE, 222.

potholer is so immediate that the action could not be called “taking the risk that [the death] would happen”.¹⁸⁷ Under this condition, in the second option, there is also intention regarding the potholer’s death, hence the effect of death is not unforeseeable and accidental.

The difference between these two options is “direct” and “indirect” intention, but Anscombe does not consider the difference important. She borrows McCormick and Bentham to explain the distinction.¹⁸⁸ Bentham describes a situation where you take a shot at one thing but hit something else. If you know that outcome may happen, he thinks, then there is “indirect intention”. McCormick shares the same sense that “indirectly intended” means “unintended, but the possibility was foreseen”. In this sense, neither option in the potholer example can be exonerated by the principle of double effect, because both cause the death with either direct intention or indirect intention – that is, either intentionally or foreseeably.

Anscombe argues that this principle of double effect does not apply to Truman’s case. In JPWE,¹⁸⁹ she refutes the argument that claims it is justifiable to attack civilians because their death is an example of a double effect. She counters that “if a military target is being attacked and in the course of attack civilians are also destroyed, then their destruction is not wicked, for it is accidental”. But there are differences here: first, attacking a group of people accidentally during an attack on others; second, attacking a group of people directly; third, attacking a group of people as a means to destroy a part of the same group, when that part consists of persons who may legitimately be attacked. There is little doubt that the principle of double effect applies to the first situation and involves no sin, and the second one is pure murder; but people hold different attitudes towards the third. Some claim that attacks may be made on a whole group of people that includes both civilians and combatants. Civilians for Anscombe, though, are not proper military target. So if the death of a group of people (including non-military targets) is the means, then that death is foreseeable (indirectly intentional), and thus is not accidental. The

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁸⁸ Anscombe’s interpretation of McCormick and Bentham is in AIDE, 221–222. In the footnote to the second page, Anscombe gives her references for McCormick as *Ambiguity in Moral Choice*, The Pere Marquette Lecture in Theology, 1973, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 1973. She gives no reference to Bentham.

¹⁸⁹ JPWE, 72–81.

principle of double effect would not apply.¹⁹⁰ In the case of Truman, then, Anscombe thinks that “it is nonsense to pretend that [Truman does] not intend to do what is the means [he] take[s] to [his] chosen end”.¹⁹¹ It is clearly foreseeable that the bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki will cause the death of civilians. No one can claim their death is just an accident.

In the Truman case, Anscombe argues that the reason for using the double effect principle to defend Truman is a misunderstanding of the concept of action perpetuated by Oxford’s moral philosophers.¹⁹² They do not truly understand the different actions supposedly covered by the principle, which involve the distinction between foreseeing, intention, and accident.

1.1.2 The Distinction between Foreseen and Intentional Consequences

The distinction between foreseeing, intention, and accident is very important to Anscombe’s ethics. One of the three main theses in MMP is that “the difference between the well-known English writers on moral philosophy from Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance”. In making this point, Anscombe indicates that Sidgwick’s account of “intention” represents a turning point in the history of ethics. In his account, “one must be said to intend any foreseen consequences of one’s voluntary action”, and he uses this definition to advocate the thesis that “it does not make any difference to a man’s responsibility for something that he foresaw, that he felt no desire for it, either as an end or as a means to an end”.¹⁹³ Anscombe thinks that it is this denial of any distinction between foreseen and intended consequences that explains the difference between old-fashioned utilitarianism and consequentialism, as we will see in this discussion.

We shall return to the potholer example. One crucial element in the description is that “moving the rock will crush the potholer’s head”. Because of this description, we can ensure that the result of death is foreseeable and not just accidental. If it were under another description, the agent may claim that he intends to move the rock but not to crush the man’s head, because

¹⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, 78–79.

¹⁹¹ WM, 59.

¹⁹² The Oxford moral philosophers that Anscombe has in mind have been discussed in Chapter 1 Section 3 of this dissertation.

¹⁹³ MMP, 11.

he does not know that by moving the rock, he would crush the potholer's head. Under such a description, this result would be unforeseeable for him.¹⁹⁴

Anscombe changes some elements of the example to make it more interesting, such that the death is not so immediate. In other words, on this amended version, if we move the rock, it will take a path after being moved, and during that journey it will crush the potholer's head. Here, the situation is more difficult to judge, because there is room to say we did not intend that result, even though we could foresee it. In a case like this one the principle of double effect could be considered.

Multiple possible descriptions appear in this new example. In other words, given a certain situation, there are in fact indefinitely many descriptions we can give for what happens. Anscombe has a famous example of pumping man to illustrate:

A man is pumping water into the cistern which supplies the drinking water of a house. Someone has found a way of systematically contaminating the source with a deadly cumulative poison whose effects are unnoticeable until they can no longer be cured. The house is regularly inhabited by a small group of party chiefs, with their immediate families, who are in control of a great state; they are engaged in exterminating the Jews and perhaps plan a world war. – The man who contaminated the source calculated that all if these people are destroyed some good men will get into power who will govern well, or even institute the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and secure a good life for all the people; and he has revealed the calculation, together with the fact about the poison, to the man who is pumping. The death of the inhabitants of the house will, of course, have all sorts of other effects; e.g., that a number of people unknown to these men will receive legacies, about which they know nothing.

The man's arm is going up and down, up and down. Certain muscles, with Latin names which doctors know, are contracting and relaxing. Certain substances are getting generated in some nerve fibres – substances whose generation in the course of voluntary movement interests physiologists. The moving arm is casting a shadow on a

¹⁹⁴ See AIDE, 223.

rockery where at one place and from one position it produces a curious effect as if a face were looking out of the rockery. Further, the pump makes a series of clicking noises, which are in fact beating out a noticeable rhythm.¹⁹⁵

Anscombe claims that “any description of what is going on, with him as the subject, [...] is in fact true”. This list includes what he intends (“operating the pump”), what he knows (“clicking out a rhythm”), and what he does not know (“generating certain substances in some nerve fibres”). If we classify by consequences, the list would include what is intended (“poisoning the inhabitants”), what is foreseen (“earning some money”), and what is unforeseen (“causing some unknown people to receive legacies”).

Thus, the situation is that one action counts as intentional under one description, but not under another. So how could we know whether a consequence is intentional or foreseeable? If we go back to the Truman case, as there are multiple descriptions of his order to drop bombs, which description do we use in judging the action? If someone claims that “among all descriptions, his only action is signing”, would that be a persuasive defense?

Anscombe does mention this justification for Truman, which claims that “Mr Truman did not make the bombs by himself and decide to drop them without consulting anybody; no, he was only responsible for the decision. Hang it all, you can’t make a man responsible just because ‘his is the signature at the foot of the order’” (TD, 66). Here we can use the example of the pumping man’s action to extend the discussion about Truman’s. If we describe Truman’s action in the way Anscombe does for the pumping man’s, we would have:

President Truman is writing letters at the foot of a piece of paper. These letters constitute his signature, and this piece of paper is an order to drop atomic bombs in Japan. When writing down these letters, the Allies are seeking the Japanese’s unconditional surrender. The Allies have found that dropping atomic bombs in Japan will cause devastating damage to Japan, which includes indiscriminate killing of combatants and civilians as well as irreversible physical harm on those who are not

¹⁹⁵ *Intention*, §23.

killed. Such damage could accelerate Japan's unconditional surrender and end the second World War. The dropping of atomic bombs will have some other effects; for example, it will stop more U.S. soldiers from getting involved in more protracted land invasions, which will allow them to return home earlier to reunite with their families. Meanwhile, if we follow Anscombe's thought in the example of the pumping man, the death of Japanese combatants and civilians will have other effects as well, including that a number of people unknown to those who die will receive legacies, of course, if they did not die in the atomic bombings or in the later stages of radiation sickness.

President Truman's wrist is moving slightly back and forth on the paper. Certain muscles are contracting and relaxing. Certain substances are being generated in some nerve fibres. The moving wrist is rubbing against the paper and the table, in a motion like that of President Truman's wrist and sleeve wiping dust off the table or sweeping away a bug. Further, the nib rustles on the paper, which is in fact making a noticeable rhythm.¹⁹⁶

Indeed, there are many descriptions for President Truman's action: "writing down some letters", "signing an order", "ordering to drop bombs", "killing the civilians in Japan", "bring U.S. soldiers back home", "generating certain substances in some nerve fibres", "contracting certain muscles", "making a rhythm", etc. Maybe we cannot easily classify all these descriptions under the heading of "what he intends", "what he foresees", and "what he does not know", but we can be sure of one thing – the fact that the description "he is signing the order" is true does not make the other descriptions false. In other words, "you cannot make a man responsible just because 'his is the signature at the foot of the order'" cannot be a persuasive justification. This justification's mistake lies in the misuse of the principle of double effect and the ignorance of alternative descriptions. It is hard to deny that, as we have analyzed the historical background of Truman's order in Chapter 1 Section 3, Truman does not know the consequences of the atomic bombs in Japan, such that one could try to justify the death of innocent people as

¹⁹⁶ This is a parody of Anscombe's example of the pumper man in *Intention* §23, and some of the sentences are Anscombe's original words.

accidents.

There is one doctrine, which has dominated the thought of philosophers and theologians from the seventeenth century until now, that tries to answer the difficulty of multiple descriptions. It is Cartesian psychology. Anscombe dislikes this doctrine – she claims that “the principle [of double effect] has been repeatedly abused [by Cartesian psychology] ...”, as according to Cartesian psychology, “an intention was *an interior act of the mind* which could be produced at will”.¹⁹⁷ Anscombe finds this view ridiculous, because it offers a way for the agent to describe any action as legitimate merely by making a little speech to oneself: “What I mean to be doing is...”.¹⁹⁸ This would make it difficult to see how an action rather than an intention could be good or bad, virtuous or vicious. Everything becomes mysterious under this doctrine.

It is natural, says Anscombe, to think that what a man intends is ultimately settled by what is going on in his mind rather than by what he does. However natural it may be, though, Anscombe aims to show that it is false.¹⁹⁹ She denies that “if we want to know a man’s intention it is into the contents of his mind and only into these that we should enquire” and proposes instead that the first thing to consider is “what physically takes place”, namely, “what a man actually does”.²⁰⁰ Wiseman comments that this proposal is reflected in *Intention* by the fact that Anscombe pays more attention to “intentional action” rather than “intention”.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ When Anscombe talks about “moral action”, she also mentions the doctrine that “if anyone thinks otherwise, he must have been misled by bad teaching. Or simply by a bad philosophic tradition, according to which the intentionality of an action (a) can’t be known to anyone but the agent and (b) is a matter of what the agent did it for – intention being often taken to mean purpose, or intention of the end” (AIDE, 216).

¹⁹⁸ WM, 58–59.

¹⁹⁹ Anscombe’s hostility to this psychology has been generally recognized, and it is one thing that has made her book so attractive to philosophers of mind. For example, philosophers in the contemporary neo-Kantian tradition – following P. F. Strawson – who insist that it is persons and not minds that are the subjects of psychological predicates, have been especially drawn to the central role Anscombe gives to actions and bodily movements.

²⁰⁰ Anscombe, *Intention*, 9.

²⁰¹ See Rachael Wiseman, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe’s Intention*, 48:

After a small detour, then, we come back to the difficulty of multiple descriptions. If our research on action starts with “what physically takes place”, then we must know how to find the description we want from among multiple possibilities. In fact, Anscombe’s strategy for solving the confusion caused by different descriptions is not complicated. Even though there are indefinitely many descriptions we can provide of what happens, only some will be relevant to what interests us: human action. We must therefore investigate the definition of “human action” in Anscombe’s sense.

1.2 Human Action: From “What?” to “Why?”

1.2.1 Anscombe’s Definition of “Human Action”

Anscombe’s definition of “human action” differs from that of other philosophers. She refuses the strategy of extensional circumscription in the philosophy of action, which would divide all events into different sub-classes, with some of them belonging to the sub-class of “action”. This strategy is very common and appears in the work of, for example, Donald Davidson. The scholastics make a contrast between “human action” (*actus humanus*) and “act of a human being” (*actus hominis*) and use examples to explain the contrast. For example, “Idly stroking one’s beard, or idly scratching one’s head, may be an ‘act of a human being’ without being a ‘human act’. (...) ‘act of a human being’ is a wider notion, which includes ‘human action’. (...) [H]uman actions are under the command of reason: this does not mean just that reason can intervene to forbid – for that holds of idle actions too.”²⁰²

Anscombe does not think “a restricted sense of ‘action’” can be attained by trying to find a characterization for a sub-class of events. She instead proposes a strategy with a special type of description for what happens. In her paper “Human Action”²⁰³, Valérie Aucouturier sums up

“Anscombe dedicates 19 of the 52 paragraphs of her book (4–12) explicitly to the topic of intentional action, and another 27 (22–49) to the intention with which an action is done. Expressions of intention for the future warrant only five sections of discussion”.

²⁰² For Anscombe’s criticism of Donald Davidson and other philosophers’ criteria, see AIDE, 208–209; see also Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 45–47.

²⁰³ Valérie Aucouturier, “Human Action”, in *The Anscombean Mind*, edited by Adrian Haddock

the strategy in this way: “[the philosophy of action] is not concerned with the extension of the concept of ‘human action’ but rather with the ‘logical circumscription’ of human action and of related concepts (such as intentional, voluntary, good and bad, etc.)”.²⁰⁴ This idea, concerning “a special type of description”, is expressed in the following passage of *Intention*:

Of course we have a special interest in human actions: but what is it that we have a special interest in here? It is not that we have a special interest in the movement of these molecules – namely, the ones in a human being; or even in the movements of certain bodies – namely human ones. The description of what we are interested in is *a type of description* that would not exist if our question ‘Why?’ did not. It is not that certain things, namely the movements of humans, are for some undiscovered reason subject to the question ‘Why?’ So too, it is not just that certain appearances of chalk on blackboard are subject to the question ‘What does it say?’ It is of a word or sentence that we ask ‘What does it say?’; and the description of something as a word or a sentence could not occur prior to *the fact that words or sentences have meaning*. So the description of something as a human action could not occur prior to *the existence of the question ‘Why?’*, simply as a kind of utterance by which we were then obscurely prompted to address the question.²⁰⁵

This paragraph first and foremost confirms Anscombe’s rejection of the doctrine that “human action” is a certain thing, and that we can find criteria to label all events belonging to the same sub-class of “human action”. Second, Anscombe specifies “the special type of description of what happens” as a description that logically depends on “the fact that words or sentences have meaning” and “the existence of the question ‘Why?’”. The asking and answering of the question “Why?” by using meaningful words and sentences belongs to a “language-game”. This

and Rachael Wiseman (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 333–354.

²⁰⁴ Valérie Aucouturier, “Human Action”, 334.

²⁰⁵ Anscombe, *Intention*, 83. Italics mine.

is one of Anscombe's philosophical tools.²⁰⁶ Here, we can see that the description concerning human actions is shifted from the question of "What?" to that of "Why?".

1.2.2 The Question "Why?"

The question "Why?" proves that not all descriptions of what happens interest Anscombe, as human actions are distinct from physiological or physical descriptions of what takes place. Anscombe does not wish to use extensional circumscription to classify events, build sub-classes, and then distinguish human actions, because she is not aiming for a complete analysis of all different action types. She uses the question "Why?" to pick out a special form of descriptions relevant for her own interest.

Let's go back to Anscombe's pumping man example. If it is asked "*What* is this man doing?" or "*What* is the description of his action?", then "any description of what is going on, as long as that man is the subject, can provide an answer. Such descriptions would include things like "he is earning wages, he is supporting a family, he is wearing away his shoe-soles, he is making a disturbance of the air. He is sweating, he is generating those substances in his nerve fibers".²⁰⁷ Among these descriptions of "What is this man doing?", however, only some are relevant to what interests Anscombe. And answers to the question "*Why?*" help us narrow the possibilities down to the description she wants. For example, when asked "What is this man doing?", the answer can be "The man is contracting his muscles." This is a true description. The question continues, and the man is asked "Why are you contracting those muscles?". If the answer only concerns an inference from his knowledge of anatomy and physiology without any further description of a reason for acting, this "Why?" question will be ruled out, and the description we are considering here, "he is contracting those muscles", will not concern human action. Next, when asked "What is this man doing?", the answer can also be "The man is pumping". This is also a true description. If the man is further asked "Why are you pumping?", and he answers that "I'm pumping water into the cistern for supplying the drinking water of a house.", this

²⁰⁶ This reference to language games, as well as the use of conceptual analysis as tool, is influenced by Wittgenstein. The strategy plays an important role in Anscombe's philosophy, including in her ethics. I will develop her view on language games further in Chapter 4.

²⁰⁷ *Intention*, 37.

would be an answer with a reason. Then the description here, “he is pumping”, is within the range that interests Anscombe. In other words, it is a description of “human action”.

Some “Why?” questions require explanation. In *Intention* §23, when talking about the pumping man, the question “Why?” is used to circumscribe the concept of “intentional action”. In *Intention* §5, whether the question “Why?” is given application is also taken as the criteria to distinguish “intentional action”. But in *Intention* §46, the question “Why?” circumscribes the description of something as a “human action”. How can these uses of “Why?” remain compatible? Do the extensions of “intentional action” and “human action” overlap? I do not believe so. In AIDE, Anscombe says that “the extension of ‘human action’ is wider than that of ‘intentional human action’”.²⁰⁸ This apparent contradiction requires an explanation about the logical domain of application for each concept and for the role of the question “Why?” in their circumscription.

In *Intention* §46, Anscombe says that “the description of something as a human action could not occur prior to the existence of the question ‘Why?’.” Here, she is admitting a logical dependence between the concept of “human action” and the question “Why?”. In other words, something we describe as “human action” is something to which the question “Why?” would apply. All Anscombe claims is that we need the existence of the question “Why?” in order to have the concept of “human action”. So far, she claims nothing concerning “intentional action”, and she gives no hint that any description to which the question “Why?” would apply would be a description under which this action – a human action – is also an intentional action.

In *Intention* §5, Anscombe says that “[intentional actions] are actions to which a certain sense of the question ‘Why?’ is given application; the sense is of course that in which the answer [...] gives a reason for acting.” Compared with the link between “human action” and the question “Why?”, “intentional action” relates to *a certain sense of* the question “Why?”. This certain sense requires that the question be answered and the answer must give a reason for acting. This sense is not mentioned in “human action”.

An example will help explain the difference.²⁰⁹ The question “Why did you knock the cup

²⁰⁸ Anscombe, AIDE, 213.

²⁰⁹ See *Intention*, 9–11.

off the table?” is answered by, “I thought I saw a face at the window and it made me jump”. This answer provides only some evidence explaining the cause for why the thing takes place; it gives no reason for acting. We can thus say that the description in the question “knocking the cup off the table” is not intentional. But the inapplicability of this special sense does not mean that the question “Why?” is refused in any sense. This given answer is different from answers such as “I was not aware I was doing that”. Compared with this latter, the given answer still responds to the question “Why?”, so “knocking the cup off the table” is still a human action.

We should notice the difference between “the question ‘Why?’” (*Intention* §46) and “a certain sense of the question ‘Why?’” (*Intention* §5). The former circumscribes “human action”, and the latter applies to “intentional action”. From there we can understand, concerning the application of the question “Why?”, why Anscombe says that “the extension of ‘human action’ is wider than that of ‘intentional human action’.” In *Intention* §20, Anscombe says that “The occurrence of other answers to the question ‘Why?’ besides ones like ‘I just did’, is essential to the existence of the concept of an intention or voluntary action.” These words also prove that the answer to the question “Why?” can be both intentional action and voluntary action (that is, human action).

We have a first conclusion here: among various descriptions of “what happens”, “a special type of description of what happens” (that logically depends on the question “Why?”) concerns “human action”. Among questions “Why?”, a certain sense of this question that gives a reason for acting concerns “intentional action”.

Anscombe also relates two other concepts to “human action”, so three concepts in total require further examination:

1. “Voluntary action”: “human action = voluntary action”.²¹⁰
2. “Moral action”: “All human action is moral action. It is all either good or bad. (It may be both)”.²¹¹
3. “Intentional human action”: “the extension of ‘human action’ is wider than that of

²¹⁰ AIDE, 208.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

‘intentional human action’.”²¹²

In the next section, I analyze Anscombe’s action theory by the definition and connection of these three concepts. I will demonstrate how she uses her action theory to lay the foundation for the study of moral philosophy.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 213. See also Valérie Aucouturier, “Human Action”, 338. My formulation of these concepts here is inspired by Valérie Aucouturier’s paper, where she formulates the issue as follows:

“In AIDE, Anscombe immediately relates this understanding of human action to two familiar (yet opaque) concepts:

1. ‘Voluntary action’: ‘human action = voluntary action’, in a sense that excludes ‘beasts and babies’ or ‘some human incapable of human action’ (like ‘a brain-damaged spastic cripple’) but which includes ‘uncalculated omissions’ and ‘sudden impulsive actions’ and
2. ‘Moral action’: in the sense that ‘All human action is moral action. It is all either good or bad. (It may be both).

Later on in this paper, we recognize a third familiar concept:

3. ‘Intentional action’: ‘the extension of “human action” is wider than that of “intentional human action”. That is to say: something may be a human action under a description under which it is not an intentional action. Acts of carelessness, negligence and omission may be of this character.”

Section 2 Voluntary Action

Let us start with “human action = voluntary action”. After claiming this equation, Anscombe continues to explain:

We might say that human action = voluntary action. But that raises a question of meaning, like what we have just glanced at in the last paragraph. We are speaking of voluntary action not in a merely physiological sense; not in the sense in which idly stroking your beard is a voluntary action. Notice, too, that what is voluntary under one description may be non-voluntary or counter-voluntary under another. We are not, like Davidson, attempting a classification which will divide all events into members and non-members of a class.

Nor are we using “voluntary” as Aristotle uses ἐκούσιον, generally translated “voluntary”. For Aristotle says that beasts and babies have the voluntary, but we would not say so in the sense of “voluntary” that we are trying to introduce. Aristotle too introduces a restricted sense of “action” – praxis, which beasts and babies don’t have. But it is a bit too limited for us. It wouldn’t include omissions unless calculated, or sudden impulsive actions.²¹³

According to her explanation, Anscombe’s sense of “voluntary action” has these features:

- (1) It is not taken in a merely physiological sense.
- (2) It is different from Aristotle’s sense of “voluntary” (ἐκούσιον), which includes beasts and babies.²¹⁴
- (3) It is also different from Aristotle’s sense of “praxis”, which does not include uncalculated omissions and sudden impulsive actions.²¹⁵

²¹³ AIDE, 208–209.

²¹⁴ This feature echoes Anscombe in GBHA, where she says that if our human agent is a baby or some other human incapable of human action, then these human actions on the part of human agent are not what we care about in ethical research. (GBHA, 205)

²¹⁵ This formulation is also inspired by Aucouturier. See Valérie Aucouturier, “Human Action”, 339.

2.1 The Physiological Sense of “Voluntary”

The first feature of “voluntary action” is that it is not “voluntary” in a merely physiological sense. In *Intention* §7, Anscombe explains the physiological sense:

I should like to reject a fashionable view of the terms ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’, which says that they are appropriately used only when a person has done something untoward. If anyone is tempted by this view, he should consider that physiologists are interested in voluntary action, and that they are not giving a special technical sense to the word. If you ask them what their criterion is, they say that if they are dealing with a grown human they ask him, and if with an animal, they take movements in which the animal is e.g. trying to get at something, say food. That is, the movements in which the dog cocked its ear at a sudden sound would not be used as an example.

This does not mean that every description of action in which its voluntariness can be considered is of interest to physiologists. Of course they are only interested in bodily movements.

This explanation shows that the physiological sense focuses on a particular type of bodily movement. Conditioned body movements are not within this specific range; it includes the movements aiming at specific goals. Regardless of any difference between these bodily movements, though, what physiologists care about is the movement itself.

Then we must figure out what is the relationship between this physiological sense and Anscombe’s own sense of “voluntary”. As Anscombe only says that her sense is not a merely physiological sense, we could understand it like this: the physiological sense of “voluntary” sometimes includes Anscombe’s cases of human action, and sometimes excludes them. As these two senses have different standards, their judgment on concrete cases may by coincidence have the same result – but that result cannot imply that both senses are consistent. As the standard for the physiological sense of voluntariness requires “bodily movement”, it seems to be identical with Anscombe’s sense, when the description of an action shows the agent’s bodily

movement. It is not identical, on the other hand, when the description is far from the agent's bodily movement. As we mentioned in the previous section, for example, when a description shows that the agent fails to prevent something from happening, it would still be a voluntary action in Anscombe's sense, but not in the physiological sense, because there is no bodily movement on the agent's part.

In her paper "Human Action", Valérie Aucouturier introduces Anscombe's argument in *Intention* §49 to explain the difference between the physiological sense and Anscombe's own sense of "voluntary". She calls Anscombe's sense of "voluntary" that characterizes human action "the philosopher's sense of 'voluntary'", while a broader sense, one that includes "acts of a human being" and "beasts and babies" is the Aristotelian sense. Aucouturier says that in *Intention* §49, Anscombe introduces four situations to distinguish the "voluntary" and the "intentional". The "voluntary" here corresponds to the Aristotelian sense, and the "intentional" is one specific to the philosopher's sense. Aucouturier sums up these four situations as follows:

1. Mere physical movements, to whose description our question 'Why?' is applicable, are called voluntary rather than intentional when (a) the answer is e.g. 'I was fiddling', 'it was a casual movement', or even 'I don't know why' (b) the movements are not considered by the agent, though he can say what they are if he does consider them. (...)
2. Something is voluntary though not intentional if it is the antecedently known concomitant result of one's intentional action, so that one could have prevented it if one would have given up the action; but it is not intentional: one rejects the question 'Why?' in its connection. (...)
3. Things may be voluntary which are not one's own doing all, but which happen to one's delight, so that one consents and does not protest or take steps against them (...).
4. Every intentional action is also voluntary (...).²¹⁶

²¹⁶ See Valérie Aucouturier, "Human Action", 340.

Along with the physiologist's concept of "voluntary", which concerns bodily movements, Aucouturier suggests that the four cases in *Intention* §49 could be used to explain the relationship between this physiological sense and Anscombe's own sense of "voluntary". It would work like this – the physiologist's sense includes case (1) and some cases of (4) at the exclusion of case (2) and case (3). Because in case (2) and (3), the result or consequence of human action does not involve any bodily movement on the agent's part.²¹⁷

Another difference between the physiological sense and Anscombe's sense is that the former also includes non-human action. *Intention* §7 mentions that physiologists care not only about humans but also animals. The example shows that the physiological sense of "voluntary" includes the movement that an animal uses to try to get at food. Here, this action can be also fully intentional, at least to the extent that animals may aim at something that is some distance from the movement itself.

Given that the physiological sense and Anscombe's sense of "voluntary" have no direct subordination, we might wonder why Anscombe introduces the physiological view at all. I argue that, by discussing the inadequacy of the physiological sense, Anscombe emphasizes that her concern with human action does not lie in the objective bodily movement actions present, since those cannot exhibit a certain kind of responsibility. The discussion of this responsibility is the purpose of Anscombe's action theory.

Before we move on to that responsibility, however, we will continue to see what features Anscombe gives to her sense of "voluntary".

2.2 The Definition of "Human Agent": Reaching the stage of deliberation and choice

In Anscombe's equation of human action and voluntary action, the second feature of the latter is that it does not include beasts and babies. Anscombe explains that she uses "voluntary" not as Aristotle uses *ekovoiov*, which is generally translated as "voluntary". In Aristotle's sense, beasts and babies have this capacity, but this is not the sense of the term "voluntary" that

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 340. See also Jean-Philippe Narboux's, "Anscombe's Account of Voluntary Action in *Intention*", in *Enrahonar. An International Journal of Theoretical and Practical Reason* 64, 2020: 135–163.

Anscombe wishes to introduce.²¹⁸ Here, two parts are included in Anscombe's idea of what is voluntary. First, it must be an action of a human, so animals are excluded; second, it does not mean all humans, so babies are excluded.

As for the first, Anscombe clarifies in GBHA that when she uses "human action", it must be on the part of a human agent.²¹⁹ When she discusses "voluntary action", therefore, the acts of animals do not fall under the scope of discussion.

It is worth looking at the case of animals in more detail. As mentioned earlier, Anscombe does not completely deny the voluntary nature of animals, nor the fact that we can analyze some theories from animals that also apply to humans. If this were so, could it be possible that a human action be performed by a non-human agent? This question may sound odd, but Anscombe answers "Yes". In *Intention* §46, she says that:

... the description of something that goes on in the world as 'building a house' or 'writing a sentence on a blackboard' is a description employing concepts of human action. Even if writing appeared on a wall as at Belshazzar's feast, or a house rose up not made by men, they would be identified as writing or a house because of their visible likeness to what we produce – writing and houses. (*Intention*, §46)

Such descriptions of "building a house" or "writing a sentence" are descriptions employing concepts of human action, which means that they suggest the voluntary action of an agent capable of deliberation and choice. Even though we are told that these descriptions are performed by some non-human beings, we could still imagine them in fantasy fictions, where these beings' actions are described as being "under the command of reason". Then such non-human beings could be identified as being capable of deliberation and choice, and their actions could be identified as human actions as well, because of their visible likeness to who we are and what we tend to produce. So in Anscombe's sense of "human action", whether the agent is a human being is not the most crucial element. She instead cares more about the capacity and

²¹⁸ See AIDE, 209.

²¹⁹ See GBHA, 203.

voluntariness in the action description.

As for the second part of Anscombe's idea of voluntariness, she notes that, in equating human action with voluntary action, she does not mean all humans. For example, babies' actions do not belong to the category of human action. Her remarks in GBHA also echo this idea of "human" – that some humans are incapable of human action, since there will be no human action being done by the human agents who have not yet reached the stage of deliberation and choice.²²⁰ Clearly, a baby or a brain-damaged cripple do not reach this stage, and so are not capable of human action.

The reason for excluding these humans from the definition of "human action" is obvious, because in this equation the human and the voluntary, Anscombe focuses on a capacity of deliberation and choice. This is a human capacity, of course, but not all humans have it. Human actions are therefore performed by human agents capable of deliberation and choice. Being a human agent is an important feature of human action. If something is described as a human action, the name suggests that it is being performed by such an agent.

We must still consider why Anscombe defines her idea of "voluntary action" in this way. For example, how is her definition better than Aristotle's idea of *ekovoiov*? What is her definition supposed to illustrate – or is it a pretext for some other theory? Just as for the feature of physiological sense, I argue that, by regulating the scope of the agent of "voluntary action", Anscombe tries to pave the way for her ethical perspective concerning human lives.

In GBHA, after explaining the necessity of defining a human agent as one who reaches the stage of deliberation and choice, Anscombe goes on to claim that:

Where humans have come to deliberation and choice, there will be a true answer to the question what they are up to in their lives. On occasion there will be a question of acting in accordance with or against some specialist virtue such as justice, or courage, or temperance, or truthfulness. At other times the question what they are up to will be answered by giving what they treat as final goals, and here their development or failure of good sense will shew itself in what can be discerned of their ranking of goals and

²²⁰ See *ibid.*, 205.

their regard for the possible conflict of particular actions with greater and lesser goals.²²¹

This paragraph provides Anscombe's reason to give the definition as she does. The capacity of deliberation and choice allows people to think about the purpose of life, and then their actions will also have that purpose as a point of reference. Accordingly, the descriptions for their actions will no longer be the physical movements of a moment; they instead will carry with them the conformity or violation of certain virtues, the judgment and decision of the purpose, the choice of the means to reach it, and so on. And these parts, which are relevant to human life, are the real purpose for Anscombe's discussion of action theory.

As before, though, we cannot yet begin the discussion of human life or ethical life. We must instead see the third feature of Anscombe's sense of "voluntary".

2.3 The Example of Omission

Anscombe also mentions another restricted sense of "action" for Aristotle – *praxis*, which does not include beasts and babies. But she claims this sense is too limited for her, because it does not include "non-calculated omissions" and "sudden impulsive actions".

As *ekovoiov* is too large a category and *praxis* too limited, what is Anscombe's sense of "voluntary" in her equation? She explains:

Voluntariness does not require that there be any act of will, any formation of intention, any choice of what is voluntary; or even any positive voluntary act. What you were able to do and it was needful you should do, if you omit it in forgetfulness or sloth, falling asleep perhaps and sleeping through the time when you should have been doing it – your omission of it is voluntary. Unless indeed you fell asleep because you were drugged without the slightest consent on your part. Consent may reside in not taking care when you could have and, in the nature of the case as available to your

²²¹ *Ibid.*

understanding, you needed to.²²²

On to this explanation, the point distinguishing Anscombe's idea of "voluntariness" from Aristotle's concept of *praxis* is whether there must be "an act of will", "a formation of intention", "a choice of what is voluntary", or "a positive voluntary act". Anscombe thinks that none of those elements are necessary to determine "voluntariness", and she gives "uncalculated omission" as a good case to explain their different definitions. In the case of "omission", no positive physical movement is required, nor even a thought – voluntariness may be achieved by not taking care of what you could have done or not doing what you should have.

There are various kinds of omissions. For example, abstention is a kind of action without doing anything. But abstention out of consideration is different from simply forgetting to vote. "Not helping people in danger" would be another kind of omission. There is a difference between "not helping out of carelessness", where one person did not notice that someone else was in danger, and "not helping out of consideration", where one person did notice the danger but did not care or decided not to do anything. Certain cases of bigamy may also concern omission, as when a man marries a woman without verifying that his first wife has died. Some murders might also involve omissions, as when a doctor forgets to give a patient necessary treatment and the patient dies.²²³

Not all kinds of omissions are of concern to Anscombe, as she mentions that her point is "uncalculated omissions". For example, deliberate omissions – such as abstention out of consideration, and a doctor withholding treatment out of the patient's interest – involve evident intentions, which are not part of Anscombe's concern. Neither are cases of omissions because of unavoidable external reasons. For example, abstention from voting because one was drugged would be included here, or not helping someone else in danger because one was wearing noise-cancelling headphones and so could not hear a call for help.

Anscombe describes the kind of omissions she cares about as "not mere not-doing" but as cases where "something ought to have been done, or something was needed or expected to have

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ See also Valérie Aucouturier, "Human Action", 342.

been done”.²²⁴ In the case of bigamy, for example, Anscombe believes that the man’s ignorance of his first wife’s death was a voluntary omission, because he should have known what he was supposed to confirm before marrying someone else.²²⁵ In the case of not helping people in danger, it would be a voluntary omission, if one did notice someone’s call for help but decided not to do anything. In the case of treating patients, negligence without intention is voluntary too.²²⁶

As this point involves what we ought to do or not to do, I argue that Anscombe’s point of voluntary omission here concerns a kind of responsibility. This kind does not require any physical movement nor even any thought on the agent’s part in order to be responsible for something that happens or does not happen. About this responsibility, Anscombe mentions two conditions: “what you were able to do” and “it was needful you should do”. Anscombe also quotes Aquinas to establish the principle concerning voluntariness in omission as involving necessity and possibility. We say an omission is voluntary, that is, when it is both possible and necessary for the agent to act, and yet he did not.²²⁷ The possibility, or difficulty, is one of the

²²⁴ See Anscombe, “Murder and the Morality of Euthanasia” (henceforth MME), in GG1, 272; and Anscombe, GBHA, 205.

²²⁵ This is a case discussed in Anscombe, “Two Kinds of Error in Action” (henceforth TKEA), in CPP3, 5: “‘I acted in good faith in marrying Jane, for I did not know that my first wife, Mary, was still alive’ could hardly be a successful plea if the speaker had no strong grounds for supposing his wife dead, but had acted on the assumption that his first marriage would never come to light. In particular, if he made no inquiry and especially if a simple inquiry would have revealed that his wife was alive, the plea of good faith would be positively refuted. Thus he went through a marriage ceremony in circumstances such that he materially committed bigamy. He did not know those circumstances; nevertheless it was both possible and necessary for him to ascertain them, and hence his lack of knowledge and of positive intent do not exonerate him. So bigamy can be formally imputed to him.” In this case of bigamy, the necessity is that, for the second marriage, the man is obliged to make sure that his first wife is dead, or they are divorced; the possibility is that he has the chance to verify the fact. Therefore, his omission of not verifying the fact is voluntary, and he cannot be exonerated from bigamy.”

²²⁶ See MME, 272–273.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 273; and St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia IIae q.6, art, 3. See also Luke Gormally, “On Killing Human Beings”, 137. When talking about the intentional killing of the innocent, Gormally talks about a distinction between “act” and “omission”, where he says “If I omit to do x there

differences between omission and positive actions, as “blame for a positive act seldom depends on how difficult not acting would have been”, while “blame for an omission must take account of the difficulty, inconvenience, etc., of the omitted act”.²²⁸

A case involving sleeping will help us understand how the difficulty of omission determines the voluntariness of an action. Anscombe says that an omission is voluntary if the agent omits it in the forgetfulness of sloth, while falling asleep at the time he should have been doing it. An omission is not voluntary if the agent falls asleep because he was drugged without consent on his part. According to what we have said – that omission is not doing something that should have been done – falling asleep when the agent should have done something is definitely counts as an omission. But the reason for falling asleep matters to the praise and blame of it. In the case of being drugged, it becomes difficult for the agent to do what he should have done, and so the chance of accomplishing the task is low. We therefore do not see his omission as voluntary and do not blame it. In the first situation, though, when omission occurs from forgetfulness, it is less difficult for him to perform the task and so the possibility of accomplishment is high. We would see this omission as voluntary, because consent may reside in not taking care of something when we should have or could have.

Anscombe mentions this idea of omission and responsibility in many specific cases, and her example of professional duties best explain it²²⁹. A simple one concerns a cook. She says that “It is the cook who spoils the potatoes by not putting salt in the water; it is his omission and not that of some else, say the gardener”.²³⁰ The profession of a cook requires the cook to cook well, so if they spoil potatoes by not putting salt in the water, it is the cook’s omission. In this case, nobody would think it is the gardener’s omission, even though the gardener did not

are consequences different from the consequences of my doing x. But an agent can be called to account for his omitting to do x only if it was both possible and necessary for him to do x”.

