

ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE'S LEGACY FOR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ETHICS

INTRODUCTION

SERGIO CREMASCHI

THE occasion for this dialogue on Elizabeth Anscombe's legacy for twenty-first-century ethics came with the publication in Italian of the collection of her ethical writings.¹ In addition to making Anscombe's ethical writings accessible to the Italian public, the book brings together her contribution to practical philosophy to its full extent for the first time. Anscombe published one book-length contribution to practical philosophy: *Intention*.² She published her subsequent elaboration in a few articles and essays, reprinted either in the third volume of her *Collected Philosophical Papers*³ or in two posthumous collections, one of which comprised mainly writings on ethics and the second on religious themes.⁴ The Italian collection comprises 15 essays by Anscombe and one, 'Good and Evil', by Peter Geach, Anscombe's husband and her fellow traveller in philosophical research. This one appears first, firstly for chronological reasons, and secondly, because it contains the critique of the argument of the naturalistic fallacy elaborated by Moore, a critique that, in parallel with the critique of the modern, "Cartesian" view of human action contained in *Intention*, provides the starting blocks for Anscombe's hurdle race through the prejudices of modern moral philosophy. It is worth remembering that after this brilliant and seldom-cited paper, Peter Geach would consistently devote himself to strictly logical topics, with the curious exception of a short book on ethics that grew out of a series of popular lectures, *The Virtues*.⁵

sergiovolodia.cremaschi@gmail.com, Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale "Amedeo Avogadro", Vercelli, Italy – Universidad de Málaga, Spain.

¹ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Scritti di etica con un saggio di Peter Geach*, a cura di S. Cremaschi, Morcelliana, Brescia 2022.

² G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Intention* (1957), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2000; It. transl. *Intenzione*, C. Sagliani (transl.), Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, Roma 2004.

³ *The Collected Philosophical Papers* III. *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, Blackwell, Oxford 1981.

⁴ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Human Life, Action, and Ethics*, M. Geach & L. Gormally (eds.), Imprint Academic, Exeter 2005; EAD., *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics*, M. Geach & L. Gormally (eds.), Imprint Academic, Exeter 2008.

⁵ P. GEACH, *The Virtues*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977.

This book is a strange piece of writing made up mostly of considerations intended for a non-specialist audience, but it also includes a few pages with perceptive comments on modern philosophy, including German-speaking philosophy, which Anscombe continued to disregard carelessly throughout her life despite being the most influential pupil of an Austrian thinker,

Anscombe's subsequent output, however, never materialised in a book. Indeed, the present writer could fantasise that, with the collection he edited, he has discovered the palimpsest of the big book on ethics Anscombe failed to write. The reasons for this missing book are several. The first is the same as several valuable thinkers who have always had problems keeping their bookshops stocked: Peirce never published a book on philosophy, and Wittgenstein only published one. The second is that although ethics was her most significant concern, Anscombe never taught this discipline. The third was a life laden with her own and Peter Geach's teaching commitments, to which we may add seven children for whom someone should take care. The fourth was the civil and ecclesial commitment which drew her to publish on ethical issues papers that straddled the line between academic research and engaged, sometimes fiercely polemical intervention. The fifth, the effect and cause at the same time of the failure to write the big book, were the theoretical tensions in her work on ethics: the polemic with the conception of ethics in terms of law coexists with difficulty with the Aristotelian and Wittgensteinian conception of action; the defence of the Medieval doctrine of absolute prohibitions clashes head-on with this conception of action. Aquinas preserves this notion in some places in homage to the ecclesiastical tradition, but elsewhere, at the heart of the *Prima Secundae*, demolishes its foundations with his doctrine of the human act.⁶ The polemic against the mysterious nature of the moral ought should extend self-critically to those pages where she insists on the moral law as divine law. It is worth noting that she carried out such self-criticism in answer to a question after one of her presentations where she states that "the content of the moral law, i.e. the actions which are good and just, is not essentially a matter of revelation".⁷ Moreover, her accusation that modern ethics tends to err on the side of what she calls consequentialism makes her reading of Kantian ethics at least deficient.⁸ One serious defect of

⁶ S. CREMASCHI, *Tradizioni morali. Greci, ebrei, cristiani, islamici*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2015, pp. 306-313.

⁷ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Authority in morals* (1962), in *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, cit., pp. 43-50, p. 50. Note that the essay is also reprinted in *Human Life, Action, and Ethics*, cit., where – surprisingly enough – the discussion's report is omitted.

⁸ S. CREMASCHI, *Elizabeth Anscombe and the Philosophy of Psychology as Propaedeutic to Ethics*, in M. Galletti (ed.), *La mente morale. Persone, ragioni, virtù*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2014, pp. 17-62; ID., *Anscombe on the mesmeric force of 'ought' and a spurious kind of moral realism*, «Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics», 19/2 (2017), pp. 51-86.

Anscombe's reconstruction of modern moral philosophy is taking as target a specific, and indeed parochial, British and Oxbridge-based tradition of so-called non-naturalism (Moore and Ross). She ignores bravely modern moral philosophy at its best – Price and Whewell, whose existence she proves to be unaware and Kant, whose work she never proves to have perused beyond the *Foundation* (and perhaps the *Critique of Practical Reason*). This scanty historical basis yields a critique of the empty ought of the non-naturalists, which hardly applies to three centuries of modern ethics and leaves her alternative with such concepts as human nature and human flourishing that are too vague a foundation for normativity.

Nevertheless, from this *opus incertum* (a term the Romans used to designate dry stone masonry) came food for thought for a couple of generations of moral and political philosophers. The first strand inaugurated by Anscombe was neo-naturalism, a current in metaethics that featured the names of Philippa Foot, Iris Murdoch, Alasdair Macintyre and Rosalind Hursthouse. A second strand, mostly intertwined with the first, is virtue ethics, a current at the crossroads of metaethics and normative ethics whose members developed a critique of utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. It is hardly worth mentioning here how this critique of Kantian ethics by Anscombe and her followers MacIntyre and Bernard Williams was off-track. Suffice it to mention the revival of Kantian studies in the Anglo-Saxon world that discovered the role of the virtues in Kant's ethics,⁹ a role that is very evident to anyone who goes so far as to read beyond the *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*. The third strand is moral psychology, i.e. the 'philosophy of psychology' referred to by Wittgenstein and Anscombe. Authors such as Bernard Williams, Tom Nagel and Alan Donagan discussed terms such as action, intention, practical reason, motives, and desires. A fourth strand, or a part of the previous one, is action theory. One may recall the names of Donald Davidson and Harry Frankfurt. The topic under discussion in this literature, starting with the action theory from *Intention*, is the nature of the causality enacted by intentional actions as distinct from causally determined events.

