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G. E. M. Anscombe (1919–2001)

ANSELM MÜLLER

Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, British philosopher, studied Greats at Oxford (1937–41), and went as a research student to Cambridge, where she became a pupil and close friend of Ludwig Wittgenstein. She was appointed Research Fellow (1946), Lecturer (1951), and Tutorial Fellow (1964) of Somerville College, Oxford. In 1967 she was elected Fellow of the British Academy. She held the Chair of Philosophy in the University of Cambridge from 1970 to 1986.

Her philosophical outlook has been influenced most of all by Aristotle and by Wittgenstein. She is one of Wittgenstein's literary executors, and has translated and edited large parts of his work. At the same time she shows great originality, not least in the way in which she brings Wittgenstein's ideas to bear on topics that he did not himself explore. Many of her papers are remarkable also for the uniquely appreciative, unsparing, and creative manner in which she engages with great minds of the past, such as Hume. Anscombe has a gift for spotting what is most basic in traditional problems, and often her solutions seem to open one's eyes to what lay under one's nose. Her language is forceful and austere, her thinking unrestricted by convention or fashion. An early example of her independence of mind can be seen in "The Justice of the Present War Examined," a pamphlet written with Norman Daniel in the autumn of 1939. Here she queried both the aims of the British Government, and the means likely to be deployed, in fighting the war against Germany; she already foresaw "area bombing," foresight that lay behind her opposition, in 1956, to the conferment on President Truman of an honorary degree by the University of Oxford (1981a, III: 72–81; cf. vii and 62–71).

Anscombe has contributed to all principal areas of philosophy. The following summary account of her work considers it under seven main headings, covering most of her published writings.

Language, thought, and reality

Apart from two articles entitled "Subjunctive Conditionals," which argue that "if–then" is, roughly speaking, truth-functional (in 1981a, II: 196–207), and "On Private Ostensive Definition," which expounds and defends the view that there can be no private conferment of meaning, no single book or essay of Anscombe's is a systematic

treatment of questions in the philosophy of language and logic. She contributes to it rather by showing up weak spots in received answers, taking as her clue, for the most part, passages from ancient Greek philosophers or Wittgenstein. Typical is her remark: "We are accustomed to think that Plato in the *Cratylus* was extraordinarily blind in assuming that phonemes have meaning-roles. But this, as often, may be a failure on our part to see a problem" (1981b: 150).

Thus, "Understanding Proofs," an imaginary continuation of *Meno* 85d9–86c2 (1981a, I: 34–43) can be read as a challenge to give a better account than the Platonic theory of reminiscence, of the fact that simple conceptual truths cannot be understood without being believed. Chapter 1 of *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (1959) contains an elaborate argument, not to be found in the *Tractatus* itself, in support of the view that "a (very large) class of mutually independent propositions" is presupposed in the common explanation of truth-functional tautologies. In other parts of this book and in papers such as "Parmenides, Mystery and Contradiction" (1981a, I: 3–8) and "The Early Theory of Forms" (pp. 9–20) we find keen observations on issues such as negation and the internal structure of sentences, truth and falsehood, proposition and assertion, meaning and reference, use and mention, tense and modality, universals, classes, and predication.

Again and again, Anscombe returns to classical problems of how words and propositions, concepts and thoughts are related to the realities they signify. In an early masterpiece, "The Reality of the Past" (1981a, II: 103–19), she shows that the question "How is it that statements about the past have meaning?" must be answered by *describing the use of the past tense* rather than appealing to "the experience of remembering" or gesturing at the past thing "reached by thought" or "seen through" the present evidence. She is intrigued by the more general Parmenideo–Platonic problem: "How can we think what is not?", which she contrasts with the modern question: "How could there be what we cannot think?" The Parmenides paper points out that, while of course we cannot without absurdity *say* of anything that it is but cannot be thought, we may reasonably *suppose* that something is but cannot be thought. Concerning modern attempts "to deduce what could be from what could hold of thought," Anscombe believes that "the ancients had the better approach, arguing only that a thought was impossible because the thing was impossible" (1981a, I: xi).