²²⁸ MME, 272. The other difference is that “a positive action carries the presumption that the agent incurs the responsibility of intentionally doing it; omission does not.”

²²⁹ In her articles “On Promising and Its Justice” and “Rules, Rights and Promises”, Anscombe notes that the concept of duty need not be interpreted as “moral” duties. It may concern duties of a profession or a function, to those related to health, or to the rules (of a game, of grammar, of mathematics, of etiquette, etc.) and even to the human life form. It thus refers to an Aristotelian sense of necessity.

²³⁰ MME, 272.

put salt in the water either, because a gardener is never expected to cook well by his profession.

The example about the profession of doctor is more complicated and involves more moral issues. Anscombe discusses these in her articles “Commentary on John Harris’s: ‘Ethical problems in the management of some severely handicapped children’”²³¹, “Sins of Omission? The Non-Treatment of Controls in Clinical Trials”²³², and “Murder and the Morality of Euthanasia”. Anscombe believes that the profession of doctor requires practitioners to treat patients with a view to curing them. If they fail to cure their patients, therefore, it is voluntary omissions. At the same time, though, we must also consider the possibility of failure. For example, a doctor may be occupied with another operation, or some resources are needed elsewhere; in a more extreme situation, a doctor may need to kill someone else in order to save his patient but does nothing, which results in the patient dying. In these cases, this doctor’s behavior of “letting his patient die” cannot make him guilty of the patient’s death – it cannot be a voluntary omission, because of the possibility of failure and the difficulty of a cure.²³³

In the case of a doctor’s non-treatment of patients, there is a controversial situation in which the doctor aims at the death of his patient and accomplishes that goal by non-treatment. The reason for this aim could be the patient’s interests. As mentioned before, the omission here is with obvious intention and does not therefore count as the omission Anscombe cares about, but it is worth saying a few words on her point of view here. She believes that, in this case, non-treatment can amount to someone’s willingness to harm. This means that, in this situation – even though the doctor does nothing – there is little difference between “bring[ing] the result about by omission of treatment” and “do[ing] the result actively”, because the crucial thing is “to aim at the patient’s death”. Anscombe explains that “if you have an obligation to do something positive, the intentional omission of it for the sake of some result may very well deserve the same blame as positive action to produce the same result.”²³⁴ Since this intentional

²³¹ Anscombe, “Commentary on John Harris’s: ‘Ethical problems in the management of some severely handicapped children’” (henceforth CJH), in GG1, 279–283.

²³² Anscombe, “Sins of Omission? The Non-Treatment of Controls in Clinical Trials” (henceforth SO), in GG1, 284–290.

²³³ See MME, 273.

²³⁴ See CJH, 280–281.

omission is very similar to active action, it does not apply under the standard of necessity and possibility for uncalculated omissions that Anscombe wants to emphasize here.

At the same time, we should note that equating such an intentional omission with active action does not mean that Anscombe is completely against doctors practicing non-treatment. She also discusses euthanasia, where she focuses on the aspect of the meaning of “human being” and the idea that “man is spirit”.²³⁵ Here, though, Anscombe insists that the profession of doctors requires them to cure their patients; this is a medical consideration, and any other consideration about the meaning of “human being” or about the value of human life does not belong to the profession of doctors. Anscombe emphasized that, even when a doctor refers to some medical facts when taking a decision, the decision may still not be a medical one. She makes this point in CJH, where she claims that “a doctor deciding that it is in a child’s best interests to die” is not a medical decision. She does not deny that the doctor must have considered medical facts in reaching the decision. But she believes that these medical facts are only a cloak for the language of moral concern. The decision is instead about the value of life, for which medicine tells us nothing.²³⁶

Given the analysis of uncalculated omissions above, we may reach the following conclusion. Although the second feature shows that “voluntary action” is performed by a human agent reaching the stage of deliberation and choice, this point does not entail that all voluntary action must be the result of deliberation and choice. Indeed, some people think that Anscombe’s sense of “voluntary” is far-fetched, because not only omissions and negligence, but also some actions seen as merely acts of humans are included in the category of human action. I prefer, though, to see Anscombe’s sense of “voluntary” as her design, by which she tries to show her concern about the idea of “human”, “human action”, and “human life”. The discussion of uncalculated omissions, as well as that of the two previous features, shows the social part of human nature, the professional role of human beings in society, and the incumbent duties accompanying those roles. As a doctor, for example, you should give reasonable prescriptions to cure patients; as a student, you should attend exams on time; as a cook, you should put proper

²³⁵ See MME, 267–271.

²³⁶ See CJH, 279–280.

seasoning in your dishes; as an athlete, you should keep in training; as a pregnant woman, you should watch your weight, and so on.²³⁷ To be fair, the discussion so far has only covered duties concerning social skills, and has not yet arrived at the ethical part. But it still characterizes an idea about responsibility concerning specifically human action, which underscores the importance of “voluntary action” in further analysis of “moral action”.

²³⁷ See *Intention*, 64.

Section 3 Moral Action

After presenting the equation between human action and voluntary action, and after explaining the three features of human action, Anscombe introduces a new equation: “all human action is moral action. It is all either good or bad. (It may be both)”.²³⁸ Anscombe explains that “it means that ‘moral’ does not stand for an extra ingredient which some human actions have and some do not.”²³⁹ She adds that “‘That was a morally good action’ is equivalent to ‘That was a good human action’, and ‘That was a morally bad human action’ is equivalent to ‘That was a bad human action.’”²⁴⁰

This equation of human action and moral action rejects the idea of morality as an aspect belonging to some human actions but not to others.²⁴¹ It means that “moral” is a property of human action itself, and when we say “moral human action”, the word “moral” adds no meaning to “human action”; at the same time, when we talk about “human action”, it is inevitable that we talk about this “moral” sense.

3.1 The Meaning of “Moral”: Good or Bad

Anscombe then explains that it is not a mere “extensional equivalence”, or “two descriptions which happen to be true of the same thing”; these descriptions are instead equivalent in content.²⁴² The key to understanding this so-called “equivalence in content” is the meaning of “moral” in this equation. And the answer is already given by Anscombe in the next sentence: “[all human action] is all either good or bad.” Here, the term “moral” suggests “some specific goodness or badness about an act that falls under it”,²⁴³ and “moral action-description” suggests something good or bad different from “neutral or indifferent action-descriptions, which suggest nothing either way”.²⁴⁴

²³⁸ AIDE, 209.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ GBHA, 203.

²⁴¹ See AIDE, 209.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 210–211.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

Later in the same article, she explains that:

To say that “human action” and “moral action” are equivalent is to say that all human action *in concreto* is either good or bad *simpliciter*. There is no need to insert “morally” and say “morally good or bad”. The term “moral” adds no sense to the phrase, because we are talking about human actions, and the ‘moral’ goodness of an action is nothing but its goodness as a human action. I mean: the goodness with which it is a good action.

(AIDE, 214, emphasis in original)

In fact, Anscombe does not explicitly use a connective between “All human action is moral action” and “It is all either good or bad”. Thus, we may wonder about two possibilities. Are all human actions moral actions because they are either good or bad? Or are all human actions either good or bad because they are all moral actions? Fortunately, in GBHA, when talking about the problem of morally good and bad action, Anscombe suggests that “the morally praiseworthy and blameworthy were good and bad things which are voluntary”.²⁴⁵ So we can understand this equation, “human action = moral action”, like this: human actions are all voluntary actions, and this voluntariness implies good and bad, which could also be presented as morally praiseworthy and blameworthy.²⁴⁶ So we can also answer the previous question – when Anscombe states the equation, she means that it holds because all human actions can be described as good or bad; they are said to be all “moral actions”.

In the last section, our analysis of “voluntary action” remains more at the level of philosophy of action, but we must not forget that Anscombe’s discussion of action theory is aimed at moral issues. In MME, Anscombe’s words about “responsibility”, a typical moral term, gives us some clues about the link between responsibility and human actions. She says that:

²⁴⁵ See GBHA, 201.

²⁴⁶ On the same page of GBHA, we find examples about skills, such as spelling, teaching, and doctoring. These examples relates to the third feature of “voluntary action” that we discussed in the last section, and they may help to understand the goodness and badness behind the application of skills.

Responsibility has three levels. (1) The primary level is that at which a mere cause (for example, a stroke of lightning) or contributory condition (such as the temperature of the atmosphere) is said to be responsible for something happening. (2) At a higher level, where a rational agent is involved, responsibility also includes callability to account. Someone responsible in this sense may have to answer the question of guilt. (3) The third level is that of guilt itself.²⁴⁷

The first level is purely physical movement, and so the responsibility here is more of an analysis of objective causes than the real concept of responsibility that interests us. The second and third levels of responsibility relate to human action, as the “rational agent” is involved, while in the second level, there is the “callability to account”, which may result in being guilty. In the third, we find the condition of being guilty.²⁴⁸ In this way, we can become aware of the connection between human action and responsibility.

A more precise analysis of this connection could be carried out by the idea of “profession”. In the last section, we talked about duties related to professions, such as that the profession of cook requires a person to season dishes properly, or the profession of doctor to give administer prescriptions to cure patients. The judgment of “good or bad” about these people’s actions here is to some extent about their “skill” – namely, whether their actions meet the objective requirements for their profession. Here, though, when we talk about “human action = moral action”, the judgment of “good or bad” is not about “skill”, but about good and bad human character. When human agents reach the stage of deliberation, their use of skills is to achieve certain goals related to human life.

An example concerns spelling. If a teacher deliberately misspells a word in order to

²⁴⁷ MME, 261–262.

²⁴⁸ See Valérie Aucouturier, “Human Action”, 346-347. See also Luke Gormally, “On Killing Human Beings”, 134. When talking about killing human beings, Gormally raises questions of responsibility and says that, in Anscombe’s account, responsibility is a three-level concept. “It may be used in reference, firstly, to being a cause or contributory condition of x happening; secondly, to being callable to account for x happening; and, thirdly, to be guilty for the occurrence of x, i.e. when one lacks an exonerating answer when called to account for causing or contributing to x happening”.

mislead students, his action is bad from the point of view of skills (the spelling) and the point of view of human character (as human action). But if a teacher teaches students the correct spelling by having them correct mistakes, his action can be a good human action, despite being bad at spelling.

In the last section, we also mentioned that, when human agents reach the stage of deliberation, there will sometimes be a question of acting in accordance with or against some specialist virtue, such as justice, courage, temperance, or truthfulness. Therefore, Anscombe claims that “a positive bad action is always an action which at least in this sense is an act of some vice; a good action one which is an exercise of some virtue and not of any vice”.²⁴⁹ Here we can see that, when we talk about “human action”, an Aristotelian ethics is always hidden behind Anscombe’s action theory; and when we talk about “moral action”, Anscombe uses the term “moral” in Aristotle’s sense.

It is worth mentioning the concept of “Aristotelian necessity”. This is the necessity without which good cannot be attained.²⁵⁰ Aristotelian necessity refers to the concept of duty, a concept under which human action considers what is good to do as human beings in particular circumstances, rather than what is right under a set of pre-existing rules or laws. This is the concept of duty for judging human actions that Anscombe advocates in her action theory.

3.2 “Human Action Description” and “Moral Action Description”

Anscombe then says that “not all human-action descriptions are moral action descriptions”.²⁵¹ This claim may confuse, “all human action is moral action” and “not all human-action descriptions are moral action descriptions” may sound contradictory at first. In fact, the apparent contradiction is related to what Anscombe calls “extensional equivalence”, which is what she argues against in understanding this equation.

²⁴⁹ GBHA, 203. See also GBHA, 205: “... not only that a bad action was one which is an act of some vice, at least in the sense that it is such an act as a vicious man of a certain sort is apt to do, but that a good action was one which is an exercise of some virtue and not of any vice”.

²⁵⁰ See PJ, 15. A more detailed discussion of “Aristotelian necessity” will be found in Chapter 4 Section 4.2 of this dissertation.

²⁵¹ AIDE, 210.

“Extensional equivalence” seems to require “two descriptions which happen to be true of the same things”. Accordingly, if the equation “human action = moral action” presents an “extensional equivalence”, “human-action descriptions” should equal “moral action-descriptions”. But Anscombe sees this extensional equivalence as a false equivalence of “human action” and “human-action description”. That’s why Anscombe says that “not all action-descriptions which can, and in the particular case often do, describe human actions are such that whatever acts fall under them are good or bad human actions”.²⁵²

Anscombe gives many examples to explain this idea. “Walking from point A to point B”,²⁵³ “picking a dandelion flower while walking along”²⁵⁴ and “falling from a tree”²⁵⁵ are all action descriptions. If the agents of these actions are adults rather than infants, they are normally human action descriptions, but they are not moral action-descriptions; rather, they are *indifferent* human-action descriptions, or morally neutral action descriptions. Anscombe, though, claims that this “does not mean that a real action, so describable, will be neither a good action nor a bad one, but will be a neutral action”.²⁵⁶ For example, “falling from a tree” sounds like a morally neutral description. However, one person may deliberately kill someone else by making himself fall from a branch of a tree onto someone’s neck. In this case, “falling from a tree” is voluntary on the agent’s part and therefore a morally bad description.

At the same time, some descriptions have some presumptions, such as “killing someone”, “cutting off a man’s arm”, “helping someone on to a bus”, “taking someone’s children away”, and “locking a man up in a cage”.²⁵⁷ They sound good or bad directly. But these human action descriptions may capture actions that are neither good nor bad. For example, “killing someone” is a description that can capture human action and often imply something morally bad. Suppose, though, that someone has been made up into a parcel, and by sheer accident, this parcel (person) got set rolling down a hill, and then this parcel (person) killed someone by knocking him over

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ The example of “walking from point A to point B” is given in AIDE, 210 and GBHA, 204.

²⁵⁴ The example of “picking a flower” is given in GBHA, 204.

²⁵⁵ The example of “falling from a tree” is given in GBHA, 203.

²⁵⁶ GBHA, 204.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

into the path of a rapid vehicle. In this case, we may still say “this parcel (person) killed someone”, but this action is not a human action on his (this parcel’s) part. We see the same for the same description “killing someone”, if the case is changed to, someone drove his car, and he reversed the car by mistake and killed a small child standing behind it. This action is a human action.²⁵⁸

All these previous examples show us the following: action descriptions that seem morally neutral may in fact describe human actions that are either good or bad, while action descriptions that seem obviously good or bad may only describe acts of human beings. There is, therefore, no direct connection between “human-action description” and “moral action description”. That is why Anscombe say that “not all human-action descriptions are moral action descriptions” and why she argues that “human action” cannot simply be equated with “human action descriptions”, so the equation between human action and moral action cannot be explained by extensional equivalence.

3.3 The Evaluation of Human Action: “It may be both good and bad.”

I have argued that there is no direct connection between “human action” and “human-action description”, and that human action is always either good or bad, while “human-action descriptions” may be morally neutral. From here it is not difficult to understand Anscombe’s comment that “every moral action-description, as a description of a particular human action, [does not] entail that that particular action was good, or again, that it was bad”.²⁵⁹ In particular, an action-description, even if a moral action description, is not enough to say whether or not it covers a human action. In other words, the “moral action” in this equation refers merely to the moral character of human actions, and this specific description does not have a direct

²⁵⁸ The example of “killing someone” is given in AIDE, 210.

²⁵⁹ AIDE, 210; See also AIDE, 203, where Anscombe writes: “... one might object that if just being an action is good, then neutral action-description must after all mention something good. [...] So how can I say that there are neutral action-description? The answer is that the good and bad suggested by moral action-descriptions is specific goodness and badness. That in the particular case each human action is good or bad is a different point from the generic goodness of any action as being an action: it means that each human action is specifically good or specifically bad”.

connection to the evaluation of human actions.²⁶⁰ As human actions are always moral actions, we would then question the connection between the evaluation of human action and moral action description.

Anscombe gives a very loose answer regarding the connection between “moral action-description” and “the goodness or badness of a particular action”: “[the moral action-description] may only entail that the action was, say, good, unless some aspect makes it bad. Or was bad, unless some excuse or justification either lets it have a certain goodness in as much as it is an action which is not wicked, or actually renders it specifically good”.²⁶¹ This answer shows two points. First, there is an asymmetry in determining whether an action is good or bad, since evaluating an action as good requires a stricter criterion. As Anscombe later adds, “one thing is good by reason of being good in every respect, bad from being bad in any. Here respects of good and bad have to belong to the thing under the description which it is described as good or bad”.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ In his article “Anscombe’s Wittgenstein”, Joel Backström explains this equation of “human action = moral action” as seeing the particular action in an interpersonal context of moral concern. He gives example that “someone sat down” sounds like a morally indifferent action description, but not so for “the one who sat down may have done so when she should have (concretely) stood up to someone, so hers was an act of cowardice or resignation”. Therefore, those seemingly morally indifferent action-descriptions can be seen as moral actions only in the light of moral concern. Backström claims that this essentially interpersonal character of moral concern is what Anscombe underscores: “the single human individual in relation to whom one acts”. Backström thinks that Anscombe’s remark that “‘moral’ doesn’t denote ‘an extra ingredient’ of some actions, but is rather the very element in which action has its being” makes explicit Wittgenstein’s discussion of “psychological concepts”. More discussion about Wittgenstein’s influence on Anscombe will be found in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. See Joel Backström, “Anscombe’s Wittgenstein”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, edited by Roger Teichmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 405.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 211–212. Similar ideas can also be found in GBHA: “And we can say: a positive bad action is always an action which at least in this sense is an act of some vice; a good action one which is an exercise of some virtue and not of any vice. I say ‘at least in this sense’ because someone may perform a spiteful act, or an act whose motive is lust, without yet having the vice of spite or licentiousness; but his act is an act of spite, say, because it is such an act as a spiteful man...” (GBHA, 203) and “... not only that a bad action was one which is an act of some vice, at least in the sense that it is such an act as

Second, a specific moral description can only indicate a possible evaluation of the human action it describes, but this evaluation for that specific action may also be influenced by other circumstances. Take again the example of “killing someone”.²⁶³ We have discussed the case where someone has been made up into a parcel and killed someone else, and so where “killing someone” is not a human action. But this is not the case I want to mention here. The “killing someone” that I am interested in now is a human action that has been proven to result in death. This description sounds like it already delivers a judgment on the action – it is this agent’s fault, we might think. But this is not necessarily a bad action. Anscombe thinks that if this agent has an excuse in the case of “killing someone”, he is perhaps exonerated and therefore not guilty of homicide. In the description “this agent killed an assailant who was attacking him out of self-defense or stopping attacks”, for example, this agent may be exonerated, or even exempt from persecution for homicide. In this circumstance, “killing someone”, even as a human action, cannot be seen simply as bad action. With this explanation, Anscombe tries to show the importance of specific circumstances when making moral judgments. This is not an easy view to accept, because we are usually used to making value judgments based on some facts; but Anscombe claims that the goodness or badness of an action is not some additional feature added on top of what already happened. To this extent, the moral fact is human action itself, and goodness or badness are the properties of human action.

There is a paradox here, however. Does this explanation mean that the human action “killing someone” is good? Indeed, Anscombe claims that all human action is either good or bad. This apparent paradox leads us to note that Anscombe adds another sentence in parentheses after claiming this equation – that “it may be both”. In other words, a human action may be both good and bad. This is what Anscombe wishes to say about good and bad for actual particular occurrences of actions, since she explains that “it may be good only in a certain respect, and bad in others, then it is not good *tout court*, but bad”.²⁶⁴

a vicious man of a certain sort is apt to do, but that a good action was one which is an exercise of some virtue and not of any vice”. (GBHA, 205)

²⁶³ The example of “killing someone” is given in AIDE, 211.

²⁶⁴ AIDE, 212. Emphasis in original.

3.4 The Source of Moral Duty

The equation “human action = moral action” also reminds of Anscombe’s second thesis in MMP, where she claims that “the concept of obligation, and duty – moral obligation and moral duty, that is to say – and of what is morally right and wrong, and of the moral sense of “ought”, ought to be jettisoned” (MMP, 1). These two claims are perplexing: it seems that in the equation Anscombe emphasizes the “moral” feature of human action, while in her view in MMP, she rejects the use of “moral” for its redundancy.²⁶⁵ I do not think this perplexity is legitimate, though, because the word “moral” represents different meanings in these two places. I also think that this equation helps us understand why Anscombe considers the concept of “moral” to be redundant in MMP.

As we have mentioned before, Anscombe uses the term “moral” as it appears in Aristotelian ethics, where it suggests some specific goodness or badness about an act that falls under it – namely, the meaning of “moral” refers to matters of human character. Anscombe means that all human action is either good or bad, and so there is no need to insert “morally” and say “morally good or bad”. That is to say, the term “moral” adds no sense to the phrase, as it means the good or bad character of human beings or human life forms.

But in MMP the term “moral” has the meaning of “duty”, which stems from Kant and is later found in most modern moral philosophers. Initially this sense of “moral” is exemplified by Kantian philosophy in the late eighteenth century onwards, where it relates to the motive of duty. The idea of “duty” here is not the duties of a profession, nor is it connected with what things are for; rather, it derives from the categorical imperative. Thus, the idea of duty and rational will are connected. This term of “moral” and idea of “duty” show a contrast between “doing something for the motive of duty” and “doing something with enjoyment” – in Anscombe’s words, “the more you like doing something, the less of a purely moral agent you are”. Furthermore, Anscombe adds that this idea of “moral” also shows a contrast between “doing something from the motive of duty” and “doing something because you are the sort of creature to whose form of life it belongs to do that in that sort of way”. This addition gives us

²⁶⁵ This redundancy of the concept of “moral” is discussed in Chapter 1 Section 1, “Three Theses” and Chapter 2 Section 1, “The Law Conception of Ethics”, in this dissertation.

a clue for understanding how Anscombe believes the concept of “moral” should be taken, where it is closely connected with human life forms.²⁶⁶ But Anscombe thinks that, within modern moral philosophy, not only deontologists but also consequentialists, expressivists, and cognitivists, all act as if the term “moral” means a universal moral law given by a divine legislator; or more precisely, they act as if saying that an action is “moral” says something more than saying that the action is a good human action.

Anscombe does not share Kant’s definition of “moral” and proposes to return to the idea of “moral” as it appears in Aristotelian ethics. Hence, she draws the discussion towards the goodness and badness of action in relation to human action. In this way, we can also say that the approach taken by Anscombe to oppose Kant’s idea, about the abstract existence of pure rational will, returns to the notion of “voluntary action”. Anscombe’s solution to this universalization is concrete “human action”, the topic of this chapter. In this contrast between “doing something for the motive of duty” and “doing something with enjoyment”, Anscombe tries to prove that moral duty should not merely be the result of a fight against desires and inclinations. It should instead involve some understanding of human flourishing, which may indeed relate to human desires.²⁶⁷ Indeed, human action could be understood as an action with a purpose towards an end, rather than with obedience to certain moral obligation or duties. This idea gives a different framework for ethical discussions, compared to the so-called modern moral philosophy.

So far, then, the equation between human action and moral action gives us an idea from Aristotelian ethics: that all human action involves good and bad human characters, and this human character relates to a human kind good life. We can therefore say that human action can be qualified as good or bad in relation to its contribution to the flourishing of human life.

Anscombe then moves to the idea of “intentional human action”: “from considering good and bad, we see that the extension of ‘human action’ is wider than that of ‘intentional human action’”.²⁶⁸ This leads us to a further analysis of “intentional human action”.

²⁶⁶ The explanation of the term “moral” in MMP is to be found in GBHA, 195–196. This concept of “moral” is also discussed in Chapter 2 Section 2, “Two Kinds of ‘Moral’”, of this dissertation.

²⁶⁷ The idea about “human desire” is given in GBHA, 206.

²⁶⁸ Anscombe, AIDE, 213.

Section 4 Intentional Human Action

4.1 Human Action and Intentional Human Action

4.1.1 “Intentional Human Action” in AIDE

As argued in the previous sections, the topic of this chapter is the link between “human action” and “responsibility”, namely, how Anscombe’s action theory provides the foundation for ethics. From the equation between human action and voluntary action, and between human action and moral action, Anscombe tells us that all human action can be qualified as good or bad in relation to their contribution to the flourishing of human life. Meanwhile, Anscombe also proposes a new kind of “human action”, one with a narrower extension: “intentional human action”. She gives examples such as “acts of carelessness”, “negligence”, and “omission”, and claims that any of them may be a human action under a description within which it is not an intentional action. The fact that these actions are not intentional does not prevent them from being human actions, and does not take the character of human actions away from them.²⁶⁹

If we compare the relationship between these two kinds of action and the question “Why?”, we can see that, with the question “Why?” as a reference, what explains the narrower extension of “intentional action” and distinguishes “intentional action” is that its answer must involve a reason for acting. This restriction does not apply to “human action”.²⁷⁰

The reason why Anscombe introduces “intentional human action” is to discuss the issue of responsibility. In Section 3.1 “The Meaning of ‘Moral’: Good or Bad” of this chapter, we mentioned different levels of responsibility, where human actions relate to the second and third levels, as rational agents are involved in these two levels. But the second level of responsibility talks about the “callability to account”, which may or may not result in one’s being guilty, and

²⁶⁹ See AIDE, 213. “From considering good and bad, we see that the extension of ‘human action’ is wider than that of ‘intentional human action’. That is to say: something may be a human action under a description under which it is not an intentional action. Acts of carelessness, negligence and omission may be of this character. For though they can be intentional, they may not be so, but their not being intentional does not take the character of human action away from them”.

²⁷⁰ Anscombe explains that even though the question “What is the relevant sense of the question ‘Why?’” and “What is meant by ‘reason for acting?’” are the same, she still brings about the question “Why?” instead of saying “reason for acting” directly in *Intention* §5.

only the third level concerns being fully guilty. Introducing the concept of “intentional human action” is meant to make more explicit the difference between various human actions and responsibility. The “reason for acting” in “intentional human action” is the essential element to characterize the third level of responsibility.

4.1.2 “Action with Different Levels of Description” in “Practical Truth”

At the beginning of “Practical Truth”,²⁷¹ Anscombe describes a kind of human action that shares much in common with “intentional human action”. Such actions are characterized by “a special kind of multiplicity of levels of description”. Anscombe illustrates this “multiplicity of levels of description” by the example of one action being described as:

I put ink on paper in the form of letters; I am writing something; I am in fact signing something with my name; By signing my name, I am joining in a petition to the governor of the state where I am an inhabitant; By joining this petition, I am taking part in a campaign to get people tortured under interrogation; By doing this, I am keeping a promise; I am avoiding trouble with some conspirators who have got me to promise to do that. (PT, 149)

Anscombe’s purpose in proposing “the kind of different levels of description of a human action” concerns the agent’s responsibility. She claims that in many different levels of description, the corresponding action is an intentional action. Because these different levels of description relate to an evolving series of answers to the question “Why?”,²⁷² Anscombe takes the same example, where “someone was writing his or her name on a piece of paper”.

- Why?
- I was signing a contract of sale of a car.
- Why?

²⁷¹ Anscombe, “Practical Truth” (henceforth PT), in GG1, 149–158.

²⁷² In PT, Anscombe’s original phrase is “what for”. Here I suppose “what for” and “why” are the same question.

- So as not to own the car, and to be able to avoid its being taken from me by bailiffs to contribute to a fine I don't want to pay.
- Why?
- Because I regard the fine as unjust and I am therefore unwilling to pay it, and I don't want property taken from me to meet it.²⁷³

We can therefore equate the “action with a special kind of multiplicity of levels of description” in PT and the “intentional human action” in AIDE. They both apply to a certain sense of the question “Why?” and hence represent deliberation on intentions. Furthermore, Anscombe says that her purpose in proposing this kind of action is to discuss “the agent's responsibility”, which is also in line with the purpose of Anscombe's discussion of human action. We could thus see a link between “a special kind of multiplicity of levels of description”, “the agent's intentions”, “the agent's deliberation and choice”, and “the agent's responsibility”.

But Anscombe also says that this type of action is not the only example where the agent is responsible. She explains that, even though the answer to “Why?” is “I didn't notice such-and-such features of the situation”, the agent is still responsible, but not with the same kind of responsibility as for certain other answer to “Why?”. This point corresponds exactly to different levels of responsibility, and shows that Anscombe's interest here is the third level, which concerns “intentional human action” and “full responsibility”.

It is also noteworthy that there exist other kinds of “different levels of description”, but Anscombe does not wish to discuss here. She gives two examples about levels she was not interested in.²⁷⁴ The first one is about a tree falling. “It breaks the glasses it falls on. It infuriates

²⁷³ The example is from Anscombe in PT, 150. “In these cases, the series of descriptions is connected with a special sort of developing series of true answers to the question ‘What for?’ You were writing your name on a piece of paper – what for? The answer is ‘I was signing a contract of sale of a car’. What for? ‘So as not to own the car, so as to be able to avoid its being taken from me by bailiffs to contribute to a fine I don't want to pay – that is, to avoid paying a fine.’ What for? ‘Oh, because I regard the fine as unjust and am therefore unwilling to pay it, and I don't want property taken from me to meet it.’ Why won't you give up your property to pay a fine you think unjust? “Simply because I think it unjust and I can reasonably avoid loss of property in this way.”

²⁷⁴ Both examples are given by Anscombe in PT, 149–150.

the owner of the glasses. It makes him behave crossly to the people he is with. So it causes him to lose a contract he was hoping to make. This is a sequence of effects, each effect a cause of the next one". The second example is that "For want of a nail, a shoe was lost. For want of the shoe, the horse was lost. For want of the horse, the rider was lost. For want of the rider, a message was lost. For want of the message, a battle was lost. And all for the want of a horse-shoe nail." These two examples do not show different levels of intentions; rather, they show a sequence of effects, each effect a cause of the next one, so they belong to a "chain of causality going back in time", as Anscombe described in her article "The Causation of Action".²⁷⁵ In that article she gives an example about a door:

The door moved because of the push from the arm of the mechanism; that happened because of the expansion of a spring; that, because of the previous compression of the spring; that, because of the previous movement of the door in the other direction; that, because of the push of a hand; that, because of the placing of the hand and the extension of the arm; that, because of the contraction of the muscles; this last because of the message down the efferent nerves... (CA, 92)

Anscombe thinks that the problem of this chain is that no one knows where the end is, unless we find more information of a different kind, such as "the man shutting the door was obeying an order" or "the man shutting the door had caught sight of something that made him want to shut the door". Without this sort of information, we cannot include a discussion of responsibility.

Anscombe claims that her purpose in discussing "intentional human action" is to explain the notion of "practical truth".²⁷⁶ So we must further investigate Anscombe's notion of "practical truth" and how it helps to understand the link between human action and responsibility.

²⁷⁵ Anscombe, "The Causation of Action" (henceforth CA), in GG1, 89–108; originally published in *Knowledge and Mind*, edited by C. Ginet (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 174–190.

²⁷⁶ See PT, 151.

4.2 Practical Truth

4.2.1 A Neglected Concept

Anscombe explains that the notion of practical truth was firstly formulated by Aristotle in Book VI of *Nicomachean Ethics*, at 1139a–b.²⁷⁷ Book VI is about “intellectual virtue”. In Book I, Chapter 13, Aristotle divides virtues into intellectual virtues and moral virtues, in accord with the differentiation of the soul. Theoretical wisdom, comprehension, and practical wisdom are intellectual virtues, and generosity and temperance are moral virtues.²⁷⁸ The notion of practical truth, though, has not received much attention since that time. At least, so claims José M. Torralba in his article “On Morally Neutral Actions, and the Relevance of Practical Truth for Action Theory”,²⁷⁹ where he also introduces a few other pieces dealing with Aristotle’s notion of practical truth.²⁸⁰ We must see, however, that Anscombe takes the notion of practical truth as essential to understanding human action – and yet Anscombe’s articles have not received much attention either. Torralba gives two explanations. First, practical truth is not explicitly discussed in *Intention*, a book exhibiting Anscombe’s action theory. Second, practical truth is a moral concept, so it is not considered necessary for the study of human action.²⁸¹ Here we see

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ The relation between “virtue” and “soul” in Aristotelian ethics has been discussed in Chapter 2 Section 3.2, “Virtue and Good”, of this dissertation.

²⁷⁹ José M. Torralba, “On Morally Neutral Actions, and the Relevance of Practical Truth for Action Theory”, in *The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 51–74.

²⁸⁰ These include Anselm Müller, “Praktisches Folgern und Selbstgestaltung nach Aristoteles” (München: Abler, 1982), 231–294; Fernando Inciarte, First Principles, “Substance and Action. Studies in Aristotle and Aristotelianism”, edited by L. Flamarique (Hildesheim, New York: Olms, 2005), 297–357; Alejandro G Vido, *Zeit und Praxis bei Aristoteles. Die Nikomachische Ethik und die zeit-ontologischen Voraussetzungen des vernunftgesteuerten Handelns* (München: Abler, 1996) and “Practical Truth and the Intellectual Virtues”, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 29(1) 2008: 73–115.

²⁸¹ See José M. Torralba, “On Morally Neutral Actions”, 53: “In my opinion, two reasons explain this. First, Anscombe does not explicitly discuss practical truth in *Intention*, and says little elsewhere about how it is related to her project in that book. Second, and more importantly, practical truth is a moral concept – since it is the morally good action – and, thus, not usually considered necessary for the study of human action as such.”

the problem mentioned before, that researchers treat Anscombe's *Intention* as an attempt to construct a complete theory of action, but they miss that its real purpose is to provide a moral philosophy through an analysis of human action. This neglect causes people to exclude the notion of practical truth from discussions about human action. In my opinion, the notion of practical truth is essential in Anscombe's action theory – it not only helps to understand the most critical part of human action, but also helps to connect Anscombe's action theory with her moral philosophy. It is thanks to the notion of practical truth that Anscombe's moral philosophy becomes systematic.

4.2.2 *Desire in Action*

Anscombe's analysis of "practical truth" begins with the parallel between thought and desire. In her own words, "Aristotle tells us that as positive and negative predication are in thought, so are pursuit of and flight from in desire".²⁸² Anscombe discusses the same topic in her article "Thought and Action in Aristotle: What is 'Practical Truth'?"²⁸³, where she translates this passage as "what affirmation and negation are in judgement, pursuit and avoidance are in desire".²⁸⁴

In the next paragraph of PT, Anscombe notes that the point of this comparison is to tie desire to action. In her own words,

Aristotle is not comparing attraction and contrary affects of the psychic faculty of desire to affirmation and negation: no, he compares pursuit and flight, which are possible actions, to positive predication and negation. That is to say, he considers desire, and in connection with it, he identifies action of pursuit and flight as saying 'Yes' or 'No', one to what is sought, the other to what is fled. (PT, 151)

²⁸² See PT, 151. Aristotle's original words are in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Chapter 2, 1139a21. The context is about things in the soul controlling action and truth.

²⁸³ Anscombe, "Thought and Action in Aristotle: What is 'Practical Truth'?" (henceforth TAA), in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, edited by J. R. Bambrough (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 143–158; reprinted in CPP1, 66–77.

²⁸⁴ TAA, 76.

Here Anscombe emphasizes that, when Aristotle contrasts desire with positive and negative predication, he does not simply discuss attraction and aversion on a psychic level – he is talking about two actions of “pursuit” and “flight”. Her explanation in TAA gives the same analysis, as she notes that “one can say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ both to a statement and to a proposal. Suppose [...] that the statement should say that doing such and such is ‘doing well’. There is the ‘yes’ in judgment and the ‘yes’ in the will, meaning that one wants to do that sort of thing. For to characterize it as ‘doing well’ is [...] to propose it as an object of ‘will’ – to put it up as a candidate for ‘will’, βουλησις.”²⁸⁵

Anscombe takes this to mean that, for Aristotle, desire is tied to action. To be more precise, if the affirmation and negation in thought are expressed by “Yes” and “No”, then the affirmation and negation in desire would be “what is sought” and “what is fled” in actions. When we talk about desire, therefore, we are not merely talking about a psychic faculty, but actions.

Anscombe then adds that:

The comparison with positive and negative judgmental predication is of course made *à propos* reactions of human beings who have language and are well advanced in the use of it. This fits the fact that his topics are *πραξις* and *προαίρεσις*, *action* and *decision*, in a sense in which neither can be attributed to children or beasts. Aristotle is therefore writing about men, *ἄνθρωποι*, not counting children, and also excluding other animals.”²⁸⁶

This supplement shows an important point. Anscombe believes that when Aristotle talks about desire here, the agent of such actions cannot include children and beasts. This definition of “men” echoes Anscombe’s analysis of the agent of “human action” that we presented in Section 2.2 of this chapter. There we said that the human action Anscombe is interested in is “voluntary

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ PT, 151. Anscombe repeats the same idea on the next page: “Thus, by identification of their roles in will with those of positive and negative predication in thought, the sort of ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ involved in decisions is claimed to be specifically human and not generically animal.”

action”, but the meaning of this term is not the same as that of Aristotle’s *ekovoioiv*, because Anscombe wishes to exclude babies and beasts as agents of actions in her definition. She did so in order to discuss the capacity of deliberation and choice in agents. In Section 2.3, we also mentioned Aristotle’s term *praxis*, which does not include beasts and babies, and is thus closer to what Anscombe wishes to discuss. But her concept of human action cannot be directly equated with Aristotle’s *praxis*, as we discussed in Section 2.3. Here, by stating that Aristotle’s concept of action does not include animals and babies, Anscombe is claiming that deliberation in action is important when Aristotle talks about desire.

Another point worth our attention is that when Anscombe talks about the restriction of “human beings”, she defines those beings as those “who have language and are well advanced in the use of it”. What is the link between the use of language and the capacity of deliberation? This question will be discussed in Chapter 4.