The three contributions to this forum deal with various contemporary developments that build on Anscombe's legacy. Maria Silvia Vaccarezza's contribution, *Ergon and Practical Reason. Anscombe's Legacy and Natural Normativity*, addresses Anscombe's critique of the modern law-based view of ethics. She illustrates Anscombe's vindication of an Aristotelian view according to which norms may subsist without the need to imply a Legislator long time after belief in his existence has vanished – something like going on skating after the

⁹ Among others see O. O'NEILL, *Towards Justice and Virtue*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996; cf. S. CREMASCHI, *L'etica del Novecento. Dopo Nietzsche*, Carocci, Roma 2005, pp. 250-253.

ice has melted down – according to the criticism of modern ethics popularised by MacIntyre’s bestseller *After Virtue*, which owes everything to Anscombe’s essay *Modern moral philosophy*. Vaccarezza claims that Anscombe’s vindication of Aristotelian normativity has been either restated by her followers – for example, Philippa Foot – in a weakened version or unwittingly appropriated by self-appointed critics who have somehow recovered it by different routes – for example, Christine Korsgaard – in her ‘constitutivist’ proposal.

Tito Magri’s contribution, *Modern Moral Philosophy, Intention in Action, Practical Knowledge*, focuses on Anscombe’s anti-anti-naturalism aiming at unearthing an unavowed double agenda in her (unaccomplished) project of a meta-critique of modern moral philosophy. He argues that the best of Anscombe’s home-made weaponry, namely the concept of intention in action and practical knowledge, have not been used by her as much as they deserved in tackling the foundational problems Anscombe complained so-called modern moral philosophy had been unable to face.

Gabriele De Anna’s contribution, *Elizabeth Anscombe, The Grammatical Method and Metaphysics* sets out to examine the role of Wittgensteinian ways of thinking in Anscombe’s proposed restructuring of modern ethics. The points he focuses are two: firstly, her adoption of Wittgenstein’s grammatical method, that is, a philosophical methodology based on analysis of the grammatical structure of language; secondly, her attitude vis-à-vis ‘naturalism’ and metaphysics, namely her refutation of the claim that knowledge depends on empirical observation and the meaning of statements can be explained in terms of empirically accessible truth conditions and her vindication of the authentic sense of Aristotelian metaphysics, against metaphysics understood as the investigation of a mind-independent reality from an ‘absolute’ point of view. In De Anna’s view, these two points are keys to better understanding her work on action theory and virtue ethics.

ERGON AND PRACTICAL REASON.

ANSCOMBE’S LEGACY AND NATURAL NORMATIVITY

MARIA SILVIA VACCAREZZA

1. ANSCOMBE’S CALL TO ARMS

Elizabeth Anscombe’s celebrated 1958 article, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, marks the birth and provides the cornerstone of virtue ethics. Nevertheless, surprisingly enough, it does not provide any theory of virtue but rather prepares the ground for a possible revival of this paradigm through some suggestions

intended to establish a 'philosophy of psychology' and a critique of so-called modern moral philosophy.

The main thesis defended by Anscombe in the text is famously 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 *co* ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it.¹⁰

The reason for such necessity lies in the waning of the idea that had made the "earlier conception of ethics"¹¹ possible, namely that of a divine lawgiver. Consequently, for Anscombe, ethicists should abolish the "mesmeric force"¹² of duty, abandon the concepts of duty and moral obligation, stop believing in their supposed mysterious force, and begin to employ different, 'thick' aretaic concepts whose applicability to the context depends on careful characterizations. Thus, the descriptive and the evaluative blur until they merge, and no hypnotic and mysterious duty intervenes, as it were, 'from the outside', to colour otherwise neutral facts with normative light. Toward the end of the article, Anscombe wonders if her analysis leaves no opening for the use of normative terminology. In response, she considers three possible ways of recovering such a conceptual apparatus: self-legislation, the contractual foundation, and the natural normativity of virtue.

The latter option is the only compatible with the paradigm shift advocated by Anscombe; she will not be the one to develop it directly, but how, in a few dashes, she outlines its essential features is nonetheless decisive: it is a conception of the "*species* man, regarded non just biologically",¹³ that can ground a form of normativity that is not moral in the modern sense of the term, but, precisely, natural: that is, conceived as a form of practical necessity rather than a law, and therefore not in need of other foundation outside itself.

Naturalistic theories of normativity, such as the one advanced by Philippa Foot, set out in the wake of Anscombe's program and would be hardly intelligible without the background of this 'conceptual cleanup' and the final call for a naturalistic shift.

2. *ERGON*, NATURAL GOODNESS, AND SELF-CONSTITUTION

Philippa Foot was the first to take up Anscombe's call to arms and formulate a theory of normativity in which norms do not take deontological form but depend on the fulfilment of the human *ergon*. Starting with early essays such

¹⁰ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Modern Moral Philosophy* (1958), in *The Collected Philosophical Papers* III. *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, Blackwell, Oxford 1981, pp. 26-42, p. 26.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

as *Goodness and Choice* of 1961, then with the naturalistic turn carried out in *Natural Goodness*, Foot proposes a theory of natural normativity according to which goodness is the teleological tension of every being toward its perfection, and moral evaluation is a particular case of the evaluation of the functioning of living things. Therefore, the dispositions of the will (virtues) are good or bad as they promote (or fail to promote) the goodness of human beings, understood in terms of the functioning of one particular living being: a human being qua a member of a species.¹⁴ Such a proposal constitutes a revisitation of the Wittgensteinian idea of life-form, declined in a biologicistic sense and deeply indebted to Michael Thompson,¹⁵ and that of 'Aristotelian categoricals' and 'Aristotelian necessity' of Anscombean derivation. This form of naturalism, whereby it is the relevant facts relating to the species' form of life that determine its standards of goodness, aspires to preserve the objectivity of the good, establishing it on a foundation rooted in biology and the exercise of natural functions.