Is Wittgenstein's later philosophy a version of the modern approach ("*essence* is expressed by grammar," that is, by the rules which govern our application of words to that whose essence is in question)? "No," we are told in "The Question of Linguistic Idealism" (1981a, I: 112–33), an exposition and defense of Wittgenstein's views on the relationship between language and reality (see WITTGENSTEIN). "It looks as if *either* the grammar corresponded to something of the object, its real essence, which it has whether there is language about it or not, *or* the 'object' were itself dependent on language" (p. 113); both seem unacceptable. Anscombe's solution is this: On the one hand, reality does not force on us the concepts in which we relate to it ("How could an experience dictate the grammar of a word?": p. 114). Sameness of experience, or of kind of object, cannot determine the shape of a concept, since it is the correct (re-)application of the corresponding expression which, in the first instance, settles which sameness – and hence, which experience or kind of object – we have in mind. (There may be a tension between this claim and the rhetorical question she quotes from Wittgenstein:

"Do we make a concept wherever we see a similarity?") Thus alternatives to our set of concepts are indeed possible. On the other hand, the existence of whatever our concepts apply to does not therefore depend on our being there to conceive of it. "These essences, then, which are expressed by grammar, are not created by grammar" (p. 114). But there is room for "a partial idealism" (p. 118), of which more in the section "Existence by Convention and Intention," below.

The second part of the paper adresses a further problem. The grammar of our language governs the permissibility of the judgments expressed in it, by laying down, in particular, what counts as decisive evidence for them. However, it lays down also what is taken for granted not on the basis of evidence but, for example, as implied in the ways we judge and argue and act, or as a result of teaching. The corresponding "hinge" propositions vary vastly in subject matter and role. Compare "My name is L. W."; "The earth has existed for a long time before I was born"; "There is no God"; and "Caesar is a historical figure" ("Hume and Julius Caesar": 1981a, I: 86–92). Can "assumptions" that are in this way at the bottom of a linguistic practice themselves be right or wrong? "Finding grounds, testing, proving, reasoning, confirming, verifying are all processes that go on *within*, say, one or another living linguistic practice which we have" (p. 130). And divergence in judgment on account of divergence in "world-picture" or "knowledge system" is not a matter of *mistake* but rather "disagreement in the language" used (p. 131). However, Anscombe also takes Wittgenstein to hold that someone who comes to jettison a certain kind of groundless assumption or its certainty may be *right or wrong* in believing he realizes that formerly he was not competent to judge. And from this she concludes: "*That one knows something is not guaranteed by the language-game*"; that is, even where the rules of our linguistic practice leave no room for doubt, falsehood is not excluded (p. 132f.).

Some of Anscombe's essays concern the notion of a material substance, defending its coherence, and criticizing "bare particular" conceptions, comparable misunderstandings of the notion of matter, and empiricist objections and alternatives to a basically Aristotelian view. (See "The Principle of Individuation," 1981a, I: 57–65; "Substance," II: 37–43; and "Aristotle: The Search for Substance," in *Three Philosophers*, 1961 (together with P. T. Geach), pp. 3–63.

Time, necessity, and causation

Anscombe's "first strenuous interest in philosophy was in the topic of causality," and much of her later work in this area is an elaboration of the idea that the future is undetermined in the sense that, for example, there is "no such thing as how someone would have spent his life if he had not died a child" (1981a, II: vii). "Aristotle and the Sea Battle" (I: 44–56) already shows her an incompatibilist: "If what the typewriter is going to do is necessary, I cannot do anything else with the typewriter" (p. 48). Anscombe maintains Aristotle's view, canvassed earlier in "The Reality of the Past" (1981a, II: 112–16), "that nothing whatever could make what is certain untrue" (I: 52); and, for this reason, that "when *p* describes a present or past situation, then either *p* is necessarily true, or -*p* is necessarily true" (p. 53).

This kind of necessity is further explored in the celebrated 1971 inaugural lecture at Cambridge University, "Causality and Determination" (1981a, II: 133–47). From

Aristotle onwards, almost all philosophers (including Hume) have seen the essence of causality in necessitation. On Anscombe's alternative account, the notion of cause is embodied, in the first instance, in the use of such verbs as "*scrape*, *push*, *wet*, *carry*, . . ." (p. 137). This notion is one of *A deriving, or coming, from B*: of something that (*pace* Hume) is often observable. And "if *A* comes from *B* this does not imply that every *A*-like thing comes from some *B*-like thing or set-up or that every *B*-like thing or set-up has an *A*-like thing coming from it; or that given *B*, *A* had to come from it, or that given *A*, there had to be *B* for it to come from. Any of these may be true, but if any is, that will be an additional fact, not comprised in *A*'s coming from *B*" (p. 136).