4.2.3 Practical Truth: Truth in agreement with right desire

For Anscombe, Aristotle’s conclusion here is that for a good decision to be made, two conditions must be met: first, the reasons must be true, and second, the desire must be right and pursue what reason asserts.²⁸⁷ But Anscombe thinks this conclusion cannot be drawn by the parallel

²⁸⁷ The original text of Aristotle’s conclusion is translated by Anscombe in this way in PT: “...this means that for decision to be sound the reasons must be true, the will right, and the same things must be named by the one and pursued by the other.” (PT, 152) In TAA, the same text is translated as: “...these things show that the judgement must be true and the wanting right, if the choice is to be sound, and the one must say and the other pursue the same thing”.

Given that I do not know Ancient Greek and cannot read Aristotle’s original text, I referenced two other versions of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Roger Crisp translates this text as “the reason must be true and the desire correct, if the rational choice is to be good, and the desire must pursue what reason asserts.” C.D.C. Reeve translates it as “both the reason must be true and the desire must be correct, if the deliberate choice is to be an excellent one, and the very things the one asserts, the other must pursue”.

Based on these different translations – and even Anscombe herself has different translation of the same term in different articles – we should note that there are three sets of concepts that Anscombe uses them interchangeably: (1) “decision” and “choice” for *προαίρεσις*; (2) “will”, “wanting” and “desire” for *ὄρεξις*; (3) “reason” and “judgment”. In writing this dissertation, I will not unify the translation of these concepts, and I will cite them according to Anscombe’s wording in the relevant citations.

alone, and must also rely on Aristotle's account of decision.²⁸⁸

Anscombe claims that since desire is tied to action, Aristotle introduces the concept of moral virtue. Moral virtue is virtue in actions and passions,²⁸⁹ and given that moral virtue is about decisions – and that decision is usually a deliberative desire²⁹⁰ - he draws the conclusion of two conditions for a good decision.²⁹¹

Thus, Aristotle's conclusion that if a good decision is to be made, the reasons must be true and the desire right. He then says that "this is practical thought and truth".²⁹² Here he introduces three different kinds of thinking: contemplative (theoretical), practical, and productive thinking. He explains that the good and bad state of thinking are truth and falsity, because truth is the characteristic activity of everything concerned with thinking.²⁹³ Aristotle adds that, in the case

²⁸⁸ See PT, 152. "This is implied by the parallel he has pointed to between thought and will (ὄρεξις), given his account of decision, which involves both thought and will. [...] Aristotle draws his conclusion not only from that identification, but, given it, from the character of a virtue as a disposition of the faculty of decision".

²⁸⁹ On the relation between "moral virtue" and "decision making", see *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II, Chapter 6, 1106b36: "[Moral] virtue is a state involving rational choice, consisting in a mean relative to us and determined by reason – the reason, that is, by reference to which the practically wise person would determine it".

²⁹⁰ About "decision is a deliberative desire", see *Nicomachean Ethics* Book III, Chapter 3, 1113a10: "Since the object of rational choice is one of the things in our power that is desired after deliberation, rational choice will be deliberative desire for things in our power; for, when we have decided on the basis of deliberation, we desire in accordance with our deliberation".

²⁹¹ Aristotle's original words are in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Chapter 2, 1139a22–26. The same passage is quoted both in PT and TAA. "So that, since moral virtue, i.e., virtue in actions and passions, is a disposition of decision making, and decision is deliberative will, this means that for decision to be sound the reasons must be true, the will right, and the same things must be named by the one and pursued by the other" (PT, 152); "So, since moral virtue is a disposition of one's choice, while choice is deliberated wanting, these things show that the judgement must be true and the wanting right, if the choice is to be sound, and the one must say and the other pursue the same thing" (TAA, 76).

²⁹² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a26.

²⁹³ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a26–29. Anscombe's analysis goes as follows: "He tells us that, for purely theoretical thinking the 'well and badly' are truth and falsehood. This is indeed what thinking does, well or badly, truly or falsely, and so these are the business (the ἐἶργον) of any

of practical thinking, “its being good consists in truth in agreement with right desire”.²⁹⁴

Torralba adds that the elements “truth” and “desire” in the definition of practical truth should be understood within the framework of the practical syllogism. His explanation is that “‘truth’ refers to the second premise (premise of the possible) and ‘desire’ to the first (premise of the good)”.²⁹⁵ By setting the definition of practical truth within this framework, we can better understand why Aristotle brings about the discussion regarding practical knowledge. It is because theoretical knowledge and technical knowledge cannot explain the realm of human action. Torralba believes that the discussion about practical knowledge is “one of the great contributions of Aristotle to the history of philosophy”. He also notes that Anscombe can be credited for her reintroduction the idea of “practical knowledge”, “practical reasoning”, “practical truth” to the twentieth century, because the philosophy of that time is characterized by the “incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge”.²⁹⁶

4.3 What is a Choice?

4.3.1 What is a Choice – Ends or Means?

After discussing the definition of “practical truth”, Anscombe presents a possible doubt on Aristotle’s consistency, or for her interpretation of Aristotle. In Book III he says that “a decision, a choice, related to means, not ends”, but in the interpretation of Book VI we just discussed, he

thinking. But he has also said, in speaking of the conditions of ‘sound’ decision, that the thinking and truth here are ‘practical thought and truth’. Here we have the explicit formulation ‘practical truth’”. (PT, 152)

²⁹⁴ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a31. Anscombe comments: “And now he adds to the general characterization of any thinking at all, that the ‘business’, the ‘job’, of thinking that is practical is ‘truth in agreement with right desire’.” (PT, 152)

²⁹⁵ José M. Torralba, “On Morally Neutral Actions”, 54. For more discussion about “practical reasoning”, see Anscombe, “Practical Inference”, in GG1, 109–147; originally published in *The Philosophy of Georg Henrik von Wright*, edited by P.A. Schilpp and L.E. Hahn, 1974, later reprinted in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, edited by R. Hursthouse, G. Lawrence and W. Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1–34.

²⁹⁶ See José M. Torralba, “On Morally Neutral Actions”, 51–52.

thinks that “the will in decision is a will for an end”.²⁹⁷

Anscombe has a relevant discussion on this issue in TAA. It also starts with a possible challenge to Aristotle’s consistency about the concept of “choice” (προαιρεσις) in different parts of *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book III (1113a4), Aristotle says that “what is ‘decided by deliberation’ is chosen”, while at the same time insisting that “the uncontrolled man (the ἀκρατής) does not choose to do what he does”, namely, “what he does in doing the kind of thing that he disapproves of, is not what Aristotle will call exercising choice”. But in Book VI (1142b18), Aristotle mentions “the possibility of a calculating uncontrolled man who will get what he arrived at by calculation (ἐκ του λογισμου τευξεται), and so will have deliberated correctly (ὀρθῶς ἐσται βεβουμενος).”²⁹⁸ The inconsistency here emerges. In Book III, what the uncontrolled man does is not a choice; in Book VI, though, the uncontrolled man does occasionally act by deliberation, and what is determined by deliberation is called “choice”, and so the uncontrolled man does occasionally act by choice. We may then wonder what Aristotle’s real view of “choice” is. The way Anscombe tries to answer this challenge relates to the question about mean or end in PT.

4.3.2 An Analysis of Choice

Anscombe first explains why the example in Book III is not a “choice”. It is because she takes “choice” not simply as “deliberating determination”, she instead claims that the context of Aristotle’s definition “what is determined by deliberation is chosen” shows that he has in mind “a deliberation what to do with a view to one’s ends”, and “that ends are things like being honored, health, the life of virtue, or material prosperity, or enjoyment of knowledge, or sensual pleasure”.²⁹⁹ This explanation takes “choice” as a deliberation about ends. In TAA, Anscombe attempts to resolve the inconsistency above with two defenses, one for the concepts of “choice” and one for “deliberation”. The first defense claims that “‘choice’ is of something determined not just by any deliberation, but by deliberation how to obtain an object of one’s will (βουλησις)

²⁹⁷ See PT, 153.

²⁹⁸ See TAA, 66.

²⁹⁹ See *ibid.*

rather than merely of one's desire (ἐπιθυμία) ...".³⁰⁰

With this claim in mind, we can take again the example of the uncontrolled man in Book III. Anscombe thinks that he is not one of those people "whose general object is enjoying a life of sensual pleasure"; instead "he simply has the particular purpose of seducing his neighbor's wife".³⁰¹ Therefore, "seducing his neighbor's wife" is not the result of deliberating about the end, and thus not a decision. This is also why we say that this man is "uncontrolled", rather than another kind of man Anscombe calls "licentious". For the same action "seducing his neighbor's wife", the licentious man acts in this way to satisfy his desires, and the satisfaction of desires or lusts is itself his end in life, which makes his action a "choice".³⁰²

Anscombe then develops a second defense against this inconsistency in order to explain the example in Book VI. This one claims that "not all deliberation is with a view to making a 'choice', forming a προαιρεσις, where none has yet been made; some deliberation is with a view to executing a 'choice'".³⁰³ Anscombe quotes Aristotle's words about "deliberation" in Book III to explain this defense: if we find something that seems to be a way of achieving our end, there may be further deliberation about how to manage that possible-seeming thing.³⁰⁴

With this interpretation of "deliberation", it is not difficult to imagine that the calculating, uncontrolled man in Book VI does act by deliberation. As Anscombe notes, he disapproves of adultery but is still tempted by his neighbor's wife, and he yields to the temptation and sets out to seduce her. He then calculates how best to do it and shows plenty of cleverness in his calculations.³⁰⁵ This calculation, the skillful approach, is reached by deliberation.

Although this uncontrolled man acts by deliberation, it is not a case of "choice", because the decision itself is not determined by deliberation. The role of deliberation here is just how to

³⁰⁰ See *ibid.*

³⁰¹ See *ibid.*

³⁰² See *ibid.*, 66-67.

³⁰³ See *ibid.*, 67.

³⁰⁴ See *ibid.* The quoted words of Aristotle are: "in Book III Aristotle speaks of trying to do the thing that a deliberation has determined in: 'if it seems possible, then try to do it. Possible things are the things that might come about through us' (1112b26)".

³⁰⁵ See *ibid.*, 68.

achieve an end. In response to this inconsistency, Anscombe admits that Book III does not suggest that the mean, which is calculated and employed to carry out a more remote end, is not itself also a “choice”. But if we want to reconcile the inconsistency in Book III and Book VI, we must say that “when deliberation how to execute a decision terminates in an action [...] this will not be a case of ‘choice’ if the decision itself was not reached by deliberation”.³⁰⁶ Therefore, both actions of uncontrolled men in Book III and Book VI are not cases of “choice”, and this for the same reason – their ends are not reached by deliberation. The difference between them is that the uncontrolled man in Book VI deliberates on how to proceed.

Of course, if the man approves of adultery, and the idea to seduce his neighbor’s wife is the application of his general principle of pursuing sensual enjoyment, the case would be an example of “choice”. His end would have been reached by deliberation as well. This would make him no longer an uncontrolled man, but an impulsive one – that is, the licentious man we mentioned before. The key to distinguishing the uncontrolled from the licentious man is that he has a bad conscience about his end, and he will not say that this is the kind of life he wants; the licentious man has chosen a life for the satisfaction of lusts.³⁰⁷

When talking about the deliberation on how to execute a decision, Anscombe mentions technical deliberation. Here she uses “technical” to cover practical cleverness in bringing particular situations about, as opposed to deliberation about the means to living well in general. She claims that this technical deliberation is how Aristotle’s account of deliberation (*βούλευσις* or *βουλή*) often seems to fit within the second defense.³⁰⁸ Given the relation between deliberation and choice, the question is whether there is such thing as a technical choice or purely executive choice.

Anscombe denies this possibility. According to Aristotle’s view in Book VI, he refuses the name “choice” for the technical or executive decision; in other words, there is no such things as “technical choice”. Technical deliberation could exist, but its result would not be “technical choice”. Anscombe emphasizes that something is only a choice if it deals with means to the

³⁰⁶ See *ibid.*, 67.

³⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, 67 and 70.

³⁰⁸ See *ibid.*, 68.

objects of a man's will. If a man's will is not concerned, therefore, no matter how much calculation is involved, the result of deliberation on how to execute it will not be a choice.³⁰⁹ Thus, Anscombe's two defenses are complementary in explaining Aristotle's concept of "choice".

We have now made clear the link between "choice" and "will", as Anscombe explains that the way to distinguish a decision reduced from "whether it is reached by deliberation" to "whether it is made with a view to the objects of the man's will".³¹⁰ The pleasure the uncontrolled man seeks to obtain from seducing his neighbor's wife is non an object of will. These defenses and explanations leave us wondering what "will" supposed to be. Is there a more precise way to explain "a man's will" that must be included in choices?

The answer in Book VI is that the uncontrolled man does not have a "will", because he is not prepared to say that this is the kind of life he wants. Anscombe thinks this point echoes Aristotle's words in Book VI, where he deals with the definition of "choice", that "choice does not exist without intellect and judgement, nor yet without moral character"³¹¹. Anscombe finds these words puzzling, because previous arguments give sound ground about choice involving intelligence, but saying nothing about it involving moral character. The only hint Anscombe finds in Aristotle's text is when he says that "doing well is the end of any choice" – in other words, "any sort of decision which does not have in view what one thinks of as a good way of proceeding in one's life, does not qualify to be a choice". At the same time, she thinks Aristotle's thesis clearly says that "there is no such things as your acting with εὐπραξία, 'doing well', in view unless you have some sort of moral character, virtuous or vicious".³¹² In the end, Anscombe concludes the following: when Aristotle says that choice does not occur without moral character, he has in mind that choice is only about those things done as means to "doing well".³¹³

We can temporarily return to the doubt in PT about Aristotle's consistency. Does a

³⁰⁹ See *ibid.*, 69–70.

³¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 70.

³¹¹ See *ibid.*, 69.

³¹² See *ibid.*, 70.

³¹³ See *ibid.*, 71.

decision/choice relate to means or ends? Here Anscombe answers for Aristotle, that a decision/choice relates to means rather than to ends, but the will or desire in choice is primarily about the end. The decision we make must contain the willing of ends.³¹⁴ We could therefore conclude that choice relates to both ends and means.

At first glance the answers Anscombe gives in PT and TAA seem to differ. In TAA she seems more inclined to admit that a choice is a man's will about the end. In my opinion, this inconsistency may simply be an ambiguity in Anscombe's wording, and the ideas presented in the two articles are consistent. For example, the choice related to means in PT seems to be the technical deliberation about how to execute a decision in TAA. In both Anscombe conveys the same idea about Aristotle's concept of "choice": first, a choice must be the result of deliberation about the end, which is the object of a man's will; and second, once a man has made a choice, he would deliberate about how to manage things in order to bring the end about. These two aspects constitute the complete concept of choice.

This concept of "choice" echoes the definition of "practical truth" as "truth in agreement with right desire", where "right desire" is the desire of doing well and "truth" means the technical deliberation on how to execute.³¹⁵ The "right desire" and "truth" also echo the intellectual virtue and moral character in choice. Indeed, Anscombe quotes Aristotle's words that moral virtue makes one's choice right, and cleverness makes the right choice come true.³¹⁶

4.3.3 Good Choice and Bad Choice

A choice does not exist without both intellectual judgement and moral character. The latter

³¹⁴ See PT, 154.

³¹⁵ In her article "Practical Truth in Aristotle", Sarah Broadie uses "logos-factor" and "desire-factor" to refer to the "true" and "right" parts in choice. In her own words, "Practical truth is evinced in a sound *prohairesis*, combining a *logos-factor* and a *desire-factor* which are as they should be: the logos true, the desire correct, and in concord." See Sarah Broadie, "Practical Truth in Aristotle", in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.90, No.2 (2016): 281–298.

³¹⁶ See Anscombe, TAA, 77; Aristotle's original words are at *NE* 1144a20: "Virtue makes one's choice right, but as for what has to be done for the sake of it, that doesn't belong to virtue but to another power – cleverness". Anscombe also says that "for doing well is the end, and that is the object of the wanting. That is why choice is appetitive intelligence or intelligent wanting" (TAA, 69).

implies deliberation about how a man wishes to live his life. Here the moral character behind the deliberation about living one's life well could be virtuous or vicious.

The example of the licentious man in TAA proves this point. Anscombe admits that the licentious man's action to seduce his neighbor's wife is a "choice", because his idea of a good life is to satisfy his lusts and his sensual appetites. That position fits with the definition of choice, where the moral character is vicious. Anscombe calls it a "bad choice", and this is also her definition of "practical falsehood". She explains that practical truth is brought about by action provided that a man forms and executes a good choice; then the man who forms and executes an evil choice will produce "practical falsehood".³¹⁷

Anscombe argues in a similar way in PT. After claiming that "practical truth" means "truth in agreement with right desire", Anscombe says that "truth in agreement with desire" means "things being as a desirer wants them to be", then "right desire" implies "things being as rightly desired". She goes on to claim that if we see the desire as a desire of doing well, then the end of the action of a wicked man is not different from that of a good man. The difference is that the former end is rightly desired, while the latter is wrongly desired, therefore they represent "practical truth" and "practical falsehood" respectively.³¹⁸ In Anscombe's own words: "practical truth is the truth brought about in sound deliberation leading to decision and action, and this includes the truth of the description 'doing well'"; while "practical falsehood" is "the agent chooses and he wants and believes the action that he chooses to be a case of doing well; and it is not."³¹⁹

Anscombe's explanation in PT also helps us to understand why the example of the uncontrolled man cannot be considered as either "practical truth" or "practical falsehood". The relevant cases here are of a wicked man who does choose but acts ineffectively, and thereby fails to achieve his objective; or an uncontrolled man who has the right conception of doing well but fails to pursue that objective. These would not be examples of "choice", because regardless of whether a wicked man accidentally does something good, or a man with good

³¹⁷ See TAA, 77.

³¹⁸ See PT, 153.

³¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 157.

objectives does something bad, there is no “truth in accord with desire”. Anscombe thinks that this point enables us to understand Aristotle’s claim that “if a choice is to be sound, not only must the thought be true, but the thinking must name and the desire pursue the same things”.³²⁰

Sarah Broadie notes that Anscombe’s rehabilitation of Aristotle’s notion of “practical truth” responds to both the objection that “the predicates ‘true’ and ‘false’ are senseless as applied to *what is done*” and the objection that “‘true’ and ‘false’ are senseless as applied to ethical judgements”.³²¹

4.3.4 Aristotle’s Insufficiency and Anscombe’s Original Concepts

Anscombe thinks that Aristotle’s view of “practical falsehood” is insufficient. She admits that Aristotle does not write as if he only wants to talk about sound practical thinking, but he does not talk about a “well or badly” thinking in determining actions either. Instead, discussion of the latter only comes implicitly when he talks about the dependence of doing well and its opposite. Anscombe does not think that Aristotle failed to notice this idea; rather, she thinks that he cannot develop the discussion of “falsehood” without getting into overly complicated questions.³²²

In addition, Anscombe thinks that Aristotle’s concept of “choice” cannot do all the work Aristotle wants it to. In TAA, when discussing the examples of the weak man and the licentious man, Anscombe thinks that there is something for which Aristotle has no regular name. More specifically, he has no name for the kind of “voluntariness” as “chosen”. For example, Aristotle regards the uncontrolled man as acting voluntarily, because he describes him as calculating cleverly to get what he proposes. But this is not the kind of voluntariness related to “choice”. Instead, it is the voluntariness of the licentious man that relates to “choice”. There must therefore exist a difference between these two kinds of voluntariness. Anscombe thinks that Aristotle did not see he was employing a key concept in action theory: in her own words, “the innocent unnoticeable verb he uses receives no attention from him”.³²³ In my view, Aristotle’s

³²⁰ See *ibid.*, 155.

³²¹ See Sarah Broadie, “Practical Truth in Aristotle”, 295; see also TAA, 77.

³²² See PT, 154.

³²³ See TAA, 69–71.

omission here would have led Anscombe to make the distinction between “voluntary action” and “intentional action”.³²⁴

Anscombe’s solution to the inadequacy of Aristotle’s concept of choice is to introduce the concept of “intentional action”. According to Anscombe’s definition, choice, as an action, is a deliberative intentional action. The link between “choice” and “deliberative intentional action” is also reflected in the correspondence between “different levels of description” in “intentional human action” and “different steps in the process of achieving the end” in “choice”.

Early in PT, Anscombe claims that her purpose for a series of descriptions of action is to explain the notion of practical truth. In TAA she also mentions that Aristotle’s concept of “choice” is influenced by his own conception of practical reasoning, where the form of practical reasoning is the form of deliberation. She notes that we must have a premise that “my concern is B”, and we start with a universal premise that “A is profitable for being B”, and then we proceed through intermediate premises “C is A”, “C can be obtained by D”, “D can be carried out by E”; in the end, we have a chain of reasoning “E – D – C – A – B”. If the action E is something that I can do, then the conclusion of this reasoning is to do E for the purpose of B.³²⁵

This idea of “a chain of reasoning/description” shared by “choice” and “intentional human action” is also part of Anscombe’s criticism in MMP. She calls this fault existing in the modern philosophy of the Anglo-American tradition the “monolithic conception of desire”, which represents a simplistic way of seeing what you want by what you do readily. But as the chain from the last paragraph shows, the present action doing E looks like a wanting to obtain D, but in fact the agent has in mind the will to achieve B; or, as in Anscombe’s example, it is possible to want to not get something you want, just as it is to believe that not everything you believe is true. The monolithic conception of desire, therefore, ignores the existence of different levels and kinds of wanting, and this is what Aristotle certainly knows.³²⁶ As we read in MMP:

³²⁴ See *ibid.*, 71–72. “The uncontrolled man who has further intentions in doing what he does, whose actions are deliberate, although the deliberation is in the interests of a desire which conflicts with what he regards as doing well – to describe his action we need a concept (our ‘intention’) having to do with will or appetite ...”

³²⁵ See *ibid.*, 72.

³²⁶ See PT, 154.

“anyone who has read Aristotle’s Ethics and has also read modern moral philosophy must have been struck by the great contrasts between them”.³²⁷ This neglect of the process of reasoning corresponds to the misunderstanding of the concept of “moral” discussed by Anscombe in MMP, where some equate “moral” with “virtue” and ignores the fact that Aristotle’s concept of virtue includes both “moral virtue” and “intellectual virtue”. We discussed this point in Chapter 2.

4.4 How Should a Human Being Live?

By the concept of “practical truth” and the discussion on “choice”, Anscombe completes Aristotle’s concept with her idea of “intention” and the “chains of description”. These ideas are necessary for the realization of “practical truth”, or truth in agreement with right desire, where practical truth is made true by action provided that a man *forms* and *executes* a good choice.

Anscombe thinks that, by the idea of “practical truth”, Aristotle provides an ideal model for acting in accordance with moral virtue – that is, the choice in which right desire participates. In order to ensure that right desire must be involved, in Aristotle’s reasoning, the first universal premises are always “It’s needed”, “It’s expedient”, and Anscombe sees these premises as Aristotle wanting a “must” in the conclusion in a verbal form. And Aristotle believes that this “must”, this necessity of good desire, comes from human beings, because happiness (doing well) is the end that anyone must have, as he has a rational end.³²⁸ In other words, as rational human beings, we should first acknowledge the grand universal premise that happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, and because happiness is the last objective of human action, we should act according to virtue, which means that the desire in decision about action must be a desire of happiness (doing well).

Anscombe’s quotation in PT also validates Aristotle’s point that “doing well is the end, and the desire in decision is for that. So decision is desiring thought or thinking desire – and the cause of this kind is man”. She underlines the importance of the final sentence in the quotation and repeats that “there is this special kind of cause operating in the world, and it is man”.³²⁹

³²⁷ See MMP, 1.

³²⁸ See TAA, 74–75. Also in Aristotle, *De Anima*, 432b5–7.

³²⁹ See PT, 152–153.

Anscombe does not think Aristotle's idea is perfect; on the contrary, she sees a certain split in Aristotle's thought. For example, his idea of the highest blessedness sounds like something divine, as he coins a word "to immortalize" (ἀθανατιζειν 1177b33).³³⁰ But she thinks Aristotle does acknowledge that most people's lives are more mundane, where people generally take "doing well" to be "having a successful and honorable conduct of life", such as "if one judges rightly, would be action in accordance with moral virtue". Anscombe claims, "Aristotle's unrealistic conception of the clearcutness of people's ends seems on investigation no to be so bad as it looked", as "many objectives that are no good are allowed for in his thought", such as "being rich or being famous or the life of knowledge".³³¹

If we go back to MMP, we see that Anscombe's discussion of "practical truth" fills that gap. She writes that "there is a huge gap, [...] which needs to be filled by an account of human nature, human action, the type of characteristic a virtue is, and above all of human flourishing".³³² And she fills it in a way that does ethics without using concepts such as "moral obligation"; she uses Aristotelian ethics. She does not expect the Aristotelian approach to fill the gap completely, and for that reason she introduces her own concepts such as "intention" and "description of action". But she does want to present a different path to ethics through the Aristotelian approach. The Aristotelian approach reminds us that moral terms do not always involve the idea of an absolute verdict as something bound by law, in which an ethical evaluation reduces to a deontic one. It also enables us to question the importance of doing the right thing. For Aristotle, as well as for Anscombe, the ethical responsibility of human beings is not to ask what duties we have; it is to ask, "How should I live my life?"

³³⁰ See TAA, 75–76.

³³¹ See *ibid.*, 76.

³³² MMP, 18.

Chapter 4 Language Game

“I don’t have a single idea in my head
that wasn’t put there by Wittgenstein”.³³³

– – Elizabeth Anscombe

Section 1 The Influence of Wittgenstein on Anscombe

1.1 Anscombe’s Method of Conceptual Analysis

When we analyzed Anscombe’s monograph *Intention*, we mentioned that the purpose of her analysis of action was not to provide a complete and systematic philosophy of action. Instead, she ought to give a *conceptual analysis* as the preparation for research ethics. This view is inspired by Rachael Wiseman’s 2016 article “The intended and unintended consequences of intention”.³³⁴ There Wiseman mentions that, in the decade following the publication of *Intention*, over 400 articles on the topic appeared in peer-reviewed philosophy journals; few, though, considered *Intention* as a whole. In face of these discussions, Wiseman puts aside those trying to develop *Intention* into a complete account of the nature of human action and turns to another two reviewers, Judith Jarvis and Iltyd Trethovvan, who see *Intention* as “a contribution towards a descriptive project, designed to clear away misunderstanding and accreted errors about the grammar of the concept of ‘intention’”. With this perspective in mind, Wiseman re-analyses the opening paragraph of *Intention*:

Very often, when a man says “I am going to do such-and-such”, we should say that

³³³ See Anthony Kenny, “Elizabeth Anscombe at Oxford”, in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, ed. John Haldane (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2019), 19.

³³⁴ Rachael Wiseman, “The Intended and Unintended Consequence of Intention”, in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, ed. John Haldane (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2019), 148–172.

this was an expression of intention. We also sometimes speak of an action as intentional, and we may also ask with what intention the thing was done. In each case we employ a concept of “intention”; now if we set out to describe this concept, and took only one of these three kinds of statement as containing our whole topic, we might very likely say things about what “intention” means which it would be false to say in one of the other cases.³³⁵

Wiseman quotes Kieran Setiya’s phrase in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*³³⁶, that if we understand *Intention* as offering a novel theory of action, this paragraph should be understood to “make a tripartite division which introduces philosophical perplexity and an explanatory task for philosophy”. Then the task of *Intention* becomes to explain the connection between the following: the mental state of *intending to act*, *intentional action*, and *reason for acting* (intention with which). But if we read *Intention* as conceptual analysis of the concept of “intention”, Wiseman says, this paragraph introduces three sorts of statement employing the concept of “intention”:

- (1) She said: “I am going to fail this exam”. (“she was expressing her intention”)
- (2) She jumped intentionally. (“an action as intentional”)
- (3) She left with the intention of fetching him. (“with what intention the thing was done”)

Here, the task of *Intention* becomes the conditions under which these statements are true or significant. Wiseman claims that Anscombe would think the distinction is intuitively clear in our everyday human interactions – but when it comes to philosophy, the difference is not something intuitively obvious at all.³³⁷ To examine the inadequacy and the inaccuracy of statements about the subject of “intention”, we must understand that Anscombe has this real goal in mind in writing *Intention*.

³³⁵ *Intention*, 1.

³³⁶ See Kieran Setiya, “Intention”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) Wiseman refers to the 2014 version.

³³⁷ *Intention*, 1–2,6.

In MMP, a more direct discussion of ethics, Anscombe also mentions a *conceptual analysis* represented by the philosophy of psychology. It is important to clarify that what Anscombe calls the philosophy of psychology is not a description of the state of mind nor an account of the psychological processes or mechanisms behind this mind; what she means is the grammar of a psychological concept. Anscombe gives her explanation in later pages of MMP:

In present-day philosophy an explanation is required how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one; to give such an explanation belongs to ethics; but it cannot even be begun until we are equipped with a sound philosophy of psychology. For the proof that an unjust man is a bad man would require a positive account of justice as a “virtue”. This part of the subject-matter of ethics is, however, completely closed to us until we have an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is – a problem, not of ethics, but of conceptual analysis – and how it relates to the actions in which it is instanced: a matter which I think Aristotle did not succeed in really making clear. For this we certainly need an account at least of what a human action is at all, and how its description as “doing such-and-such” is affected by its motive and by the intention or intentions in it; and for this an account of such concepts is required.³³⁸

This paragraph shows that the purpose of philosophy of psychology is to provide a solution to a problem in ethics. And the reason why the philosophy of psychology is required is that in ethics, we need “an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is”, namely, a conceptual analysis of virtues. This analysis involves the analysis of concepts such as “human nature”, “human action”, and “human flourishing”, because only these can explain how virtue relates to human actions and how the description of a human action is affected by the intention in it. So the philosophy of psychology becomes a sort of conceptual analysis for psychological concepts.

Anscombe is not the first to use this concept of “philosophy of psychology”. It is in fact

³³⁸ Anscombe, MMP, 4–5.

introduced by Wittgenstein to note a confusion in empirical psychology. He claims that what is needed is a grammar of psychological terms, as he says in *The Blue and Brown Books*: “what we were concerned with in these investigations was the grammar of those words which describe what are called ‘mental activities’: seeing, hearing, feeling, etc.”.³³⁹

All this discussion suggests that Anscombe inherits Wittgenstein’s method and uses a linguistic approach for research in both moral philosophy and action theory. We cannot understand her philosophy unless we understand this kind of research and the method suitable for it. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to discuss how conceptual analysis shapes Anscombe’s action theory and moral philosophy.

Before starting the discussion, I first provide a historical background on why Anscombe was influenced by Wittgenstein to use this linguistic approach.

1.2 The Influence of Wittgenstein on Anscombe

Until 1956, Anscombe had not publicly published anything on moral philosophy except for a pamphlet she co-authored as an undergraduate.³⁴⁰ From the late 1940s to the early 1950s, Anscombe’s scholarly energies had been almost entirely absorbed in the translation of Wittgenstein’s late writings, and she published almost nothing besides her translation of

³³⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the “Philosophical Investigation”* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1958), 70; See also Elisa Grimi, “Anscombe and Wittgenstein”, *Enrahonar: An International Journal of Theoretical and Practical Reason* 64 (2020): 167–169.

³⁴⁰ In 1939, Anscombe, together with Norman Daniel, a history undergraduate at St John’s, wrote a short pamphlet entitled “The Justice of the Present War Examined” opposing the war on the traditional Catholic doctrine of just war theory. They had it printed and sold in bookshops in Oxford and London. This pamphlet is reprinted in CPP3, 72–81. See Benjamin J.B. Lipscombe, *The Women Are Up to Something: How Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch Revolutionized Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 155–156; and Clare Mac Cumhaill & Rachael Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals: How Four Women Brought Philosophy Back to Life* (Chatto & Windus, 2022), 67.

Wittgenstein's masterpiece *Philosophical Investigations*.³⁴¹ Then, as we discussed in Chapter 1 Section 3, in 1956, when Oxford University's Convocation considered nominating Truman for an honorary degree, Anscombe publicly expressed her opposition to the nomination. After objecting in vain, she gave public talks and published articles in the following years.³⁴² Perhaps it is because Anscombe's work during this time has been related to Wittgenstein's late writings that we can note traces of Wittgenstein in Anscombe's articles on moral philosophy published after 1956.

In fact, not only Anscombe herself, but the whole Oxford Quartet were also influenced by Wittgenstein.³⁴³ This fact provided the theoretical consensus for their joint opposition to Truman's nomination and to the Oxford moral philosophy of the time.

In 1942, Anscombe moved to Cambridge because she was awarded the Sarah Smithson studentship at Newnham College, and she began attending lectures given by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's influence on Anscombe began here. Anscombe later returned to Oxford as the recipient of the Mary Somerville Research Fellowship at Somerville in 1946. In her application for this fellowship, she wrote, "I have been in great difficulties in the attempt to bring my work ... to a conclusion because my philosophical ideas have undergone radical alterations in the last two years". She is referring to her unsubmitted D.Phil. project about "Thomas Aquinas

³⁴¹ Wittgenstein died of prostate cancer in 1951. *Philosophical Investigations* was published posthumously in two parts in 1953. Most of Part I was ready for printing in 1946, but Wittgenstein withdrew the manuscript from his publisher. The Part II was added by his editors, Elizabeth Anscombe and Rush Rhees. In Wittgenstein's will, Rush Rhees is his executor, and Elizabeth Anscombe and G.H. von Wright are his literary administrators.

³⁴² These talks and articles from 1956 to 1958 have been presented and analyzed in Chapter 1 Section 3 of this dissertation.

³⁴³ The main references for the historical background of the Oxford Quartet include Mary Midgley's book *The Owl of Minerva: A Memoir*, Benjamin J.B. Lipscombe's book *The Women Are Up to Something*, Clare Mac Cumhaill & Rachael Wiseman's book *Metaphysical Animals*, and Thomas Nagel's review of these two books, entitled "What is rude?", published in *London Review of Books*, Vol.44 No.3, 10 February 2022. Specific chapters and page numbers will be given successively in the corresponding paragraphs below.

on the identity of bodies”. The project concerns ancient and modern conceptions of body and soul, and in particular about “Aristotle’s concept of ‘life’”; at the same time, though, she was strongly interested in Wittgenstein’s thought. As she came back to Oxford, she would then help her friends see an alternative to Oxford’s dominant views.³⁴⁴

Murdoch went to Cambridge for her graduate studies in the fall of 1947. In her research proposal, Murdoch wrote,

...although I have a great admiration for its methods ... I cannot regard logical positivism as the whole of philosophy. A consideration of ethical problems first convinced me of this ... One cannot abolish a sphere of human thought by branding it as ‘imaginative literature’. The unrest and the debate about the nature of human goodness and of ‘human reality’ will continue whether or not it is permitted to call itself philosophy. The linguistic philosopher should be prepared to take this challenge seriously.

She did not know yet how she would challenge logical positivism, but she knew that Wittgenstein was preoccupied with something similar. As soon as she arrived in Cambridge, Murdoch asked Anscombe for an introduction. In late October of that year, before Wittgenstein left Cambridge, Murdoch had a brief meeting with him. Later, Anscombe introduced Murdoch into the small community of Wittgenstein disciples in Cambridge and shared Wittgenstein’s unpublished lecture notes. In a later interview, Murdoch described herself as a “Wittgensteinian

³⁴⁴ References to the historical background for Anscombe include Clare Mac Cumhaill & Rachael Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 3 “Disorder and Hardship”: Section 2 “Elizabeth Returns to Aristotle & Human Nature”, Section 7 “Miss Anscombe Meets Professor Wittgenstein”, and Section 9 “Elizabeth’s New Plan”; Lipscombe, *The Women Are Up to Something*, Chapter 4 “The Coming Philosophers”: Section 3 “Homecomings”, 88–90. Anscombe’s original sentences in the application come from a letter to Janet Vaughan in March 29, 1946, applying for the Fellowship, in the Mary Somerville Research Fellowship file. (The note is given by Lipscombe in the above page numbers.)

neo-Platonist”.³⁴⁵

Foot was back in Oxford to take an offer for a place as a graduate student at Somerville in 1945. In her renewed application to Somerville, she sketched a project entitled “The Idea of Substance in Locke and Kant”. But there was something she wanted to say about ethics, and nothing in the moral philosophy of her time satisfied her. The problem with the moral philosophy of Foot’s time was that it was constrained by the question of what is read and what is unread. This question traces back centuries in the history of Western philosophy. During the war time, it had been stated clearly by the Vienna Circle and by A.J. Ayer, who went to Vienna and returned with new ideas to change Oxford. Ayer’s influence continued and spread throughout Foot’s undergraduate years. With the dichotomy between facts and values, moral judgements merely expressed the approval or disapproval of the speaker. But after seeing wartime news, Foot sought alternative doctrines to express the evils of the Nazis. Years later she would claim: “This is not just a personal decision ... or an expression of disapproval. There is something objective here”. She did not find the words alone, as her friends helped her.³⁴⁶

Upon leaving Oxford for Reading in 1950, Midgley had stepped away from the world of professional philosophy. But in the late 1940s, the four of them spent time together in Oxford, while Midgley began her doctoral thesis in Oxford. Discussions during that time influenced her ideas on moral philosophy, which showed up in later publications.³⁴⁷

After Anscombe returned to Oxford in 1946, she was often seen with Foot walking towards

³⁴⁵ Reference to the historical background for Murdoch includes Lipscombe, *The Women Are Up to Something*, Chapter 5 “Murdoch’s Diagnosis”: Section 3 “A Wittgensteinian Neo-Platonist”, 117–121. Murdoch’s original sentences come from the Newnham College Archives; the note is given by Lipscombe in the above page numbers.