Nothing more than Korsgaardian constructivism seems to be far from such a naturalistic theory of normativity. Korsgaard herself, in *Sources of Normativity*, advocates an anti-realist and anti-naturalistic conception of objectivity rooted in the sovereignty of practical reason. What Korsgaard calls 'dogmatic rationalism', that is naturalism, assigns reason just the task of tracking an objective order of values existing prior to and independently of agents and their reasoning and describes moral agents as grasping the ends of action through an intellectual act but without really 'using' practical reason. They are 'affected' by moral truths and accept and enact them almost passively.

Even after the constitutivist turn, the distance between Korsgaard and Aristotelian-Anscombean objectivist naturalism does not seem to shrink. For example, in the opening to *Self-Constitution*, Korsgaard portrays the hero of virtue-ethical theories as a "Good Dog"¹⁶ who no longer feels the force of normative necessity and wags his tail festively in the performance of his duty. Besides, she blames realism about moral facts for being a 'homuncular' theory, whereby reason is merely the mouthpiece of an objective fact located "out there", a "little representative"¹⁷ within us, and thus unable to explain the peculiarity of our feeling normatively bound.

¹⁴ See PH. FOOT, *Natural Goodness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001; see also PH. FOOT, *Moral Dilemmas and Other Topics in Moral Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, p. 1.

¹⁵ Cf. M. THOMPSON, *The Representation of Life*, in R. Hursthouse, G. Lawrence, W. Quinn (eds.), *Virtues and Reasons. Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995, pp. 247-296.

¹⁶ CH. KORSGAARD, *Self-Constitution. Agency, Identity and Integrity*, Oxford University Press, New York 2009, p. 3.

¹⁷ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, cit., p. 6.

However, in this work, the explicitly Kantian practical-deliberative point of view, favoured in *The Sources of Normativity*, is now situated within a naturalistic framework that partially alters its original meaning¹⁸ since it locates the source of the categorical force of moral obligations in the constitutive features of agency. In a singular synthesis, we witness the ‘embedding’ of Kantian-derived categories within a general framework that rests on an explicitly Aristotelian teleological framework and pivots on the concepts of function, form and nature. It is the function of action – its *ergon* – that determines its normativity: thus, normativity derives from the constitutive elements of agency.

Just as the typical form of action is to be an end in itself and to bind an act to a purpose through an appropriate reason – a conception on which Aristotle and Kant allegedly agree – the form of the agent is doubly linked with the constitutive function of action: that is, action is part of the form of the agent and, therefore, contributes to defining and constituting it.

In a way, Anscombe’s call to arms has been taken up as much by Footian naturalism as by Korsgaard’s constitutivism,¹⁹ albeit in the latter case applied not to human beings and their supposed natural *ergon* but action and the relation between the objects of the world and the agent. Nevertheless, as I will argue, both proposals fail to adequately meet the challenge of successfully linking form and practical reason.

3. AN EXCESS OF TELEOLOGY OR A SURPLUS OF RATIONALITY?

It would seem, at first glance, that the problem inherent in Foot’s neo-Aristotelian naturalism is an ‘excess of nature,’ or, rather, of ‘first nature.’ This, at least, is the main line of criticism, emblematically represented by Julia Annas’ and John McDowell’s rejection of first-nature naturalism.²⁰ However, one should be careful to avoid a misunderstanding. Foot puts forth a theory of natural goodness as a form of excellence in the use of practical rationality, which makes it possible to distance oneself from markedly biological ends

¹⁸ A very useful reconstruction of Korsgaard’s argument can be found in G. VERRUCCI, *Azione come autocostruzione. Normatività ed agency in Christine Korsgaard*, in M. Meletti (ed.), *Ragione pratica e immaginazione*, Mimesis, Milano 2011, pp. 79-103. CH. KORSGAARD, *Self-Constitution*, cit., pp. 14-18.

¹⁹ This commonality, on which many interpreters agree, is strongly denied by Korsgaard herself. See, on this point, CH. KORSGAARD, *Natural Goodness, Rightness, and the Intersubjectivity of Reason: Reply to Arroyo, Cummiskey, Moland, and Bird-Pollan*, «Metaphilosophy», 42/4 (2011), pp. 381-394. However, such denial is highly problematic, as I will show in the third section of my paper.

²⁰ J. ANNAS, *Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?*, in S. M. Gardiner (ed.), *Virtue Ethics Old and New*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 2005, pp. 11-29; J. MCDOWELL, *Two Sorts of Naturalism*, in R. Hursthouse, G. Lawrence, W. Quinn (eds.), *Virtues and Reasons. Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995, pp. 128-152.

by a reflexive activity that is constrained by the ideal of excellence and in the meantime excels precisely as it can perform this distancing:

What conceptually determines goodness in a feature or operation is the relation, for the species, of that feature or operation to survival and reproduction, because it is in that that good lies in the botanical and zoological worlds. At that point questions of 'How?' and 'Why?' and 'What for?' come to an end. But clearly this is not true when we come to human beings.

Take reproduction, for instance. Lack of capacity to reproduce is a defect in a human being. But choice of childlessness and even celibacy is not thereby shown to be defective choice, because human good is not the same as plant or animal good. The bearing and rearing of children is not an ultimate good in human life, because other elements of good such as the demands of work to be done may give a man or woman reason to renounce family life. And the great (if often troubling) good of having children has to do with the love and ambition of parents for children, the special role of grandparents, and many other things that simply do not belong to animal life.²¹

So, while on the one hand, Foot's proposal seems to fail due to 'too much naturalism', on closer inspection, its most significant weakness is that the introduction of practical reason and its reflexive capacity breaks the enchantment of first nature. Moreover, on the one hand, this trait makes the theory decidedly more palatable, going in the direction of a 'second-nature' naturalism, but, on the other, it contradicts its exquisitely first-naturalistic premises, making it fall into contradiction.