The second part of the lecture examines the notion of determination and its applicability to physical events. "When we call a result determined we are implicitly relating it to an antecedent range of possibilities and saying that all but one of these is disallowed . . . [by] . . . something antecedent to the result" (1981a, II: 141). We may know that A has been *caused* by B without having any reason to think it was, in that sense, *determined* by B or anything else. A *system* like Newtonian mechanics would, it is true, provide such a reason; and the solar system offers a misleadingly undisturbed instantiation of its laws, which can make it look as if all causality had to match this model. But this appearance is illusory on two counts.

(1) Only if this system (or a comparable one) applied to arbitrarily small quantities (so as to exclude even minute causal indeterminacies and their multiplication over time) – only then would the result of, say, many balls interacting with each other for some time in stable surroundings, be (not only caused but) determined by some initial situation. And where we cannot assume such a system, we shall have to admit non-necessitating causes, like the radioactive material which (in Feynman's thought experiment) *may or may not*, via some Geiger counter, *cause* a bomb to go off (pp. 144f.). Anscombe hopes that this particular kind of example may prevent us from going on "as if undeterminedness were always encapsulated in systems whose internal workings could be described only by statistical laws, but where the total upshot, and in particular the outward effect, was as near as makes no difference always the same" (pp. 146f.).

(2) Even a physicist who believes that "the result that happens ought to be understood as the only one that [in the circumstances] was possible before it happened" (1981a, II: 142) need not be a *determinist*. Suppose Newton's laws were valid for arbitrary quantitative dimensions and thus provided for necessitating causes. This supposition does not yet rule out prevention and interference from other forces, and, in this sense, the possibility of alternative results. Determinism involves more, namely the belief that "the whole universe is a system such that, if its total states at *t* and *t′* are thus and so, the laws of nature are such as then to allow only one possibility for its total state at any other time." Anscombe sees no reason for believing this and, moreover, thinks it incompatible with the freedom of action, which after all for the most part concerns physical movements: "if these . . . are physically predetermined by processes which I do not control, then my freedom is perfectly illusory" (p. 146).[1]

In other works, Hume's account of causality is found wanting on the following three counts. (1) He argues that it is imaginable and therefore possible for a beginning of existence not to have a cause. But, Anscombe asks, can we determine, without

identifying a cause, that there and then an object *started to exist*, rather than *arrived* (having travelled "say as a gas": 1981a, II: 161)? (2) Hume fails to tell us what kind of specification of a cause and its effect is to count if we want to convince ourselves of his claim that the idea of the one is "distinct" from that of the other (p. 150). (Such distinctness *seems* to be absent, for example, when X's *mother* is said to be the cause of X.) (3) I may know without observation of something that it has caused me to do something, as when "I thought I saw a face at the window and it made me jump" (p. 75). This type of cause (which Anscombe calls a "mental cause") does not lend itself to Hume's explanation in terms of regular succession at all.

From experience to self-consciousness

Anscombe is best known for her influential work in the philosophy of mind. Apart from her classic *Intention*, she has produced "case studies" such as "The Subjectivity of Sensation" (1981a, II: 44–56), "Comments on Professor R. L. Gregory's Paper on Perception" (pp. 64–70), "On Sensations of Position" (pp. 71–4), "Pretending" (pp. 83–93, including an account of *anger*), "On the Grammar of 'Enjoy'" (pp. 94–100), and "Will and Emotion" (1981a, I: 100–7). One of her main targets is a temptation to bring everything mental under the heading of "experience," thus assimilating it to sensations and images. (See "Events in the Mind": 1981a, II: 57–63.) In fact, a psychological concept may make essential reference to a wide variety of things such as antecedent and surrounding conditions, behavioral and verbal expression, actions and aims, assumptions and thoughts, capacities and tendencies.