³⁴⁶ References to the historical background for Foot include Lipscombe, *The Women Are Up to Something*, Chapter 1 “Facts and Values”, 1–21; and Clare Mac Cumhaill & Rachael Wiseman’s book *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 4 “Park Town”: Section 2 “Philippa Determines to Show that Ayer is Wrong”, 143–148. Foot’s original words come from an interview with Jonathan Ree “Twenty Minutes – Philosophical Lives”. (The note is given by Lipscombe in the above page numbers.)

³⁴⁷ References to the historical background for Midgley includes Lipscombe, *The Women Are Up to Something*, Chapter 8 “Slipping Out Over the Wall”, 200–237.

Somerville. They could also be found after lunch in the Somerville Senior Common Room, sitting on stools at the end of the hall, one on either side of the fireplace, perhaps practicing or experimenting Wittgenstein's philosophy. As Foot would later tell her students, Wittgenstein's philosophy "really needs to be done live, with two people, one trying to articulate what one naturally wants to say, the other trying to get deep into their head and diagnose what is going wrong." Foot recalled these afternoon discussions many years later and wrote: "Every week I was defeated and I thought of myself like a character in a child's comic where a steamroller has gone over them and you're just a silhouette on the ground – but you're there in the next episode. Elizabeth liked this very, very much and we had become great friends".³⁴⁸

With Murdoch's return to Oxford in late summer of 1948 to take up the appointment she had won at St. Anne's College, the four women began to meet regularly and attended lectures and classes together. Murdoch recorded in her journal: "A world of women. I reflected, talking with [Mary, Philippa and Elizabeth], how much I love them". They had a brief time together until Midgley left for the University of Reading in 1950. One of the ideas they discussed in that window was the meaning of "rudeness", inspired by Foot's patrician upbringing; she would express the idea in her 1958 article "Moral Arguments". This notion is similar to Hare's idea of "thick concepts" – some concepts involving both description and evaluation might be a foundation for moral judgment. But the idea of these four friends came to them from Wittgenstein through Anscombe. According to them, "rude" is clearly a descriptive concept. We can gather evidence to support a judgement that an action is rude, and these judgements can be correct or incorrect. At the same time, "rude" is also an evaluative concept. If we call an action "rude", we are judging it as a bad behavior. This view began to suggest the possibility to all of them that, if moral judgments of rudeness could be objectively correct or incorrect, what other judgments might be so as well?³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ References to the discussion between Anscombe and Foot include Lipscombe, *The Women Are Up to Something*, Chapter 7 "The Somerville Senior Common Room": Section 1 "A Day in the Life", 173–174; and Clare Mac Cumhaill & Rachael Wiseman's book *Metaphysical Animals*, Chapter 4 "Park Town": Section 5 "Elizabeth & Philippa Begin a Philosophical Conversation", 158–161.

³⁴⁹ References to the discussion after Murdoch's return to Oxford include Lipscombe, *The Women*

In the early 1950s, when Anscombe was deeply invested in Wittgenstein's late writings, Foot, Murdoch and Midgley developed their ideas from conversations with her. The inseparability of description and evaluation in ordinary human discourse would later be a major theme in a seminar Murdoch and Foot taught together in the early 1950s. Midgley later recalled:

[I] pick up some idea of Wittgenstein's later philosophy ... I think it was Elizabeth Anscombe who really made this new approach visible to me. Repeatedly and carefully, she spelt out how our thought about language has to be rooted in the complexities of real life, not imposed on it from outside as a calculus derived from axioms. ... [The special importance of language] arises because speech is a central human activity, reflecting our whole nature – because language is rooted, in a way that mathematics is not, in the wider structure of our lives. So it leads on to an investigation of our whole nature.³⁵⁰

They all agreed that language use is a complex form of behavior; it was, as Wittgenstein called it, “form of life”. Any simple set of rules purporting to lay out the necessary conditions for language to have meaning – that is, what Ayer was attempting – had to be wrong.

Are Up to Something, 98–101. Mary Midgley, *The Owl of Minerva: A Memoir*, Chapter 4 “At Oxford, 1938–1942”, 115. Concerning the discussion about “rudeness”, Midgley recalls a side story in her memoir to tell something of Anscombe's personal character. During their peaceful discussion, Murdoch happened to mention “Of course, the evaluative meaning of rudeness might not be all bad. For instance, Elizabeth, I should imagine that some people might sometimes describe you as ‘rude’?” Midgley thinks that Murdoch did not mean anything offensive, given that Anscombe's unbridled rudeness was so proverbial. But Murdoch did not realize that Anscombe herself might not be aware of it and did indeed take pride in it. Anscombe froze and was silent for a long time; then she stood up and gave a short speech showing that she regarded the suggestion as an intolerable insult. Then she marched out. This incident fit the stereotype that many people have of Anscombe. She was known to be sometimes fractious, intolerant, and unreasonable. But Midgley thinks these are just one side of Anscombe, and that Anscombe was in fact very helpful to Midgley.

³⁵⁰ Mary Midgley, *The Owl of Minerva: A Memoir*, Chapter 6 “In Oxford Again, 1945–9”, 159.

1.3 The Influence of Wittgenstein on Oxford Philosophers

In fact, not only Anscombe and her friends but those philosophers who they opposed were also influenced by Wittgenstein. The same story could be told about the rising generation of Oxford philosophers in the 1930s. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Cambridge had been the center of Anglophone philosophy, due mainly to Alfred North Whitehead, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. They produced groundbreaking works in logic and the philosophy of mathematics. There was not a similarly important figure at Oxford, nor was Oxford associated with any particular philosophical movement.³⁵¹

The change began in the 1930s. Among the philosophers who came up during the time, and who began to engage with their Cambridge peers, the most influential one was Ayer. Ayer's teacher Gilbert Ryle had encouraged him to explore the Vienna Circle. When he returned to England, Ayer published the best-seller, *Language, Truth and Logic* in 1936.

The Vienna Circle, also known as the school of logical positivism, was interested in the logic of science and mathematics. They wanted to banish from science and philosophy any talk that went beyond "facts", or empirical observations. They were against the spirit of "metaphysics" and embraced "the opposite spirit of enlightenment and anti-metaphysical factual research". They attempted to do so in part by means of a purification of language, seeking to eliminate from our descriptions of the world all traces of human subjectivity. They advocated for and tried to produce "a neutral system of formulae, for a symbolism freed from the slag of historical languages; and also ... a total system of concepts".³⁵²

As Oxford philosophers were nearly all trained as classicists and so lacked the requisite scientific background, when the positivist doctrine reached Oxford, it was used to uncover alleged confusions behind traditional philosophical problems. Ayer connected what he had seen

³⁵¹ Reference to the situation at Oxford is Lipscombe, *The Women Are Up to Something*, 40–44.

³⁵² These citations come from "The Vienna Circle", *The Scientific Conception of the World* (1929), in *Empiricism and Sociology*, by Otto Neurath (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing, 1973). They are quoted by Lipscombe in *The Women Are Up to Something*.

and heard in Vienna with his earlier reading of the British empiricist tradition: Hobbes, Locke and especially Hume. He thought traditional philosophers produced little of value because they had not policed their language in order to make sure that their statements were even meaningful. What kinds of statements are meaningful? Just two: (1) statements about the world that could be confirmed or disconfirmed by observation; (2) statements about the logic of our language. Thus, all theological and metaphysical statements were excluded, as well as all moral judgements. Ayer's book tried to show that reality was the world of facts described by the natural sciences, and that there was no place for value in that world.

Why would I say that those philosophers targeted by Anscombe and her friends were also influenced by Wittgenstein? It was Wittgenstein, in fact, who inspired the doctrine of the Vienna Circle. The story started at the beginning of the twentieth century, when a revolutionary movement later known as the linguistic turn took place in the history of Western philosophy. Philosophers proposed that the way to answer philosophical questions might be to study words and concepts rather than things and essences. They believed that once we get clear about the grammar of our language and its logical form, philosophical problems would simply disappear.

With his ideas in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), Wittgenstein was a pioneer in the linguistic turn. It was the Wittgenstein of this early period that influenced the Vienna Circle, and then Ayer. During the time, Wittgenstein viewed language as an abstract symbolism with which we can picture empirical facts. The role of language is to describe the world, and it is the isomorphic structure of thought and reality that makes this picturing possible. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the Vienna Circle deepened the linguistic turn with their rejection of metaphysics and their attempt to invent "ideal language philosophy".

The later Wittgenstein developed the linguistic turn in a different direction, and this was the Wittgenstein Anscombe learned from. Starting in the 1930s and continuing until his death in 1951, Wittgenstein worked out a sharply contrasting view.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Wittgenstein conducted seminars at Cambridge, developing most of the ideas that he intended to publish in his second book, *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein came to believe that the structure of language is not a reflection of a given world

of facts but is rather shaped by the lives and actions of people. Thus, his attention turned from formal logic to ordinary language, from an emphasis on definition to the ideas of “family resemblance” and “language game”, and from the general form of propositions to the general form of human life. In brief, the later Wittgenstein argued that the meanings of words reside in their ordinary uses, and have no need for clarification nor exhibition by formal logic. This is why previous philosophers had encountered difficulties in attempting to extract words from ordinary contexts in order to understand them. Wittgenstein would later describe his task as “to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (*PI*, §116).

In the next sections, I will demonstrate how the ideas of the later Wittgenstein influenced Anscombe’s philosophical approach in terms of three sets of connections: the connection between language use and human action, that between language use and human life, and that between language use and moral life.

Section 2 Language and Human Action

2.1 The Relation between Language Use and Human Action

In Chapter 3, when we spoke of “human action”, we mentioned that the human action that interests Anscombe is not only the actions of humans who reach the stage of deliberation, but also the actions of human beings “who have language and are well advanced in the use of it” (PT, 151).³⁵³ For Anscombe, “the use of language” is an important condition for “human action”.

At the same time, her famous characterization of “intentional action” in *Intention* §5, that “they are the actions to which a certain sense of the question ‘Why?’ is given application”, also shows that Anscombe makes “the use of language”, and more specifically the answering of a particular type of question, an important condition for the description of a certain type of human action.

Likewise, in *Intention* §46, Anscombe speaks about her special interest in human actions and raises the question “Why?” again: “The description of what we are interested in is a type of description that would not exist if our question ‘Why?’ did not.” She explains that this does not mean that “the movements of humans” are subject to the question “Why?”, just as we would not say that “certain appearances of chalk on blackboard” are subject to the question “What does it say?”. But we could still say that the description of the chalk marks on a blackboard would not exist if the question “What does it say?” did not. In Anscombe’s own words, it is because “it is of a word or sentence that we ask ‘What does it say?’; and the description of something as word or a sentence at all could not occur prior to the fact that words or sentences have meaning” (*Intention*, §46). If we regard these chalk marks on a blackboard as mere scribbles, therefore, that look like words but are not words, then the question “What does it say” is irrelevant here; conversely, if we raise the question, it means that we regard the marks as words or sentences with meaning.³⁵⁴

³⁵³ It appears in Chapter 3 Section 4.2.2. I foreshadow that the link between the use of language and human beings’ capacity of deliberation will be discussed in Chapter 4.

³⁵⁴ Valérie Aucouturier offers a similar analysis of this paragraph in her “Human Action” (335–

All this is meant to illustrate that, in Anscombe's view, the use of language is important in discussing human actions. Next, we must further explain how language use has this role. Afterwards we will show how the later Wittgenstein's influence manifests in Anscombe's work.

2.2 Language-Games

2.2.1 *A Theory of Language*

We just mentioned the example of whether certain appearances of chalk on a blackboard are mere scribbles that look like language, or are words and sentences with meaning. According to Anscombe's "A Theory of Language?",³⁵⁵ that chalk marks are words and sentences only within a particular language-game. She does not use the example of chalk marks and sentences in this article; here she takes Wittgenstein's words out of context and modifies them, saying that a sound is an expression only in a particular language-game.³⁵⁶ Anscombe sees it as "a possible basic statement of a theory of language", where the task of "describing the language-game" is to show how noises are significant speech.³⁵⁷

Anscombe says that this idea about language-games attracted her for a long time, and she once thought "that was the main thing, or the most fundamental thing, that was going to in Wittgenstein" (TL, 193). By the time she wrote "A Theory of Language?", she had already

337). She notes that this paragraph shows that there is a logical dependence between the concept of "human action" and the question "why?", and then uses an analogy of the connection between a word or sentence and the question "What does it say?" to explain this logical dependence. In her own words, "To a great extent the analogy is illuminating: the question 'What does it say?' is not relevant in the face of any scribble (say) that would merely look like a piece of written language. Something has to be recognized as a piece of language before we may ask 'What does it say?' and to ask 'What does it say?' about (say) some traces of ink on the paper simply is to treat them as language." Aucouturier has a different argumentative purpose here than I do, but I share her understanding of the text.

³⁵⁵ Anscombe, "A Theory of Language" (henceforth TL), in GG3, 193–203; originally published in *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, edited by Irving Block (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 148–158.

³⁵⁶ Wittgenstein's original text is, "But such a sound is an expression only in particular language-game, which now has to be described" (*PI*, §261).

³⁵⁷ See TL, 193.

given up on that idea. But she still wishes to discuss it to see whether it offered basic clues to a better understanding of Wittgenstein.³⁵⁸

Anscombe says that, once we pursue the conception of language-games, we feel constrained to distinguish between a “primitive language-game” and a “non-primitive language-game”.³⁵⁹

According to her view, a *primitive language-game* is a procedure into which sounds are interwoven, and the sounds’ role within the procedure makes them words or signs. There are very few primitive language-games that determine sounds to be signs; greeting someone would be an example.³⁶⁰ A *non-primitive language-game* is a procedure using what are already understood to be words. There are two cases of non-primitive language-games: the first is when nothing except what are already words will be used in a new procedure; the second one is when some old words and some new sounds integrate into the new procedure.³⁶¹ Anscombe uses Wittgenstein’s example of builders to explain these two kinds of language-games.

2.2.2 Primitive Language-Games

According to Anscombe, Wittgenstein’s example of builders, who are first described using just four words – “Slab”, “Block”, “Pillar”, and “Beam” – is to be conceived as “a complete primitive language”.³⁶² This example comes from §2 in *Philosophical Investigations*:

[T]he language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass him the stones and to do so in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they make use of a language consisting of the words “block”, “pillar”, “slab”, “beam”. A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-

³⁵⁸ See *ibid.*

³⁵⁹ See *ibid.*

³⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, 193-194.

³⁶¹ See *ibid.*, 194.

³⁶² See *ibid.*

such a call. (*PI*, §2)

Wittgenstein says that this language corresponds with the description of Augustine's conception of the learning of language. In §1 of *Philosophical Investigations*, he quotes Augustine and claims that these words give the essence of human language, which is that "*the words in language name objects*"; by this idea Wittgenstein concludes that, according to Augustine, "Every word has a meaning. The meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands". We can understand this conclusion with the builder example. The "block" consisting of the letters b-l-o-c-k is a "word", and its meaning is "*the stone that got a square shape*". The meaning "square stone" is here not an abstract concept, but refers concretely to what the builders have in front of them. In the same way, the "beam" consisting of the letters b-e-a-m is a word, and its meaning is "a long thick piece of stone". The relation of "block" and "beam" is not one of belonging to the same species with different shapes under that species. They are simply two different words, and the objects they stand for happen to be before the builders.

Instead of using "the spelling of letters", Anscombe uses "sound" to describe language use. This is a more appropriate description – apparently, in the scene described by Wittgenstein, the builder A does not write down the letters "b-l-o-c-k" in order to tell B what he needs. The builder A must instead have made some sounds, and the syllables form the word "block", and in the process of interacting with B, B comes to understand that "block" refers to the square stone in the pile. According to Anscombe, therefore, in the procedure of communication, the sound uttered with "block" becomes a word with meaning, and its meaning is the object for which it stands.

Later on in *Philosophical Investigations*,³⁶³ Wittgenstein explains that when children learn to talk, they practice such primitive forms of language. In these forms, the teaching of language is not explaining but training, and we could call it the "ostensive teaching of words". He gives a picture of this teaching process: "teacher's pointing to the objects, directing the

³⁶³ See *PI*, §5–7.

children’s attention to them, and at the same time uttering a word...” (*PI*, §6). By this means an associative connection between the words and objects is established. The game is similar to the communication between the builder A and the assistant B.³⁶⁴

After explaining this form for teaching language, Wittgenstein first introduces the concept of a “language-game”: “We can also think of the whole process of using words in [§2, the builder example] as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games ‘language-game’ and will sometime speak of a primitive language as a language-game” (*PI*, §7).

So far, my quotations from §1–§7 of *Philosophical Investigations* still fall within the essence of human language in Augustine’s sense. In §3 and §4, though, Wittgenstein notes Augustine’s limit: “[he] does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is in this system” (*PI*, §3). Wittgenstein introduces an analogy attempting to show that Augustine is correct, but strictly limited. If using language is like playing a game by moving objects around on a surface according to certain rules, Augustine seems to be thinking of boardgames. Boardgames do fit this description, but they are not the only games that do. If language activities are games as such, Augustine’s description seems to include only primitive language-games, but language-games are by no means limited to the primitive ones.

2.2.3 Non-Primitive Language-Games

In addition to the system of communication described by Augustine, Wittgenstein suggests including more things in language as well, like “the activities into which [language] is woven” (*PI*, §7). This would also be the non-primitive language-game described by Anscombe: “some old words and some new sounds weave into the new procedure” (TL, 194). Anscombe then borrows Wittgenstein’s expansion of the builder example in §8 to explain this non-primitive

³⁶⁴ There is one more thing in the process of teaching language that does not exist in the builder example – the is “the image of the word”. Wittgenstein says that, when a child hears the word, it is possible that a picture of the object comes to the child’s mind first, but the object’s picture is not the purpose of the words. See *PI*, §6.

language-game, in Wittgenstein's words:

Besides the four words "block", "pillar", etc., let it contain a sequence of words used as the shopkeeper in (1) use number-words (it may be the series of letters of the alphabet); further, let it contain two words which may as well be "there" and "this" (because that roughly indicates their purpose), which are used in connection with a pointing gesture; and finally a number of color samples. A gives an order like "d-slab-there". At the same time he shows the assistant a color sample, and when he utters the word "there" he points to a place on the building site. From the stock of slabs, B takes one for each letter of the alphabet up to "d", of the same color as the sample, and brings them to the place A indicates. – On other occasions A gives the order "this-there". At "this" he points at a building stone. And so on. (*PI*, §8)

This expanded language-game introduces three more kinds of words: first, the series of letters of the alphabet representing numbers, such as a, b, c, ...; second, the words "there" and "this", used with a pointing gesture to indicate a place; third, the words representing colors. If the words in primitive language-games are learnt by the ostensive teaching of words, how do we learn these new words from non-primitive language-games?

According to Wittgenstein, the series of number-words could be learnt by ostensive teaching. For example, people can point to slabs and count "a, b, c slabs", in the same way they learn the words "block", "pillar", etc. And Wittgenstein thinks, in fact, that children do learn the use of the first five or six elementary number-words in this way.³⁶⁵ But what about a bigger number? Or even numbers the alphabet could not represent? It seems that the ostensive teaching of words cannot be used to learn all number-words. The words "there" and "this" do not seem possible to teach in the ostensive way either. People might have trouble discerning whether the meaning of "there" is always connected with a pointing gesture, or whether it represents an ensemble of each specific place pointed to.

³⁶⁵ See *PI*, §9.

In primitive language-games, words signify objects, but in non-primitive language-games, objects do not always exist. So what do words signify? Wittgenstein asks this question in §10 and proposes an answer: the words “a”, “b” and so on signify numbers different from the roles played in the language by “block”, “slab”, “pillar”. In short, the uses of those words are absolutely unlike each other. As Wittgenstein’s criticism of Augustine goes, the idea that “every word has a meaning, and this meaning refers to the object for which the word stands” does not apply to all language activities.

Wittgenstein uses the analogy of tools to explain the roles of different kinds of words in §11: “Think of the tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pout, glue, nails and screws. – The functions of words are as diverse as the function of these objects (And in both cases there are similarities.)”.

As he notes, the functions of words in the non-primitive language-game in §8 – block, pillar, slab, beam, number-words, there, this, color-words – are as the functions of tools in a toolbox: hammer, pliers, saw, screwdriver, rule, glue gun, glue, nail, screw. These tools are not unrelated to each other, and some can be put into the same category, similarly to how we categorize the words in this language-game. For example, in this language, “block”, “pillar”, “slab” and “beam” all refer to stones, while “a”, “b”, “c” and “d” clearly do not refer to stones but, to numbers; “there” and “this” do not belong to either categories. Analogously, in the toolbox, “hammer” and “saw” can be categorized in the same group as they are all tools that modify something. In Wittgenstein’s words, “a hammer modifies the position of a nail, a saw [modifies] the shape of a board” (*PI*, §14). While “glue”, “nail” and “screw” seem like they could fall into the same category, since they are all tools that hold different things together. Here, the “rule” does not belong to any of the above categories. Even though Wittgenstein proposes that “[a rule can modify] our knowledge of a thing’s length”, he admits that nothing will be gained by this assimilation of expressions (*PI*, §14).

In the end, Wittgenstein does not attempt to make a complete classification of these words, but just sees them as different kinds of words. Of course, we can still categorize them if we wish, but we must clarify that “how we group words into kinds will depend on the aim of the

classification – and on our own inclination” (*PI*, §17). For example, in the toolbox, we can group “glue”, “nail” and “screw” together, because they all are tools that hold different things together; at the same time, we can exclude “glue” and group “nail”, “screw” with other tools such as “hammer”, because they are all tools made of steel. Therefore, we need not seek the completeness for the classification of words.

There are always new languages being incorporated into existing ones. We would not say that our language was incomplete before the incorporation of the notation for the infinitesimal calculus in the seventeenth century; nor would we say that our language was incomplete before incorporating chemical symbolism in the nineteenth century.³⁶⁶ In §18 Wittgenstein gives the example of city development to show why the completeness is not important in language: “Our language can be regarded as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, of houses with extension from various period, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses”. He also says, “[New languages] are suburbs of our language”.

After realizing that we cannot give any complete and unchanging definition for our language, Wittgenstein suggests that we should see the diversity of languages. For example, the utterance “Five slabs” is described as an assertion that the builder A uses to order the assistant B to move five slabs to a specific place in §8, but Wittgenstein suggests another possibility in §21, that the utterance “Five slabs” is a report by which B answers A’s question about the number of slabs in a pile. Our daily life has many more examples. Wittgenstein says that the sentence “Isn’t the weather glorious today?” could be taken as a question, but in fact is often used as an assertion.

In §23 of *Philosophical Investigations*, he claims that, in addition to assertions and questions, there are countless kinds of sentences, and countless different kinds of use for all the things we call “signs”, “words”, “sentences”. And the diversity of language is not something fixed, or given once for all; rather, new types of language, new language-games, come into existence. He gives some examples to show the variety:

³⁶⁶ The examples of chemical symbolism and calculus appear in *PI*, §18.

Giving orders, and acting on them –
Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements –
Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) –
Reporting an event –
Speculating about the event –
Forming and testing a hypothesis –
Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams –
Making up a story; and reading one –
Acting in a play –
Singing rounds –
Guessing riddles –
Cracking a joke; telling one –
Solving a problem in applied arithmetic –
Translating from one language into another –
Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. (*PI*, §23)

Wittgenstein would say that these various language-games represent various forms of life, since “the word ‘language-game’ is used here to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (*PI*, §23).

Anscombe agrees with Wittgenstein TL: “We should not be put off by the extreme simplicity of the example [of builders]” (TL, 195). She adds that “language and human capacity are so complex that e.g. different words can come to be counted as in some way the same word” (TL, 195). Here, she gives some examples about different sounds in order to explain how different words can be counted as the same,³⁶⁷ but she immediately urges us to forget the

³⁶⁷ Anscombe’s examples include different inflections and different sounds: “It might be that one used a different sound the next time: ‘Slab’, ‘Tink’, ‘Noffle’ might all be the ‘same word’ – you say ‘Tink’ if last time you said ‘Slab’ etc. but otherwise the role is the same” (TL, 195). As for different

possible complications in these examples and to see the difficulty in even simple cases.

2.2.4 *The Limitation of Language-Games*

Anscombe then comments in TL that, if Wittgenstein's effort was to explain all language reductively – using the example of builders to represent all possible language – his effort was unsuccessful, and he failed. As she puts it: “the pretended attempt would be positively fraudulent” (TL, 198). To be precise, Anscombe thinks the example of builders is a fraud, because:

[Wittgenstein] deliberately constructs a very small number of proceedings with a very small number of noises, each of which is a cluster of phonemes, and invites us to consider the very first type of proceeding as a “complete primitive language”. When the additions are given, we are presumably to consider the whole set of procedures of the builders as now constituting their “complete language”. (TL, 198)

Anscombe believes that in this setting, many problems of language are not presented. She gives an example of “red”, since she focuses on the problem of phonetics and morphemics. She says: “no problem is presented such as appears when we say we are quite sure that the word ‘red’ doesn't occur in ‘Get ready’, ‘He's read it’, ‘Don't tread there’, ‘Better edit it’, ‘Have you any bread?’, ‘It's ready to shred’, ‘It's predatory’, etc., etc.” (TL, 198–199) According to her, if we take the examples at the beginning of *Philosophical Investigation* as Wittgenstein's embryonic attempt to use micro-reductionist theory to study language, and we accept that his proposal is those clear and simple language-games, then the presentation is fraudulent.³⁶⁸

However, Anscombe does not think that this is Wittgenstein's real purpose. She writes,

inflections, she says: “That people master different inflections is impressive. ‘Romam’ is after all quite as different from ‘Roma’ as ‘broken’ is from ‘broker’” (TL, 195).

³⁶⁸ See TL, 199.

[t]he main purpose of the opening of the *Investigations* is to persuade us not to look at the connection between a word and its meaning either as set up or as explained (a) by ostensive definition, or (b) by association, or (c) by mental pictures, or (d) by experiences characteristic of meaning one thing rather than another, or (e) by a general relation of reference or naming or designation or signifying which has (logically) different kinds of objects as its terms in different cases. (TL, 199)

In short, these clear and simple language-games are not models, but just objects of comparison. They “give us the idea of the possible functioning of a word in use, without even invoking that of meaning” (TL, 199).

2.3 The Meaning of Words

2.3.1 The Grammar of Language

In TL, Anscombe further emphasizes a difficulty in understanding the functioning of a word. “There is an internal relation between a word and its meaning”, she says, and this relation makes it so that “under some circumstances we would so use the expression ‘that word’ that ‘it’ wouldn’t ‘be the same word’ if it hadn’t the same meaning” (TL, 200). Then how can we know the meaning of words? Anscombe asks “was Wittgenstein trying to break the ‘internal relation’ – to set up external relations instead?” (TL, 200) She answers no, and gets the answer from Wittgenstein’s claim about “*grammar*”.

Anscombe introduces the example of surgeons to explain this idea. In surgical work, surgeons often need to catch hold of different items, and although the action of “catching-hold-of” is always the same in every case, the things to be caught hold of are different in shape, and so surgeons will need different instruments to achieve the work of catching hold of differently shaped items. Then Anscombe proposes to “consider now the difference between naming a number, naming a particular man, and naming a kind of fruit” (TL, 200). She takes this consideration as an analogy to surgeons’ different instruments. It suggests that naming is always the same kind of activity, and “a number”, “a particular man”, “a kind of fruit” are different

instruments. The question is, in the action of “catching-hold-of”, there are different shapes of items; while in the process of naming, what are the things that have different “logical shapes”?³⁶⁹

What Anscombe wishes to discuss here is Wittgenstein’s idea of “the grammatical characterization of words”. The different shapes in words mean the different grammatical characterizations for them. Anscombe adds that Wittgenstein’s use of the word “grammatical” has been noticed, but is odd. Others prefer to use the word “logical”. Wittgenstein would not agree to equate “grammar” with “logic”, though, and he claims that his use of “grammar” is literally like what we learned in grammar class at school. Here, Anscombe does not declare her preference – she seems rather to think Wittgenstein’s use of “grammar” and people’s disagreement with it is not that important. She uses the analogy of God and notes that: “we ought to remember that there can be a difference of opinion about grammar, even though ‘grammar’ is the word for what the disagreement is about – just as there can be different beliefs about God, though the word is not the wrong one to use for the topic of disagreement” (TL, 201).

Then Anscombe introduces the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition to explain Wittgenstein’s conception of “grammar”. Before introducing it, she first comments that it is strange that Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar is closer to that tradition than the linguistic approach of the present times, given that Wittgenstein is always against the influence of Aristotelian logic.³⁷⁰ According to Anscombe’s introduction, Plato was the first to distinguish between name and verb, or subject and predicate, and this distinction covers a large number of diverse structures. The difference between Wittgenstein and Plato is that Plato sees the grammatical difference between “Theaetetus” and “walks”, while Wittgenstein sees the grammatical difference

³⁶⁹ For the example of surgeons and its analogue, see TL, 200.

³⁷⁰ She writes: “[it is strange that] Wittgenstein’s conception of the grammatical is closer to the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition than that of the linguistics... because Wittgenstein is always inveighing against the influence of ‘Aristotelian’ logic in causing people to force uses of language all into one mould; and here ‘Aristotelian’ logic is to be understood so broadly that Frege and Russell are examples of it too” (TL, 201).

between “Theaetetus” and “two”. In Wittgenstein’s conception, just as “proper name” is a grammatical category, so too are “numeral”, “color-name”³⁷¹, “psychological verb” all grammatical categories. To be more generic, “there are ‘categorical’ differences within each kind” (TL, 201).

Anscombe quotes passages from both Wittgenstein and Plato to demonstrate their similarity.³⁷² From Plato:

A statement does not consist of names spoken in succession or verbs apart from names ... it does not merely name something, but gets you somewhere by weaving together verbs with names ... those that fit together make a statement ... stating something *of* something (of you, say) ... the false statement stating of you, as being, things which are different from the things that *are* of you, and so things that are not, but all the same things which do exist. (*Sophist*, 262-3b)

And Wittgenstein:

The agreement, the harmony, between language and reality consists in this: if I say falsely that something is red, then, after all, it isn’t *red*. And if I want to explain “red” to someone in the statement that it is not red, I do it by pointing to something red. (*PI*, §429)

Anscombe then concludes: “The harmony between language and reality is found in the false statement no less than the true” (TL, 201). In other words, whether we point to a red apple and

³⁷¹ For “numeral” and “color-name” being grammatical categories, Anscombe adds: “Now ‘numerals’ would often be a special chapter in the grammar of a particular language. This is, however, largely because numerals affect cases and constructions of sentences in peculiar ways. Color-words do no in the language I know. If there are languages in which they do, then the treatment of those languages by grammarians will equally include separate chapters for them” (TL, 201).

³⁷² The quotes are from Anscombe, TL, 201. The passage of Wittgenstein is from *Philosophical Investigations* §429; in TL, Anscombe mistakenly gives the reference as §420.

correctly say “It’s red”, or we point to a green apple and incorrectly say “It’s red”, or we continue to point to this green apple and say instead “It’s not red”, in each of these statements, the word “red” refers to something red. In the false statement as well in the true one, therefore, the word “red” has a consistent meaning.

Anscombe also finds it a truism but still astonishing that, if we falsely say “It is red”, we can simply correct it to “It isn’t red”. She explains that we can change a false statement to a true one by negating or cancelling a negation, and this is possible because of “the distinction of different kinds of words which fit together to make description” (TL, 202). In other words, in Wittgenstein’s different statements about the color “red”, this agreement between language and reality is not achieved merely by the experience of colors, or mere by “something red” or the grammar of “red”. It comes about by the collective function for different kinds of words, such as the subject “it” with a gesture pointing to an object, the predicate “is”, and the negative “not”.

As for the difference between “the experience of colors” and “the description of colors”, Anscombe quotes Wittgenstein’s own words:

If you trained someone to emit a particular sound at the sight of something red, another at the sight of something yellow, and so on for other colors, still he would not yet be describing objects by their colors. Though he might be a help to us in giving a description. A description is a representation of a distribution in a space (in that of time, for instance). (*PI*, II, ix, 70)

If I let my gaze wander round a room and suddenly it lights on an object of a striking red color, and I say ‘Red!’ – that is not a description. (*PI*, II, ix, 71)

This quotation shows that if we are just trained to discern different colors and to make corresponding sounds – for example, saying “red” when seeing strawberries, saying “yellow” when seeing bananas, and this because of our training to make the correct sounds – this would just be the experience of colors. The word “red” here would mean that “my visual field was

suffused with red". At the same time, though, this experience of colors is helpful in making a description. The same examples would work too. When we see strawberries, we say "They are red", not because of the training to make a corresponding sound to a different color, but because we are providing a representation of a distribution in space, and so the sentence becomes a description. Here, "they" is the subject, maybe with a gesture pointing to strawberries; "are" is the copula, and "red" is the color-word. These words together make the description.

For Anscombe this is why Wittgenstein would not equate "grammar" with "logic", and it also explains why he insists that his use of "grammar" is literally like what we learned in grammar class at school. What's more, Anscombe thinks Wittgenstein would claim that many philosophical statements and metaphysical statements are just disguised statements of grammar. She does not elaborate on that claim here; I believe she mentions it simply to highlight Wittgenstein's interest in grammar. She notes that these claims are contentious, and "each such claim has to be examined separately, ... [because] it is difficult to form a judgement on the general claim" (TL, 202).

She also distinguishes two different opinions about what belongs to grammar. The first believes in the practice of a "formal" science of grammar; while the second view involves investigating what a given use of words attempts to tell us. The first would lead to "an examination of the ways that words occur together and an attempt to formulate rules and explanation of this, always in terms of purely linguistic structures" (TL, 202). The second would tend to consider the contrast between, for example, "For how long did you forget that?" and "For how long did you reflect on that?" (TL, 202).

Anscombe calls people who take the first view the "formal grammarians". She concludes that "there is after all no theory of language in Wittgenstein. ... attempts on the part of formal grammarians are bound to fail. If [formal grammarians] have been at all influenced by Wittgenstein in taking this direction that can only have been through a misunderstanding" (TL, 203).³⁷³

³⁷³ Here, Anscombe explains more details about the relation between Wittgenstein and formal grammarians: "[Wittgenstein's references to 'grammar' and his occasional statements of the form 'That

We can learn more about the meaning of “grammar” with Wittgenstein’s discussion in other works. In *Philosophical Grammar*, he writes that “grammar describes the use of words in the language” and “the place of a word in grammar is its meaning”, thus “[grammar] has somewhat the same relation to the language as the description of a game, the rules of a game, have to the game”.³⁷⁴ These passages imply that grammar consists of rules governing the use of words and thereby constituting the meanings of words. In his book *Wittgenstein on the Arbitrariness of Grammar*, Michael N. Forster writes that “[Wittgenstein] identifies grammar in general with the ‘rules for use of a word’”.³⁷⁵

Contrary to formal grammarians, Wittgenstein’s rules of grammar are not merely technical instructions for how to use language correctly, as with the external system of grammar that we can find in grammar books. Rather, they express the norm for meaningful language. Grammar, which usually contains rules of correct syntactic and semantic usage, becomes a collection of rules determining which linguistic activities are meaningful and which are not.

Since Wittgenstein says that grammar has the same relation to language as rules do to a game, his famous characterization of linguistic practice as “language-game” also helps to understand the identification of grammar as rules. Wittgenstein says in §54 of *Philosophical Investigations* that “a game is played according to a particular rule”. Even though there are many types of games, there will always be a rule for the game, and only obeying rules allows games to proceed smoothly.³⁷⁶ Saying something in a language is analogous to making a move

is not how the language-game is played’ may have played some part in leading ‘formal’ grammarians to try to characterize as ‘ungrammatical’ various forms of statement, such as ‘I mean to punish the mountain’, or ‘The mountain devoured the boy’ where there is for example an inappropriate object for a verb or the like. In view of the pictoriality of our use of language, the endless possibilities of a metaphor and picturesque new applications of words, such attempts on the part of formal grammarians are bound to fail” (TL, 202–203).

³⁷⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, § 23.

³⁷⁵ Michael N. Forster, *Wittgenstein on the Arbitrariness of Grammar* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 7.

³⁷⁶ Wittgenstein emphasizes that there is nothing in common among all games, but only similarities and affinities. He calls these similarities “family resemblances”. See Wittgenstein, *PI*, §66–67.

in a game, and so it is only by saying something according to the rules of grammar that utterances can be meaningful. This analogy between a language and a game demonstrates that the fact that words have meaning depends on their use in accordance with rules of grammar in various linguistic activities.

We must note here that, as the rules of games may in some cases be definite but in other cases can be vague or fluctuating, the same goes for the rules of grammar.³⁷⁷ In §83 of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes,

We can easily imagine people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball like this: starting various existing games, but playing several without finishing them, and in between throwing the ball aimlessly into the air, chasing one another with the ball, throwing it at one another for a joke, and so on. And now someone says: The whole time they are playing a ball-game and therefore are following definite rules at every throw. And is there not also the case where we play, and make up the rules as we go along? And even where we alter them – as we go along.

This example of playing a ball game shows the vagueness in the rules of a game. Given the analogy between language and games, Wittgenstein next says that “the application of a word [...] is not everywhere bounded by rules”.

Since the rules of grammar are sometimes vague, I would like to introduce another path to understand the meaning of words.

2.3.2 The Circumstance of Language Use

In her article “Wittgenstein: Whose Philosopher?”³⁷⁸, Anscombe asks “when do we understand

³⁷⁷ Michael N. Forster, *Wittgenstein on the Arbitrariness of Grammar*, 9.

³⁷⁸ Anscombe, “Wittgenstein: Whose Philosopher?” (henceforth WWP), in GG3, 205–215; originally published in *Wittgenstein: Centenary Essays*, edited by A. P. Griffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–10.

words?” For her the answer is that we mostly understand the meaning of a word when we *hear or say* it, but the real question is if we did not know the word before, how can we suddenly understand its meaning when we hear it?³⁷⁹ Anscombe quotes Wittgenstein from *Philosophical Investigations*, that “For a large class of cases of the employment of the word ‘meaning’ – though not for all – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (*PI*, §43).