Similar objections strike the constitutivist phase of Korsgaardian thought. The most powerful one identifies the reason for the constitutivist project's failure in an excess of teleology. Silverstein, echoing and extending Enoch's famous critique,²² argues that where *Sources* rested on the need for the overcoming of an ethics of excellence, the Aristotelian constitutivism of *Self-Constitution* uses, not unlike standard naturalism, the concept of function to bridge the is-ought gap,²³ and thus falls back on an ethics of excellence, making the whole project fail.

If the authority of the norms governing action flows from what is constitutive of agency, then every agent will necessarily act following those norms by the mere fact of being an agent: there is, conceptually, a lack of room for the possibility of bad or wrong actions. This problem has not so much to do with the *positive content* of the constitutive norm identified by Korsgaard (i.e., self-constitution) but with the idea of constitutive norms as Aristotelian forms.

²¹ PH. FOOT, *Natural Goodness*, cit., p. 28.

²² Cfr. D. ENOCH, *Agency, Shmagency. Why Normativity won't come from what is Constitutive of Agency*, «Philosophical Review», 115/ 2 (2006), pp. 169-198.

²³ M. SILVERSTEIN, *Teleology and Normativity*, in R. Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 11, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, pp. 214-240.

In short, what produces the short-circuit is the deadly combination of three elements, namely, (i) the application of the idea of a function as a constitutive norm to action, (ii) the idea that the constitutive norm of action is self-constitution, and (iii) the framework within which all this is framed, namely, that of a 'weak teleology'.

Unable to disavow (i) and (ii), which represent the very heart of the constitutivist proposal, the only possible option for Korsgaard to defuse the short-circuit would be, according to this line of objection, to rectify (iii), by introducing a surplus of teleology into the theory, that is, by landing on a robust (rather than weak) teleological conception, not too different, precisely, from Foot's.

Such an option would prove, however, not only more metaphysically controversial, but also inconsistent with the premises of constitutivism itself. As Korsgaard repeatedly states, what is constitutive of action is not simply the fact of *trying to* constitute oneself as an agent, but instead *actually doing so*. Since the core of Korsgaard's theory of agency is that agents constitute themselves by acting, the alternative view borders on incoherence. The problem is that if merely attempting to constitute oneself were sufficient to satisfy the constitutive condition of agency, one could satisfy that condition while failing to attempt to constitute oneself. In that case, the same agent would and would not be a unified self or agent.

It seems, then, that Korsgaard could introduce a further level of teleology, rectifying (iii), only by abandoning her view (ii) that action is self-constitution, which, however, is one of the two fundamental premises of the theory.

Here we come to a paradoxical point. On closer inspection, just as Foot's main problem is that, in order to avoid unacceptable drifts in her theory, she has to introduce a crucial role of practical reason that blurs the naturalistic scope of her framework, so Korsgaard's problem is that her theory could escape fatal short-circuits only by introducing a more robust teleologism, a hard choice indeed, since it would contradict her constitutivist starting point.

4. CONCLUSION

One could be inclined to conclude that the source of trouble, more than the excess of nature or reflexivity, is a shared tension between form (function) and practical reason. However, if this is true, between the normativity typical of the space of reasons and the natural normativity that descends from human form and function, the tension is radical and the distance unbridgeable, and any project that would set out to dampen that tension is doomed to failure.²⁴

²⁴ On the naturalistic side, more promising proposals of 'second nature naturalism' have been advanced by J. ANNAS, *Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?*, cit.; see also I. LIU, *Elevating Human Being: Towards a New Sort of Naturalism*, «Philosophy», 92/1v (2017), pp.

So should we conclude that Anscombe's call to arms is bound to fall on deaf ears, whatever the declination of its reception? Indeed, much has yet to be done to plausibly recompose the rift that opens when one tries to link *ergon* and normativity. Nevertheless, somehow healing this rupture sounds like a daring yet lofty and perhaps necessary task. In my opinion, the failure of the proposals discussed is a sign of such boldness.

MODERN MORAL PHILOSOPHY, INTENTION IN ACTION,
PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

TITO MAGRI

1. ANSCOMBE'S FIRST THESIS

Of the 'three theses' presented by Anscombe in her much discussed and celebrated 1958 article *Modern Moral Philosophy*,²⁵ the second: "the concepts of obligation, and duty – *moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say [...] ought to be jettisoned" (p. 26) is opposed to deontological conceptions of ethics and, more subtly, to certain forms of ethical non-naturalism (p. 29). The third: "the differences between the well-known English writers of on moral philosophy from Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance" (p. 26) is opposed to (broadly understood) consequentialism. The third thesis is more or less straightforward. The first thesis is more elusive as to its point and implications. Anscombe formulates it variously, introducing it as follows: "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" (p. 26). Unfortunately, this does not tell us much about the content of the thesis or why this states a necessary condition for moral philosophy to make sense – even taking psychology in an Aristotelian sense.

Later in the text, we encounter two more enlightening formulations. In either case, the context is the shift from deontology and consequentialism to virtue ethics that Anscombe is advocating and the need for a sound understanding of the concept of virtue. This comes to expression, in one passage, as the need for a conception of human nature that makes sense of justice as a virtue. Anscombe refers back to "how Plato and Aristotle talk". Nevertheless, she recognizes "that philosophically there is a huge gap, at present unfillable [...] which needs to be filled by an account of human nature, human

597-622. On the constructivist side, a nice attempt at recomposing the rift is represented by Fischer's renovationist approach. See N. FISCHER, *Natural and Ethical Normativity*, «The Southern Journal of Philosophy», 54/IV (2016), pp. 417-439.

tito.magri@uniroma1.it, Università La Sapienza, Rome, Italy.