In "Memory, 'Experience' and Causation" (1981a, II: 120–30), after reminding us that a mental image cannot be the essence of memory because (memory) *beliefs* "are involved in referring an image to the past" (p. 126), Anscombe argues that there is no *core experience* to memory *at all* (as there is to seeing, or hearing). Genuine remembering is generally assumed to be composed of some such experience, M, plus an "appropriate" causal link between what is remembered and M. Consider, however, the case of X, who knows about a past event, E, in his life without knowing whether he does so because he remembers E or because he has been told of it. Interestingly, *this* lack of knowledge does not preclude X from *knowing* that E happened. Nor, Anscombe argues, does it consist in X's failing to know whether his present certainty of E was *caused* by E. Suppose now that X's knowledge is *not* in fact *memory* of E; then, of course, M does not come into the picture at all. If, on the other hand, it *is* a case of memory ("he must be remembering"), again it cannot involve M; for M was supposed to be a "memory experience," leaving no room for questions like "Is my belief, if true, a case of remembering E?" Hence M is a philosophers' fiction. As Anscombe points out, this is a problem not only for Cartesians and Empiricists, but also for any materialist identity theory of the mind (p. 128).

According to Anscombe, the human mind is characterized not so much by experience as by self-consciousness, understood not as some kind of self-perception but as the basis of self-ascription of all sorts of things *including* experiences. "Self-" here has the same function as in the claim that everyone uses "I" to speak of him-, or herself and, indeed, as the word "I." Does this stand for the human being who uses it, or rather for a Cartesian ego? Neither, we are told in "The First Person" (1981a, II: 21–36). "I" is

not, since it has not the sense of, a name, demonstrative, or other "referring expression." Such a sense would require "a 'conception' through which it attaches to its object" (pp. 28f; cf. n. 2). For the same reason, NN, in saying "I am NN," may express knowledge (or a mistake, or lie) but does not make a statement of identity. Suppose that everybody could avail themselves of every possible conception of every human being. The resulting information would leave unanswered for me but not for others the question *which one of these people I am*.

Human action and practical thought

Intention first appeared in 1957 and has been influential ever since, perhaps even more than is generally recognized. We speak of intention to ϕ, intentional ϕ-ing, and (further) intention in ϕ-ing. The second of these forms is the central topic of Anscombe's inquiry. Intentional actions can be marked off from non-intentional actions as those which the agent, without relying on observation, knows he is performing and to which he allows the question "Why?" to apply in a special sense. This sense is marked off from the sense assumed in an answer that would state a cause and, in particular, a mental cause. A relevant answer will give a *reason* for ϕ-ing which either looks backward (as in revenge: "I ϕ because he hit me") or amounts to a further intention (an interpretative reason: "My ϕ-ing is a signal for NN"; or an end: "I am ϕ-ing in order to find X"); or it will indicate that there is no reason ("I just thought I would ϕ"). The latter case must be distinguished from a *rejection* of the "Why?" question ("I was not aware I was ϕ-ing" or "I observed that I was ϕ-ing" or "I don't know the cause").

Knowledge of what you are doing, not by observation but *in intention*, may be called "practical knowledge." Discrepancy between thought and reality is here blamed on the latter. If you do not buy what is on your shopping list, the mistake is in your performance not in the list, as it *would* be in the list of a detective who made a mistake in tracking your proceedings. What you practically know you are doing will often coincide with the conclusion of an Aristotelian "practical syllogism." If this conclusion is *to* ϕ (or words such as "So I'll ϕ"), your premises mention (1) something wanted (under some "desirability characterization" or other) and (2) ϕ as a way of achieving it. Such practical reasoning need not "necessitate": ϕ-ing may not be the *only* way of realizing the thing you want. Also, the connections exhibited in a practical syllogism may truthfully be stated in your answer to the "Why?" question even though you did not go through them before you ϕ-ed. These ideas are further developed in "Thought and Action in Aristotle: What is 'Practical Truth'?" (1981a, I: 66–77), "Practical Inference" (1995: 1–34), and "Von Wright on Practical Inference" (1989: 377–404).