Anscombe does not think this point answers her question. She continues and asks, if the meaning is the use we make of the word, how can I grasp it in a flash?” She also presents some examples:

When you said “funny” did you mean queer, or funny like a joke? [...] Suppose I utter the sound *bord* to you. You may be able to answer the question “what did you hear that as: the word ‘board’ or ‘bored’ – the noun or the past participle of ‘to bore’?” and if you say “the first” did you hear it as meaning something like a plank or something like a group of people with some official purpose? And if you say “the past participle” was it connected with boredom or with boring holes? Of course, you may say you didn’t hear it as anything, you just heard me make that noise and wondered why I did so. But if you do have one of those answers, which you very well may, then haven’t you experienced a meaning? (WWP, 207–208)³⁸⁰

All these examples are meant to show that we cannot understand the meaning of words so quickly. Anscombe believes that there must be something more behind words, which would make it possible for us to understand their meaning when we hear or say them. Here she introduces Wittgenstein’s view³⁸¹:

³⁷⁹ See WWP, 207.

³⁸⁰ Anscombe gives more examples in the following paragraphs.

³⁸¹ See WWP, 208–209. The original words are Wittgenstein’s, and the reductions are Anscombe’s.

If there has to be anything ‘behind the utterance of the formula’, it is *certain circumstances*, which justify me in saying I can go on – when the formula occurs to me. [And further:] In the sense in which there are processes (including mental processes) which are characteristic of understanding, understanding is not a mental process. (*PI*, §154, emphasis in original)

Thus [he continues] ... when [the man] suddenly knew how to go on, ... then possibly he had a special experience ... but for us it is the *circumstances* under which he had such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on. (*PI*, §155, emphasis in original)

These texts show that understanding is not a mental process; it relates instead to certain circumstances. We can suddenly understand a word when we hear or say it, because of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Anscombe then analyses Wittgenstein’s detailed consideration of reading, which appears following his claim about the importance of circumstances. She does so because the purpose of Wittgenstein’s investigation of reading is to help his contentions about understanding, which is to say that certain circumstances make us understand a word’s meaning.³⁸²

For Anscombe, the enquiry into reading must be important for Wittgenstein, as it occupies nine pages in *Philosophical Investigations*.³⁸³ About this enquiry she first says, “he will not count understanding what is read as part of reading for purpose of his investigation: it is there the activity of writing from dictation as well as those of rendering out loud what is written or printed and playing from a score” (WWP, 209).³⁸⁴ In my opinion, Wittgenstein examines the

³⁸² See WWP, 209.

³⁸³ In Anscombe’s own words: “The enquiry on reading occupies nine pages of the English edition of the *Untersuchungen*” (WWP, 209). By my count, Wittgenstein talks about “reading” from §156 to §170, or from page 67 to page 75. This is where Anscombe gets the figure of nine pages.

³⁸⁴ This passage derives from Wittgenstein’s original text: “I’m not counting the understanding of what is read as part of ‘reading’ for purposes of this examination: reading is here the activity of rendering

word “reading”, because he believes that the use of this word in our ordinary life is extremely common; at the same time, the roles this word plays, or the language-games where we employ it, are difficult to describe even in outline.³⁸⁵

Anscombe quotes Wittgenstein’s examples of an Englishman reading a newspaper, and a beginning reader doing so:

A reader reads a newspaper: his eye passed along the words; perhaps he says the words; some he takes in as wholes, others he reads syllable by syllable, occasionally letter by letter. Even if he says nothing while reading we would count him as having read a sentence if he could afterwards reproduce it, or nearly so. (WWP, 209–210)

A beginner in reading, by contrast, reads the words by laboriously spelling them out. He may guess some, or know some by heart. If he does that the teacher will say he is not really reading those words, and perhaps that he is pretending to. (WWP, 210)³⁸⁶

Anscombe continues with Wittgenstein’s explanation of these two examples, “as far as [it] concerns uttering any one of the printed words, the same thing may take place in the consciousness of the pupil who is ‘pretending’ to read, as in that of the practiced reader who is ‘reading’ it. The word ‘read’ is applied differently in the two cases.” (WWP, 210)³⁸⁷ The question then arises: can we give a criterion for what constitutes the reading mentioned above?

Wittgenstein offers some points here, which Anscombe mentions in WWP. These include the investigation about the first word that someone reads,³⁸⁸ about the brain and the nervous

out loud what is written or printed; but also of writing from dictation, copying something printed, playing from sheet music, and so on” (*PI*, §156).

³⁸⁵ See *PI*, §156.

³⁸⁶ See *ibid.* In Wittgenstein’s original text, it is “a German”; Anscombe adapts it to “an Englishman” in the English translation of *PI*.

³⁸⁷ See also *ibid.*, §156.

³⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, §157.

system,³⁸⁹ about a conscious experience of reading,³⁹⁰ about repeating something known by heart,³⁹¹ and others.³⁹² In the end, Wittgenstein concludes that “we use the word of ‘read’ for a family of cases. And in different circumstances we apply different criteria for a person’s reading”. (*PI*, §164) Here, Wittgenstein uses “family” to indicate the characteristic of these cases. The concept of “Family resemblances” is introduced by Wittgenstein in §67 of *Philosophical Investigations*; it describes “the various resemblances between members of a family – build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same way”. Wittgenstein believes that this is also the characteristic for the cases of reading.

Anscombe reaches a similar conclusion. From the first case to the last one, we must admit that no matter whether it concerns a beginner or a practiced reader, they all meet the criteria for reading. The fact is that there are different criteria, and the various circumstances give us with the understanding for each case of reading with its criterion.³⁹³ Anscombe also gives an example: “A child once said proudly when visiting his grandmother ‘I can read!’ ‘Good’, she said, and put a book before him. ‘Oh no’, he said, ‘that’s not the right book’.” For the child, his reading pertains to reading a particular book; for the grandmother, reading is the basic literacy ability to read any text almost without much difficulty. Neither is wrong about their criteria for reading. At the same time, we can understand the different meanings they are expressing, even though they are both using the same word “read”.

Anscombe also claims that “a ‘special experience’ or ‘words coming in a special way’ do not function as explanations of what reading is” (WWP, 211). Here she means that, while there are many experiences of and criteria for reading, no single one can explain the meaning of reading in a general sense. One explanation of reading fitting one circumstance might be considered wrong under another criterion. Anscombe admits that we can make some

³⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, §158.

³⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, §159-160.

³⁹¹ See *ibid.*, §161.

³⁹² See WWP, 210–211. These points are all from *PI*, §157–163.

³⁹³ See WWP, 211.

generalizations, but they are very restricted, so they can only represent very restricted criteria for reading. In short, she argues against an explanation of reading that is in some way supposed to apply generally, and she repeats that “our cases are particular and that cases vary according to circumstances” (WWP, 212).

2.4 Language-Games and Human Action

In the beginning of this section, we mentioned that the human action that interests Anscombe is that of human beings “who have language and are well advanced in the use of it”, and it means that “the use of language” is an important condition for “human action”. Meanwhile, in Chapter 3 Section 2.2, in talking about the equation between human action and voluntary action, we also noted that Anscombe’s concept of “human action” does not refer to all humans. Babies, for example, cannot fall under “human action”. This is because of her focus on the human capacity of deliberation and choice, as that capacity allows people to think about the purpose of life and act accordingly. She thus believes that a baby or someone with brain damaged do not reach this stage and so are not capable of human action. Here, we observe some consistency between the conditions of human linguistic capacity and action capacity.

In TL, when talking about the non-primitive language-games, Anscombe introduces a dialogue with a four-year-old child. This child had a piece of paper in her hand:

- A (Anscombe): Give me that.
C (Child): Whose is it? (Hands it over)
A: How many words did I say?
C: When?
A: When I asked you to give it to me.
C: One.
A: What was that one word?
C: “Can I have the paper, please?”³⁹⁴

³⁹⁴ TL, 198.

Anscombe explains that the last utterance of the child is in quotation marks because it was quite clearly an answer to her last question, and the utterance was not attempting to get the paper back. For Anscombe, this dialogue is not an important support for her contention, but it does illustrate it well: “the division of utterances into distinct words is a sophisticated proceeding” (TL, 198).³⁹⁵

In WWP, she also describes a story about children:

I went with my little girl, then four-years-old, to look in on Kanti Shah in Trinity. He was not in his rooms, but there was an offprint on a table. I sat down and picked it up. “Shall we go now?” asked the child. “Yes, but first I’ll read this a bit.” She waited expectantly and then said “Read it”. “I am reading it.” A bewildered silence followed, then she angrily shook my arm, exclaiming “Read it, read it!” I could not explain. (WWP, 215)

These examples are in line with what we mentioned in Section 2.3: that the use of language, as the most basic form of expression and communication, relies on the knowledge of grammatical rules and an understanding of the circumstances. These conditions require language users to have basic comprehension and rational thinking capacities, which is something that people under a certain age have not yet achieved. In other words, the appropriate use of language

³⁹⁵ Anscombe introduces this dialogue after quoting Wittgenstein’s text in *Philosophical Investigations* §20, where he states that the expression “Bring me a slab” sometimes could be seen as one word, and sometimes as four. We know this expression consist of four words when we use it in contrast to other sentences such as “Hand me a slab”, “Bring him a slab”, and so on. However, we say that because our language contains the possibility of those other sentences. Someone who did not understand our language – for example, a foreigner – who had fairly often heard someone giving the order “Bring me a slab!” might believe that his whole sequence of sounds was one word corresponding to the word for “building stone” in his language. This case is not with children, but it shows the same idea. A foreigner here represents people who do not have language or are not well advanced in its use in the sense that, as a foreigner, he does not know this particular language.

actually indicates a capacity of understanding and deliberation; hence if one is able to use language, it is assumed that one has reached the stage of those capacities, and that one can therefore act as a rational agent. This is why Anscombe says that the human action that interests her is the reactions of human beings “who have language and are well advanced in the use of it”, as those would be humans who have reached the stage of deliberation.

After analyzing the examples involving children, we now return to the beginning of this section, where we mentioned that “the use of language” is an important condition for “human action”. However, as human linguistic activities and human action are highly connected for Anscombe, rather than saying that language use is an important condition for human action, it is more correct to say that the linguistic activities are themselves important human actions.

The connection between human linguistic activities and human actions is not only about individuals acquiring language skills or individuals achieving the capacities of thinking and acting independently. The conception of a language-game emphasizes the study of word meaning in the process of use, so that language is not made of isolated and static signs, but involves a dynamic expression of human activity and human life. Individuals’ linguistic skills are reflected in their knowledge of rules, their understanding of the circumstances and their interaction with each other. If we wish to understand human actions in a society, we must understand the use of language in that society. The role of language-games as the form of life implies that the different language-games in different societies reflect different forms of people’s lives. Therefore, in addition to the discussion we had in this section about “language and human action”, we must also further analyze the connection between “language” and “human life”.

Section 3 Language and Human Life

3.1 The Conventional Nature of Language

At the end of the last section, we mentioned that all the use of language can be called language-games, and that linguistic activities are themselves important human actions. But the use of language is never just an individual activity; it is rather a collective one that involves people living within a society. We also mentioned that language is characterized by having grammars and rules, but that characteristic does not entail that every language game has a strict and defined system of rules. It instead implies that language is conventional. As Wittgenstein says in *Philosophical Investigations*, “What is true or false is what human beings say; and it is in their language that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life” (*PI*, §241). He adds that “It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language” (*PI*, §242).

In her article “Was Wittgenstein a Conventionalist?”³⁹⁶, Anscombe introduces the conventionality of truth, which she considers to be a contribution of the later Wittgenstein. The idea of truth implies that it is thinking that makes things good or bad, fair or foul, true or false, while the thinking may be a consensus within a society.³⁹⁷ She also claims that the goal of philosophy is achieving knowledge of what must be truth; instead, the problems of philosophy are that “the forms of language are deeply rooted in us” and “the truths of everyday communication are true only within the framework of a system of conventions” (WWC, 217). In the conventionality of truth, therefore, the forms of language are then associated with the truth or falsity of things.

Anscombe borrows Wittgenstein’s example of the concept of pain to explain the association. “You learned the concept pain by learning language”, Wittgenstein says (*PI*, §384), and Anscombe adds, “not by experiencing pain” (WWC, 220). Given that we already have a concept of pain, there is some other group of people with a similar concept of pain like ours,

³⁹⁶ Anscombe, “Was Wittgenstein a Conventionalist?” (henceforth WWC), in GG3, 217–230.

³⁹⁷ See WWC, 217.

except that their concept does not apply to situations where there is no obvious damage or physical disorder or incapacitation.³⁹⁸ Anscombe concludes these two concepts “pain without damage” and “pain with damage”. In this case, can we – as people who hold the concept of pain without damage – say that their concept misrepresents or misses something out?

Anscombe does not answer this question immediately and continues with another example. Given our concept of red, there is a group of people in a different world, whose concept of red is a degenerate form of green, and this color only occurs on the edges of some leaves.³⁹⁹ In this case, can we say that those people miss anything, or that they are making a mistake?

In order to answer these questions and to make these concepts intelligible when they are so different from ours, Anscombe asks us to imagine the “differences in facts of nature” and the “differences in human practices”.⁴⁰⁰ Assuming that the concept of red is used in two worlds, in our world, the concept of red refers to the color of strawberries, while in the other world, it refers to a degenerate form of green occurring on the edges of certain leaves. This is a difference in human practices that does not lead to a difference in the facts of the natural world itself. Whether we call it “red” or “green”, the color of the edges of certain leaves remains the same. At the same time, the color of strawberries is probably not ignored in the other world just because the concept of red has been used to describe something else. Even though the concepts used to describe the color of strawberries are different – which is clearly a difference in human practices – the fact of the existence of strawberries and the color of them remain the same. What is important for each world, each formation of the concepts, is that they have their own correspondence between concepts and facts of nature.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ See *ibid.*, 220.

³⁹⁹ See *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ See *ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ Anscombe offers another example about a linguistic world where the description of some general facts of nature is very different from ours. Color and shape vary independently in our world, while in this other world, people have only “simple” concepts which correspond to our “round and blue”, “red and square”, etc. Anscombe comments that “of course we have said in our description that there are not in their world the facts for which distinct words for color and shape give us the means of description. However, we might suppose that there were some such facts; these might then be

By this distinction between “differences in facts of nature” and the “differences in human practices”, Anscombe answers the questions above. We do not have the right to say that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones. We do not have the right to say that other people’s concepts misrepresent or fail to realize something that we realize.⁴⁰² In other words, we cannot tell the truth or falsity of things in the world outside the society in which we find ourselves, because our judgements of fact could only work within a shared system of language and our conventions.

Anscombe also cites Wittgenstein’s words to show the key thought of this discussion: “‘So you are saying that human agreement decides what is correct and what is wrong?’ – It is what human beings say that is correct and wrong, and they agree in language. That isn’t any agreement in opinions, but in form of life.” (*PI*, §241) Anscombe explains that, before we conclude about the truth or falsity of what people say, we have to know the system of language they use and the agreement in that language.⁴⁰³

This part started at the outside of one linguistic world in order to describe the association between the system of language and conventions in judgments about truth or falsity. The next part will investigate how understanding is formed within a world, or by a shared system of language and shared conventions.

overlooked, or might be regarded as very unimportant. The possession of such a language as we have would presumably make it easier to notice such facts than it might otherwise be. But we haven’t reason to say that people possessed only of the color-shape concepts would not be able to notice these facts. They can grant similarities without having terms for the respect of similarity” (WWC, 220–221).

⁴⁰² A few pages earlier, Anscombe already gives a similar conclusion: “One society [...] cannot criticize the beliefs and practices of another if their forms of life are different from one another. You are talking your language, and anything you say is a move in a language-game which is played in your society” (WWC, 218). This is not an original idea of Anscombe’s; she notes it is from Wittgenstein. He writes: “if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize – then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.” (*PI*, II, xii.)

⁴⁰³ See WWC, 223.

3.2 The Reliability of a Passerby

In the previous part, we said that people in one linguistic world might have trouble understanding the language of people in another linguistic world, and that people in one society cannot criticize the practices of people whose forms of life are different. This implies, at the same time, that people in the same world, who play the same language-games, share the same conventions.

In *Intention* §4, Anscombe raises a question: how do we tell someone's intention? To be more precise, she rewrites the question this way: what kind of true statements about people's intentions can we certainly make, and how do we know that they are true?

She introduces a traditional answer: people's intentions are purely in the sphere of the mind. She lists three reasons to support this traditional view. First, "[what] we are interested [is] not just in a man's intention *of* doing what he does, but in his intention *in* doing it, and this can very often not be seen from seeing what he does". Second, "the question whether [a man] intends to do what he does just does not arise; while if it does arise, it is rather often settled by asking [the man]". Third, "a man can form an intention which he then does nothing to carry out, [...] but the intention itself can be complete, although [the intention] remains a purely interior thing".⁴⁰⁴ Anscombe thinks that these reasons make us believe that "if we want to know a man's intention, [we must investigate] the contents of his mind, and only [...] by investigating something whose existence is purely in the sphere of the mind, [we can know what intention is. This traditional idea will definitely think that] what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does, is the very last thing we need consider in our enquiry."⁴⁰⁵

However, Anscombe rather claims that those things are actually the first we must consider, and her answer to the question of how to discern intentions is that "if you want to say at least

⁴⁰⁴ *Intention*, §4.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.* In Chapter 1 "Intentional Action" of his book *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, Roger Teichmann also talks about this traditional Cartesian view about intention. The "first-person authority" implies that "one's own statement of what one intends counts for more than what another person would say on the subject". (17)

some true things about a man's intentions, you will have a strong chance of success if you mention what he actually did or is doing" (*Intention*, §4). She explains that "whatever else he may intend" or "whatever may be his intentions in doing what he does", what we would "*say straight off* what a man did or was doing" will be what he intends.⁴⁰⁶

Anscombe continues explaining that the situation she has in mind is that of a witness in court being asked to tell what he had witnessed, such as in answer to "what was the man doing when you saw him?" The fact that the testimony of witnesses is admissible in court indicates precisely that, in the majority of cases, the witness' description of what a man was doing, from the large number of true statements of what physically happened – together with the man's own statement of what he was doing – may coincide with each other. She gives an example of someone sitting in a chair writing, and anyone passing by would know that this person is sitting in a chair and writing. If this passerby is asked "What is that person doing?", in general, "He is sitting in a chair and writing" would be his first account of an answer.

Anscombe concludes that here, what she is interested in is the fact that we can say "Look at a man and say what he is doing". This means that we can say what comes directly to mind and use it as a report to give information to someone who was not there, but is interested in what happened. We need not ask anyone.

My point is that Anscombe gives the premise for this example, that this passerby has "grown to the age of reason in the same world [as this person who is writing]".⁴⁰⁷ Two conditions are mentioned in this premise. First, the passerby or the witness must have grown to the age of reason. This echoes our argument in the previous section that people must reach a certain age in order to have the ability to use language correctly and to think deliberately. Second, the person who does the act and the person who passes by and describes what he saw

⁴⁰⁶ Emphasis in original. Here, we must notice that Anscombe's words are "a strong chance of success" and "the greater number of the things". These phrases indicate that Anscombe does not attempt to provide an absolutely right answer applying in all settings; instead, she describes an answer that is most likely in reality. In fact, Anscombe argues against any kind of absolute, universally applicable answer.

⁴⁰⁷ See *Intention*, §4.

must live in the same world. It means they must share the same system of language, and even more, the same conventions.

Anscombe also adds that if either condition is not met, it does not follow that the passerby cannot make a description of what he saw, or that his description is necessarily wrong. The more likely scenario is that it will take a lot of time or be very difficult for him to arrive at the description that “He is sitting in a chair writing”, if the first condition is not met; or, it might be difficult to realize that what the passerby knew straight off was not “He is sitting in a chair writing” but “He is affecting the acoustic properties of the room”. The second description may not be wrong, but it would be likely that the two people are not living in the same world.

With this premise, I would like to summarize again that, for Anscombe, if we are able to give correct descriptions of other’s actions, and perhaps even of other’s intentions, and we are able to correctly understand⁴⁰⁸ each other’s actions, it is all because we live in the same world where we share the same system of language. By the same token, it is not difficult to understand that, as long as we are people who have reached the age of rational thinking and are living in the same world, we are able to understand the language and actions of others, as well as describe and evaluate their actions. The function of language is not just about individual speech; it is an important part of public life.

In his article “Anscombe’s Wittgenstein”⁴⁰⁹, Joel Backström also analyzes the connection between “purely interior act” and “outer behavior” in actions. He thinks that Anscombe follows Wittgenstein on this topic, and that they share a common opposition to the view that human actions, such as in forming intentions, in remembering, or in saying something, consist in some “pure interior act of meaning and intending”, to which our “outer behaviors” are only contingently attached. Instead, Backström argues that to understand human actions is a matter of how someone concretely relates himself to others in the circumstance in which he acts. By

⁴⁰⁸ “Correct” in the sense that our descriptions and understandings coincide when provided by the agents without asking them.

⁴⁰⁹ Joel Backström, “Anscombe’s Wittgenstein”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, ed. Roger Teichmann (Oxford University Press), 415–441.

Anscombe's use of the "Why?" question as the characterization of intentional action, Joel Backström concludes that this type of action exists in the mutual life of human beings asking, opposing, challenging, and explaining to each other.⁴¹⁰ Backström's analysis confirms my summary of the premises of human actions and the description of them, and its purpose.

Elisa Grimi analyzes the same topic from another angle. In her article "Anscombe and Wittgenstein"⁴¹¹, she says that one of the invaluable reflections in Anscombe's famous masterpiece *Intention* is "the criticism of mentalism (and therefore the relative rejection of behaviorism)".⁴¹² Grimi's analysis of the criticism of behaviorism makes the connection between "interior mental states" and "outer behavior" more explicit. We mentioned that both Anscombe and Wittgenstein agree that we should focus on the description of what physically happened, rather than asking for the mental states of the agents. Grimi further explains that this focus on actions and behaviors in no way implies a form of reductionism that would attempt to access mental states by reducing them to behavior; instead, they are not interested in mental processes, but in the circumstances under which the agents say or do something. Grimi's view implies that our actions should not be seen as an externalization of an inner state; they are an activity that arises under the circumstance of where we are, with the purpose of communicating with others.

3.3 The Impossibility of a Private Language

In discussing the passerby's description of a person's action, Anscombe mentions that Wittgenstein raises related questions about it in *Philosophical Investigations*, and she quotes him: "I see a picture: it shows a man leaning on a stick and going up a steep path. How come? Couldn't it look like that if he were sliding downhill in that position? Perhaps a Martian would give that description."⁴¹³ She also emphasizes "*et passim*", which indicates that more related

⁴¹⁰ Joel Backström, "Anscombe's Wittgenstein", 424.

⁴¹¹ Elisa Grimi, "Anscombe and Wittgenstein", *Enrahonar: An International Journal of Theoretical and Practical Reason* 64 (2020): 165–179.

⁴¹² Elisa Grimi, "Anscombe and Wittgenstein", 167.

⁴¹³ *Intention*, §4. The reference Anscombe gives in *Intention* is to page 59 of *Philosophical*

discussions can be found in the following sections of *Philosophical Investigations*. Regarding the idea that a passerby, grown to the age of reason in the same world as the person who is acting, is able to give correct description of that person's action, we should refer to Wittgenstein's discussion of private language. Anscombe gives a related analysis in her article "Private Ostensive Definition".⁴¹⁴ I will follow Anscombe's argument in this article to present the discussion of "private experience", "private sensation", and "private language" and how they relate to the reliability of a passerby's description.

3.3.1 Private Experience

In "Private Ostensive Definition", Anscombe mentions a possible challenge about private experience and private definition for the passerby's description: "You never tell whether someone else sees the same colors as you, even though he uses the same words and applies them to the same things" (POD, 244). She explains that even though two people are calling English pillar boxes "red", perhaps one of them is experiencing "red", and the other is actually experiencing "green" and mistakenly calling the color green "red". Anscombe also quotes Wittgenstein saying that "the essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own specimen, but that nobody knows whether other people also have this or something else. The assumption would thus be possible – though unverifiable – that one section of mankind had one visual impression of red, and another section another" (*PI*, §272).⁴¹⁵

Anscombe thinks that this challenge may seem acceptable, but in fact people who raise it just enjoy a certain frivolity, as it does not appear to have any real consequences at all. She argues that if these people really cared about the issue, then all they would have to do is check the relevant tests for various different kinds of color-blindness, and they would realize that two people's color visions come out the same and that their powers of discriminating are the same.

Investigations. In the fourth edition of *Philosophical Investigations* that I reference, this quotation is located after §139 on page 60 of the English translation.

⁴¹⁴ Elizabeth Anscombe, "Private Ostensive Definition" (henceforth POD), in GG4, 223–256.

⁴¹⁵ As for the discussion about the impression of colors and the private experience, see Wittgenstein, *PI*, §272–278.

And yet these people would still claim that “you can never know”.⁴¹⁶

Anscombe also suggests that Wittgenstein would say that it is not a matter of private experiences about colors, but of following a rule. She quotes that “the use of the word ‘rule’ and the use of the word ‘same’ are interwoven” (*PI*, §225). She explains that, when applying rules, we must always “do the same as last time”, where “the same” means acting according to the rules. Similarly, we must always use “red” for the same color. Here, there is a rule behind about what the color “red” is, and only if you can apply the word “red”, do you know what the rule is – namely what the color “red” is and what “the same” means.⁴¹⁷

If we see the rule behind the color “red”, Anscombe suggests that we would understand that word “red” means not only our own sensation of the color “red”, but it also means something confronting us all and known to everyone.⁴¹⁸ For example, when we describe the color of strawberries, we say that the strawberry fruit is red and the leaves are green, and that is not only the color of the strawberries as we see them in our eyes, but it is likewise the reference to the color red and the color green as prescribed by the language. In this way, a red-green colorblind person may see no difference between the color of the strawberry fruit and the color of the strawberry leaves, but he can still understand and say that “the strawberry fruit is red, and the strawberry leaves are green”. Here, he is not describing his visual experience but following a rule of language.

3.3.2 Private Sensation

Private experience about colors involves the consistency of different individuals’ perceptions of and reflections on the objective world. Anscombe goes on to say that, privacy, as a psychological concept, also means “what goes on in my mind”, where the contents of sensations I experience are private in a far stronger sense, as nobody else can really share them.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ See POD, 245; see also Anscombe, “The Subjectivity of Sensation”, in CPP2, 44–56.

⁴¹⁷ See POD, 245.

⁴¹⁸ See POD, 245–246; see also *PI*, §273.

⁴¹⁹ See POD, 246.

Anscombe gives Wittgenstein's reflection about the possibility of humans speaking only in monologue. In §243 of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein imagines the following situation:

A human being can encourage himself, give himself orders, obey, blame and punish himself; he can ask himself a question and answer it. So one could imagine human beings who spoke only in monologue, who accompanied their activities by talking to themselves. [...] But is it also conceivable that there be a language in which a person could write down or give voice to his inner experiences – his feelings, moods, and so on – for his own use? [...] The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.

She says that Wittgenstein starts his analysis with “private sensation” as a human who speaks only in monologue is using the words of this language to refer to his immediate “private sensations”. But before discussing “private sensation”, it is necessary to discuss “what sensation is” and “how words refer to sensations”. Wittgenstein thinks it is not difficult, given that we talk about sensations and name them in our daily lives. Instead, the real question is “how does a human being learn the meaning of names of sensations?” Wittgenstein's answer is that “words are connected with the primitive, natural, expressions of sensation and used in their place.” He takes the word “pain” as example and explains: “A child hurts himself and cries; then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and sentences. They teach the child new pain-behavior.” In other words, “the verbal expression of pain replaces crying”.⁴²⁰

Accordingly, Wittgenstein argues that saying “my sensations are private” means that “only I can know whether I am really in pain” and “another person can only surmise it”. He thinks that it is false or nonsense. He explains why the statement is nonsense by the meaning of the word “know”. In his own words, “if we are using the word ‘know’ as it is normally used (and

⁴²⁰ As for “how words refer to sensations”, see POD, 246 and *PI*, §244.

how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know if I'm in pain" (*PI*, §246). But he does not deny that there are sensory differences between individuals, and that other people cannot know my sensations with the certainty with which I know them myself. For example, Wittgenstein explains that other people need to "know" if I am in pain, while we never say "I know I am in pain", because we *have* these sensations without the need to *know* or to *learn* them. Other people may doubt whether I am in pain, but I would not say that about myself.⁴²¹ Nevertheless, private sensations cannot provide the basis for establishing a private language. Individual sensations are indeed special, but they can be known to others.

3.3.3 *Private Language*

Anscombe continues with Wittgenstein's discussion about the possibility of using private language to record sensations. In other words, as Wittgenstein says, words refer to sensations by replacing the expressions of sensations, and so we may ask whether it is possible that there is a private language "which describes my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand?" (*PI*, §256) Wittgenstein gives an example: "I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign 'S' and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation" (*PI*, §258). It seems that the sign "S" plays the role of a private language.

He first observes that "a definition of the sign cannot be formulated". But it is not a problem that cannot be solved, because "I can give one to myself as a kind of ostensive definition", namely "I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation" (*PI*, §258). But Wittgenstein sees this so called "ostensive definition" as a mere ceremony. "A definition serves to lay down the meaning of a sign", says Wittgenstein, but by this ceremony, what can be brought about is that "I commit to memory the connection between the sign and the sensation" and "I remember the connection correctly in the future", where I cannot even have a criterion of correctness.

Why is a criterion of correctness necessary? He imagines: "One would like to say:

⁴²¹ See *PI*, §246.

whatever is going to seem right to me is right” (*PI*, §258). Anscombe thinks that Wittgenstein might have ended the discussion before this question, but here it is “his zeal for capturing the particular sentiment that operates on a philosopher defending the position he is attacking – who is indeed his own alter ego” (POD, 247). She notes humorously: “Wittgenstein makes his alter ego sell himself into Wittgenstein’s hands by saying: whatever seems right is right”, where she herself would rather say “Seeming right is going to be good enough! I shan’t be able to be wrong!” (POD, 248) But Anscombe replies: “If there is no such possibility as being wrong, what sense is there in a claim to be right here?” (POD, 248) Wittgenstein provides his version of the reply as simply: “That only means that here we can’t talk about ‘right’” (*PI*, §258).

Anscombe agrees with Wittgenstein’s analysis and adds that

... the fact that one has made a certain mark in a calendar for every day on which a certain sensation happens does not offer any information on the basis of which one could produce a definition of the mark. It could serve as enabling a record of the recurrences without being susceptible of definition – merely because one knows one made that mark according to the rule. An association of a mark with something is insufficient ground for asking for a definition of the mark. (POD, 246–247)

She claims that this is what Wittgenstein has mentioned in §257 of *Philosophical Investigations*, when speaking of giving a name to a sensation or using a sign to refer to a sensation: “one forgets that a great deal of *stage-setting* in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone’s having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word ‘pain’; it shows the post where the new word is stationed” (*PI*, §257; POD, 247).

Anscombe comments that in §258 of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein tries to imagine a case without the “stage-setting”, as he does not even call the “S” a name, he only calls it a “sign”. Then it seems that the use of “S” includes everything necessary, namely the association with a sensation and the recurrent sensation itself, and the user of “S” can give

himself a kind of ostensive definition to make it become a kind of private language. Anscombe agrees with Wittgenstein's conclusion, however, that without the stage-setting, the sign "S" cannot be a language. She claims that the stage-setting here is a grammar of the sign "S" that is supposed to be defined. If this grammar exists, we will know that "S" is the sign of a sensation, "where sensation is a word of our common language, which is not a language intelligible only to me." (*PI*, §261) We still try to keep "S" private and explain it this way: "'S' need not be a sensation, but when he writes 'S', he has 'Something'", we still cannot avoid the fact that "has" and "something" also belong to our common language. Therefore, the stage-setting is always necessary as long as we wish to make it intelligible. By contrast, Anscombe says that "No grammar, no sense for 'the same' because no rules of application of the concept of identity in this case." (*POD*, 247) Even if "S" is always used in the same person's diary, no stage-setting means that there is no rule to ensure the application of "S" is consistent in every place.

In general, for Wittgenstein's imagining the possibility of private language in §258 of *Philosophical Investigations*, Anscombe argues that the grammar of a language establishes that the language has meaning and can be understood. The grammar of languages also determines that languages cannot be private, in other words, the existence of a language that can only be understood by the speaker but not others is impossible. This argument of Anscombe and Wittgenstein about "private language" also proves the reliability of the passerby's description, which we discussed previously.

3.4 The Moral Concern in Language Use

The arguments above show that Anscombe's ideas on language are largely influenced by Wittgenstein. They share the same views; to be precise, they emphasize the significance of linguistic activities, encourage the study of language in the context of use and claim that people with the same background share the same understanding for the meaning of words. In short, for both of them, language is not an isolated sign, but a living, dynamic human activity. Anscombe's arguments about the relation between language, human actions, and mutual life also show her idea that the individual cannot exist independently of society, as far as the linguistic aspect of

life is concerned. At the same time, this perspective not only inspires Anscombe's argument on the topic of human action and human mutual life. It also has an impact on the topic of morality.

In his article "Anscombe's Wittgenstein", Joel Backström claims that one particular aspect of Wittgenstein's influence on Anscombe is the reorientation of her philosophical approach away from "the dominant subject-object paradigm of philosophical thought" towards "the focus on what happens between human beings". This is not a standard interpretation of Wittgenstein's influence on Anscombe, Backström adds, especially since Anscombe herself has not explicitly formulated the influence in this way. But Backström still tries to demonstrate that the interpretation unifies central themes in Anscombe's writings.⁴²²

For example, we have analyzed some passages of *Intention* in Section 3.2. In response Backström writes that, in a letter to G. H. von Wright, Anscombe acknowledges Wittgenstein as the source of most ideas in *Intention*, and it is Wittgenstein and Aristotle that got her interested in the question of how one knows what one is doing. Backström comments that Anscombe argues against presenting intention as a quasi-object – a mental or brain state; instead, following Wittgenstein, Anscombe reorients the discussion of intention this way: "One cannot see an intention or intentional action by looking 'into the contents of [the agent's] mind', at 'the movements of muscles or molecules', or at anything else that 'can be determined about the man by himself at the moment [of action]' (*I*, 9, 29)".⁴²³

Backström gives an example: "If contemptuous words go through my mind as I greet someone, for example, this doesn't by itself show that my greeting is secretly contemptuous, unless I mean those words, silently direct them at the other as signs of contempt".⁴²⁴ This example is an interpretation of Anscombe's words in §27 of *Intention*, where she argues that "words [...] may occur in somebody's mind without his meaning them [...] so intention is never a performance in the mind, though in some matters a performance in the mind which is seriously *meant* may make a difference to the correct account of the man's action" (*Intention*, 49).

⁴²² Joel Backström, "Anscombe's Wittgenstein", 421.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

Therefore, intentional action is not only one that contains purely internal intentions to which external behavior is only incidentally attached; rather, the action itself is significant in some way. In short, what Backström wants to make clear here is that Anscombe is opposed to the kind of subject-object paradigm that presents the intention as some kind of passive quasi-object in the mind. It is instead what people actively *do*.⁴²⁵

Backström also claims that Anscombe's use of the question "Why?" as the positive characterization of "intentional action" indicates that intentional actions exist only in the context of our living with each other, and especially within the linguistic activities between each other, such as wondering about, objecting to, challenging, and explaining ourselves to each other. In his own words, "we don't have intentions, and then also happen to ask each other about what they are; rather, to have intentions in the full human sense is to participate in this life of mutual exchange and questioning."⁴²⁶

In addition, Backström thinks that when we have these mutual exchanges and questionings, it is not only out of curiosity or with the purpose of explanation or prediction, but happens from an essentially moral concern, namely the concern with "good and evil", with the responsibility for our actions to each other.⁴²⁷ He takes it as the interpretation of Anscombe's equation between human action and moral action, an equation in AIDE that "All human action is moral action" and "it means that, 'moral' does not stand for an extra ingredient which some human actions have and some do not." (AIDE, 209) Backström explains that this equation implies that, although there are morally indifferent action-descriptions that do not suggest anything for good or bad, if we see the particular action in an interpersonal context of moral concern, the good or bad meant by it will be revealed. I have analyzed this equation in Chapter 3 Section 3, where I conclude that it tells us that all human action involves good and bad human characters, and this human character relates to a good human good life; therefore, we can say that human action can be qualified as good or bad in relation to its contribution to the flourishing of human life.

⁴²⁵ See *ibid.*, 423–424.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 424.

⁴²⁷ See *ibid.*, 424–425.

When I analyzed this equation in Chapter 3, I focused on Anscombe's idea of "human action" and did not connect it to linguistic activities nor to Wittgenstein's idea of language-games. Backström attempts to demonstrate that the equation makes explicit the fundamental insight that orients Wittgenstein's discussion of "psychological concepts" and even his whole later philosophy. He adds that even though Wittgenstein does not use the concept of "moral" directly, this moral orientation is "the very reorientation away from subject-object thinking and towards the interpersonal dimension."⁴²⁸ Backström takes the word "pain" as an example to illustrate his interpretation of Wittgenstein. He claims that Wittgenstein's discussion of pain shows that "our understanding of pain cannot be conceived as an epistemological matter in which we determine whether a mental thing is present in the other, with 'moral concerns' entering only secondarily in our caring about the pain we've registered." Instead, the most primitive way to understand other people's pain is "a reaction to somebody's cries", "a reaction of sympathy", and "a trying to comfort or to help". He quotes Wittgenstein's words in *Philosophical Investigations*: "if someone has a pain in his hand, [...] one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his face." (*PI*, §286) Backström explains that in the search for the essence of pain, people supporting the subject-object paradigm will focus on the painful hand and disregard the person whose hand it is. By contrast, Wittgenstein's care for the sufferer is a care for others, that is, a moral concern that creates moral responses including compassion, cruelty, negligence, and so on.⁴²⁹

Whether or not this moral concern is the basic insight of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, Backström's interpretation of the morality in the language people use to communicate has inspired my understanding of Wittgenstein's influence on Anscombe. All kinds of linguistic activities – wondering about, objecting to, challenging, explaining, and so on – are the basis of our mutual life, and moral concern is indeed included in our responses to each other, no matter whether we are understanding the sensations of others, comforting them or asking "Why?". Language provides the basis for moral concern in mutual life.