²⁵ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Modern Moral Philosophy* (1958), in *The Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe III: Ethics, Religion and Politics*, Blackwell, Oxford 1981, pp. 26-42.

action, the type of characteristic a virtue is, and above all of human ‘flourishing’” (p. 41). Anscombe’s reference to human nature and human flourishing is important. Part of the change in modern moral philosophy that Anscombe is considering consists in dropping the view that there is a special moral sense of ought, which is the subject matter of ethics. She writes: “It may be possible, if we are resolute, to discard the term ‘morally ought’, and simply return to the ordinary ‘ought’, which, we ought to notice, is such an extremely frequent term of human language that it is difficult to imagine getting on without it” (p. 41). Thus, Anscombe’s reverting to virtue is a move against not only deontology but also intuitionistic non-naturalism, the position of those philosophers Peter Geach calls “the Objectivists”.²⁶ The indispensable “ordinary ‘ought’” is given point and content by connecting it to ordinary notions like that of need (“a man needs, or ought to perform, only virtuous actions”)²⁷ or, much more problematically, of flourishing (“it is the last concept that appears the most doubtful” (p. 41). The notion of flourishing refers back to a conception of human nature, and the idea of “some sort of necessary connection between what you think *you* need, and what you want” (p. 31). Or to the idea that “it is not possible never to want *anything* that you judge you need” (p. 31). Or, lastly, to the idea that “the species *man*, regarded not just biologically but from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice in regard of the various departments of life [...] ‘has’ such-and-such virtues” (p. 38). This framework for moral philosophy has its difficulties, particularly regarding the connection between needing and wanting, as Anscombe, with her keen attention to Hume, is only ready to recognize.²⁸

It is interesting, therefore, to look at the other formulation of the first thesis. Also in this case, the context is how the contrast about the “subject-matter of ethics”²⁹ between virtue ethics and Moorean and Rossian non-naturalism, with the need for “an account of what *type of characteristic* a virtue is”. This postulates, in turn, “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 motives and the intention or intentions in it” (p. 29; cf. p. 38). The emphasis is different: while the question is still that of the presuppositions of a moral philosophy that did not follow the steps of the modern one (deontological, consequentialist, non-naturalist), the focus now is more specifically on human action and (in particular) on the connection between action-individuation and the inten-

²⁶ See J. DOYLE, *No Morality, No Self: Anscombe’s Radical Skepticism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2018, pp. 7-9, 12-13, 67, 76.

²⁷ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, cit., p. 41.

²⁸ For such difficulties, see Sergio Cremaschi’s remarks in the *Introduction* to his edition of Anscombe’s ethical writings (G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Scritti di etica*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2022, pp. 14-15).

²⁹ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, cit., pp. 29, 38.

tion or intentions in it. I think that this deserves our attention. Anscombe's masterpiece, *Intention*, published in 1957, immediately precedes *Modern Moral Philosophy*, published in 1958.³⁰ Moreover, of the notions Anscombe mentions as required for making moral philosophy intellectually viable (needing, wanting, flourishing, human nature), she has enquired none so in-depth and with such stunning results as intentional action. Therefore, I suggest that we connect Anscombe's first thesis, concerning the conceptual presuppositions of the proper engagement in moral philosophy, with some aspects of her philosophy of action. Perhaps, the foundational questions raised by Anscombe about moral philosophy (the first thesis) are best understood and addressed in connection with action because, in Anscombe's philosophy, action has a specifiable, intrinsic normative structure, which may open the way to draw ethics closer to nature, without losing its specific subject matter. The notion of *praktion agathon* might be theoretically more fruitful than a functional conception of goodness such as *ergon*.

2. THE INTENTION OR INTENTIONS IN IT

Of course, I can only sketch some aspects of my suggestion. Human action is natural to our species as a form of "activity of thought and choice".³¹ As such, it contains its norm of correctness or success. In this respect, I want to link Anscombe's philosophy of action to her first thesis about moral philosophy and her praise of virtue ethics. The internal teleology of notions like need and flourishing, if applied to any "activity of thought and choice" in the "various departments of life", necessarily involves the internal or intrinsic teleology of human action. My suggestion is that it is only here that we can detect and understand a teleological order of human nature. The intrinsic teleology and normativity of (Anscombean) actions are the key to teleology and normativity in general. The two crucial notions of Anscombe's view of the intrinsic (inherently practical) normativity of action are intention in action and practical knowledge. Such notions are involved in her program of dismantling conceptions of agency as purely internal (will as an impression) and of actions as purely its expression.

All this conspires to make us think that if we want to know a man's intentions it is into the contents of his mind, and only into these, that we must enquire [...] and that although intention issues in actions, and the way this happens also presents interesting questions, still what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does, is the very last thing we need to consider in our enquiry. Whereas I wish to say that it is the first.³²

³⁰ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Intention* (1957), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2000.

³¹ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, cit., p. 38.

³² G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Intention*, cit., p. 9.

Anscombe develops this insight by articulating the concept of intention along three dimensions: expression of intention (up to p. 8), intentional action (up to p. 32), intention in action (p. 32 and following). The second and the third are the theoretically most essential dimensions. The concept of intentional action is accounted for in terms of a certain kind of constitutive explanation.

What distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not? The answer I shall suggest is that they are the actions to which a certain sense of the question 'Why?' is given application; the sense is, of course, that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting (p. 9).

Intentional actions are actions susceptible to reason-giving explanations of a practical sort. However, what features of intentional actions make them susceptible to such explanations? "*Why* this question 'Why?' should be applicable to some events and not to others" (p. 28). What makes such explanations appropriate and possibly true? Anscombe is very alert to threats of circularity, and one aspect of her complex answer to this question (alongside conditions on awareness and ways of knowing what we do, pp. 24-25) refers to intentions in action. One of the roles of the concept of reasons for acting and reason-giving Why?-explanations is to give an interpretation of intentional actions (pp. 24-25). Correspondingly, one of the conditions for the appropriateness and success of such explanations is that actions be susceptible of, and actually satisfy, interpretations of the appropriate (reason-involving) kind. Anscombe points out that the most crucial class of descriptions of actions is as "things effected by the movements of human beings which go to make up the history of a human's being's day or life" (p. 85). In this context, what physically takes place must be taken first, but it must be grasped and understood in its essential normative unity, holding together different specifications of what is done, worldly circumstances, and the agent's self-movements. This constitutes its individuation, content, and conditions of success as action. And this is what Anscombe articulates in terms of the concept of intention in action.

