2011

The Politics of Practical Reason: Why Theological Ethics Must Change Your Life

Mark Ryan
University of Dayton, mryan1@udayton.edu

Elizabeth Anscombe: Practical Reason as Political and Linguistic

The first business of this study is to establish clearly the aforementioned connection between three key concepts: moral anthropology or an account of human agency, practical reason, and politics. If this is, as I claim, the structure of an adequate account of practical reason, or one that avoids the distortions to which we are most susceptible, we must try to lay it out prior to considering its influence in theological ethics. Elizabeth Anscombe allows us to do just this.

In this chapter I will try to display the fundamental connection between the form of practical deliberation displayed in a moral theory and its requisite underlying account of human agency. Simply stated, theories of moral judgment are influenced by the way they conceive of practical deliberation, and accounts of practical deliberation, in turn, are both informed by and rest upon a conception of the psychology of agency. In order to articulate this basic conceptual connection between practical deliberation and its underlying anthropology, I will draw on Anscombe's influential essay "Modern Moral Philosophy"[1] and look as well to her book *Intention*. As we will see, Anscombe's biting critique of modern moral philosophy in terms of its inadequate psychology leads her to defend the distinctive character of practical reason as compared to theoretical reason.

Anscombe asserts that the right kind of psychology is something an account of which no current philosophers are capable of providing, herself included. Yet in her critique of the going theories, rooted in

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1. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, 26–42.

great modern figures such as Hume, as well as in her careful study of intentions, I believe that we begin to see an outline of such a psychology.

In "Modern Moral Philosophy," Anscombe shows that certain conundrums raised by modern moral theories and their views of the moral life lead naturally to the theme of anthropology, or what she calls "the philosophy of psychology"—i.e., accounts of human agency. These conundrums, she further implies, cannot be addressed any other way. She argues that the sense of "moral" associated with "overriding obligation" is a vestige from a worldview no longer prevalent, and therefore in seeking to explain this sense of "moral" current theories are chasing after a ghost.[2] Consequently, it is time to turn to more basic, psychological concepts such as those of human action and practical knowledge—i.e., philosophical psychology. In her book *Intention*, she gives an extended account of one component of a philosophical psychology—the intentions embodied in human actions—which informs how we understand practical reason itself.

In the first part of this chapter, I will examine the three theses Anscombe defends in "Modern Moral Philosophy." The examination of these theses will take us through some of her meditations on problems raised by Hume regarding reason, motivation and human desire. It will ultimately arrive at Sidgwick's implicit account of "intention" and its relation to knowledge concerning the consequences of our actions. What I will highlight is that for Anscombe the relation between psychology and moral theories is best understood when we pay close attention to the "descriptions" embedded in our language and folkways.

In the next part, I will turn to *Intention*. Here Anscombe elucidates psychological concepts such as practical knowledge, practical reasoning and, of course, intentions themselves. We will find that her treatment of these concepts, and in particular that of the form of description associated with intentional actions, provides a therapy for certain among the problems raised in her discussion of Hume and Sidgwick in "Modern Moral Philosophy." My treatment of *Intention* here will thus help to clarify psychological problems relevant to moral

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2. "The moral sense of ought," together with its associated concepts of moral obligation and duty, are said to be, "survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives. . . ." (Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion, and Politics*, 26).

theory. Her treatment of these concepts also shows that practical reason is distinctive and how.

By all this I hope to, first, locate a principle that will be useful as we turn to assess other thinkers, and ultimately from moral philosophy to theological ethics. This is that all ethics must recognize that it relies on accounts of human agency, and that how a thinker accounts for this can be key to understanding and assessing her work. In modern moral philosophy, anthropology came to play a more and more inconspicuous role. Therefore, the anthropologies implicit in such work were largely unexamined.[3] Yet if we do not have a good enough account of practical reason in relation to moral psychology, our attempts to understand "morality" are bound to go astray. In the more polemical terms of Anscombe's first thesis in "Modern Moral Philosophy," moral theory should be "laid aside . . . . until we have a more adequate philosophy of psychology . . . which we are conspicuously lacking."[4] I call this claim "Anscombe's challenge."