⁴²⁸ See *ibid.*, 425.

⁴²⁹ See *ibid.*

Meanwhile, in Chapter 3 Section 3 of this dissertation, when talking about the equation of human and moral action, we mentioned Anscombe's second thesis in MMP, where she claims that "the concept of obligation, and duty – moral obligation and moral duty, that is to say – and of what is morally right and wrong, and of the moral sense of "ought", ought to be jettisoned" (MMP, 1). In this thesis, the term "moral" has the meaning of "duty", which comes initially from Kant and then is found in most modern moral philosophers. The idea of "duty" here is derivable from the categorical imperative, which means people should "always act so that you can consistently universalize the maxim on which you act". Therefore, this term of "moral" and idea of "duty" show a contrast between "doing something for the motive of duty" and "doing something with enjoyment". Anscombe argues against this theory that puts "moral duty" against human desire and human enjoyment, and she proposes an idea that "doing something because you are the sort of creature to whose form of life it belongs to do that in that sort of way", which is opposed to "doing something from the motive of duty". After analyzing the connection between language and human life in this section, we will be able to better understand the discussion about the source of moral duty in Chapter 3, namely, the influence of language as a human life form on human actions and moral concepts. The specific examples of this influence will be further discussed in the next section.

Section 4 Language and Human Flourishing

In the previous section, we discussed the relation between language and human public life and mentioned that this human public life involves moral concern. In this section, we will analyze how Wittgenstein's philosophy of language may contribute to Anscombe's thought on ethical issues, in how language is relevant to human flourishing.

Earlier in Chapter 2 Section 1, when we took on Anscombe's distaste for religiously legalistic moral principles and the poisonous effects of such principles in the second thesis in MMP, we mentioned that Anscombe's reason for this view is that the special sense of "moral" is an empty concept based on some abandoned background. This reason shows Anscombe's idea that a concept would become unintelligible when the background in which it originated disappears. This in fact implies the variability and the complexity of language, a feature⁴³⁰ that makes its meaning dependent on rules and circumstances, as we discussed in Chapter 4 Section 2.

4.1 The Conventionality of Promises

Anscombe's discussion about the concept "promise" can help to understand the importance of "language" on moral issues. These discussions are mainly in her articles "Rules, Rights and Promises"⁴³¹ and "On Promising and its Justice",⁴³² as well as in some passages of "The Two

⁴³⁰ This feature may cause a relativistic reading of Wittgenstein, as language (as forms of life) can be understood as changing and contingent, depending on culture, context, history, and so on. However, it is the form of life common to humankind, as language is a shared human behavior, which is "the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (*PI*, §206). This might be seen as a universalistic interpretation of Wittgenstein.

⁴³¹ Elizabeth Anscombe, "Rules, Rights and Promises" (henceforth RRP), in CPP3, 97–103; originally published in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 3 (Morris, Minnesota, 1978): 318–323.

⁴³² Elizabeth Anscombe, "On Promising and its Justice, and Whether it Need be Respected in *Foro Interno*" (henceforth PJ), in CPP3, 10–21; originally published in *Critica: Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofia*, vol.3, no. 7/8, (1969): 61–83.

Kinds of Error in Action”,⁴³³ “On the Source of the Authority of the State”,⁴³⁴ and “The Question of Linguistic Idealism”⁴³⁵.

4.1.1 Hume’s Analysis of the Conventionality of Promises

Anscombe starts her discussion with David Hume’s ideas, as she writes at the very beginning of RRP: “Hume had two theses about promise: one, that a promise is ‘naturally un-intelligible’, and the other that even if it were ‘naturally intelligible’ it could not naturally give rise to any obligation” (RRP, 97). This passage shows that Anscombe’s thinking about promise contains an idea of “convention” that is distinguished from “nature”, which comes from Hume, as Hume’s purpose is to prove that promises arise from conventions.⁴³⁶

About what a promise is, Anscombe describes a conversation in RRP: “I’ll help you today; will you help me tomorrow?” and “Yes!”, and she claims that “Here are promises given and received”.⁴³⁷ This is a case from Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature*, where David Hume introduces an example with two farmers have different harvest times. He writes:

Your corn is ripe today; mine will be so tomorrow. It is profitable for us both, that I should labour with you today, and that you should aid me tomorrow. ...I learn to do a

⁴³³ Elizabeth Anscombe, “The Two Kinds of Error in Action” (henceforth TKEA), in CPP 3, 3–9; originally published in *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 60, no. 14 (1963): 393–401.

⁴³⁴ Elizabeth Anscombe, “On the Source of the Authority of the State” (henceforth SAS), in CPP3, 130-155; originally published in *Ratio*, 20 (1), (1978).

⁴³⁵ Elizabeth Anscombe, “The Question of Linguistic Idealism” (henceforth QLI), in CPP1, 112–133; originally published in “Essays on Wittgenstein in honour of G. H. von Wright”, *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 28, 1–3, (1976).

⁴³⁶ See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. A Critical Edition. Volume 1: Text, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Hume writes “I say, first, that a promise is not intelligible naturally, nor antecedent to human conventions; and that a man, unacquainted with society, could never enter into any engagements with another, even though they could perceive each other’s thoughts by intuition” (T 3.2.5.2).

⁴³⁷ See RRP, 99.

service to another, without bearing him any real kindness; because I foresee, that he will return my service, in expectation of another of the same kind, and in order to maintain the same correspondence of good offices with me or with others. And accordingly, after I have served him, and he is in possession of the advantage arising from action, he is included to perform his part, as foreseeing the consequences of his refusal. ...there is a *certain form of words* invented [to sustain interested commerce between people], by which we bind ourselves to the performance of any action. This form of words constitutes what we call a promise... When a man says *he promises anything*, he in effect expresses a *resolution* of performing it; and along with that, by making use of this *form of words*, subjects himself to the penalty of never being trusted again in case of failure. (T 3.2.5.8 – T 3.2.5.10, emphasis in original)

From this example, Anscombe concludes that, this conversation constitutes a promise because it makes a sign containing a description of possible future states of affairs, and this future-tense description should be made true by the promise-giver's performance.⁴³⁸ What interests Anscombe here is that “[the significance of a promise] purports to make it the case that there is a new obligation”⁴³⁹. Here, the obligation is that the giver “has to” make the description come true; otherwise, he needs to take the consequences for breaking the promise. Then, it is normal to ask “the obligation is a kind of necessity to make the description come true. But what sort of necessity is that?” (RRP, 99)

⁴³⁸ See RRP, 99. Anscombe's discussion in “On Promising and its Justice” confirms this description of “promise”, where she introduces various actions, such as marrying, swearing an oath, and entering a contract. (PJ, 13-15) Candace Vogler writes about these passages and makes a summary of elements that make up promises and similar actions: “In order to do such a thing, I must think that this is what I am doing, my undertaking must be received as such by someone else, everyone must take it that what I undertake is in the recipient's interest, and that having undertaken to do something (provided that what I agreed to do is not wicked, or that doing my word in this instance will not need me to break some prior commitment) will tend to require me to do what I agree to do.” See Candace Vogler, “Anscombe, G. E. M.”, *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, January 2013.

⁴³⁹ See RRP, 99.

Anscombe continues to follow Hume's argument and comments that his discussion about "promise" sees one crucial part of this conception: that the obligation generated by promises is not natural but conventional in human society. This means that, before human society, the concept of "promise" cannot exist; and within a society, a man, unacquainted with his social surroundings, could never be engaged with others and could never know what promises mean.⁴⁴⁰

⁴⁴⁰ See David Hume, T 3.2.1 – T 3.2.5. In his discussion of "virtue", Hume has already mentioned that human's sense of every kind of virtue is not natural. He holds the same idea about "promise", as he says, "a promise would not be intelligible, before human conventions had established it; and that, even if it were intelligible, it would not be attended with any moral obligation." From his perspective, all morality depends upon human's sentiments, as he says, "when any action, or quality of the mind, pleases us after a certain manner, we say it is virtuous; and when the neglect, or nonperformance of it, displeases us after a like manner, we say that we lie under an obligation to perform." Therefore, according to the origin of virtue, the change of obligation requires the corresponding change of sentiment, and the creation of a new obligation presupposes some new sentiments. However, in the situation of the promise, Hume thinks that "it is certain we can naturally no more change our own sentiments... nor by a single act of our will, that is, by a promise..." Therefore, Hume claims that, the promise cannot be naturally intelligible.

Then Hume argues that "promises are human inventions, founded on the necessities and interests of society". A promise generates obligation in the social convention by "a special word". He says that originally the promise is founded on the selfishness and limited generosity of human nature. In Hume's idea, humans are naturally selfish or endowed only with a confined generosity; therefore, they only consider the interests and benefits of their own or their friends and relatives in most cases. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine that a person would be willing to act for the benefits of a stranger. But there is one exception, in which humans would perform some actions of mutual aid. This is when people can only obtain their advantages by reciprocal performances of helping actions. And these reciprocal performances give rise to the initial model about how a promise and its obligation are generated.

The reason to say that these reciprocal performances are only the initial model of promises, rather

However, Anscombe does not think that, even though Hume's discovery of "natural unintelligibility" is valuable, he does not go deep enough into the idea; it has wider application than he proved. This is because Hume's argument on "promise" is closely related to his philosophical psychology, metaphysics and ethics, but "the rightness of Hume's conclusion is independent both of his psychology and of his theory of the foundation of morals in peculiar 'sentiment'".⁴⁴¹ Anscombe claims that Hume focuses on discussing the intrinsic connection between obligation and sentiment, but ignores the "sign" indicating a promise. The latter is the real analysis Anscombe thinks should take place about "promise", which Hume begins but does

than the whole idea of promise, is that the obligation generated by these performances is sometimes unreliable, and so the only thing we could do to guarantee the contract between the parties is to institute signs that "create a new motive". This form of words is "promise", and by saying so, the speaker binds himself to the performance of an action, in order to enjoy the reciprocal interests. With the invention of this form of behavior, a tacitly approved rule was gradually established, and it shows that, "When a man says he promises anything, he in effect expresses a resolution of performing it; and along with that, by making use of this form of words, subjects himself to the penalty of never being trusted again in case of failure." With the sanction of this rule, the unreliability of a promise is avoided and its stability is established. This stability indicates the origin of the convention, a convention that people would obey in order to obtain some interest and would know that, if they refuse to perform what they promised, they can never expect to be trusted again and cannot enjoy the interests any longer.

Roger Teichmann analyzes Anscombe's discussion of promises in Chapter 3 "Ethics", Section 2.2 "Promising and Practical Necessity" of his book *The Philosophy of Anscombe*. He reaches a conclusion on the shared points between Anscombe and Hume: "[Hume's] discussion points out that the key thing about a promise is its being expressed by means of a sign whose significance consists, not in any attendant act of the mind (a natural phenomenon), but in the conventional role it plays in society. Anscombe takes Hume to have noticed certain very important facts about the nature of promises, and a number of points made by her echo points made by Hume". See Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Anscombe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 95.

⁴⁴¹ RRP, 99.

not finish.

4.1.2 The Analysis from the Perspective of Language-Games

According to what we mentioned above, promises appear to be making a sign, together with a description of a future state of affairs, where the consequence of doing so is that one has to bring that state of affairs about. About this definition of promises, Anscombe asks, “How can a sign, attached to a description of a future that is in someone’s interest, tend to restrict my possibilities of doing well?” (PJ, 16) Her answer is “[the restriction] is created purely by my voluntary giving of the sign” (PJ, 16). This question and its answer seem to be a bit strange. To be more specific, when “promise” is taken as a sign and is uttered by a person, the related restriction is created. When an agent uses a sign, saying “I promise”, at the same time, the restriction on his or her behavior is generated, and the obligation for the agent to accomplish what was promised is created. But “the necessity is created by the sign itself” does not sound like a persuasive and satisfying answer. Anscombe continues asking that “Suppose we say that the meaning of the sign is that my possibilities of doing well are restricted. But how can I make them be restricted in any way at all simply by saying that they are?” (PJ, 16).⁴⁴² In order to answer this further question, she presents an example about “Bump!”, which explains how a sign creates an obligation:

Returning to the suggested from ‘Bump! I will do so-and-so’, let us ask how this could be learnt as an utterance having something of the same force as ‘I promise to do so-and-so’. it will be characteristic that the learner is induced to say ‘Bump! I will...’ and is then told ‘Now you’ve got to do it’ and is then made to do the thing or reproached if he does not, and that the theme of the reproach is not merely that he did not do it after it was required of him, but that he failed to do it after saying ‘Bump! I will’. He also learns to extract the utterance from others in connection with what he wants them to do and to use their having made it as a weapon in making them do what they have said

⁴⁴² Anscombe asks the same series of question in RRP, 100.

they would, and as a ground of reproach if they do not. (PJ,16)

This passage shows that Anscombe thinks the word “Bump!” could share the same force as the utterance “I promise”. In this situation, the force would be that the agent who gives the utterance must complete the task presented after “Bump!” or “I promise”; otherwise he would be censured. It is very crucial to clarify that the reason for the censure is not merely the un-accomplishment, but the un-accomplishment after saying “Bump!” or “I promise”. This clarification indicates that the obligation is created by the giving of the sign. Furthermore, Anscombe says that this is not a sign known by only a minority; it is a widely recognized sign. Any person in a society where people share the same social background would act by obeying the rule of “Bump!” and would have the right to reproach people who fail to do so.

Anscombe adds, “What I have sketched here is what Wittgenstein usefully and intelligibly called a ‘language-game’, and we may say that it is a fact of nature that human beings very readily take to it” (PJ, 16). The conception of “language-game” is exactly what Anscombe believes is the best way to prove the necessity generated by the giving of a sign.

As we mentioned earlier, language is not some isolated, and static set of symbols; it is a set of dynamic human activities. Private language is therefore impossible, for the reason that language can be used in the first place is that it is publicly acknowledged. It is also an essential feature of language that people with the same social background normally share an identical understanding of the same words.

The conception of a language-game means that we can think of language use as game-playing, and the users of the language are the players. Players of a game know the rules of the game when they participate in it, and their participation indicates their agreement to obey the rules. Similarly, users of a language are familiar with word meanings and grammar rules when they use the language, and their use of the language indicates their agreement to follow these meanings and rules. In PJ, Anscombe explains that:

... it is clear that what you do is not a move in a game unless the game is being played

and you are one of the players, acting as such in making the move. That involves that you are acquainted with the game and have an appropriate background, and also appropriate *expectations and calculations* in connection with e.g., moving this piece from point A to point B. To have these is to think you are playing the game. (PJ,17, emphasis in original)

Here Anscombe means that, as long as we live in society, we are familiar with the rules; as long as we use languages, we know both the meanings of the words we use and the consequences which might be caused by this use.

Now let us return to the discussion of promises. The conception of language-games shows that all people living in the same social background would be acquainted with the meaning of the utterance of “I promise”, and therefore all of them would know that saying “I promise” is giving the sign, by which one generates an obligation for oneself. How does a game generate an obligation for its player? The answer is convention. As Wittgenstein says, the grammar of language consists of conventions.⁴⁴³ Therefore, the obligation generated from the sign “I promise” is a kind of conventional necessity, and this necessity is determined by the rules of our language.

We must note here that this necessity is determined by the rules of language, rather than created by its users. It means that, when the word “promise” is only written in the dictionary but not used by someone, the obligation is already created but in a state of potentiality and not activated yet. When someone speaks out “I promise”, which is the giving of a sign, the obligation is activated; it is the very moment that the obligation is generated for the speaker. Therefore, the obligation is not created at the moment of the use of the sign but is always latent in the life in which this language is used. This necessity does not come from the speaker but from the rules of the language. In Anscombe’s own words, the answer to the question “what is the necessity?” is given only by describing the procedure, the language-game – which as far as concerns the “necessity” expressed in it does not differ from this one: “I say ‘ping’ and you

⁴⁴³ See Wittgenstein, *PI*, §335; Wittgenstein, *PG*, §138.

have to say ‘pong’.” (PJ, 18) In conclusion, Anscombe thinks that, with the background of language-games, all people are acquainted with the meaning of “promise”, and everyone can easily understand that the utterance of “I promise” indicates an obligation to make it come true.

4.2 The Naturalness of Promises

So far, we see that Anscombe regards the necessity generated by promises as conventionally created. At the same time, though, Anscombe thinks that this kind of conventional necessity is not sufficient to account for the necessity generated from promises. In PJ, she also mentions the insufficiency of the notion of language-game. In her own words, “It is at this point that I cease to use the notion of a language-game, since I should find further application of it useless and unintelligible” (PJ, 17). Besides, there are different kinds of human actions. Compared with a chess-playing game, a promise is a different kind of action, an ethical one. Therefore, the necessity behind rules applicable to chess-playing games might not be the same as the one applying to ethical actions.⁴⁴⁴

Anscombe borrows Aristotle’s ideas and explains that the kind of necessity that is missing in our discussion of language-game is “that without which some good will not be attained or some evil avoided” (RRP, 100). Anscombe regards this as a necessity typical of Aristotle, because “Aristotle in his dictionary says that in one sense of ‘necessary’ the necessary is that without which good cannot be or come to be” (PJ, 15).⁴⁴⁵ For example, if I say, “I have to take

⁴⁴⁴ See Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Anscombe*, 99: “Of course, we might say that we’ve already explained how you can be obliged to move your king, and how the action-guiding ‘You have to move your king’ follows from various facts. But the reason of human action to ethics seems to be on an altogether different plane from that of human action to chess. If promising is like a game, still, for all that, it isn’t a game. Here is one source of the inclination to posit a special ‘moral’ sense of ‘ought’, ‘have to’, ‘cannot’, ‘must’, and so on, a sense that is appropriate when it comes to promises, but not appropriate when it comes to chess”.

⁴⁴⁵ In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle mentions different forms of necessity, the second one corresponding to “The conditions without which good cannot be or come to be, or without which we cannot get rid or be freed of evil, e.g. drinking the medicine is necessary in order that we may be cured of disease, and sailing to Aegina is necessary in order that we may get our money.” (1015a20–25) He also says the

these pills every morning”, then there could be the Aristotelian necessity. Because when I say, “I have to”, it means “If I do not take these pills every morning, I will get ill.” As being ill is something bad for me, the necessity behind “have to” is exactly that the one “without which, bad things would happen, and good cannot come to be”.

Anscombe first presents the background in which promises happen. In her view, when talking about “promise”, the premise is that all people are living in public society where they get along with each other; they are not living unconnectedly. We should therefore think about the question of what is the best way to maximize everyone’s benefits in these mutual activities.

Anscombe begins her answer by asking another question “what ways are there of getting human beings to do things?” She then introduces the following possible situations: first, if someone is in a position of authority, he can order others to do things and others would obey; second, if someone is being loved, his admirer would do as he wants in order to please him; third, if someone has the power to hurt others and is therefore feared, people would do what he wants to protect themselves. She thinks, however, that few people have authority over everyone, few people have power to hurt or help others, and few people could command affection from others. All in all, “Those who have extensive authority and power cannot exercise it to get all the other people to do the things that meet their mutual requirements” (PJ, 18).⁴⁴⁶

second form of necessity is “Of things that are called one in virtue of their own nature”. (1015b35–36) See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translated by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2016), 74–75.

Also, in *Politics*, Aristotle mentions the feature of “nature” by claiming that the union of male and female to a single complete community is a natural activity for the sake of good life. He writes: “When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end” (1252b28–1253a2). See Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2017), 3–4.

⁴⁴⁶ Candace Vogler writes: “the need to get others to do things in human life goes considerably beyond the range of any individual’s authority and exceeds the limits of such love and fear as one of us might inspire”. See Candace Vogler, “Anscombe, G. E. M.”, *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*,

Compared with all the previous means, Anscombe comes to the idea of “promise” by saying:

...though physical force seems a more certain way of producing desired physical results than any other, and authority and power to hurt or help and sometimes affection too, more potent than the feeble procedure of such a language-game as the one with “Bump!” that I described, yet in default of the possibility or utility of exerting physical force, and of the possibility of exercising authority or power to hurt and help, or of commanding affection, this feeble means is at least a means of getting people to do things. (PJ, 18)

Even though it seems that there is a good deal of power in physical forces, authority, and affection, at least compared with the restriction from “I promise”, she still believes it is highly possible that all these apparently benefits would fail to bring enough force. At the same time, “promise” – the seeming feeble means – is more reliable and effective in getting people to do things.⁴⁴⁷ Furthermore, she not only states that “promise” is a better means than the forces of authority, fear, and affection; she also takes “promise” as a useful way for human beings to interact and an important means to the achievement of human good. She writes, “getting one another to do things without the application of physical force is a necessity for human life, and that far beyond what could be secured by those other means.” (PJ, 18) Therefore, “promise” is a good way to maintain trust between social members and to guarantee the smooth operation of all mutual activities. Because of the benefits it brings to human life, “promise” is taken as a

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⁴⁴⁷ See Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Anscombe*, 100. “The question to ask is: Why do we go in for promising? And the answer is simply that the institution of promising is very useful for human beings. All sorts of enterprises and activities require that people can rely upon others to do certain things. You can indeed rely on others to do things if they love you or fear you or if there exists some sort of tit-for-tat arrangement between you and them. But these sorts of situation are comparatively rare; the institution of promising vastly extends the range of situations of this type.”

good way for human beings to be, and as good for human life.

Anscombe thinks the content of “promise” is exactly an Aristotelian necessity, and it is this special kind of necessity that distinguishes “promise” from other chess-like games, as it is the necessity concerning “human good” generally. Although both chess-like games and promises share the “has to”, there is a special force existing in promises but lacking in those chess-like games. Because even though these chess-like games do serve some purposes, they are not the instrument of human good.⁴⁴⁸

Philippa Foot’s explanation in her book *Natural Goodness* could help us understand this Aristotelian necessity better. Foot says that, when Anscombe writes about the necessity for human life to get others to do things without the application of physical force, she is indicating what she elsewhere calls “Aristotelian necessity”, or “that which is necessary because and in so far as good hangs on it”. Foot thinks the same notion is involved in talk about plants and animals. For example, “it is necessary for plants to have water, for birds to build nests, for wolves to hunt in packs, and for lionesses to teach their cubs to kill.” This necessity depends on the need of particular species of plants and animals, based on their natural habitat and their ways of giving full play to their repertoire. From Foot’s perspective, all of these elements together determine what a particular species should be. Correspondingly, the differences between the life of humans and that of plants or animals show us what human beings naturally are. Therefore, what human beings should do to achieve the good or to flourish is naturally determined by human nature, it can be taken as a “natural necessity”.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ See Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Anscombe*, 101. Besides the comparison between “making a promise” and “playing chess”, Teichmann also mentions that Anscombe thinks the content of “promise” is exactly an Aristotelian necessity, because sanctions are designed to be something bad for the agent in order to prevent him from acting against his promise. If the agent did not act as what he presented in his promise, then the restriction was broken, and the necessity of doing so was not obeyed; therefore, he would suffer some bad things. This is what Anscombe, as well as Aristotle, means when saying “good cannot be or come to be” if this necessity does not exist.

⁴⁴⁹ See Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

4.3 The Practical Necessity as the Combination of Conventionality and Naturalness

Conventional and natural necessity seem contradictory. The obligation from conventional necessity is created by the convention, which is naturally unintelligible, while the obligation from natural necessity is generated from human nature. It seems impossible to have both kinds of necessity in a theory of promising. But Anscombe does not see a contradiction here, as she never denies the significance of either of the two kinds of necessity.⁴⁵⁰ In turning her focus from conventional necessity to natural necessity, her exact words are about the insufficiency in interpreting the obligation generated from promises stemming from the aspect of the language-game only. She does not say that this aspect is wrong. Instead, Anscombe encourages us to interpret promises as a unique kind of practice called “human linguistic practice”,⁴⁵¹ within

⁴⁵⁰ Anscombe’s argument in this part is indeed in agreement with Hume’s. Actually, Hume never negates the coexistence of conventional necessity and natural necessity in the idea of promise. In Hume’s view, even though the obligation generated by promises is artificial, it is human beings’ nature to construct this convention. Therefore, the utterance of “promise” and the necessity generated by it are conventional, while the invention of “promise” and the generation of the necessity are in human nature. See Hume, T 3.2.1.19. “...when I deny justice to be a natural virtue, I make use of the word, *natural*, only as opposed to *artificial*. In another sense of the word; as no principle of the human mind is more natural than a sense of virtue; so no virtue is more natural than justice. Mankind is an inventive species; and where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural as anything that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflection. Tho’ the rules of justice [including the obligation of promises] be *artificial*, they are not *arbitrary*. Nor is the expression improper to call them *laws of nature*; if by *natural* we understand what is common to any species, or even if we confine it to mean what is inseparable from the species.”

⁴⁵¹ Anscombe’s discussions about “human linguistic practice” are mainly in her articles “On the Source of the Authority of the State”, “Rules, Right and Promises”, and “The Question of Linguistic Idealism”. She writes: “I don’t mean by the practice merely of uttering words in a particular arrangement or of doing so in a particular context, but by actions (of stopping from doing something) into which words were inserted in such a way that the use of the words themselves became such an action.” (SAS, 141) “The competent use of language is a criterion for the possession of the concepts symbolized in it, and so we are at liberty to say: to have such-and-such linguistic practices is to have such-and-such concepts. ‘Linguistic practice’ here does not mean merely the production of words properly arranged into sentences on occasions which we vaguely call ‘suitable’. It is important that it includes activities other than the production of language, into which a use of language is interwoven” (QLI, 117); “There

which the conventional necessity and natural necessity can co-exist harmoniously. “Human linguistic practice” means the words themselves become an action by actions (of modals) into which words were inserted. Among all human linguistic practices, the most philosophical examples given by Anscombe are “rule”, “right”, and “promise”.⁴⁵² From her perspective, only by putting “promise” in the background of human linguistic practice could we understand the coexistence of the conventional feature and the natural feature of promises, which together form the complete meaning of promises. This new idea of necessity is interpreted by Roger Teichmann as a kind of “practical necessity”, which is the combination of conventional necessity and Aristotelian necessity.⁴⁵³

Rachael Wiseman offers an alternative view of promises as the “human linguistic practice” in her article “Linguistic Idealism and Human Essence”.⁴⁵⁴ Wiseman claims that the “use of modal notions” that is characteristic of a statement of a rule, right, or promise is exactly the “moral obligation” or “moral duty” that Anscombe urges us to reject in MMP⁴⁵⁵. Wiseman’s argument is that rules, rights, and promises are associated with certain kinds of modal notions,

are, of course, a great many things whose existence does depend on human linguistic practice. The dependence is in many cases an unproblematic and trivial fact. But in others it is not trivial – it touches the nerve of great philosophical problems. The cases I have in mind are three: namely rules, rights, and promises” (QLI, 118).

⁴⁵² Anscombe’s analysis of these three cases is mainly in her articles “On Promising and its Justice”, “Rules, Rights, and Promises”, and “The Two Kinds of Error in Action”.

⁴⁵³ See Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Anscombe*, 98 footnote 19: “Anscombe gives her account of practical necessity (stopping modals plus Aristotelian necessity) in at least four articles – PJ, RRP, SAS, and QLI – is an indication of the general importance she must have attached to that account”. See also Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Anscombe*, 100: “The necessity expressed by ‘You have to, since you promised to’ is that of a forcing modal, internal to the practice of promising; but the necessity of going for promising, and so of sticking to the rules internal to the practice – this is an Aristotelian necessity. Without promising, an enormous amount of human good would be impossible. Breaking one’s promises ‘will tend to hamper the attainment of the advantages that the procedure serves’ (PJ, 18) – and the same goes, to a lesser degree, for eschewing all promising”.

⁴⁵⁴ Rachael Wiseman, “Linguistic Idealism and Human Essence”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, edited by Roger Teichmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 344–358.

⁴⁵⁵ See MMP, 1.

such as “You mustn’t...”, “You can’t...”, “You ought...”, etc., which are connected with the existence of a prohibition. As rules, rights, and promises are all human linguistic practices, the existence of these prohibitions is based on human linguistic practices in general. In Anscombe’s words, the use of these modal notions is not expressed but created by human linguistic practices. In this way, the necessity expressed in these modal notions is brought about not by any practical reason, but the practical use of these modal notions as the expression of rules, rights, and promises. Wiseman argues that this kind of necessity gives no space for any examination of practical reason, and therefore many moral philosophers choose to exclude it from consideration. This is also why Anscombe suggests to jettison “the concepts of obligation and duty ... and of what is *morally* right and wrong, and of the *moral* sense of ‘ought’” in MMP.

I agree with Wiseman’s criticism of the kind of necessity that derives exclusively from linguistic expressions, and I think that this is precisely where Anscombe sees the deficiency of using Hume and Wittgenstein’s ideas to explain the theory of promising. But I do not think that is what Anscombe is trying to say in the second thesis in MMP. As I noted before, the “moral ought” that Anscombe argues against in that second thesis is specifically the special sense of “moral” derived from the Christian law conception of ethics.

Anselm Winfried Müller analyzes different meanings of “ought” in his article “Anscombe on *Ought*”,⁴⁵⁶ where one of these meanings is the “ought” from the second thesis in MMP. Müller explains the force of this “ought” as a “chimerical law”, because the Christian law conception of ethics is already an empty idea with mere mesmeric force. Müller’s explanation here helps to prove my point. In the introduction of the article, Müller briefly mentions the kind of “ought” related to rules, rights, and promises, which is a kind of practical necessity “relying on conventions” and “without which human life would be impossible or ghastly”. This explanation echoes Roger Teichmann’s interpretation we mentioned a few paragraphs ago.

At the same time, Rachael Wiseman’s criticism inspires us to think about the natural necessity mentioned in Section 4.3. She says that the limitation of a convention shaped by

⁴⁵⁶ Anselm Winfried Müller, “Anscombe on *Ought*”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, edited by Roger Teichmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 196–221.

linguistic expression is that it stops us from asking “Why?”. It assumes that the rules are fixed and cannot be adjusted, and that all we have to do is follow them; hence it prevents us from deliberating about important concepts in the context of human life.⁴⁵⁷ Wiseman suggests we instead start from everyday “ought”, such as “a pregnant woman ought to watch her weight”, “a ballerina ought to point her toes”; “a wolf must stay downwind of a deer”, etc. It may seem that there is nothing moral in these “oughts”, but when we describe a world in which humans participate in activities that they can be said to do well or badly at, we already have the beginning of ethics. Wiseman thinks that this suggestion is what Anscombe recommends in MMP, “when she says that we should look for the norms of ethics where we find statements such as ‘that a man ought to have so many teeth’”.⁴⁵⁸

Now we need to explain how these two kinds of necessity can exist harmoniously. Katharina Nieswandt also notices that Anscombe distinguishes two kinds of necessity, and she describes them in her paper “Anscombe on the Sources of Normativity” as:

First, there is practice-internal or “conventional” necessity:

It is *conventionally* necessary for N to do A *if*: a certain practice P exists in N’s community and P allows someone to use “N must do A” as a forcing modal.

Second, there is practice-external or “Aristotelian” necessity:

⁴⁵⁷ Rachael Wiseman gives an example from Philippa Foot about deliberating about whether to break a lightly made and inconsequential promise because the opportunity has arisen to go to an “especially marvelous circus”. Rachael Wiseman says: “Here we might wonder whether keeping this promise would be foolish or fastidious or culpably austere. Our concepts work well when the patterns they lay down reflect our interests and our needs and direct our attention in many ways that serve us well. There need be nothing illicit in the question ‘What are the limits of this practice?’ It does not imply the attitude of the amoralist but may be asked from a stance of serious enquiry into human life.” See Rachael Wiseman, “Linguistic Idealism and Human Essence”, 356; Philippa Foot, “Rationality and Goodness”, in *Royal Institute of Philosophy, Supplement 54: Modern Moral Philosophy*, ed. Anthony O’Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–14.

⁴⁵⁸ Rachael Wiseman, “Linguistic Idealism and Human Essence”, 345; Anscombe, MMP, 14.

It is *Aristotelianally* necessary for a community C to have a practice P and for P to contain rule R *if*: an important good G will otherwise not be realized (*or* a grave evil E not be prevented) in an adequate way. ⁴⁵⁹

Nieswandt claims that while Anscombe stays mostly silent about the relation between these two kinds of necessity, there are clues about it in another Anscombe paper “On Brute Facts”.⁴⁶⁰ According to Nieswandt, “Anscombe argues that certain institutions form the necessary background of certain facts, in the sense that some facts might not exist if the respective institution does not exist. As she points out, such a metaphysical dependence of a fact on its background does not entail that a description of this fact must (or even may) mention the background”.⁴⁶¹ Accordingly, Nieswandt argues that “the existence of certain duties – viz. those imposed by rules, rights and promises – requires the good purpose of the practice as a background. That, however, does not entail that a justification of these duties must (or even may) mention the practice”.⁴⁶² She concludes with a suggestion regarding the necessity of the practice as a precondition of any practice-internal duty, and then she arrives at a new necessity claim:

It is necessary for N to do A *if*: a certain practice P exists in N’s community C and P allows someone to use “N must do A” as a forcing modal – provided that it is

⁴⁵⁹ Katharina Nieswandt, “Anscombe on the Sources of Normativity”, *Journal of Value Inquiry* 51, no.1 (2017): 141–163. The quotation is from the final draft of this paper (May 2016), page 14 of 26, emphasis in original.

⁴⁶⁰ Anscombe, “On Brute Facts” (henceforth BF), in CPP3, 22–25; originally published in *Analysis*, 18, 3 (1958).

⁴⁶¹ Katharina Nieswandt also quotes Anscombe’s example in “On Brute Facts”: “[T]he statement that I owe the grocer does not contain a description of our institutions, any more than the statement that I gave someone a shilling contains a description of the institution of money and of the currency of this country. On the other hand, it requires these or very similar institutions as a background [...]” (BF, 22)

⁴⁶² Katharina Nieswandt, “Anscombe on the Sources of Normativity”, final draft (May 2016), page 16 of 26.

Aristotelianally necessary for C to have P.⁴⁶³

Nieswandt explains that, in other words, “it is necessary to respect a conventional necessity if the practice within which that conventional necessity exists is necessary in Aristotle’s sense”.⁴⁶⁴

Nieswandt also mentions that John Rawls has relevant discussions about the practice-internal necessity and the practice-external necessity in his book *A Theory of Justice*,⁴⁶⁵ Sections 18 and 52, and his article “Two Concepts of Rules”.⁴⁶⁶ Candace Vogler also introduces John Rawls’ theory in order to explain Anscombe’s discussion on promises in her article “Modern Moral Philosophy again: Isolating the Promulgation Problem”.⁴⁶⁷ In that article, Vogler discusses the question of “what is in the will and can be expressed in intentional action?”, or what Anscombe calls the “source of interaction”. Vogler thinks that the answer to this question involves two aspects: first, “how people can act from a single source”; second, why any of those people should act from that source”.

As for the first question, Vogler claims that both Anscombe and Rawls would agree that this source could partly be found in social practices. The difference between them is that Rawls

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*: 17 of 26. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Revised Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁴⁶⁶ John Rawls, “Two Concepts of Rules”. *The Philosophical Review* Vol. 64, No.1 (January 1955): 3–32.

⁴⁶⁷ Candace Vogler, “Modern Moral Philosophy again: Isolating the Promulgation Problem”, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. Vol. 106 (2006): 347–364.

Thomas Nagel mentions that the Quartet were not alone in their resistance to logical positivism. There was an American branch to the revival of substantive moral theory, partly influenced by Anscombe and Foot in certain ways. The seminal figure was John Rawls. He tried to develop ways of addressing real moral questions and disregarded metaethical arguments because there was no such thing as moral truth. See Thomas Nagel, “What is rude?”, review of *The Women Are up to Something* by Benjamin J.B. Lipscomb and *Metaphysical Animals* by Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 44 No. 3, 10 February 2022.

explains its occurrence with the theory of social practices,⁴⁶⁸ while Anscombe explains it with Wittgensteinian language-games. Meanwhile, language-games and social practices could answer the first question but not the second one: in Vogler’s words, “although careful discussion of a practice or a language-game might explain how many different people can act from a single source, it cannot explain why any of them should act from that source”.⁴⁶⁹ She explains that language-games and social practices are not enough to distinguish actions for the sake of justice and for the sake of activities such as playing games of baseball. We therefore need to complete the shift to a virtue-centered ethics.⁴⁷⁰ Vogler’s analysis is consistent with our previous arguments here about the twofold necessity.

Now we can try to summarize the two kinds of necessity generated from promises: the first is conventional – it concerns “what is right”, in the sense of a right movement within the social practice; while the second is natural and concerns “what is good”, in the sense of good for human beings and human flourishing. In a human linguistic practice, on the other hand, the conventional necessity can only be justified when the natural necessity is a precondition.