The intentional descriptions we give as agents in answering Why?-questions can be true or false, depending on their contents and what is done. If it is true, they have correspondence with actual features of the action that takes place; they fit with its nature of reasons-individuated event, with the intentions it realizes (but which it could have failed to realize). Anscombe illustrates this joint condition on reasons, descriptions, and the actuality of actions through the deservedly famous example of a man replenishing the tank of a house (pp. 38-39, 46-47). The point of the example is to bring out the teleologically ordered series of intentions that individuate what happens as an action and as that action, given that they really take place ("Is there any description which is *the* description of an intentional action, given that an intentional action occurs?"),

p. 37). In this way, we can bring as close to one another as possible what happens on a specific occasion, its nature as intentional action, and the content and truth-conditions of action-descriptions. "Now we ask: What is this man doing? What is *the* description of his action? First, of course, *any* description of what is going on, with him as subject, which is in fact true" (p. 37). The true description of what this man is doing would amount to the intention in his action. Moreover, this makes it possible to say that an ongoing action takes place correctly or incorrectly, as a success or a failure. "Let the answer [to the question: What is this man doing?] contain a further description Y, then sometimes it is correct to say not merely: the man is X-ing, but also: 'the man is Y-ing' [...] unless indeed, he is not" (pp. 38-9). If 'he is not', then, either we were mistaken in our action-description, or the action failed, that is, he failed in what he was doing. In the second case, it is with reference to intentions in action that there is conceptual room for an intrinsic difference between correct and incorrect action.

Even on this minimal sketch, it should be clear that Anscombe's actions, taken first (as they should) as what physically happens, are also and necessarily an ordered, teleologically oriented, and normative layer of reality. "The answer that we imagined to the question 'Why?' brings it out that the four descriptions form a series, A-B-C-D, in which each description is introduced as dependent on the previous one, though independent of the following one" (p. 45). Given the external conditions, the rational order of intention in action allows identifying not only what the agent intends but also what she is doing and what is for what she does to be correct or incorrect. This indicates how a department of our lives and a perfectly natural happening can have intrinsic normative significance: an example of and (most importantly) a support or a ground for the kind of naturalism Anscombe seems to have in mind.

3. PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

I want to make one last, even sketchier point. Intentions in action provide a ground for the individuation and normativity of actions precisely because their contents and order mirror (and are mirrored by) those of practical reasoning. "The interest of the account [of the practical syllogism] is that it describes an order which is there whenever actions are done with intentions; the same order as I arrived at in discussing what 'the intentional action' was, when the man was pumping water" (p. 80). Intention in action is thus essentially connected to the kind of reason-giving questions and answers that are criteria of intentional action and are fully spelt out in practical reasoning. Together, practical reasoning and intention in action have the theoretical role of individuating happenings as actions (practical reasoning has action as its conclusion; intentions in actions are internal to the reality of actions) and their conditions of correct performance. In this respect, too, Anscombe regards action, i.e.,

what happens when we act, as intrinsically normative. (Syllogism or practical reasoning has well-established conditions of correctness.) But practical reasoning is undoubtedly an exercise of knowledge: knowledge of what to do and of the structure of our doing. This also holds of intentions in action and thereby of action: “two features, knowledge and enlarged description [the rational order], are quite characteristic of intention in acting” (p. 86). Action, therefore, can be understood as a form of knowledge: what Anscombe calls practical knowledge.

In the case of practical knowledge the exercise of this capacity is nothing but the doing or supervising of the operations of which a man has practical knowledge; but this not *just* the coming about of certain effects [...] for what he effects is formally characterized as subject to our question ‘Why?’ whose application displays the A-D order which we discovered (p. 88).

Practical knowledge is actual in and as action. But knowledge, either practical or theoretical, is an essentially normative capacity and state. “Because there is a possibility of being right or wrong; there is a point in speaking of knowledge only where a contrast exists between ‘he *knows*’ and ‘he (merely) *thinks* he knows’” (p. 14). This constitutive normative condition also holds of action, the contrast between doing and merely thinking one is doing something (or is acting at all). This raises the difficult and enormously interesting problem, which I can only mention, of what form and conditions of right and wrong can keep together theoretical and practical knowledge or knowledge and action. Still, this conception of action, with its intrinsic normativity of action, is undoubtedly the kind of support that, according to Anscombe, modern moral philosophy requires and, differently from notions like need or human flourishing, she provides its systematic formulation.

ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE, THE GRAMMATICAL METHOD
AND METAPHYSICS

GABRIELE DE ANNA

1. BEYOND ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE’S WORK ON ACTION THEORY
AND VIRTUE ETHICS

Contemporary analytic philosophers often mention Elizabeth Anscombe for two significant contributions dating back to the late Fifties: her short book *Intention* and her essay *Modern Moral Philosophy*.³³ They are two complex works

gabriele.deanna@uniud.it, Università di Udine, Udine, Italy.

³³ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Intention* (1957), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2000; EAD., *Modern Moral Philosophy* (1958), in G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *The Collected Philosophical Papers* III. *Ethics Religion and Politics*, Blackwell, Oxford 1981, pp. 26-42.

in which Anscombe's dense philosophical prose struggles with subtle distinctions and elusive philosophical problems. The former started current debates in the philosophy of action and is still an essential reference in the literature. The latter changed the history of contemporary ethics and reset the landscape of the field by beginning a new mainstream, virtue ethics. The importance of those works is beyond question, but the almost exclusive attention reserved for them perhaps obscures a set of critical, mutually connected theses that Anscombe held. Those theses set the premises of Anscombe's views on action and the virtues. She developed some of those theses in the sixties and seventies. Her later work is not as widely read and discussed as the above-mentioned writings but deserves equal consideration.

In this short essay, I would like to recall two less-known theses of Anscombe and some of their implications, namely, her development of Wittgenstein's grammatical method and her attitude toward naturalism and metaphysics. I dare to say that these views are part of an important heritage that Anscombe left to analytic philosophy in general and ethics in particular. They also seem to be keys to better understanding her work on action theory and virtue ethics.