Second, and more important, I hope to begin to show that we can best recognize the distinctive form of practical reason by recognizing its connection to politics. Anscombe's analysis of modern moral theories, especially "consequentialism," shows that the notion of practical deliberation has been overtaken by abstraction and a theoretical model of reason. Her recovery of the "local" sense of practical reason is accomplished both by a more truthful moral psychology and acknowledgement of the role of communal speech habits within practical reasoning. She thus helps provide the backdrop against which to read Hauerwas.

The Theses of "Modern Moral Philosophy"

In "Modern Moral Philosophy" Anscombe puts forward the following three theses: 1) "[I]t is not profitable at this time for us to do moral philosophy—that should be laid aside, at any rate, until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology"; 2) "[T]he concepts of 'obligation' and 'duty'—*moral* obligation and *moral* duty—. . . ought to be jettisoned if psychologically possible"; 3) "[T]he differences between the well-known English writers on moral philosophy from Sidgwick

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3. See, e.g., Iris Murdoch's criticisms of Stuart Hampshire in her paper "Idea of Perfection," 1–45.

4. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion, and Politics*, 26

[1838–1900] to the present day are of little importance"—i.e., are inconsequential in relation to their similarities. In interpreting these three theses, I will show how they all show that moral psychology is an unavoidable component of a moral theory and that practical reasoning is grounded in a form of life.

Thesis 2: The Use of "Moral" and the Lack of Intelligibility

I will begin with the second thesis, both because doing so follows the order in which Anscombe actually proceeds and because the thesis addresses what she sees as the current state of philosophy.

Anscombe suspects that the term "moral" as we are accustomed to use it in order to issue a summary verdict has a profound problem: it is without content. After quickly dismissing the abilities of Butler, Kant, and Mill to provide an intelligible account of our modern use of the term "moral," she offers an historical explanation. The sense of moral that implies a final judgment or verdict upon an action or policy is a survival from an earlier conception of the nature and origin of the world that we have since rejected. In particular, the reference to "obligation" and "duty" in our talk about what we ought to do is intelligible only in a context of general belief in God as a lawmaker—i.e., within such belief systems as Judaism, Stoicism, or Christianity. She finds that the failure to locate an equivalent of this sense of moral in Aristotle's influential ethical philosophy highlights its cultural particularity. It is natural, she goes on, for a Jew to understand what she or he ought to do as a matter of obeying God's law, but to bring the notion of being bound by law into Aristotelian language produces . . . a mouthful. In Anscombe's rendition: ". . . that is 'illicit' which, whether it is a thought or a consented to passion or an action or an omission in thought or action, is something contrary to one of the virtues the lack of which shows a man to be bad *qua* man."[5] The unavoidable clumsiness of translation shows that Aristotle's system had no need for such a concept.

Yet, even though our culture has largely left behind belief in a Divine law-giver, we have retained certain ways of talking deriving therefrom —such as the sense of the term "duty" as an overriding concern.

Anscombe's concern is partly to do with the efforts of theorists and partly also with a culture that has lost its traditional moorings. As

5. Ibid., 30.

regards the culture, Anscombe's concern is that a lack of correspondence between our worldview and our ways of talking implies a lack of intelligibility respecting the latter. This gap between what we say and our larger networks of beliefs—symbolized by the empty character of "moral"—then reveals a lack of linguistic resources for giving truthful descriptions of our actions. As regards the moral theorists, when they set out to give sense to the concept of a "moral ought" using the means provided by their theories themselves, Anscombe suggests they tend to exacerbate the cultural problem rather than giving an intelligible account of the relation between our moral terms and their relation to our beliefs.

This I believe sheds light on Anscombe's seemingly radical recommendations that the concept of a "moral ought" should be "jettisoned from the language . . . if psychologically possible." One cannot strictly separate the beliefs that help us make sense of our actions and the actions themselves. Insofar as the adjective "moral" used to pronounce judgment on an action or policy lacks a conceptual home, it signifies a problem for our culture. Moral theories that at this point go on while neglecting this problem do so at their peril, and ours.