⁴⁶⁸ Candace Vogler rephrases Rawls’ theory as “As Rawls taught us [in ‘Two Concepts of Rules’], a group of eighteen people who knew nothing of baseball could wander onto a baseball field. Their individual fascinations might lead four to arrange themselves around the diamond, one kneel behind home plate, three to wander into the outfield, one to stand on the pitcher’s mound and start tossing a baseball to the kneeling man, and the other nine to take turns attempting to spoil the game of catch by knocking the ball away with a baseball bat. It is not possible for these creatures to play baseball. In order to play baseball, each man needs to have baseball in him. Even if each man has idiosyncratic ludic tendencies that lead him to formulate, endorse, and abide by a set of rules governing his movements that (as it happens) corresponds to the rules of baseball, such that each understands himself to be playing a position in the game that he has given to himself, it will be the merest accident that aggregated individual actions look to add up to a game of baseball. We have eighteen individual amusements taking place simultaneously on the same field, not a game of baseball. And this will be so even if some players leave and others wander onto the field, each of whom sees a splendid opportunity to pretend to play the very game that he has given to himself.” See Candace Vogler, “Modern Moral Philosophy again: Isolating the Promulgation Problem”, 354–355.

⁴⁶⁹ Candace Vogler, “Modern Moral Philosophy again: Isolating the Promulgation Problem”, 356.

⁴⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, 357.

Therefore, Anscombe's discussion on promising first shows us the importance of language-games in moral issues. Then she introduces Aristotle's ethics to explain that only language-games by themselves are not sufficient, and why the best way to understand promising should be a combination of social convention and Aristotelian naturalism. The introduction of Aristotelian ethics is also in line with what Anscombe proposes in MMP. After the discussion of "human action" in Chapter 3 and the discussion of "language game" in this chapter, we will return to the discussion of morality in the next one, in order to investigate what Anscombe's moral philosophy, which is influenced by both Wittgenstein and Aristotle, looks like.

Chapter 5 Morality

“My interest in moral philosophy has been more in particular moral questions than in what is now called ‘meta-ethics’”.⁴⁷¹

– – Elizabeth Anscombe

The first thing I wish to emphasize, before any specific discussion, is the importance of moral philosophy for Anscombe. We have already noted that, until 1956 with her paper on Truman’s case, Anscombe had not published anything on ethics except for a pamphlet she co-authored as an undergraduate; she had secondhanded awareness of recent developments in ethical theory from discussions with Philippa Foot; and she had spent her scholarly energies almost entirely in translating Wittgenstein’s later writings. After Truman’s case, Benjamin Lipscombe claims that, Anscombe had no interest in debating with R. M. Hare or in replacing his moral theory with her own, also so she walked away from ethics and began the introduction to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. According to this interpretation of events, Anscombe’s interest in ethics stops with discussion of Truman’s case. I cannot agree. Many of Anscombe’s later writings on ethical issues such as war, abortion, and euthanasia would support my point of view. Even though Anscombe’s goal is not to provide a complete and comprehensive moral philosophy, nor to replace anyone’s moral theory, we cannot deny her interest in morality.

When we talk about Anscombe’s moral philosophy, then, it is impossible to avoid the topic of the revival of contemporary virtue ethics. In this regard, I believe we must discuss at least the following questions: why is MMP considered the revival of virtue ethics? Was Anscombe’s purpose in writing MMP the revival of Aristotelian ethics? What is the relation between Anscombe’s moral philosophy and Aristotelian ethics? Are contemporary virtue ethicists continuing Anscombe’s approach?

⁴⁷¹ Anscombe, CPP3, viii.

To answer these questions, we must begin with MMP. I begin with Anscombe's opposition to the fact-value dichotomy in order to present her two different ethical approaches. I will also present the approaches taken by different ethicists who follow Anscombe's thought to show that neither Anscombe nor her followers have taken Aristotle as the exclusive intellectual resource for their ethics. Then I will move on to a section on virtue ethics to discuss the questions of to what extent MMP can be considered as the revival of contemporary virtue ethics, and can virtue ethicists who continue Anscombe's thought about the issues in MMP fully represent contemporary virtue ethics. I will also discuss characteristics they share. Then I will investigate Anscombe's military ethics in order to analyze her attitude toward killing and her concept of human dignity underlying it, thus presenting Anscombe's concern for particular moral questions. Finally, I will offer a female perspective on Anscombe's moral philosophy that is already implicit in many parts of this dissertation.

Section 1 Anscombe's Two Approaches to Ethics

1.1 Two Responses to the Fact-Value Dichotomy

We have discussed the fact-value dichotomy in Chapter 1 Section 4 of this dissertation. I introduced the joint "No" from the Oxford Quartet to their Oxford male peers, because these male philosophers who returned to Oxford from their services began to promote the idea that reality is the world of facts described by natural sciences, and there is no place for value in such a world. The Quartet tried to bring fact and value back together.

In Chapter 1 Section 4.2.2, I discussed Anscombe's argument on this dichotomy in MMP, where Anscombe argues that "fact" and "value" cannot be separated, because facts are the foundation of moral evaluation. This discussion started with Anscombe's objection to Hume's Law, and then introduced Anscombe's twofold thought: the transition from "is" to "owes" and the transition from "is" to "needs". When talking about that from "is" to "owes", Anscombe uses the example of a grocer and the idea of "brute facts" to demonstrate that this relation between "fact" and "value" is based on the convention of social customs and social institutions. When talking about the transition from "is" to "needs", Anscombe uses the example of the

growth of an organism and its environment to demonstrate that the relation between “fact” and “value” is based on a naturalistic point of view.

Her two-aspect argument against the fact-value dichotomy echoes our discussion of the necessity generated from promise in Chapter 4 Section 4, where we mentioned that there are two kinds of necessity in Anscombe’s theory of promising: the first is the conventional necessity, which concerns “what is right” in the sense of a right movement within the social practice; the second is the natural necessity, which concerns “what is good” in the sense of good for human beings and human flourishing.

These two aspects of the argument reflect two different aspects of Anscombe’s moral philosophy, which also show the different approaches taken by later ethicists following her. The first approach takes a naturalistic view, while the second focuses on the reality of human life and social conventions associated with human life. If we want to understand the influence of Anscombe’s moral philosophy on contemporary virtue ethics – and the extent to which its influence is a revival of Aristotle – we must investigate how many of the ethicists inspired by Anscombe are actually thinking along Aristotelian lines.

1.2 The Naturalistic Approach

1.2.1 The Naturalistic Approach of “Is-Needs”

In arguing for the transition from “is” to “needs”, Anscombe uses the example of the needs of a certain environment as determined by the characteristics of an organism, where the “needs” means that this organism will not flourish unless it has a certain environment. In later pages of MMP, Anscombe attributes this “needs” to humans, and uses the example of the number of teeth to present a kind of human flourishing. She says:

It might remain to look for ‘norms’ in human virtues: just as man has so many teeth, which is certainly not the average number of teeth men have, but is the number of teeth for the species, so perhaps the species man, regarded not just biologically, but from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice in regard to the various departments

of life – powers and faculties and use of things needed – ‘has’ such-and-such virtues: and this ‘man’ with the complete set of virtues is the ‘norm’, as ‘man’ with, e.g., a complete set of teeth is a norm. [...] the notion of a ‘norm’ brings us nearer to an Aristotelian than a law conception of ethics. (MMP, 14)

Here, Anscombe suggests that the fact that humans have a complete number of teeth is also a “norm”, which is a typical characteristic of adult humans required by the species. This “norm” is not only a biological characteristic, but is also relevant to aspects of life such as thought and choice, which are themselves necessary for human flourishing; this is the case in just the same way as the characteristics of plants are relevant to how they can grow better and achieve their flourishing. Anscombe believes that this “norm” here is closer to Aristotelian naturalism than to the law conception of ethics she opposes.⁴⁷²

1.2.2 Philippa Foot’s Naturalism

Philippa Foot continues Anscombe’s naturalistic approach. In her book *Natural Goodness*,⁴⁷³ Foot sets out a naturalistic theory of ethics called “natural normativity”, which is opposed to the subjectivist tradition from Hume as developed by G. E. Moore, as well as to contemporary theories influenced by Moore, such as the emotivism and subjectivism in Ayer and Hare.

Foot’s “natural normativity” involves a special form of evaluation that predicates goodness and defect of living things by virtue of the characteristics of their own form. “Natural norms” are the normative criterion for predicating whether something is a good member of its kind or not. There are two premises to Foot’s argument. First, we must place an organism in the context of its species; second, we must consider the organism from the normative perspective of the species. For example, the description “rabbits eat grass” is a description of the life form of rabbits, which involves the self-preservation, nourishment, and reproduction of this organism

⁴⁷² We have discussed the opposition between Aristotelian ethics and the law conception of ethics in Chapter 2 Section 1 of this dissertation.

⁴⁷³ Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

itself, and which constitutes a natural norm for the evaluation of the organism; therefore, a rabbit that does not eat grass is defective in terms of the life form of its species. This “natural normativity” allows us to have normative propositions for individuals of a species from descriptive propositions about that species. This is also Foot’s response to the fact-value dichotomy.

Furthermore, Foot claims that natural normativity is also the form of evaluation in moral judgments. She explains that:

In spite of the diversity of human goods—the elements that can make up good human lives—it is therefore possible that the concept of a good human life plays the same part in determining goodness of human characteristics and operations that the concept of flourishing plays in the determination of goodness in plants and animals. So far the conceptual structure seems to be intact.⁴⁷⁴

This passage shows that the form of evaluation in human moral judgments is not different from that for plants and animals; the account of natural normativity in plants and animals also applies to human beings. In other words, there is a shared conceptual structure between moral evaluations and the evaluations of the characteristics of plants and animals. The word “good” appears in the same sense in “the good root of plants” and “the good inclination of the human will”. In this way, Foot develops Anscombe’s naturalistic approach with the idea of “natural normativity”.⁴⁷⁵

1.2.3 Rosalind Hursthouse’s Naturalism

Rosalind Hursthouse explains and defends neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics in her book *On Virtue*

⁴⁷⁴ Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 44.

⁴⁷⁵ Foot’s idea of natural normativity also draws from Michael Thompson’s work on living things. See Michael Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Ethics,⁴⁷⁶ which is also a detailed development of Foot's theory of natural normativity. In her discussion of "the rationality of morality", Hursthouse discusses whether there is any "objective" criterion for a certain character trait to be a virtue. Her discussion suggests that the idea "a virtue is a character trait a human being needs for *eudaimonia*, to flourish or live well" includes two claims: first, the virtues benefit their possessor; second, the virtues make their possessor good as a human being, who needs the virtues to live a characteristically good human life.

Hursthouse notes the importance of Foot's idea of natural normativity for ethical discussions. She also wishes to examine plants, irrational animals, and human beings, and claims that human life is characterized by four ends: (1) survival; (2) reproduction; (3) characteristic enjoyment and freedom from pain; (4) the good functioning of the group. Survival and reproduction are common to all living things, but the way these ends should be pursued is characteristic of a particular species. For example, penguins have one characteristic way of reproducing, while lions have another. Among these animals, humans are the only ones who act not merely from instinct, but from a rational capacity of deliberation and choice. Therefore, the characteristic way humans pursue these four human ends is by using rationality, and humans who can achieve flourishing are those who pursue the four ends following reason.

Hursthouse continues Foot's argument that the conceptual structure of the word "good" does not show any fundamental difference between the evaluation of humans and that of plants and animals. It is true that when evaluating the human species, the addition of the ability to reason makes a huge difference. For example, humans have a conception of happiness that plants and animals do not. But according to Aristotle's understanding of human nature, humans are still social animals who live rationally, and human views about happiness are still defended or modified based on whether they promote the four ends.

1.3 The Conventional Approach

1.3.1 The Conventional Approach of "Is-Owes"

In arguing for the transition from "is" to "owes", Anscombe uses the example of a grocer

⁴⁷⁶ Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

delivering potatoes, along with the idea of brute facts, in order to show that “owes” cannot be logically deduced from “is”. For her, this transition is based not on logical deduction, but on social practice and social customs that are contextualized by a particular social system. It means that all members of that society who participate in activities and understand the practices of that society would agree on the transition from “is” to “owes”. These contexts are sufficient to constitute a defense of this “owes”. In the context of social practices, therefore, we can derive “value” from “fact”.

1.3.2 Bernard Williams’s Thick Concepts

Bernard Williams proposes the notion of “thick concepts” in his book *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*⁴⁷⁷, which is a continuation of Anscombe’s conventional approach.⁴⁷⁸ Williams develops the notion in response to the problem of the objectivity of ethics. He believes that the key to solving this problem is to explain the distinction between science and ethics, rather than to explain that between theory and practice, or between fact and value. Unlike science, which supports a convergence of knowledge to allow systematic theorizing about the world, there is no convergence of knowledge in ethics. Thus, Bernard Williams proposes the notion of “thick concepts” to show how ethical beliefs are possible.

“Thick concepts” are the counterpart of “thin concepts”. “Thin concepts” are those that are universal and abstract but lack specificity, such as “ought”, “good”, and their opposites. Such concepts have come to dominate our moral system, as the moral language we consider is basically only them. In contrast, “thick concepts” are those that combine evaluation and non-evaluative description, and Bernard Williams gives *coward*, *lie*, *brutality*, and *gratitude* as examples. These concepts appear descriptively more specific or rich in content than terms such as *good* or *wrong*, which seem more general or more purely evaluative. For example, even

⁴⁷⁷ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985).

⁴⁷⁸ See Sophie Grace Chappell, “Bernard Williams”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

though calling someone *selfish* evaluates them as bad in some way, not just any bad act can count as *selfish*; the act must also involve the fact that the agent gives some significant degree of priority to himself over others. Therefore, a thick concept “*selfish*” is more specific in content than a thin one “*bad*”, and the thick concept combines both the evaluation of *bad* and the non-evaluative description of what happened.

“Thick concepts”, as specific and rich in content, are highly relevant to specific social environments, and therefore can provide members of a society both with guidance for actions and ethical knowledge. For example, given that our society has the concept of *brutality*, it follows that we have a clear idea about the circumstances under which it is applicable – and there would be facts about brutality (ethical facts) and justified true beliefs about brutality (ethical knowledge).

This relevance of thick concepts for specific social environments also implies that, unlike thin concepts – which only function to guide and evaluate actions – thick concepts not only provide reasons and guidance for actions but are also guided by the world. This “being guided by the world” also means that a concept that exists in one society may not exist in another; that a concept that existed in one society may no longer exist in the same society; and that a concept that did not exist in one society may exist now in the same society. The evolution of thick concepts closely relates to specific social and cultural environments. So if we wish to have an adequate account of any thick concept, it is necessary to understand the relevant cultural or social structures in which the concept is used.

Even though, in Chapter 4 Section 4, when discussing the theory of promising, we noted the coexistence of conventional necessity and natural necessity, as it is human nature to construct the convention, as well as the fact that “thick concepts” are still related to Aristotle’s concept of virtue and vices, the relation between ethical knowledge and the society in which the concepts are used, embodied in Bernard Williams’ notion, does not follow Aristotle’s naturalism. It follows Anscombe’s conventional approach.

Section 2 Anscombe and Virtue Ethics

According to Anscombe's two responses to the fact-value dichotomy from the last section, as well as the different approaches taken by ethicists who follow Anscombe's thought, we can see that her thought, as presented in MMP, does not all belong to Aristotelian ethics. Nor are ethicists inspired by Anscombe all working along Aristotelian ethical lines. This section will begin with a discussion of how we should see MMP in relation to the revival of contemporary virtue ethics, and then it will discuss how we should see Anscombe's role in that same field.

2.1 "Modern Moral Philosophy" and Contemporary Virtue Ethics

In the introduction to the book *Virtue Ethics*⁴⁷⁹ they co-edit – a volume that collects important articles representing changes in moral philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century – Roger Crisp and Michael Slote claim that Anscombe's article MMP is widely regarded as "having inaugurated the present revival of virtue ethics"; however, they think that "this recognition occurs with considerable benefit of hindsight".⁴⁸⁰

Crisp and Slote admit that MMP contains significant discussions of many topics only loosely related to the idea of virtue ethics; the main reason the article originally attracted attention was its sharp criticism of modern moral philosophy and moral philosophers. Crisp and Slote claim that Anscombe's article anticipates recent developments in virtue ethics not really by her own argument but by having influenced many philosophers who write directly about virtue ethics.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, eds. *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁸⁰ Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, "Introduction", in *Virtue Ethics*, edited by Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

⁴⁸¹ See Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, "Introduction", 3–4. Crisp and Slote introduce this influence by listing the articles collected in this book. Bernard Williams, Micheal Stocker, and Susan Wolf continue Anscombe's critique of modern ethical theory, and their articles are found in Chapters 2–4; Iris Murdoch, Alasdair MacIntyre, John McDowell, and Philippa Foot seek to develop an ethics of virtue from within philosophy, and their articles are found in Chapters 5–8; Jerome Schneewind and Robert Louden bring out some objections to the change in virtue ethics, and their articles are found in Chapters 9-10; Rosalind Hursthouse, Michael Slote, and Annette Baier develop virtue ethics into new

Crisp and Slote see Anscombe's sharp criticism of modern moral philosophy and philosophers as both the focus of the article and the object of criticism shared by all subsequent virtue ethicists. Virtue ethics is an emerging picture with many different accounts, and it is initially defined by what it is not rather than what it is. That is, virtue ethicists initially set the theory up as a rival to deontology and consequentialism. This is one of the reasons why MMP has been recognized as a revival.

Crisp and Slote argue that, before the publication of MMP, discussion of moral philosophy had centered around two traditions: Kantianism or deontology, which has its roots in the work of the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant; and utilitarianism or consequentialism, which is based on the writings of later British philosophers Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick. Then, in 1958, "Elizabeth Anscombe launched a scathing attack on both of these traditions simultaneously", as Crisp and Slote put it. They say that Anscombe's attack expresses the view that both of these traditions build their moral theories on legalistic notions such as "obligation", which require a legislator; however, as many no longer believe in God, moral theories based on legislators and legislation are rootless.⁴⁸²

Thus, Crisp and Slote write:

[Anscombe suggests that] our only route to providing a foundation for ethics is in the notion of virtue, understood independently from obligation as part of human flourishing. [...] In speaking of human flourishing, Anscombe was referring back to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, of the fourth century BC, who has been the main source of inspiration for modern virtue ethics.⁴⁸³

directions and respond to new objections, and their articles appear in Chapters 11–13.

⁴⁸² See Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, "Introduction", 1–2; see also Chapter 1 Section 2 of this dissertation, where I have discussed Anscombe's criticism of consequentialism, and Chapter 2 Section 1, where I have discussed Anscombe's criticism of the law conception of ethics. The latter explains her criticism of Kantianism.

⁴⁸³ Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, "Introduction", 2.

But they realize Anscombe's insistence on the fact that Aristotle does not fully clarify the notion of virtue, and that we must further analyze terms such as "intention", "wanting", "pleasure", "action" before we can say what a virtue is. Therefore, Anscombe does not say we can only talk about moral philosophy after understanding Aristotelian ethics; rather, she claims that we should stop doing moral philosophy until we have some clarity about philosophical psychology.⁴⁸⁴ This indicates that Anscombe's purpose in writing MMP was not a revival of virtue ethics – she was instead simply borrowing some parts of Aristotle's ethics that fit with her moral ideas while adding her own arguments along the way in places where she thought Aristotle was not clear enough.

In general, Crisp and Slote's introduction tells us two things. First, Anscombe does borrow Aristotle's ideas, but her purpose is not to revive Aristotelian ethics; and it is only to criticize modern moral philosophy and philosophers. Second, the development of MMP by subsequent ethicists did bring about the revival of virtue ethics, but we must ask whether all subsequent virtue ethicists took more from Anscombe's way of thinking. In other words, if we say that Anscombe's MMP is the starting point for the contemporary revival of virtue ethics, does Anscombe's way of thinking represent the approach of all contemporary virtue ethicists?

2.2 Analytic Virtue Ethics

2.2.1 A Return to Both Aristotle and Aquinas

The answer is no. Anscombe's moral philosophy cannot represent the approach of all contemporary virtue ethicists. In her article "Aristotle, Aquinas, Anscombe and the New Virtue Ethics",⁴⁸⁵ Candace Vogler introduces the notion of "analytic virtue ethics", which "understand[s] itself as directly responsive to Elizabeth Anscombe's call for a return to Aristotle, that turns to both Aristotle and Aquinas".⁴⁸⁶ Vogler's description suggests that, among

⁴⁸⁴ See Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, "Introduction", 3–4; see also Anscombe, MMP, 1, 4–5.

⁴⁸⁵ Candace Vogler, "Aristotle, Aquinas, Anscombe, and the New Virtue Ethics", in *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Matthias Perkams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 239–257.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

contemporary virtue ethicists, those who respond directly to Anscombe's call are only one group. In other words, even though we say that Anscombe's MMP marks the revival of contemporary virtue ethics, not all contemporary virtue ethicists are following Anscombe's approach. There are many ways of being neo-Aristotelian. Of these approaches, only the so-called analytic neo-Aristotelians, or analytic virtue ethicists, are the real followers of Anscombe, because they draw from Aquinas under Anscombe's influence.

According to Vogler, there are many examples of contemporary neo-Aristotelians indebted to Anscombe and who move between Aristotle and Aquinas. Philippa Foot's work is exemplary; Rosalind Hursthouse develops her practical philosophy by reading Aquinas; Anthony Kenny, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Anselm Muller have a deeper relation to Aquinas; in the next generation, Michael Thompson uses both Aristotle and the *Summa Theologiae* in his discussion of individual justice, while two of his students, Matthew Boyle and Doug Lavin, defend both Aquinas and Aristotle.⁴⁸⁷

Meanwhile, Vogler lists contemporary virtue ethicists that she does not consider to be among those who really follow Anscombe. For example, Martha Nussbaum's path-breaking work *The Fragility of Goodness* neither draws directly from Aquinas nor is indebted to Anscombe; Michael Slote's *Morals from Motives* expressly parts company with Aristotle and ignores Aquinas.⁴⁸⁸

2.2.2 The Importance of Aquinas

Vogler emphasizes the importance of Aquinas for Anscombe's moral thought, and she quotes Mary Geach:

Anscombe drew upon [Aquinas] to an unknowable extent: she said to me that it aroused prejudice in people to tell them that a thought came from him: to my sister she said that to ascribe a thought to him made people boringly ignore the interest of it,

⁴⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, 240–241.

⁴⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, 239.

whether they were for Aquinas or against him.⁴⁸⁹

Vogler concludes that “work with Aquinas informs Anscombe’s writings in practical philosophy. [...] work with Aquinas began to inform analytical Aristotelian virtue ethics as well”.⁴⁹⁰

Following Anscombe, Philippa Foot finds that Aquinas provides a more detailed, more focused and more systematic discussion of acquired virtues than Aristotle. She writes:

By and large Aquinas followed Aristotle – sometimes even heroically – where Aristotle gave an opinion, and where St. Thomas is on his own in developing the doctrine of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and in his theocentric doctrine of happiness, he still uses an Aristotelian framework where he can: as for instance in speaking of happiness as man’s last end. However, there are different emphases and new elements in Aquinas’s ethics: often he works thing out in far more detail than Aristotle did, and it is possible to learn a great deal from Aquinas that one could not have got from Aristotle. It is my opinion that the *Summa Theologica* is one of the best sources we have for moral philosophy, and moreover that St. Thomas’s ethical writings are as useful to the atheist as to the Catholic or other Christian believer.⁴⁹¹

Vogler takes Foot’s words as “looking to Aristotle for guidance came to include looking to Aquinas”.⁴⁹²

Vogler also mentions a kind of questioning of the way Aristotle is understood through

⁴⁸⁹ Mary Geach, “Introduction”, in *From Plato to Wittgenstein: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2011), xix; quoted by Candace Vogler, “Aristotle, Aquinas, Anscombe, and the New Virtue Ethics”, 240.

⁴⁹⁰ Candace Vogler, “Aristotle, Aquinas, Anscombe, and the New Virtue Ethics”, 240.

⁴⁹¹ Philippa Foot, “Virtues and Vices”, in *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1–2; quoted by Candace Vogler, “Aristotle, Aquinas, Anscombe, and the New Virtue Ethics”, 241.

⁴⁹² Candace Vogler, “Aristotle, Aquinas, Anscombe, and the New Virtue Ethics”, 241.

Aquinas, given that there are profound differences between them. These focus principally on theology. For example, Candace Vogler writes that:

...although both Aquinas and Aristotle understand contemplation of the divine as the highest good for human beings, Aristotle's god is not the almighty creator of Thomas's theology, Aristotle certainly did not hold that this highest good was best identified with beatific union with God in a resurrected life, and Aristotle did not think that the virtues were best understood as giving more specific direction to human reason bound by natural law understood in the broader context of divine or eternal law.⁴⁹³

These differences between Aristotle and Aquinas, however, do not much impact analytic virtue ethics. Vogler says that theologians who debate on these differences do not participate in the discussion of virtue ethics, and most of the neo-Aristotelians are neither scholars of medieval philosophy nor Latinists, and they do not identify themselves as Christians; they are instead more concerned with contemporary moral philosophy.⁴⁹⁴ As a result, analytic virtue ethicists have been able to use Aquinas's thought to understand Aristotle.

2.2.3 The Concern of Analytic Virtue Ethicists

Vogler observes that these ethicists, who draw from Aristotle and Aquinas under the influence of Anscombe, share an attention to action and practical reason, and they all agree on the importance of thought about good and bad. She further explains:

They share the view that right action is action from and for the sake of virtue and that right practical reasoning is virtuous practical reasoning. Relatedly, all hold that practical reason is the defining mark of the human being, and that virtue and practical wisdom are the highest expression of practical reason. Virtues pattern right choice,

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 241–242.

right action, appropriate emotions, and developed sensitivities to ethical salience. Further, the virtues make the adult good qua human being. Philosophers in my target group find significant common ground between what they take from Aquinas and what they take from Aristotle on these points.⁴⁹⁵

Vogler adds that most analytic philosophers of action, who treat Anscombe's *Intention* as the starting point for analytic action theory, think that an account of action theory can be developed without drawing in theorizing about good and bad. But analytic virtue ethicists hold the view that the first principle of practical reason shows that "good is to be pursued and bad avoided". Given the disagreement between analytic philosophers of action and analytic virtue ethicists, the latter must explain how intentional action is bound up with thought about good and bad.

Vogler explains this connection as when we are asked questions such as "Why are you doing that?", "What is the point of doing that?", and "What are you up to?", we are asked not only for a description of the action itself, but also for a description of the sense in which the action is a good sort of thing to do. In other words, analytic virtue ethicists think that we cannot understand intentional actions without seeing them as something dealing with good and bad. What these analytic virtue ethicists draw from Anscombe, says Vogler, is that "the most basic orientation to good involved in intentional action attaches to the means-end structure of the act and establishes what is supposed to happen next".⁴⁹⁶

This orientation to good involved in intentional action, as described by Vogler, includes two aspects: first, it attaches to the means-end structure of action; second, it establishes what is supposed to happen next. The means-end structure indicates that intentional action has a calculative structure, such as "I do A in order to do B, B in order to do C, and so on". This structure allows us to see what is being done and to what end, which is also what the "what is supposed to happen next" means; it also allows us to see what the agent has in mind in doing what she is doing, and we can therefore rationally criticize what she does. Vogler concludes that

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

analytic virtue ethicists would claim that, without this structure of intentional action, we would lose the track of the process by which people do things on purpose; this “purpose” is the most basic form of orientation to good and bad in action.⁴⁹⁷

The discussion here about the relation between intentional action and thought about good and bad echoes the analysis of “moral action” in Chapter 3 Section 3, and that of “intentional action” in Chapter 3 Section 4 of this dissertation.

In Chapter 3 Section 3, we showed that Anscombe’s equation between human action and moral action tells that all human action involves good and bad human characters, and this human character is related to a human good life. We can therefore say that human action can be qualified as good or bad in relation to its contribution to the flourishing of human life.

In Chapter 3 Section 4, we analyzed Anscombe’s idea of “intentional action”. “Intentional action” is the action to which a certain sense of the question “Why?” is given application; in this certain sense, the answer gives a reason for acting. Meanwhile, such actions are characterized by “a special kind of multiplicity of levels of description”. These two characteristics of “intentional action” point to the same purpose of Anscombe, which is to discuss the agent’s responsibility, given that these different levels of description relate to a developing series of answers to the question “Why?”. We have mentioned that Anscombe’s purpose in discussing “intentional human action” is to explain the notion of “practical truth”, which is made true by action provided that a man forms and executes a good choice. Anscombe claims that, through the idea of “practical truth”, Aristotle provides an ideal model for acting in accordance with moral virtue, which is the choice in which right desire participates. In both sections, we emphasized that Anscombe’s argument is influenced by Aristotle’s philosophy of action. Vogler attempts to demonstrate that Anscombe’s discussion of action is not only influenced by Aristotle, but also largely by Aquinas.

To this end Vogler introduces two important ideas of Anscombe, which comes from Aquinas. The first one is about “intentional action”, or what analytic philosophers call “act-types”. The closest equivalent to act-types in Aquinas is the *objectum*, the object or objective

⁴⁹⁷ See *ibid.*

of the act, which establishes the species of act for Aquinas. Vogler claims that “it seems likely that Anscombe had Aquinas’s *obiectum* in mind when introducing act-types into analytic philosophy”.⁴⁹⁸ The second is about “moral action”. Anscombe’s well-known formula, that “all human action is moral action. It is all either good or bad.” is a continuation of Aquinas; the latter holds that no particular act is morally indifferent – particular acts are either good or bad – and that an act is good just in case it is not bad in its species, its circumstances, or its end.⁴⁹⁹ In Chapter 3 Section 4 of this dissertation, I argued that the discussion of “practical truth” is one of the most important parts of Anscombe’s moral philosophy, and the introduction of the concept of “intentional action” is an important solution to the inadequacy of Aristotelian ethics. Together with the discussion in this section, we can say that Anscombe also credits Aquinas with this important part of her moral philosophy.

2.2.4 Anscombe’s Role in Contemporary Virtue Ethics

My goal here is not to argue in detail for Aquinas’s influence on Anscombe’s moral philosophy; rather, I wish to offer an alternative view for the discussion on Anscombe’s role in the revival of contemporary virtue ethics. The claim that MMP marks the revival of contemporary virtue ethics is by no means false, but it is also important to understand that the revival of virtue ethics is not the purpose of Anscombe’s writings. Indeed, the philosophers who have truly followed Anscombe in the study of Aristotelian ethics are only one group of contemporary virtue ethicists.

I prefer not to label Anscombe, but am trying to view Aristotelian ethics as one of Anscombe’s intellectual resources in order to focus on practical issues that concern her. Her interest has never been to provide a universal and complete moral theory that explains

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁴⁹⁹ Vogler further explains: “Chewing on a piece of straw, like stroking one’s beard, or lying down, all count as analytic philosophical intentional act-types with indifferent descriptions. A token of such a type need not count as an *actus humanus*. Aquinas distinguishes acts that count from those that don’t in terms of the combined acts of intellect and will at issue in *actus humanus*”. This is identical to Anscombe’s explanation in Chapter 3 Section 3 of this dissertation. See Candace Vogler, “Aristotle, Aquinas, Anscombe, and the New Virtue Ethics”, 246.

everything, but rather to answer to practical moral questions.

Section 3 Killing and Human Dignity

3.1 Military Ethics and Human Dignity

In the introduction of her collection of papers *Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers Volume III*, Anscombe writes: “In general, my interest in moral philosophy has been more in particular moral questions than in what is now called ‘meta-ethics’”.⁵⁰⁰ Anscombe’s public opposition to unjust wars and to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki attests to her description of herself. Duncan Richter comments on this feature of Anscombe in his book *Anscombe’s Moral Philosophy*: “She boldly and brilliantly defended unfashionable and unpopular beliefs. Despite her efforts, most of those beliefs remain unpopular, but her impact on the history of philosophy is ongoing”.⁵⁰¹

According to our introduction to the historical background for MMP, we know that an important aspect of these particular moral questions is the issue of warfare. Richter also chooses the theme of war as the beginning chapter of his book. His reasoning is that Anscombe began the work on military ethics before she wrote MMP, and so it may provide “a more accessible introduction to her thinking on ethics”, as well as “the background necessary for understanding her primary concerns in her later work”.⁵⁰²

In previous chapters, we have two discussions on the subject of war: Chapter 1 Section 3 “Truman’s Case”, and Chapter 3 Section 1 “From Truman’s Case to Action Theory”. In Chapter 1 Section 3, we talked about Anscombe’s opposition to granting Truman an honorary degree. In order to defend her opposition, Anscombe claims that Truman’s order in the war was unjust, and we specifically discussed two points: first, Anscombe is not a pacifist – so she is not opposed to just wars, but Truman’s order in dropping bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not qualify as a just war; second, Anscombe is not opposed to any form of intentional killing, but rather opposes the intentional killing of the innocent, and we have analyzed the concept of “innocent” in warfare. In Chapter 3 Section 1, we talked about one justification for Truman,

⁵⁰⁰ CPP3, viii.

⁵⁰¹ Duncan Richter, *Anscombe’s Moral Philosophy*, 3.

⁵⁰² See *ibid.*

which claims that the killing of innocents was just a side effect of Truman's order. In order to demonstrate the mistake of this justification, we started with the doctrine of double effect and discussed the distinction between intended, foreseen, and accidental consequences, which involved Anscombe's famous analysis of action-description.

One important conclusion of these discussions about military ethics is that Anscombe is not opposed to legitimate killing in a just war; what she opposes is the intentional killing of innocents. This is also what Anscombe repeatedly emphasizes in her discussion of Truman's case, that "choos[ing] to kill the innocent as a means to their ends is always murder, and murder is one of the worst of human actions".⁵⁰³

However, it is not clear whether the discussions about the definition of the innocents in warfare, the definition of intentional killing, and the conditions for a just war actually answer all the questions we might have about killing human beings. For example, we have argued why there are innocents in war, and why combatants can be the target of legitimate killing in war; but is "they do not cause direct harm" the only reason why the innocents cannot be killed? What attributes of the combatants as human beings are eliminated or ignored, making them the target of legitimate killing? I think there is another very important concept to discuss here – human dignity.

3.2 Human Dignity

3.2.1 Killing and Human Dignity

In her article "The Dignity of the Human Being",⁵⁰⁴ Anscombe describes situations where the equality between human beings is violated, one of which is "in warfare civilian populations are bombed" (DHB, 67). When Anscombe writes this phrase, I believe she has in mind the civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She gives other examples, such as "people are killed for others' convenience as the Nazis killed mental defectives", "anyone murders his fellow human, not in anger as deserving death, but for advantage to himself", "an obviously human foetus is

⁵⁰³ TD, 64.

⁵⁰⁴ Anscombe, "The Dignity of the Human Being" (henceforth DHB), in GG1, 67–73.

deliberately killed in abortion”, “a dead or dying mother is put out into a rubbish bin”, and so on.⁵⁰⁵ This equality, which is violated in these situations, is “impregnable” and “lies in the value and dignity of being a human being” (DHB, 67).

In his article “On Killing Human Beings”,⁵⁰⁶ Luke Gormally discusses Anscombe’s thinking on the topic of “killing human beings”, where he refers to many unpublished writings of Anscombe’s, deriving from a seminar given by Anscombe at Cambridge between 1970–1971 for the Faculties of Divinity, Law and Medicine under the title “On Killing Human Beings”.⁵⁰⁷ In this article, Gormally mentions that Anscombe’s definition of “murder” is “intentional killing of the innocent”, and he thinks that in Anscombe’s view, murder is “a paradigm case of injustice”, while “justice in this domain rests on the valuation of human life”.⁵⁰⁸ Therefore, we can conclude that “intentional killing of the innocent” is unjust killing, and it is the destruction of human dignity and human value.

3.2.2 Legitimate Killing and Human Dignity

Gormally presents human dignity and human value by analyzing the conditions under which killing is justifiable. He quotes Anscombe’s words: “There is one ‘justification’ which [...] does not take away the character of ‘murder’. That is where the justification of a piece of deliberate killing is on the sole ground of advantageous consequences to be gained, or disadvantageous consequences to be avoided, in the particular situation”.⁵⁰⁹ Gormally views this quotation such that Anscombe’s justification for murder is similar to her justification for treachery, namely, if the betrayal or killing is “for the best” in the circumstances, it would be justified.

⁵⁰⁵ DHB, 67–68.

⁵⁰⁶ Luke Gormally, “On Killing Human Beings”, in *The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, 133–153.

⁵⁰⁷ Gormally notes in a footnote that these writings are in the Interim Archive of Professor Anscombe’s papers.

⁵⁰⁸ See Luke Gormally, “On Killing Human Beings”, 135.

⁵⁰⁹ See *ibid.* Anscombe’s words are from unpublished writings, and the reference is given by Luke Gormally in the footnote.

This idea echoes Anscombe's argument about legitimate killing in warfare, which we discussed in Chapter 1 Section 3 – the condition under which intentional killing is permissible. There we said that the combatants can be the target of legitimate killing, because they are engaged in an objectively unjust proceeding that causes harm, and therefore killing them is stopping the harm. If we analyze legitimate killing in terms of human value and human dignity, it is justifiable because the combatants are *devalued* due to the harm that their unjust proceeding would cause. Gormally quotes Anscombe's unpublished writings here: “[the combatant's] existence is counted as worth nothing in comparison with the ends of others”. He explains that, in murderous killing, an individual human being is done away with for the sake of others; for example, his continued being existence is judged evil.⁵¹⁰ He also explains “devaluation” as: “Terrible consequences to others of not killing this innocent person will be enough to prove it just to kill him, so he is devalued”.⁵¹¹ This devaluation that justifies killing human beings includes “the killing of violent offenders by the forces established by civil authority to protect innocent citizens”, “killing in war by soldiers”, and “the assassination of tyrants”.⁵¹²

3.2.3 Equality in Human Dignity

What is this human value or human dignity, which is equal in every human being but can be devalued under certain circumstances? Anscombe gives some explanation in her article “Murder and the Morality of Euthanasia”: “A human being is a person because the kind to which he belongs is characterized by rational nature. Thus we have the same individual and have the same person when we have the same human being. One is a person just by being of this kind, and that does indeed import a tremendous dignity.” (MME, 268) This passage proves that this value is inherent and equal in every human being.