2. THE GRAMMATICAL METHOD

It is well known that, in the second phase of his inquiries, Wittgenstein developed a philosophical methodology based on analysis of the grammatical structure of language. That methodology was meant to overcome the problems encountered in the first phase of his inquiries, as he had attempted to implement his mentor's, i.e., Bertrand Russell's, view of philosophy as the logical analysis of language.

In an earlier phase, Wittgenstein had held that philosophical problems could be overcome only by dissolving them through a logical analysis of the language which produces them. Hence, the logical structure of thought, poorly conveyed by everyday language, should receive a clearer and univocal interpretation. The desired (dis)solution of philosophical problems would imply setting the truth conditions of statements through logical atomism.³⁴ However, logical atomism presupposes a fundamental ontology of objects, and Wittgenstein found it impossible to furnish such an ontology. Two central problems preoccupied Wittgenstein: first, fundamental objects and deep logical structures of thought are mainly unknown to speakers, leaving linguistic understanding unexplained; second, the suggested solution purports that all atomic terms should have a meaning by referring to fundamental objects and that caused an ontological proliferation.

³⁴ L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Kegan Paul, London 1922.

In order to overcome these difficulties, in the second phase of his work, Wittgenstein turned to everyday objects and everyday language (as opposed to fundamental objects and logic) as analytical means for the solution of philosophical conundrums.³⁵ Such conundrums, he contended, originate from some gratuitous assumptions we make. One is that having a meaning for any word is always having an object as the referent. Another is that anytime we use a word as a general name for different individuals, those individuals must share a common essence, a nature: by contrast, in many cases, individuals can be grouped together by a mere family resemblance. Solving our philosophical conundrums requires distinguishing the different ways different names mean and finding out what relations allow to group individuals in different cases.

The analysis of everyday language purports that the philosopher should not uncover a real logical structure hidden beyond everyday language. However, he or she should investigate everyday language to find out how the same words and syntactical structures can be used for different purposes in different circumstances. The focus is the usage of sentences by speakers: it is not a mere record of usages but a careful consideration of how speakers can and cannot use a particular expression or a specific name to preserve meaningfulness. This means uncovering the normativity of language.

However, that language is normative does not mean that it is constituted by norms, which might even be hidden from the speakers (as it was for the logical analysis of Wittgenstein's first phase). Instead, language is normative since it is constituted by the practices of a community, on the ground of which not all linguistic moves a speaker can make with a specific expression or word are meaningful for the members of the community. Rather than being ruled by norms, speakers reveal what norms there are by showing what moves they can meaningfully make with words. The grammatical method aims at finding out the patterns of possible moves. John Hacker-Wright, who has recently analysed and discussed the grammatical method employed by Wittgenstein and his followers, spells out this feature, arguing that such method

examines how our concepts work in practice to discover what comes from their use. Instead of arriving at explicitly formulable rules, we arrive at an insight into the practical ordering of our language, that is, insight into the different purposes a term might serve. This practical ordering is driven in large part by our having coherent goals in using the terms. If the grammatical investigation hits its mark, we should realise that there isn't a thought that could be formulate if only some rules did not restrict us.³⁶

³⁵ L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, Macmillan, London 1953.

³⁶ J. HACKER-WRIGHT, *Philippa Foot's Metaethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2021, p. 13.

Wittgenstein's later theory of language, and therefore the grammatical method, can be interpreted in various ways and grouped into two leading families. Members of the first stress the role of practices in setting normative constraints to language and offer purely conventionalist accounts of meaning.³⁷ According to these accounts, our ways of thinking determine how we perceive and understand the world, and practices held in our linguistic communities entirely shape our concepts. In support of these readings, their proponents quote statements by Wittgenstein, for example, "the essential is the mark of a concept, not the property of an object".³⁸ From these points of view, the grammatical method is a way of investigating the practices and ways of using the language of a linguistic community.

Proponents of the other family of interpretations of Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language acknowledge that languages are conventional but see them as ways of representing the world. Linguistic conventions are part of broader social conventions which are necessary for our survival in the world. All social practices are tools for the interaction of individual humans among themselves and with the world around them. Linguistic practices, in particular, have several purposes (giving orders, begging, foreseeing, promising, etc.), some of which consist in and many of which at least involve representing the world. Thus, its conventional nature notwithstanding, language also has the purpose of representing the world. Hence, the grammatical method can also highlight distinctions within reality that the unreflected resources of our language do not manage to represent.

Elizabeth Anscombe and her husband and philosophical associate Peter Geach – both Wittgenstein's pupils – had a crucial role in developing the non-purely conventionalist interpretation of Wittgenstein's later conception of language and philosophical method. They can be seen as the beginners of the second family of interpretations since their work influenced and is still influencing other philosophers, e.g., Philippa Foot, David Braine, Michael Thompson, and Roger Pouivet.³⁹ These philosophers stress that according to Wittgenstein, "essence is expressed by grammar":⁴⁰ thus, when, in the *Investigations*, "essence is expressed by grammar":⁴⁰ thus, when, in the *Investigations*,

³⁷ CH. TRAVIS, *The Uses of Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011.

³⁸ L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1967, §73.

³⁹ D. BRAINE, *The Human Person: Animal and Spirit*, Duckworth, London 1993; PH. FOOT, *Natural Goodness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001; R. POUIVET, *Wittgenstein's Essentialism*, J. Dutant, D. Fassio, A. Meylan (eds.), *Liber Amicorum Pascal Engel*, Université de Genève, Genève 2014, pp. 449-464; M. THOMPSON, *Life and Action. Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2012.

⁴⁰ L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Macmillan, London 1953, § 371.

tigations, Wittgenstein gives the example of a small world made of a builder, of an apprentice who is learning the craft and language at the same time, and of construction material (bricks, beams, tools, etc.), he shows that linguistic meaning results from a triangulation between an individual speaker, a linguistic community and a world divided into kinds. Although we have no language-neutral access to the world, the structure of the world emerges in language, albeit only partially and often deceptively.