Thesis 1: Hume on the Logic of Moving from "Is" to "Ought" or "The Naturalistic Fallacy"

Examining the objections Hume raised to moving from "is" to "ought" allows Anscombe to treat the problem posed by the concept of a moral ought in terms of its basic conceptual components. She particularly focuses on the relation between these components and how more complex concepts, or "descriptions," depend upon other, comparatively fundamental, ones. The nature of descriptions will become clearer as we move on.[6]

6. It may seem loaded to use the word "description" for concepts. Anscombe's participation in a philosophy after the "linguistic turn" is in evidence here. By "description" she means basic "forms" of speaking and acting that emerge out of the background of a form of life. They also imply "facts," but the factual quality of a fact is defined in terms of its role in supporting a more "complex" description of what is the case that depends upon it. The connection of descriptions, in her sense, with forms of life is illuminated by her use of the phrase "under a description" in discussing intentional actions. "Descriptions," as used here in relation to her essay, "On Brute Facts," is related, but not to be confounded with "under a description," as it appears in the book *Intention*. Here the emphasis is on descriptions as forms embedded in language, and

Hume's objections allow Anscombe to trace the logical relations between descriptions that imply different levels of conceptual complexity. Such descriptions often describe human action and activities. The advantage Hume brings, if indirectly, is to allow the philosopher concerned with morality ("value") to begin with more simple notions. Reflecting on the "logic" of moving from "is" to "ought" allows Anscombe to begin the quest for greater theoretical clarity on the subject matter to which the term "moral" pertains—i.e., human actions and passions. (This, in turn, leads ultimately to greater intelligibility for our cultural forms.)

The so-called "naturalistic fallacy" is based on Hume's argument that it is logically illicit to pass from the judgment that something is the case, to a conclusion that something ought to be done—i.e., from "is" to "ought." The problem has also been articulated in terms of a gulf between "facts" and "values." While Anscombe claims to be unimpressed by Hume's argument for such a position,[7] she nevertheless believes that reflecting on Hume's objections can be fruitful.

She uses the following rendition of a Humean claim to illustrate the points she sets out to make:

> Suppose I say to my grocer "Truth consists either in relations of ideas, as that 20s. =£1, or matters of fact, as that I ordered potatoes, you supplied them, and you sent me a bill. So it doesn't apply to such a proposition as that I *owe* you such and such a sum."[8]

Anscombe notes that the relation between such facts as "I ordered potatoes, you supplied them, and you sent me a bill" and "I owe you such and such a sum" is an interesting one, and begs further attention. She calls this relation that of being "brute relative to." The connection

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not on their role in practical knowledge. For comparison, see Julius Kovesi's use of "notion" in *Moral Notions*.

7. She claims that he simply "defines truth" in a way that suits his argument and construes "passions" as an agent's aiming at anything, indiscriminately, about which Anscombe also intimates suspicion. Truth, which consists in judgments of facts and relations among ideas, and passions, which are primitive moving forces, are divorced from one another. We will deal more fully with the problem in this conception of passion in the section of this chapter on the book *Intention*—particularly, when we consider Anscombe's thoughts on the role of desire in instances of practical reasoning.

8. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion, and Politics*, 28.

between descriptions that are "brute relative" to one another is subtle. In a sense, the descriptions that are brute relative to "A owes B such and such a sum" provide the conditions making this latter description possible. In Anscombe's terms, "if xyz is a set of facts brute relative to a description A, then xyz is a set out of a range of facts some set among which holds, if A holds . . ."[9] Yet, she adds, the holding of xyz does not *entail* A, for some further facts, themselves brute relative to xyz, may imply an "exception" to the holding of A. Thus, whereas xyz ordinarily justifies A—the facts about the ordering and supplying of potatoes and the fact described as "I owe the grocer such and such a sum"—there can always be circumstances that render the connection void. Moreover, it is not possible to give an explicit account of the circumstances that make for an exception, either in theory or in our habits of speech. The most one can do here is to offer a few examples of sets of circumstances that constitute an exception. Anscombe's point is also that it is impossible to obtain a *mastery* of the relation of being brute relative *a priori*—only experience and immersion within a language gives us competence in such matters. We are thrown from our theoretical perch back among the descriptions and institutions that characterize ordinary life. She therefore concludes, allowing a partial concession to Hume, "though it would be ludicrous to pretend that there can be no such thing as a transition from, e.g., 'is' to 'owes,' the character of the transition is in fact rather interesting and comes to light as a result of reflecting on Hume's arguments."[10]

Through the concept of "brute relativity," Anscombe shows that movements from descriptions of how things are in the world to more complicated descriptions that seem to contain a normative dimension do not require "the addition of a further fact" or of something nonfactual (i.e., a "value"). The description "I owe the grocer 10 shillings" does not consist in any facts over and above the ones in "I ordered

9. Anscombe expounds on the relation between the descriptions involved in the scenario of the transaction involving potatoes in her paper "On Brute Facts." Here she stresses that the movement from the descriptions about her ordering of potatoes and her grocer's supplying them to the description "I owe the grocer 20s." depends on certain institutions—e.g., that of the use of money in our society. Furthermore, in justifying the description "I owe the grocer such and such" the set of brute facts mentioned here belong to a range of sets of facts. Some set in the range must hold if "I owe the grocer" holds. *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, 22–25.

10. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion, and Politics*, 29.

potatoes, he brought them to my house, and left them there." We may want to say, "It consists in such and such facts holding in the context of our institutions."[11] But Anscombe is careful to remind us that the description "I owe the grocer 10 shillings" does not *itself* contain a description of those institutions. Such complex descriptions "I owe the grocer 10 shillings" are not mysterious in the sense of requiring that we posit a realm beyond that named by the world of facts. On the other hand, these relations are indeed complex to the extent that it is impossible to formalize them—all one can do is point to some examples from everyday life. The relations of such descriptions, as well as the logical license to move from the simple to the complex among them, depend on social practices embodied in a common language.[12]

Anscombe goes on to note that the description "I owe the grocer 10 s." might itself be brute in relation to the description "I am a bilker"— and bilking may be translated as a species of "injustice." She then points out, however, that a typical modern student may feel inclined to ask whether a man who acts unjustly is a (morally) bad man. Anscombe responds that one way to answer this question—the only sensible way, it seems, for her—is by providing some account of a "virtue."[13] A virtue, we may say, is a psychological characteristic of some kind, and its possession enables a person to act justly. If we can articulate what type of characteristic a virtue is, and how it relates to man *qua* man, we at the same time are able to say something about why a man who acts justly is good. Anscombe claims, however, that we are far from having the conceptual resources to do this at present. Yet these questions lead Anscombe into a further meditation on Hume's objections to moving from "is" to "ought." For she notes that the same objection would apply to moving from "is" to "needs."

From "Is" to "Needs": Hume Continued

Under the heading of "is" to "needs" Anscombe reinforces her earlier comments on moving inferentially between descriptions of relatively

11. Ibid., 22.

12 The problem, in consequence, with many of the attempts of modern philosophers to give an account of the sense of specifically "moral" judgments lies in their tendency to abstract the moral realm away from this background. In trying to single out the moral in this way, such an approach inadvertently confuses (I might say, "mystifies") the logic of normativity.

13. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion, and Politics*, 29.

lesser to those of relatively greater complexity—or, from facts that are more "brute" to those that are relatively less "brute." Here, however, she focuses on the relations between characteristics of an organism and what they imply is "good for them," or what they "need" by way of environment. In her meditations on both topics—"is" to "owes" and "is" to "needs"—Anscombe's deeper interest is in displaying the logic of moving from "is" to "ought," for her more ultimate concern is with human action.[14] She recognizes that establishing a connection between is and needs does not fully explain human actions. For, as Hume points out, that will depend on whether the agent "wants" what they judge is good for them.[15] The intelligibility of the move from "is" to "needs" is again provided by an order among descriptions embedded in our ways of life. In what follows I expand on Anscombe's relatively brief comment on this topic.

Like the relation of is to ought, the relation of is to "needs" is an interesting one. How do we typically make this move? Anscombe turns to plants for an example and we may broaden her choice by considering machines as well. When we say of a machine that it "needs oil" we mean that without oil the machine will not function well. To give the machine oil, then, is "good for it." Machines have certain characteristics which explain why this is the case. Similarly, a plant, due to its characteristics, needs water and sunlight. In these examples, certain characteristics (what *is* the case) seem to determine what is required, or what *ought* to be.

But how do we explain the logical relation between descriptions concerning what "is" the case about a thing or organism and those expressing what it "needs"? Or, in other words, what here plays the role that Anscombe's notion of being "brute relative" played in her discussion of transitions from "is" to "owes"? The concept at play here is the functional[16] one of "flourishing," or the perfection of a particular living

14. Certain of these descriptions, then, are psychological, and thus Anscombe here begins the defense of her first thesis. Yet not all are concepts of a psychological kind, and the boundary between psychological concepts and those referring to other aspects of the cultural world is somewhat fluid.

