

ELISABETH ANSCOMBE'S LEGACY FOR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ETHICS

Introduction

Sergio Cremaschi

Università Amedeo Avogadro – Universidad de Málaga

Abstract

The occasion for this dialogue on Elisabeth Anscombe's legacy for twenty-first-century ethics came with the publication in Italian of the collection of her ethical writings (G. E. M. Anscombe, *Scritti di etica con un saggio di Peter Geach*, a cura di S. Cremaschi, Morcelliana, Brescia 2022). 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*. She published her subsequent elaboration in a few articles and essays, reprinted either in the third volume of her *Collected Philosophical Papers* or in two posthumous collections, the comprising mainly writings on ethics and the second on religious themes. 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, except for a short book on ethics that grew out of a series of popular lectures, *The Virtues*.

Ergon and practical reason. Anscombe's legacy and natural normativity

Maria Silvia Vaccarezza

Università di Genova

Abstract

One of Elizabeth Anscombe's most decisive legacies is the rejection of modern legalistic morality, in the name of a rescue of Aristotelian-inspired natural normativity. However, as I will argue in this contribution, this legacy does not seem to have been fully collected, neither by those who, like Philippa Foot, are explicitly inspired by Anscombe's work nor by those who, while apparently opposing its assumptions, have also somehow recovered it by different routes, as emblematically does Christine Korsgaard in her constitutivist proposal. In more detail, I aim to explore the relationship between teleology and normativity at the crossroads between neo-Aristotelian naturalism and constitutivism: both theories, though opposed, rest normativity on a link between function (the Aristotelian *ergon*) and practical reason and fail precisely in declining this relationship convincingly.

Summary

1. Anscombe's call to arms
2. Ergon, natural goodness, and self-constitution
3. An excess of teleology or a surplus of rationality?
4. Conclusion

Modern Moral Philosophy, Intention in Action, Practical Knowledge

Tito Magri
Università La Sapienza, Roma

Abstract

In criticizing modern moral philosophy, Anscombe seems to have in mind also the tradition of non-naturalism (Moore and Ross, say), which comes to expression in a presumptive, special and general sense of “ought”. Anscombe’s first thesis, that theoretical engagement of ethics does not make sense, pending an adequate philosophy of psychology or account of human flourishing and human nature, primarily targets this form of non-naturalism. However, even considering her option for some version of virtue ethics, it is not easy to say what Anscombe’s naturalistic alternative to intuitionist non-naturalism is and how it can make sense of moral philosophy. Concepts like human nature and human flourishing seem too generic to be useful in this respect. I suggest looking in a different direction (also mentioned by Anscombe): the possibility and structure of human action. Two concepts, in particular: intention in action and practical knowledge could help understand the character of the foundational problems that Anscombe thinks confront and are evaded by modern moral philosophy.

Summary

1. Anscombe’s First Thesis
2. The Intention or Intentions in It
3. Practical Knowledge

Elisabeth Anscombe, The Grammatical Method and Metaphysics

Gabriele De Anna
Università di Udine

Abstract

Elizabeth Anscombe is mainly known for her work in the philosophy of action and ethics. However, this essay suggests that her most significant contribution is the development she gave to Wittgenstein’s grammatical method, which is also a base for her work in action theory and ethics. In her interpretation, the grammatical method does not imply a purely conventionalist conception of language but also enables an investigation of reality, which bypasses empiricist challenges to metaphysics. The essay discusses the significance of the grammatical method and Anscombe’s inheritance to contemporary philosophy.

Summary

1. Beyond Elizabeth Anscombe’s work on action theory and virtue ethics
2. The Grammatical Method
3. Naturalism and Metaphysics
4. On Anscombe’s Inheritance