Anscombe also claims that this inherent equality as a human being is “impregnable”. Given that the intentional killing of human beings is permissible under certain situations, we

⁵¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 135–136.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 138.

may be puzzled as to how this human dignity has the quality of being impregnable. Anscombe anticipates this puzzle and explains: “When I call this equality impregnable, I do not mean that it is inviolable. That is, I do not mean that it cannot be violated” (DHB, 67). In fact, Anscombe thinks this equality is often violated. We have referred to her example a few pages earlier, for example, when civilian populations are bombed in warfare, when someone murders his fellow human for advantage to himself, when people are enslaved, when mental defectives are killed by Nazis, when a human foetus is deliberately killed in abortion, and so on. They are all cases where this inherent equality is violated. What she means when saying “impregnable” is that “[this equality] cannot be taken away” (DHB, 68). This equality is so impregnable that, even though combatants can be the target of legitimate killing, they are not being deprived of human dignity, but only devalued in comparison to the harm they may cause. In other words, their living is of negative value, and so things are better with them dead.

Gormally compares Kant’s understanding of “human dignity” with Anscombe’s in order to show that Anscombe’s understanding represents an idea of equality. He notes that, in Kant’s understanding, the only possessors of human dignity are “those who are actively capable of exercising rational agency”, and this interpretation of human dignity is “a consequence of the modern tendency to locate the origin of value in human willing”; this interpretation “goes with the ‘personalism’ which is the plague of bioethics, according to which only a restricted class of human beings, those in possession of a range of presently exercisable psychological abilities, count as persons and enjoy basic human rights”.⁵¹³

Gormally comments that this Kantian understanding is obviously not Anscombe’s position, and he quotes Anscombe’s words from MME: “A human being is a person because the kind to which he belongs is characterized by rational nature. Thus we have the same individual, and have the same person when we have the same human being. One is a person just by being of this kind, and that does indeed import a tremendous dignity” (MME, 268).⁵¹⁴ He concludes that “Anscombe’s locating dignity in human nature rather than human willing assumes a

⁵¹³ See *ibid.*, 139–140.

⁵¹⁴ This passage is quoted by Luke Gormally; see *ibid.*, 140.

particular anthropology”, and “It is because human beings are endowed with capacities through which they can realize a distinctive kind of goodness that they possess the dignity they do. So dignity attaches to our natural constitution understood as having an immanent telos”.⁵¹⁵

Gormally’s comment on Anscombe’s understanding of “human dignity” is not wrong, but it is deficient. Indeed, when Anscombe speaks of this characteristic of equality of human dignity, she is presenting a position that is the opposite of Kant. But this is not the entirety of Anscombe’s view, as there is another point of her that is much more similar to Kant. This one involves the characteristic of excellence in human dignity.

3.2.4 Excellence in Human Dignity

This aspect of excellence in Anscombe’s understanding of human dignity is not the part related to unjust killing that we discussed earlier. But we must still understand it in order to understand Anscombe’s conception of human dignity as a whole.

In his article “The Meaning of Human Dignity”⁵¹⁶, Duncan Richter talks about “human dignity” through Anscombe’s discussion of connatural knowledge as well as several specific issues in practical ethics. Richter claims that Anscombe’s idea of “human dignity” has a duality, given that human beings are both rational and embodied beings. Richter says that the embodied aspect of Anscombe’s idea comes from Wittgenstein, as Wittgenstein gives reasons to connect human dignity with lower and more physical aspects of human life. He quotes Wittgenstein’s words in *Philosophical Occasions* and observes that Wittgenstein appears to believe that, presumably, there is a high risk that a person in the situation of losing some parts of their body would lose some self-respect. At the same time, other people are likely to lose respect for those who are badly mutilated. Richter claims that this is because Wittgenstein believes that “the concept of human dignity depends on the normal condition of the body”.⁵¹⁷ Richter argues that

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 140–141.

⁵¹⁶ Duncan Richter, “The Meaning of Human Dignity”, in *G.E.M. Anscombe and Human Dignity*, edited by John Mizzoni (Aston, Pennsylvania: Neumann University Press, 2016), 17–40.

⁵¹⁷ See Duncan Richter, “The Meaning of Human Dignity”, 20. What he quotes from Wittgenstein is this: “Mutilate a human being all the way, cut off his arms & legs nose & ears & then see what remains

Anscombe identifies several aspects of human dignity, and one part is the bodily integrity that Wittgenstein brings up – as Anscombe claims in DHB that one value and dignity of human nature is man’s bodily life.⁵¹⁸

At the same time, Richter also mentions that another part of the value and dignity of human beings is having free will and being answerable for one’s actions. This is the kind of consideration Kant emphasizes.⁵¹⁹ Anscombe introduces this aspect of human dignity as different from the bodily life of man by saying: “Remember that we are intellectual animals, whose vegetative and animal life is part of a life framed by our intellectuality: we are nourished, for example, not like plants but like other animals, but our eating is conducted in a specially human way, reason entering into the getting and preparation of food and into the conduct of meals” (DHB, 70–71). The important practical issue related to this aspect of human dignity discussed by Anscombe here concerns “sexual activity and reproduction”. She claims:

Our sexual activity and reproduction is all tied up with our intellect, our not merely animal emotions and our aesthetic feelings. Reason and love enter into most, and certainly into all characteristically human exercise of this vital function. Hence marriage and the celebration of and awe before procreation and pregnancy. The child who is conceived by a mother, and who has a father, is not unequal to them. (DHB, 71)

Anscombe therefore opposes same-sex sexual behavior and contraceptive behavior, for the reason that human sexual activities are the means belonging to our human life, and any behavior

of his self-respect & of his dignity & to what extent his concepts of such things still remain the same. We have no idea how these concepts depend on the ordinary, normal, condition of our body. What becomes of them when we are led by a leash with a ring through our tongues & tied-up? How much of a human being sink? We don’t know that we are standing on a high & narrow rock & around us chasms in which everything looks completely different”. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 147–148.

⁵¹⁸ See DHB, 70; Duncan Richter quotes this passage, “The Meaning of Human Dignity”, 21.

⁵¹⁹ See Duncan Richter, “The Meaning of Human Dignity”, 21.

not respecting human sexuality – in other words, human life – is a violation of human dignity.⁵²⁰ Here, this dignity concerns, in Anscombe’s words, the kind of “human life” which means “the human course of life” rather than “a human’s being alive”. According to our previous interpretation, the former, the human course of life, concerns the intellectual aspect of human dignity, while the latter, the human’s being alive, concerns the bodily aspect of human dignity.⁵²¹

Anscombe adds that this aspect of human dignity concerns free will, and so it is possible that we might use our powers wrongly. In her opinion, an experimenter who requests for human ova from gynecological clinics and fertilizes them with his own semen, or a woman who becomes pregnant, keeps the baby until twenty-eight weeks, then goes somewhere where they pay her for a late abortion, and sells the foetus as a valuable material, are cases where people do not respect human procreation of human beings. This results in the alienation from belief in the dignity and value of humanness.⁵²²

Anscombe describes a bitterly interesting and complicated scene concerning human dignity in the very end passage of DHB. In the celebrations of VE Day following the Allies’ victory of Germany, when people talk about (or in Anscombe’s own words: “prate” about) how the human spirit could not be suppressed and the love of freedom must win in the end, she wishes to say “Fools!” and “You talk about being armed in spirit against possible future threats of evil. You seem all unconscious of living in an actually murderous world.” She explains that “Each nation that has ‘liberal’ abortion laws has rapidly become a nation of murderers”.⁵²³ This comparison between the celebration of victory in the Second World War and the legality of

⁵²⁰ Anscombe thinks that homosexual sexuality does not respect human sexuality because it will not produce children. For her discussion about homosexuality, see Anscombe, “Contraception and Chastity”, in GG2, 170–191; Anscombe, “Contraception, Chastity and the Vocation of Marriage”, in GG2, 206–213; Anscombe, “You Can Have Sex without Children: *Christianity and the New Offer*”, CPP3, 82–96. See also Duncan Richter, “Anscombe and Sexual Ethics”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, edited by Roger Teichmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 324–343.

⁵²¹ See DHB, 71.

⁵²² See *ibid.*, 71–72.

⁵²³ See *ibid.*, 72–73.

abortion exemplifies the duality of Anscombe's understanding about human dignity.⁵²⁴

In his paper "Dignity's Transformation: Merit, Equality, and Priority of Coherence over Agreement",⁵²⁵ Bryan C. Pilkington also mentions that "the key to offering a coherent account of dignity is making sense of its meritorious and egalitarian elements".⁵²⁶ He explains these two elements as: first, dignity is employed as the ground for the equal treatment of human beings, which applies to all people to the same degree – this is the egalitarian element; second, dignity is employed as a concept denoting the best human lives, which highlights the great achievements of individual human beings – this is the meritorious element.⁵²⁷ This egalitarian element corresponds to the kind of human dignity that Richter mentions as deriving from Wittgenstein, while the meritorious one corresponds to the kind of human dignity emphasized by Kant.

3.2.5 Aquinas's Notion of Human Dignity

Anscombe's characterization of the duality of human dignity is not her original idea; instead, it rests on a teleological understanding of human nature from Aquinas. In "On Killing Human Beings", Gormally presents three concepts of human dignity in Aquinas' thought:

- (1) the dignity which belongs to our constitution and the immanent telos of our nature,

⁵²⁴ See also Ryan Cobb, "Anscombe, Abortion, and Human Dignity", in *G.E.M. Anscombe and Human Dignity*, edited by John Mizzoni (Aston, Pennsylvania: Neumann University Press, 2016), 143–157. In this article, Ryan Cobb elaborate Anscombe's reasoning against abortion and defend her position by considering several objections against it. In my opinion, abortion is a special case for Anscombe, given that it concerns both kinds of human dignity. It concerns the aspect of equality because abortion violates people's bodily lives, namely, "a human's being alive"; it concerns the aspect of excellence because abortion violates people's intellectual lives, namely, "the human course of life".

⁵²⁵ Bryan C. Pilkington, "Dignity's Transformation: Merit, Equality, and Priority of Coherence over Agreement", in *G.E.M. Anscombe and Human Dignity*, edited by John Mizzoni (Aston, Pennsylvania: Neumann University Press, 2016), 53–89.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵²⁷ See *Ibid.*, 53–57. These two elements are also called human dignity and personal dignity.

the one I've been discussing, which one might call "intrinsic dignity", a dignity which one cannot lose; (2) the dignity of those who live a virtuous life, which one might call "acquired dignity", and which one might fail to acquire and, if acquired, lose; and (3) the definitive dignity of those who have achieved our human destiny, the dignity of "beatitude".⁵²⁸

The fact that Anscombe's concept of human dignity was drawn in part from Aquinas's philosophy also echoes what we mentioned in the previous section about the influence of Aquinas on Anscombe's moral views.

3.3 Practical Issues about Human Dignity

3.3.1 Euthanasia

As we mentioned before, Richter talks about Anscombe's idea of "human dignity" by means of her discussions of several specific issues in practical ethics. In his own words, "consideration of practical cases can shed light on the notion of human dignity, and that consideration of human dignity can shed light on practical case ...".⁵²⁹ Legitimate killing in wartime is one of these specific issues. Meanwhile, Anscombe also discusses other issues concerning human life, well-known examples of which include euthanasia, abortion, capital punishment, and so on. These all concern the egalitarian element of human dignity.

As for capital punishment, people would agree that it is against human dignity. Anscombe claims that, even though there might be people arguing that those who suffer capital punishment are those who violate the human dignity of others, these people should be found guilty by due process rather than capital punishment. She lists examples: "the English hanging, drawing and quartering for high treason", "the French *peine forte et dure*", "the American electric chair or gas chamber", and "the Chinese's death of a thousand cuts"; these are all cases where the

⁵²⁸ Luke Gormally, "On Killing Human Beings", 141–142.

⁵²⁹ Duncan Richter, "The Meaning of Human Dignity", 17.

victim's human dignity is being violated.⁵³⁰

By contrast, the issue of euthanasia is much more complex than that of capital punishment, especially the case of voluntary euthanasia. Cases of non-voluntary euthanasia are not very controversial: given that the victim did not volunteer, then such a case would be the same as murder. In other words, it would be a violation of human dignity, because his living is considered as of negative value and things will be better with him dead.⁵³¹

Voluntary euthanasia is more complex, as it is the person to be killed who makes the judgment about the value of his own life. Gormally comments that "if one locates value in the will, i.e. if one holds that what is to count as valuable in a life is determined by the choice of an individual, then one may well have a conception of human dignity which commends voluntary euthanasia as a reasonable choice".⁵³² But this is not Anscombe's idea of human dignity, and she claims that "the stress on voluntariness tends to be spurious" (MME, 268). Therefore, the question becomes "whether a person's judgment that his life is no longer worth living is compatible with respecting the dignity of that person".⁵³³ Anscombe's answer is no. She believes that euthanasia in any form is disrespectful to human dignity.

Her first argument is about the capacity of the person choosing euthanasia, and whether they can make judgments or decision. She explains that the voluntary euthanasia is when people judge their own lives to be useless or burdensome to themselves or the world, and then choose to kill themselves. The problem, however, is that these judgments are made by people "whose mental capacity is gone or much diminished" (MME, 268-269). Therefore, the people who make the judgement do not actually have the capacity to judge, and hence the voluntary euthanasia would be an incoherent idea. Gormally extends this argument of Anscombe by further analyzing the capacity to make judgement. He explains that it is common to associate the notion of dignity with self-determination, which means "what is to count as the value of life

⁵³⁰ See DHB, 69.

⁵³¹ See *ibid.*, 68–69.

⁵³² Luke Gormally, "On Killing Human Beings", 142.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 143.

is determined by the person whose life it is". But self-determination and the judgment about the value of life require a developed capacity to carry out, and the real situation is that there are developmental stages in the life of human beings during which no such capacity exists; and at the same time, there can be periods of decline and debility, during which any such capacity may be lost.⁵³⁴ This analysis is consistent with Anscombe's argument that these people who need to make judgments about their value and decisions about their voluntary euthanasia may not have the capacity to do so.

Anscombe's second argument is about the role of doctors in voluntary euthanasia. She argues that "to get doctors killing people and to have this accepted in medical ethics ought to be regarded as sinister even by those who regard suicide in face of terminal suffering as justified and worthy of a human being" (MME, 269). She explains that even though we may justify voluntary euthanasia by the dignity of human freedom and self-determination, "it is inconsonant with this to ask someone else to do so grave a thing" (MME, 269).

Here, Anscombe also compares the difference between pet-euthanasia and person-euthanasia, as with those who suffer and say to a doctor "Kill me: I need death but cannot kill myself". She says we treat such people as animals. She explains that when we conduct pet-euthanasia, the impulse to put an animal out of its misery is an impulse of sympathy with a creature resembling us. But she thinks "this attitude is mistakenly called mercy or care", because "you cannot take care of something by destroying it" (MME, 269). Even though for animals, we can judge it not worth preserving and may even be inclined to terminate a reduced and pathetic existence, human beings, "being spirit as well as flesh, are not the same as the other animals. Whatever blasphemes the spirit in man is evil, discouraging, at best trivializing, at worst doing dirt on life" (MME, 269). In the end, we can say that euthanasia in any form is contrary to human dignity according to Anscombe's view of human dignity.

3.3.2 Religious Element in Anscombe's Moral Philosophy

In MME, Anscombe also comments that "propaganda in favour of death as a remedy [...] is

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 143–144.

irreligious, in a sense in which the contrasting religious attitude [...] is not necessarily connected only with some one particular religious system” (MME, 269–270). Anscombe sees this propaganda as promoting a potential suicide and glorifying it as the result of self-determination, such as by saying “I belong to myself, and I can set conditions on which I will consent to go on living”. Under this influence of propaganda, Anscombe says that “Life is regarded as good or bad hotel, which must not be too bad to be worth staying it” (MME, 270). She claims that to anyone with religious feelings, this propaganda lacks reverence and insight.

The claim about religious feelings indicates that Anscombe’s very important argument for why any form of euthanasia is contrary to human dignity comes from God’s view of life:

A religious attitude may be merely incipient, prompting a certain fear before the idea of ever destroying a human life, and refusing to make a ‘quality of life’ judgment to terminate a human being. Or it may be more developed, perceiving that men are made by God in God’s likeness, to know and love God. The love of God is the direction of the will to its true end. The human heart and will are set on amenity; they may also be set on what is just: that is (when it comes to dying) set in acceptance of life – which is God’s gift – and of death, as it comes from him. [...] Acceptance of life and death is what justice is in circumstances of unavoidable dying: it is accord with God’s will.

Such perception of what a human being is makes one perceive human death as awesome, human life as always to be treated with a respect which is a sign and acknowledgement of what it is for.

To fight a human being to the death, to try him, condemn him to death and execute him, are grave and tragic actions. But they may be compatible with this awe and respect. To kill him (whether he is oneself or someone else) because one judges his life is wretched or not worth living, is not. (MME, 270–271)

These paragraphs show that Anscombe’s understanding of human dignity and human value is based on a religious understanding of human life. Therefore, the religious understanding is also

behind her view of killing and euthanasia.⁵³⁵

Indeed, we cannot ignore the religious element in Anscombe's moral philosophy. Vogler confirms this fact in her article "Anscombe, G. E. M."⁵³⁶ that Anscombe's writings on ethics is partly based on Catholic moral theology, and that part of her work is addressed to specifically Catholic audiences.

In "Authority in Morals"⁵³⁷, Anscombe claims that there cannot be any true moral principles requiring special revelation, and our fundamental understanding of good and bad in human life cannot be something that must be learned from God or from any other religious doctrine.⁵³⁸ But it is hard to understand Anscombe's conservative views on many moral issues, such as abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality, without considering her religious positions. The intertwining of Anscombe's religious views and moral philosophy on these issues complicates them.

This is, however, not my purpose here to clarify that intertwining. I wish to show that the religious element does not completely cancel out the credibility of Anscombe's moral philosophy. The purpose of this section is not to defend or endorse Anscombe's specific positions against issues like abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality; rather, it attempts to show that Anscombe's consideration of these issues is not based on any religious doctrine, but on a general understanding of good and bad in human life.

⁵³⁵ See also Luke Gormally, "On Killing Human Beings", 145.

⁵³⁶ Candace Vogler, "Anscombe, G. E. M.". In *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, edited by Hugh LaFollette (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2013), 303–309.

⁵³⁷ Elizabeth Anscombe, "Authority in Morals". In *Problems of Authority*, edited by John Todd (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1962); reprinted in CPP3, 43–50.

⁵³⁸ See Anscombe, "Authority in Morals", 49–50. She writes: "... there is no such thing as revelation that such-and-such is good or bad not for any reason, not because of any facts, not because of any hopes or prospects, but simply: such-and-such is good to do, this is to be believed, and could not be known or inferred from anything else. [...] There would be no room for that knowledge by connaturality which is characteristic of the understanding of a virtuous person, in such a case; no room, therefore, for understanding application of what one believed to be right or wrong".

Section 4 Anscombe's Female Perspective

4.1 A Female Perspective

As the dissertation nears a close, it seems that we are still unable to come up with any complete and comprehensive theory of Anscombe's moral philosophy, that can explain all controversial moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and so on. But I would like to repeat Anscombe's own words: "my interest in moral philosophy has been more in particular moral questions than in what is now called 'meta-ethics'."⁵³⁹ It seems that providing a complete and comprehensive theory of morality is not Anscombe's goal at all; instead, she is just using the philosophy she learned and read about to discuss those particular moral questions that interest her. It is for this reason that we find seemingly contradictory theories in Anscombe's articles.

Given that Anscombe does not give us a complete and comprehensive theory of morality, what new things can we learn from her moral philosophy after these five chapters? My answer is that we revisit moral philosophy from a female perspective under her lead. I have been thinking about Anscombe and the Oxford Quartet as I prepare and write this dissertation. I believe that we cannot truly understand Anscombe's moral philosophy without the historical context in which she was writing, and without the interactions between her and her friends. What she and they offer together is a female perspective, a caring perspective, in which we see the concrete human beings behind those universal and abstract moral theories. Even though Anscombe does not write anything directly about feminism, nor does she claim to be a feminist in her writings, we cannot ignore that Anscombe and the Quartet provide us with a female perspective.

In the article "A Female School of Analytic Philosophy? Anscombe, Foot, Midgley and Murdoch" published on the website "(Women) in Parenthesis", Clare MacCumhaill and Rachael Wiseman write:

For the women of the Quartet, the ethics of Ayer and Hare – and indeed much contemporary moral philosophy – is "unreal" in ways that connect to the six theses. It

⁵³⁹ Anscombe, CPP3, viii.

is formally independent of the facts of human life, for example human physiology. It is autonomous and derived only from rationality in ways that obscure and occlude the form of life of human animals. It holds on to the consoling assumption that on whole human animals are rational agents who will act in ways that are not monstrous or systematically harmful to others but are grounded in motives and intentions that are transparent to them and a product of reason. It deflects attention away from careful consideration of real human situations through the use of examples which are either trivial or fantastical (not possibilities for actual human beings). In contrast, the stance of these women is realistic: ethics is formally dependent on facts of human life, facts that can be excavated through careful study of the human animal; ethics is not an autonomous sphere but is connected to human nature, and in particular to what humans need to flourish; the reality of human evil, error and fantasy is recognized, but also the possibilities for moral works; it depicts real or imagined cases of the human moral predicament, often in domestic and everyday situations. This sort of commitment of “reality” recognizes the extreme difficulty of sustaining a realistic attitude in philosophy. Part of this difficulty is simply a reflection of the complexity of human beings, human life, and human language – a complexity that our concepts reflect – but another part is an ethical, rather than an intellectual, difficulty.⁵⁴⁰

4.2 What do Women Philosophers Want?

4.2.1 The Difference between Men and Women

Let us to turn Annette Baier’s article “What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?”⁵⁴¹ This article is inspired by Carol Gilligan’s “In Another Voice”, where Carol Gilligan claims that women think morally in terms of caring and interrelatedness, whereas men think in terms of

⁵⁴⁰ Clare MacCumhaill and Rachael Wiseman, “A Female School of Analytic Philosophy? Anscombe, Foot, Midgley and Murdoch” published on the website “(Women) in Parenthesis”, 13.

⁵⁴¹ Annette Baier, “What do Women Want in a Moral Theory?”. *Nous*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Mars, 1985): 55–63; collected in *Virtue Ethics*, edited by Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 263–277.

justice and autonomy.⁵⁴² Facing Gilligan's claim, Baier asks "What differences one should expect in the moral philosophy done by women?" and "How will any moral theories women produce differ from those produced by men?"

By asking these questions, Baier first admits Gilligan's claim, and says that if we look at what sorts of contributions women have made to moral philosophy, we find that they are different in tone and approach from the standard kind of moral philosophy done by men – who tend to follow the footsteps of the great moral philosophers, who are also all men. When Baier mentions the "contributions women have made to moral philosophy", what she has in mind are:

.... I think of Philippa Foot's work on the moral virtues, of Elizabeth Anscombe's work on intention and on modern moral philosophy, of Iris Murdoch's philosophical writing, of Ruth Barcan Marcus' work on moral dilemmas, of the work of the radical feminist moral philosophers who are not content with orthodox Marxist lines of thought, of Jenny Teichmann's book on Illegitimacy, of Susan Wolf's recent articles, of Claudia Card's essay on mercy, Sabina Lovibond's recent book, Gabriele Taylor's work on pride, love and on integrity, Cora Diamond's and Mary Midgley's work on our attitude to animals, Sissela Bok's work on lying and on secrecy, Virginia Held's work, the work of Alison Jaggar, Marilyn Frye, and many others, I seem to hear a different voice from the standard moral philosophers' voice. I hear the voice of Gilligan heard, made reflective and philosophical.⁵⁴³

Among all these names, I see Philippa Foot, Elizabeth Anscombe, Iris Murdoch, and Mary Midgley, the ones we have mentioned many times in this dissertation.

Baier is cautious about this generalization based on gender, which I think is also a very feminine perspective. She reminds us to be careful in realizing that not all important contributions to moral philosophy by women fall easily into Gilligan's stereotype, nor has it

⁵⁴² See Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, "Introduction", 13.

⁵⁴³ Annette Baier, "What do Women Want in a Moral Theory?", 53.

been only women who have proclaimed discontent with the standard approach in moral philosophy and so have tried new approaches. She notes that Michael Stocker, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Ian Hacking, even though they are all men, should all be given the status of honorary women, according to the standard that there are some moral insights that women seem to attain more easily or more reliably than men do.⁵⁴⁴

4.2.2 Women Have No Moral Theory

Baier mentions an interesting phenomenon: “If we try to find out what sort of moral philosophy women want by looking to see what moral theory they have provided, the answer we get seems to be ‘none’”. Then she asks: “Is it that reflective women, when they become philosophers, want to do without moral theory, want no part in the construction of such theories?”⁵⁴⁵ This observation echoes our earlier conclusion, that Anscombe does not provide us with a complete and comprehensive theory about moral philosophy.

Baier shows her caution about any generalized conclusion again by reminding us that it is too early and too rash to say that women are not interested in moral theory, given that we have only a few generations of women moral philosophers. But if we do want to investigate this phenomenon, her explanation rests on the definition of the term “theory”. She claims that the term can be used in a wide sense and a narrow sense. In the widest sense, as Baier puts it, “a moral theory is simply an internally consistent fairly comprehensive account of what morality is and when and why it merits our acceptance and support. [... In this sense], many women moral philosophers can be seen as engaged in moral theory construction”;⁵⁴⁶ while in the

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 54–55. Annette Baier believes: “In that wide sense, a moral theory is something it would take a sceptic, or one who believes that our intellectual vision is necessarily blurred or distorted when we let it try to take in too much, to be an anti-theorist. Even if there were some truth in the latter claim, one might compatibly with it still hope to build up a coherent total account by a mosaic method, assembling a lot of smaller scale works until one had built up a complete account – say taking the virtues or purported virtues one by one until one had a more or less complete account.”

narrowest sense, “[theory means] coherent near-comprehensive account, then there are plenty incomplete theories to be found in the works of women moral philosophers. And in that sense of theory, most of what are recognized as the current moral theories are also incomplete, since they do not purport to be yet really comprehensive”.⁵⁴⁷

Under this distinction between the wide and the narrow senses, the question turns on whether comprehensiveness is necessary for a moral theory. Baier answers:

The paradigm examples of moral theories – those that are called by their authors ‘moral theories’, are distinguished not by the comprehensiveness of their internally coherent account, but by the sort of coherence which is aimed at over a fairly broad area. Their method is not the mosaic method, but the broad brushstroke method. Moral theories, as we know them, are, to change the art form, vaults rather than walls – they are not built by assembling painstakingly-made brick after brick. In this sense of theory, namely fairly tightly systematic account of a fairly large area of morality, with a key stone supporting all the rest, women moral philosophers have not yet, to my knowledge, produced moral theories, nor claimed that they have.⁵⁴⁸

This passage indicates that the standard for “moral theory” is set by male moral philosophers, and under their standard, women moral philosophers have not yet produced moral theories. It does not matter for these women, however, as it has never been their purpose to conform to the standard set by men.

4.2.3 Women’s Attitude to Men’s Moral Philosophy

The fact that women moral philosophers do not care about the standard set by men does not mean that women moral philosophers do not care about men’s moral theories. Even though Baier supports Gilligan’s claim about the difference between women and men, she tries to look

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

for a moral philosophy that combines both masculine and feminine aspects. Baier explains that any good theory needs not to ignore the partial truth of previous theories; therefore, if women wish to create good moral theories, they must accommodate both the insights men have more easily than women, and those that women have more easily than men. When talking about how “[any good theory] should swallow up its predecessor theories”, Baier adds humorously that women moral philosophers will have a great advantage over men, because women can stand on the shoulders of men moral philosophers, while no man has yet had a chance to stand on the shoulder of any woman.⁵⁴⁹

In saying “a combination of both the masculine side and the feminine side”, Baier proposes to connect women’s ethics of love with men’s ethics of obligation in order to arrive at the concept of “trust”, which mediates between reason and feeling. I will not go further into the details of Baier’s argument about trust. What I want to say here is that whether it is the lack of a comprehensive moral theory, the neglect of the standard set by male moral philosophers or the critical inheritance of the theories held by some male philosophers, our analysis of Anscombe’s moral philosophy does not contradict Baier’s analysis of women moral philosophers generally. At the end of this chapter, her analysis provides us with a brand-new perspective for understanding Anscombe from the point of view of gender, a perspective that Anscombe herself does not mention – but cannot be understood as denying.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

Conclusion

As we mentioned in the introduction, Anscombe's discussion of virtue ethics, action theory, and philosophy of language is like different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and the five chapters proceed like the process of putting those pieces together. In different chapters, we developed a study centred on different concepts in the context of Anscombe's different personae: as instigator of virtue ethics, pioneer of contemporary action theory, and student/friend/translator of Wittgenstein, respectively, in order to show not only the content of each piece of the puzzle, but also the fusion between the pieces with different concepts. We have also been able to unravel the connections between the different philosophical theories discussed under Anscombe's different personae. We found that the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are not simply arranged side by side – they are intertwined. We also gradually saw the pattern of the whole puzzle.

I will conclude my dissertation by going back to the three theses in MMP once again, to end the discussion where it began. At the very beginning of this dissertation, we investigated what each of the three theses is about and how they are related to each other; the three concepts in the title of this dissertation are actually found within these three theses. The intricate connection of these three theses in fact demonstrates that Anscombe's different personae are inherently interconnected in her moral philosophy.

Morality and Action

In Chapter 1 Section 2, we discussed how Anscombe's criticism of Henry Sidgwick in thesis 3 of MMP lies in his erroneous definition of intention, and this definition causes the absurd consequentialist ethics, which holds that killing the innocent could be right. In Chapter 3 Section 1, we introduced a justification of Truman's decision, which claims that the death of the innocent in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was an accident; we presented Anscombe's response that this justification is a misuse of the principle of double effect, which lies in ignoring the difference between intentioned, foreseen, and accidental consequences. Neglecting this distinction between different consequences here exactly echoes Anscombe's criticism of Henry

Sidgwick. Anscombe's analysis of the principle of double effect also makes the reason for her criticism of contemporaneous moral philosophy more obvious and clearer: that an analysis of human action, which is necessary for the study of moral philosophy, is lacking.

With such an analysis of human action, we can have a more complete and comprehensive understanding of Anscombe's attitude towards Truman's decision, and of her dissatisfaction with Oxford moral philosophy, which we discussed in Chapter 1 Section 3. We can also understand why Anscombe, when she criticizes Oxford moral philosophers, mentions that their mistake lies in lacking an appropriate understanding of human action. These connections demonstrate Anscombe's path from moral issues toward an investigation of action theory, and how Anscombe's action theory serves as a basis for solving moral problems.

Virtue and Action

We have discussed in Chapter 2 Section 2 how Anscombe introduced Aristotle's concept of "moral" in order to explain her criticism of the modern sense of "moral" in thesis 2 of MMP. Compared with Aristotle's sense, in the modern sense, there is no introduction of intellectual virtues and no discussion of the distinction and connection between moral virtues and intellectual virtues. Therefore, given that virtues are related to praise and blame, and there is a difference between moral and non-moral praise and blame, we claimed that the absence of intellectual virtues would cause us to confuse all praise and blame as moral praise and blame; we would then give the meaning of an absolute verdict to all modal verbs such as "should", "ought" and "need". As a result, the inevitable consequence is the neglect of the role of "voluntary" in human actions. Later in Chapter 3 Section 4, we discussed how this absence of intellectual virtues would affect an understanding of practical truth and good choice.

Meanwhile, in Chapter 2 Section 3, we also noted that, after using Aristotle's ethics to explain her philosophy of psychology, Anscombe suggests that Aristotle's research on "human action" is insufficient. This echoes what we discussed in Chapter 3 Section 4: that, after using Aristotle's practical truth to explain intentional human action, Anscombe suggests that Aristotle's concept of "choice" cannot do all the work he wishes it to do. For example, he has

no name for the kind of “voluntariness” as “chosen”. Anscombe argued that this insufficiency comes from the fact that Aristotle does not notice he is employing a key concept in action theory, which is “intentional action”, Anscombe’s original concept. This is the connection between virtue and action in Anscombe’s analysis of morality.

What’s more, when we introduced Candace Vogler’s idea of “analytic virtue ethics” in Chapter 5 Section 2, the connection between action and virtue ethics was established too. We showed that Candace Vogler claims that analytic virtue ethicists are the only ones who have really inherited Anscombe’s thought, and they are characterized by a standpoint toward the first principle of practical reason – that it shows that good is to be pursued and bad avoided. Their argument for how intentional action is bound up with thoughts about good and bad takes precisely from Anscombe’s argument for practical truth and good choice in Chapter 3 Section 4. This shows the importance of the concept of action in Anscombe’s discussion of virtue ethics.

Morality and Language

In Chapter 4 Section 1, we discussed how the philosophy of psychology proposed by Anscombe in thesis 1 of MMP is not a description of a state of mind, nor an account of the psychological processes or mechanism. It is the grammar of a psychological concept, which is required because we need a conceptual analysis of virtues; we can then provide a solution to moral philosophy. This philosophy of psychology is not Anscombe’s original concept, but a concept introduced by Wittgenstein to point out a confusion in empirical psychology.

Similarly, in Chapter 4 Section 3, we argued that the use of language is never just an individual capacity but a collective activity involving people living within a society, as well as people living in the same world, where they share the same system of language. These people would play the same language-games and share the same conventions. We then showed that when we have these mutual linguistic activities – wondering about, objecting to, challenging, explaining, and so on – it is not only out of curiosity or purpose of explanation or prediction, but also out of an essentially moral concern with the responsibility for our actions to each other, that language provides the basis for moral concern in mutual life.

The discussion of promising in Chapter 4 Section 4 is a good example to show this connection between language and morality. As a kind of human linguistic practice, a moral restriction on myself is generated when I say “I promise”. The basis behind this moral obligation is that the parties involved in promises are well aware of the meaning of the utterance “I promise”, which also shows the essential feature of language use that people with the same social background normally share an identical understanding of the same utterance.

Therefore, for Anscombe, the concept of language – both as a method of conceptual analysis and as a human linguistic activity in social life – is closely related to the concept of morality.

Action and Language

In Chapter 4 Section 1, in addition to mentioning the use of conceptual analysis in moral philosophy in order to study the concept of virtue, we also mentioned that Anscombe also uses conceptual analysis to study the concept of intention. In other words, the linguistic approach appears not only in Anscombe’s study of moral issues but also in the study of human action.

Besides the linguistic approach, we also introduced the relation between language use and human action in Chapter 4 Section 1. This relation started with Anscombe’s explanation of human action in Chapter 3 Section 2, where the human action that interests her is not only the actions of humans who reach the stage of deliberation, but also the actions of human beings who have language and are well advanced in the use of it. This means that the use of language is an important characteristic of human agents. Given that language is the most basic means of expression and communication in human life, using it relies on the knowledge of grammar rules and the understanding of linguistic context. The correct use of language, therefore, means that the language user has attained the basic capacity to understand and to think, which in fact means that the person is able to act as a rational agent. This is what Anscombe says when she talks about the agent of human action who reaches the stage of deliberation. We can thus say that the correct use of language is an important characteristic of human agents.

Meanwhile, in Chapter 4 Section 3, we mentioned that Anscombe’s analysis of the

equation between human action and moral action in Chapter 3 Section 3 could also be explained by the idea of language. In Chapter 3 Section 3, our interpretation of this equation is that all human action involves good and bad human characters, and this human character is related to the human good life. Therefore, human action can be qualified as good or bad in relation to its contribution to the flourishing of human life. In Chapter 4 Section 3, however, we introduced a view whose claim is that this equation implies that language constructs our shared moral judgments: in particular, if we see the specific action in an interpersonal context of moral concern, the good or bad meant by this action will be revealed.

Therefore, the concept of language and the concept of action – both of which serve as key concepts in the study of Anscombe’s moral philosophy – are also closely related to the concept of morality. And they are closely related to each other.

Anscombe’s Moral Philosophy

Finally, after the puzzle has been completed by the combination of the individual pieces, we can now have a look at how this puzzle will appear in its entirety. At this point, some may expect the puzzle to present a clear and complete pattern; in other words, they might expect Anscombe’s moral philosophy to present a complete and comprehensive theory. But it is not Anscombe’s purpose nor interest in moral philosophy to provide a complete and comprehensive theory of morality. Instead, she is just using the philosophy she learned and read about to discuss the particular moral questions that interest her. It means that instead of looking at the puzzle from a holistic perspective, we should focus on how its localized details connect seemingly unrelated lines of thought together to form entirely new patterns.

I argue that this way of looking at the puzzle, or this way of doing moral philosophy, is a female perspective. I have also tried to show this by discussing the story of the Oxford Quartet and Anscombe. This perspective is characterized by a focus on specific moral problems rather than on systematic theories. We should note that evaluating philosophical thought in terms of whether or not it has a systematic theory is inherently an evaluative criterion drawn from a traditionally male perspective. In this way, the criticisms of Anscombe’s readability and

systematicity are in fact criticisms of the male perspective itself, and my discussion of Anscombe is an attempt to step outside that perspective and criterion.

If we revisit Anscombe's personae from this female perspective, it seems that we can see Anscombe differently: she did influence the contemporary revival of virtue ethics, but her goal in *MMP* was not to revive virtue ethics, and she probably does not see herself as a virtue ethicist; she is a pioneer of contemporary action theory, but it is not her goal to provide a complete and systematic action theory; she is a student, translator, and friend of Wittgenstein, and she recognizes that Wittgenstein has had a tremendous influence on her, but she does not blindly follow him. Anscombe herself may not appreciate being defined or categorized, and she does not attempt to provide a complete and comprehensive theory of moral philosophy. She just focuses on discussing particular moral questions and, by her papers, shouts "No!" to the philosophical tenets around her.

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