15. In the section to follow on *Intention*, I will discuss how wanting can be brought within a similar logic of descriptions. For the present, it will be instructive to note how Anscombe outlines the logic of moving from "is" to "needs."

16. The paradigm of this concept seems to be psychological: the idea of a person doing well. It is perhaps derivatively applied to other organisms.

or artificial thing. The "perfection" of a living or artificial organism—the plant, the machine—in the sense of the fulfillment of its nature, is something we see immediately, though aiding in its fulfillment may require deliberation. When we speak of the perfection of a thing, we often derive it from a picture of what that thing does (its function) when it is doing well, or flourishing. The notion of flourishing (or, "perfection") provides the background for intelligible inferences from is to needs. It *shows* why certain characteristics imply certain needs, and we can discern these needs by imagining how a particular thing would fair in the absence of what is required for the fulfillment of its needs.

When a machine does not get the oil it requires its movements become labored and noisy. A plant that has not received sun or water, wilts. The machine functions well when it gets the oil it needs—it "flourishes." As does the plant when it receives sun and water. So at least with machines and plants, the relation between is and needs seems stable. The notion of flourishing makes the inference possible.

Now Anscombe notes that judging that a plant needs water and sunlight, that they ought to have them, ordinarily entails giving such judgments influence on our action. But here again Hume's objections are of interest. Hume's beliefs about the disjunction between fact and value—a disjunction inscribed within his conception of human psychology—lead him to insist that no judgment concerning what "is the case" could possibly move one into action. "It all depends on whether you *want* what is good for the plant!" he will say.

Regarding human action, Anscombe admits that while judgments of what is needed—what ought to happen—ordinarily do influence our actions, the logical relation is not one of necessary entailment, for it is not always so. Hume's objection points us to the fact that "it is possible not to want something you judge you need." "Wanting" here, in relation to human action, symbolizes the subtlety of the move from *is* to *needs*—that is, of the sort of description implied in the former to that implied in the latter—because it indicates the complexity of the concepts involved. How can we move easily from certain characteristics of a living being to a description of what ought to happen, when that being is also free not to conform its behavior to what such characteristics imply? To illumine the nature of human action will require more explanatory work. Whereas, to say that a plant needs water and ought

to get it is in a certain sense irrespective both of a judgment of what the plant wants and of what you want.

Anscombe admits that the transition between what *you* need and what *you* want is problematic. For, "it is possible not to want something you judge you need. Yet, on the other hand, "it is not possible never to want *anything* you judge you need."[17] As we will see more fully when we discuss *Intention*, the proper order among descriptions in ordinary language implies *limits* on what human beings can reasonably want, and at the same time licenses the move from "is" to "ought." There we will see that to remain intelligible statements about wanting must conform to a certain form—i.e., the object of want must fall under a certain kind of description. We cannot want something without having a reason that those who share our form of life would find intelligible. The idea that it is possible to want *anything* at all is nothing more than the beginning of a classroom exercise for philosophers.

Thesis 3: English Moral Philosophy and "Absolutely Prohibited" Actions

The third thesis stating that the differences between English moral philosophers from Sidgwick to the present are insignificant is sustained by the claim that their theories all lead to recommendations that fly in the face of the ethical teachings of the Hebrew-Christian tradition, which teaches that some actions (e.g., "procuring the judicial execution of the innocent") are to be avoided no matter what consequences beckon.

Anscombe connects this characteristic of the philosophy she criticizes with the way it understands a certain element of moral psychology—namely, intention. The mistaken conception of intention to which such philosophy is beholden, in turn, stems from its mechanistic conception of practical reasoning. Anscombe coins the term "consequentialism" referring to the importance this conception of practical deliberation attributes to expected consequences.[18]

What is the nature of "consequentialism" as a form of practical deliberation? We may again extrapolate from Anscombe's brief discussion and say that it has two fundamental components. First, an agent must imagine (or envision) states of affairs that might follow from doing or refraining from action "A" or "B." Second, a kind of weighing or

17. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion, and Politics*, 31.
18. Ibid., 36.

balancing of these possible outcomes must be carried out with respect to a measure of "utility." The activities of imagination and weighing and balancing are perhaps indispensable parts of any psychological account of the moral life. Iris Murdoch, for example, has stressed the role of "vision" in her own account of moral discernment. But as Anscombe notes in regard to Mill, the folly in this approach lies in its assumption that the notion of utility is sufficient to allow us to identify an action as being of a certain kind and thereby allowing us to evaluate it. The conception of discernment implied in utilitarianism is in fact empty as far as relevant action descriptions are concerned. This is because the idea of evaluating human actions according to utility implies the moral agent may always remove herself from a situation. Moral decisions would be made formally in a disengaged posture, or, perhaps better, in retrospect rather than in the moment of response.