Under a description

As Anscombe points out (1963: 37–49), one and the same action may be intentional under some descriptions and not under others. In a single action you may be intentionally moving your arm *and* intentionally cutting bread but unintentionally (though *perhaps* knowingly and therefore voluntarily) contracting these particular muscles and pointing towards X with the bread-knife. In "The Two Kinds of Error in Action" (1981a,

III: 3–9), this is brought to bear on the legal and moral assessment of actions. Since, for example, "you may consent to something under one description and not under another, the fact of fraud may be a proof that a *certain* consent has not taken place at all" (p. 3). And "if a man genuinely and reasonably, but wrongly, thought that this was property he had a right to take away, then we say 'That was not stealing at all'" (p. 5). More generally, culpable and non-culpable ignorance, knowledge and intention can be relevant in various ways to (1) what descriptions are true of an action of yours, and (2) whether you are responsible for the action under a given description which applies to it. Here also belongs the distinction, essential to the doctrine of "double effect" (see below), between descriptions under which you intend an action and descriptions under which you merely know it to be involved in what you are doing intentionally.

In "Under a Description" (1981a, II: 208–19), Anscombe defends this expression against attacks and misunderstandings. She extends its application and reminds us that "the description *under which* [something] is aimed at is that under which it is *called* the object" (1963: 66). The description under which an action is intended/something is an intentional[2] object (e.g. of sight), can be (1) non-interchangeable, (2) indeterminable, and (3) existentially non-committal, in ways that may be elucidated by the following examples. (1) "I meant to cut bread but not to point the knife towards X."/"Didn't you see the blood?" "Well, I saw red patches on the floor." (2) Cutting a slice roughly 1 cm thick will *be* cutting it 0.90 or cutting it 0.91 or . . . cm thick. But intending to cut it roughly 1 cm thick is not intending to cut it 0.90 or intending to cut it 0.91 or . . . cm thick./The people you saw were thirteen in number; but as an eye-witness you may *have to* stick to "I saw quite a lot of people" or "perhaps a dozen." (3) "Cutting bread" describes my intention but not what I am actually doing if the knife is hopelessly blunt./"Was there a real flash of light when *I saw one*, or was there something wrong with my eyes?" (cf. p. 4).

In "The Intentionality of Sensation" (1981a, II: 3–20), Anscombe shows how different accounts of perception suffer from a common neglect of this topic: phenomenalism "misconstrues intentional objects as material objects of sensation," while "'ordinary language' philosophy . . . does not allow for a description of what is seen which is e.g. neutral as between its being a real spot (a stain) or an after-image" (pp. 11f.). In "Causality and Extensionality" (pp. 173–9) she comments on the inadequacy of a causal statement like "The child died because the tallest girl in town is Rhesus-negative" as compared with ". . . because his mother is Rhesus-negative." On Anscombe's view, such statements should be understood as non-extensional statements connecting, non-truth-functionally, genuine propositional components. Here again, we may say that it is the *description under which* the elements of cause and effect are identified that matters to the intelligibility if not truth of the causal claim.

Existence by convention and intention

Alternative descriptions are in play also where, in virtue of given conventions, a certain distribution of ink on a piece of paper is an English sentence, or a particular killing capital punishment. "Convention" here points to cultural constitution rather than agreement, let alone arbitrariness. It is a pervasive theme in Anscombe, its variations surfacing in the philosophy of (1) language, (2) knowledge, (3) action, (4) morality, and

(5) social institutions. The extensive relevance of the topic is made explicit in "Rules, Rights and Promises" (1981a, III: 97–103), where Anscombe mentions the "natural unintelligibility" (Hume's phrase) of promises, contracts, rights, legal obligation, etiquette, rules of games, rules of grammar and logic, infringement, and sacrilege.

(1)   In "A Theory of Language" the question "*what* about the occurrence of a sound constitutes it a sign" (1981b: 150) is left unanswered. But language-game descriptions are said to give us, by way of comparison and without recourse to the notion of meaning, an idea of the possible functioning of a word in use: an idea of how the grammatical conventions of our actual language work. There is no right or wrong about these conventions. They create our concepts, but not what these are concepts *of* (cf. the section "Language, Thought, and Reality," above), with the notable exception of "promises . . . rules and rights, [which] are essences *created* and not merely captured or expressed by the grammar of our languages" (1981a, III: 100; see also (3) below).

(2)   Grammar is, however, supposed to determine not only criteria (the type of evidence for the presence of X whose prima-facie validity is part of the concept of X), but also standards of comparative certainty for potentially incompatible judgments. Is convention at the bottom of these standards, too? And is there, in case of conflicting standards, any court of appeal? These questions (also discussed in the first section, above) do not seem to receive a definitive answer in Anscombe's work.