Geach offered a famous and influential example of how the grammatical method can be used to deepen our understanding of reality. In his essay *Good and Evil*,⁴¹ Geach contended that, contrary to what many philosophers of his time had suggested, e.g., George E. Moore, 'good' is not a property, neither natural nor non-natural. Geach noted that those who think that good is a property are misled by the fact that 'A is good' resembles 'A is white', and since white is a property, they conclude that good must also be a property. A closer inspection of the grammar of the two examples, though, shows that 'A is good' and 'A is white' are quite different: we can understand that 'A is white' even if we do not know what A is, but in the case of 'B is good' we do not understand the judgement unless we know what B is. Being a good knife is different from being a good car or pencil. The upshot is that the two examples use the adjectives differently: 'white' is a predicate, whereas 'good' is an attribute. 'White' always tracks the same property, 'good' tracks different clusters of properties, depending on what it is used for.

Anscombe used the grammatical method systematically in her work. In *Intention*, for example, she investigates human action by considering what possible kinds of answers an agent can give if someone asks him why he acted in a certain way; the grammatical reflection of the possible moves the agent can make allows Anscombe to define action as something done for a reason. Furthermore, she uses the grammatical method to investigate what a reason is, and concludes that only one of the possible uses of the word 'reason' is apt to account for human action, i.e. when reason means intention. Again, using the grammatical methods, she concludes that an intention is not a psychological state like a belief or a desire, but a certain way of grouping mental states together in certain situations. In this way, her grammatical analysis shows that 'reason' refers differently in different cases: sometimes, its referent is a mental state, and sometimes it is an entrenched pattern of mental states and situations in which the agent finds herself. This conclusion suggests that human actions are part of reality, but they are not part of reality in the way mental states are, nor in the way in which middle size everyday objects are.

Anscombe reflected on the grammatical method and offered a non-purely conventionalist account of it too. Against purely conventionalist interpreta-

⁴¹ P. GEACH, *Good and Evil*, «Analysis», 17/2 (1956), pp. 33-42.

tions of Wittgenstein's dictum that "essence is expressed by grammar", she stressed that Wittgenstein did not say that "essence is created by grammar" and rejected 'linguistic idealism'.⁴² However, at the same time, following Wittgenstein, she rejected the idea that all words have meaning by having an object as a referent. In her view, that empiricist assumption is unjustified and absurdly turns philosophy into a 'magic' discipline by suggesting that philosophical words should track objects in an unreachable reality. Instead, many words have meaning by having complex relations with experience, e.g., by tracking complex features of reality that cannot be reduced to a definite object or property. Of course, they do not track objects of experience, but this does not mean that they track objects behind experience either: instead, their assertability-conditions rest in complex features and relations of the contents of experience.

3. NATURALISM AND METAPHYSICS

Anscombe's account of the grammatical method has metaphysical consequences: it seems to be an investigation of what there is, and this is the task of metaphysics. However, had Wittgenstein not rejected metaphysics? How reliable can Anscombe's interpretation of Wittgenstein's grammatical method be if it leads to the conclusion that metaphysics is possible? I cannot answer these questions here since that would require considering what positions Wittgenstein rejects and in what sense he criticises metaphysics. Instead, I will mention two brief points which show that Anscombe can justifiably claim that she is following Wittgenstein in that she does reject some way of understanding metaphysics while constantly holding on to her view of the grammatical method.

The first point I want to make is that she denies that the grammatical method might be used to enlarge our naturalist account of reality. By naturalism, I mean the view that knowledge is based on empirical observation and that we can explain the meaning of statements in terms of empirically accessible truth conditions. She makes her position clear when she endorses Hume's view that promises are naturally unintelligible. She offers an accurate account of the grammar of promises, which shows that they exist and are different from forecasts, lies, orders or expressions of intentions. However, she claims that there is no natural reality that we track with the word 'promise' and that, in this sense, Hume was correct in claiming that promises are naturally unintel-

⁴² G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *The Question of Linguistic Idealism* (1976), in EAD., *The Collected Philosophical Papers* 1. *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein*, Blackwell, London 1981, pp. 112-133, pp. 112-114.

ligible.⁴³ It would be a superstition to think that they exist as natural entities.⁴⁴ Their existence is linguistic: they originate from the normativity involved in the practices of our community.

The second point I want to make is that, according to Anscombe, what practices can exist and ground conventional entities – like promises – is not a matter of *pure* convention, but it also involves the needs and requirements of human life. Not any convention would be acceptable; some conventions are even necessary for human life. Therefore, the criterion that establishes what practices are viable or not is human life and its requirements.⁴⁵ Of course, this is compatible with the first point since it does not purport that we have an absolute standpoint from which we can observe human life and establish what practices are apt for it: when judging which form of life is more liveable and conducive to flourishing, we can only compare the viable possibilities from the standpoints of our particular ways of living.⁴⁶

4. ON ANSCOMBE'S INHERITANCE

Anscombe's influential contributions to action theory and ethics start with the grammatical method she took from Wittgenstein, developed in original ways and left as a fundamental inheritance to contemporary analytic philosophy and ethics. The grammatical method is a way of investigating reality, including human nature, that overcomes the absurdities of metaphysics, understood as the investigation of a mind-independent reality from an absolute point of view. The grammatical method is based on the awareness that all our knowledge is linguistic and that we can investigate reality only by reflecting on the different modes of functioning of our language. This is the method that Aristotle used, for example, when he distinguished substances from other categories by noting that only in substantial predication the definition of the predicate can be used to describe the subject as well. Anscombe's inheritance is also a reconquest of Aristotle's original conception of metaphysics against many misinterpretations introduced in the course of history.

⁴³ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Rules, Rights and Promises* (1978), in EAD., *Ethics Religion and Politics*, cit., pp. 97-103.

⁴⁴ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *On the Sources of the Authority of the State* (1978), in EAD., *Ethics Religion and Politics*, cit., pp. 130-155, p. 141.

⁴⁵ G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *On the Sources*, cit., p. 137, and p. 145; EAD., *On Promising and its Justice, and Whether it Need be Respected in Foro Interno* (1979), in G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, *Ethics Religion and Politics*, cit., pp. 10-21.

⁴⁶ I argued this point extensively in G. DE ANNA, *Authority and the Metaphysics of Political Communities*, Routledge, London 2020, ch. 4.