A further problem to which Anscombe leads us has to do with the tendency in such theories to see weighing and balancing as an algorithmic operation and treat it as though it were the essence of moral deliberation. When practical deliberation is depicted on this mechanistic model, the deliberator him or herself is seen as a kind of computer, coldly adding facts into distinct columns. The model is thus tied to a disengaged conception of practical knowledge. The agent—the person her or himself—is ultimately separate from what she or he contemplates doing.

Anscombe anticipates that her readers may feel she overlooked real diversity in the group of philosophers she is criticizing. We can perhaps respond to such readers by explaining why she is not simply siding with the partisans of "deontology." Consider Anscombe's reflection on the "objectivists" among post-Sidgwickian moral theorists such as Ross. These theorists propose that one of the things a moral theory must weigh in the balance is the "intrinsic" value of certain discernible types of action. While to speak of "action-types" at all does come closer to what Anscombe has in mind, the underlying model of practical deliberation according to which "intrinsic values" are one more item to be added into a calculating process prevents the "objectivist" school from holding a position substantially distinct from other varieties of consequentialism. The variety here does not disarm Anscombe's third thesis because all the theorists under consideration refuse to recognize that some actions are wrong regardless of consequences.

Anscombe's larger concern regards consequentialism's effect on moral responsibility. This effect can be explored by considering an example found in Anscombe's text. Consider a certain man who has in his charge a small child. He is responsible for maintaining this child, and so to deliberately abandon the child would be a bad thing for him to do. It would be bad, Anscombe notes, both in itself and in that it would compel another person to do something (i.e., take care of the child). "But now," she asks us to imagine, "he has to choose between doing something disgraceful and going to prison."[19] If he goes to prison, it will result that he gives up caring for the child. What form will the man's moral reasoning take?

On Sidgwick's view, we are responsible for the foreseen consequences of our actions, whether we intended them or not. In this case the man's responsibility for abandoning the child is the same whether he does it "for its own sake or as a means to some other purpose, and when it happens as a foreseen and unavoidable consequence of his going to prison rather than doing something disgraceful."[20] This suggests that the man ought to reason by calculating which action will produce more bad consequences: going to prison (and leaving the boy) or doing the "disgraceful thing." It may be that intentionally abandoning the child would constitute a more vicious act than the "disgraceful thing." Yet, the notion of "disgraceful" or "laudable" *kinds* of action, with their usual function in discernment, will cease to have any role in what goes on in this man's deliberations. Anscombe stresses that once one gets onto the track of calculating consequences, such consequences will quickly become the only thing relevant to our responsibility.

Consequentialism has a radical impact on how one comes to conceive of practical deliberation. As she writes, "Sidgwick's thesis leads to it being quite impossible to estimate the badness of an action except in the light of *expected* consequences."[21] More important still are consequentialism's implications for how we conceive the fabric of the moral life which is evacuated of established meanings.[22] And for Anscombe

19. Ibid., 35.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Furthermore, given that our moral meanings are socially and linguistically encoded, fully implementing the consequentialist model would cause a profound transformation in how we talk about such things. The meanings of such terms as "disgraceful" and "temptation" are unimaginable outside of a particular community's way of life.

this is an alarming prospect. It becomes quite possible to do something *more vicious* than deliberately abandoning a child, if you can make out the consequences as being less damaging. Anything is justifiable![23]

The consequentialist model of deliberation also produces a form of individualism, and the ultimate failure to take responsibility for one's actions. The special emphasis Anscombe places on "expected" in the quote above highlights the essentially individualistic conception of practical deliberation at play in Sidgwick's account. The agent is effectively distanced from the world in which she or he acts. Anscombe draws out the implication of Sidgwick's notion of responsibility as follows: "*you* must estimate the badness in the light of the consequences *you* expect; and so it will follow that you can exculpate yourself from the *actual* consequences of the most disgraceful actions, so long as you can make out a case for not having foreseen them."[24]