(3)   In a short paper "On Brute Facts" (1981a, III: 22–5) we are introduced to the idea of facts, describable as A, which (in a society with certain institutions, given a vaguely specifiable normal context and the absence of an indefinite range of defeating conditions) "amount to" facts describable as B. For instance, making the above assumptions, the fact (A) that X has delivered a quarter of potatoes to Y amounts to (and is "brute" relative to) the fact (B) that Y owes money to X. But *how* can, in this case, the event described as A constitute the obligation claimed in B? How can, in a whole area of comparable cases, an "ought" derive from an "is"?

These questions are taken up in an essay "On Promising" (1981a, III: 10–21). Under suitable conditions, my uttering "I promise you to φ" amounts to a promise to φ. One of these conditions is my intention to promise. But (a) how can we invoke this intention in explaining *promising to* φ, if an account of the intention has to mention its content, i.e. that very promise? And (b) how can I, merely by uttering certain words with that intention, bring about restrictions, which did not exist before, on my possibilities of acting? Anscombe's answer to both questions consists in a highly original application of Wittgenstein's idea of a language-game. She imagines the following *practice* (pp. 15–17): There is a form of words "Bump! I'll φ." A participant NN who has used it is liable to be made by others to φ. The pressure they put on NN may be physical or, at a less primitive stage of the language-game, conventional. In the latter case, they address "stopping modals" to NN, like "you can't" and "you have to." These "are at first words used by one who is making you do something (or preventing you), and they quickly become themselves instruments of getting and preventing action" (p. 101). Finally, they are combined with "logoi" like "(but) you bumped to φ!" (pp. 101f., 142f.): "reasons," whose connection with φ-ing "*is itself nothing, except that it is linguistically MADE*" (p. 140). If recalcitrant, NN is reproached for *having used those words*

and not ϕ-ed. This practice of bumping has the significance of promising, if we assume that a participant will *try to extract* a "Bump! I'll ϕ" from others when he *wants* them to ϕ, and use their having bumped to ϕ as a weapon in making them ϕ, etc.

How is this an answer to our questions? (a) My promise can now be understood, without circularity, as involving my intention to promise. "For 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 . . . That involves . . . appropriate *expectations* and *calculations*" in connection with your proceedings (1981a, III: 17). That is, in order to have the requisite intention *of promising to* ϕ, I need not administer an *account* of promising to myself; rather what I *do and think* has to be in line with a certain *practice*. (b) To see how mere words can create real restrictions, we need no more than look at the impossibility, which issues from one's bumping to ϕ, of avoiding the danger of unwelcome consequences unless one ϕ's.

(4)   This restriction, however, is not yet (a) moral requirement, or (b) a necessity to respect it. (Hence that paper's full title, "On Promising," is followed by "and Its Justice, and Whether It Need Be Respected *in Foro Interno*.") Is there a (prima-facie) need to keep promises and respect rights – some of them of course created by promises – which goes beyond the necessity internal to the linguistic practice? (a) This practice provides us, *inter alia*, with a way of "getting one another to do things without the application of physical force," and this "is a necessity for human life" (1981a, III: 18) in Aristotle's sense of "that without which good cannot be or come to be" (p. 15). Hence obligation: "a restriction" on "one's possibility of acting well" (p. 15). (b) The practical necessity arising from the common good is not *eo ipso* one from the point of view of my own good. Rather, Anscombe holds, "if someone does genuinely *take* a proof that without doing X he cannot act well as a proof that he must do X, then this shows . . . that he has a purpose that can be served only by acting well, as such" (p. 19). Note that neither (a) nor (b) type necessities are created by convention, though the second is, in a sense, brought about by my intention – an overall purpose in life – unless "man has a last end which governs all" (1995: 34).

(5)   Anscombe's chief contribution to political theory and the philosophy of law, "On the Source of the Authority of the State" (1981a, III: 130–55), is partly based on her account of rights. Political government, to be distinguished both "from authority in voluntary co-operative enterprises" and from "control of a place by a gang of bandits," must be characterized "by its authority in the command of violence" (p. 132). Since authority is a right to give orders and make decisions, we may hope to explain it by describing a language-game in which "It is N's right to ϕ" gets its meaning, originally as a prelude only to "So he/she can ϕ," "So you can't ϕ," etc., from a practice of preventing anyone but N from ϕ-ing, of reproaching them for interference with N's ϕ-ing, and so on (cf. (3) above). Given this explanation, N's right to ϕ may yet be merely customary ("conventional"), and perhaps even an injustice. A way of proving that it is not (if it is not), is to show that ϕ-ing is needed for the performance of a *task* which it is *practically necessary* that N perform. For here we have a non-conventional "N must," and it entails the conventional "N can" which ascribes a right to N. An existing government G might then be shown to have political authority – a right to enforce obedience by the threat and use of violence – by showing that (a) such enforcement is needed

for government, (b) (in view of how men tend to treat each other) government is a task necessary for human good, and (c) it is G that customary right or some practical necessity require to govern.

Challenges to contemporary moral philosophy

"In general, my interest in moral philosophy has been more in particular moral questions than in what is now called 'meta-ethics'" (1981a, III: viii). Some of these questions relate to topics in social ethics: parental authority (pp. 43–8, 135); state, law, and punishment (pp. 51–60; 123–55); war (pp. 51–81). Others concern contraception (pp. 82–96), murder (pp. 51–61), and topics in medical ethics. Some of Anscombe's themes are "topic-neutral." They include the ones discussed here on pp. 320–4, the problem of "Authority in Morals" (1981a, III: 43–50), absolute prohibitions, and the anti-consequentialist principle that you are not responsible for foreseeable but unintended consequences of your actions *in the way* you are for chosen means and ends (see pp. 54–5, 58–60, and 78–9).

More widely noticed than her treatment of particular moral questions has been Anscombe's 1958 article "Modern Moral Philosophy," a spirited defense of three theses: (1) We should stop doing moral philosophy "until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology" (1981a, III: 26). For an adequate account of acting well must be based on a philosophical understanding of human nature and such concepts as action, pleasure, need and want, intention, motive, and virtue. (2) "The moral sense of 'ought'" is an illusion due to reminiscences of a "law conception" of ethics which has long since been given up (pp. 26, 29–33). If you do not believe in God as a law-giver (as Stoics, Jews, and Christians do), what remains of an *obligation* to act well is the *word*, spoken with a *special emphasis and feeling* (plus vain attempts to ground the "moral law" in individual autonomy or social contract). Hence "'morally wrong' *both* goes beyond the mere factual description 'unjust' *and* seems to have no discernible content except a certain compelling force, which I should call purely psychological" (p. 41). Without the assumption of divine legislation, there is indeed no "ought" from "is" that is not of the kind discussed in the previous section: necessity by convention and by the practical requirements of common or individual human good, or "flourishing" (pp. 38–42). (3) The differences between the well-known English moral philosophers since Sidgwick are "of little importance," compared with their common "consequentialism," that is, their rejection of the Hebrew–Christian conviction that "certain things [are] forbidden whatever *consequences* threaten, such as: choosing to kill the innocent for any purpose, however good; vicarious punishment; treachery," etc. (pp. 26, 34–6).

Anscombe's challenges to moral philosophy have been taken up over the last decades by some who conceive of ethics on broadly Aristotelian lines. In other quarters, however, her substantial and critical contributions to this as to other areas of philosophy have not yet received the attention they deserve.

Notes

1   Cf. the more elaborate argument in "Soft Determinism" (1981a, II: 163–72). Cf. also "Chisholm on Action," *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 7/8 (1979), 205–13; and "The

Causation of Action," in *Knowledge and the Mind*, ed. C. Ginet and S. Shoemaker (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 174–90. Here Anscombe examines the relations between a physiological investigation into the causes of human actions, an account of agency in terms of intentions, and historical explanations. She argues that the second and third are in some sense *supervenient* only, if determinism is true.

2 Because of the common structure of the two contexts, Anscombe here keeps to this spelling, rather than "intensional," reminding us of the etymological background: "intendere arcum in" = "to shoot at." In the philosophy of logic, the topic of intensionality is typically treated in discussions of identity, or modal or belief contexts, within which an intensional object in Anscombe's sense *corresponds* to the sense of, e.g., a name.

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