Anscombe claims that Sidgwick's view of practical deliberation—and here he is a representative of consequentialism—and the implications we have just seen to stem from it flow from an aspect of his moral psychology: his conception of intention. As the example above shows, the agent's responsibility for leaving the child to someone else's care is the same whether he chooses it as an end or whether it is a consequence of avoiding something vicious. He "foresees" the result of abandoning the child, and for consequentialism the distinction between foreseeing and intending has no moral significance. Anscombe argues that the conception of intention on which this view is based is distorted. Consequentialism equates intending with foreseeing. It does so because mechanistic model of practical reasoning causes it to lose sight of the action descriptions that ground moral deliberation. Consequently, the engaged nature of practical knowledge is lost from view, or reduced to a disengaged, spectating activity carried out by an alienated subject.[25] That is, picturing moral deliberation as an impersonal process of

23. "The overall similarity is made clear if you consider that every one of the best known English academic moral philosophers has put out a philosophy according to which, e.g., it is not possible to hold that it cannot be right to kill the innocent as a means to any end whatsoever and that someone who thinks otherwise is in error" (Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion, and Politics*, 33).

24. Ibid., 35, emphasis original.

25. It is helpful to note her own conception of responsibility by contrast. "I should contend that a man is responsible for the bad consequences of his bad actions, but gets no credit for the good ones; and contrariwise is not responsible for the bad consequences of good actions" (ibid., 35–36).

weighing expected consequences causes us to lose sight of the engaged knowing implied in the concept of intention. The following section will show with Anscombe that, properly understood, intentions (known through practical knowledge) are closely related to the action types or action descriptions that a form of life sustains, as discussed above.

To summarize the point of this section, the English philosophers grouped together here pass over the descriptions embedded in our common language (and justify deplorable behavior) because their model of practical reason substitutes an impersonal procedure—an algorithmic one that fails to note established action types—for a realistic conception of deliberation that recognizes the limitations of human reasoning.

Intention and the Logic of Human Desire

In *Intention* Anscombe is able to show that human practical reasoning is characterized by desire for an end that the agent takes to be desirable (good). This distinguishes practical reasoning from speculative reasoning—the kind Sidgwick seems to confuse with practical reasoning—and thus implies an account of moral responsibility distinct from that found in consequentialism. How does she accomplish this?

In analyzing the book's argument for my purposes, I will try to honor as much as possible Anscombe's method of interrogating ordinary language and experience. This method is epitomized in her use of the question "Why?" In order that this analysis serve my larger purpose of showing how moral theories depend upon accounts of human agency, I streamline her discussion into the following four themes: 1) "reasons for action," 2) "descriptions," 3) "practical knowledge" and 4) "practical reason and desire." As we will see, none of these topics can stand alone. Each makes sense only in relation to the others, so that their explications will sometimes overlap.

By clarifying the concept of an intention in her book, Anscombe helps us understand the notion of a "reason for action." Reasons for action represent a particular kind of reason-giving activity characteristically distinct from what goes on in giving explanations. To illuminate her notion of a reason for action, Anscombe introduces the reader to a distinct mode of knowing. "Practical knowledge" refers to the knowledge an agent has of what she or he is doing *in* the performance of that action. Sidgwick's neglect of this mode of knowing leads to his equating intending consequences and foreseeing them. Further, Anscombe

shows that the exercise of practical knowledge is intimately tied to "descriptions" sustained in a community's form of life, and in this way answers certain of Hume's problems about the logical movement from statements about what "is" the case to those about what "needs" to be.

She further explores the form of "practical reasoning"—beginning with Aristotle's practical syllogisms—in such a way as to respond to Hume's claims about the incommensurability of passions and reasons. Action implies desire insofar as it requires a source of original movement. Anscombe argues that the form of practical reasoning implies a relationship between a reason for action and an end that is desired by the agent in whom the reasoning takes place. The desired end is contained in the first premise of such a syllogism. Only here Hume will object that because it is possible to want anything at all, reasons in this sense are virtually boundless. Yet Anscombe shows that since what is wanted must be perceived by the agent "under a description," and these descriptions have an inter-subjective or social source, the very character of practical reasoning is evidence that desire is neither individualistic nor arbitrary. Her investigation thus shows up the notion popular among philosophers that anything is a possible object of wanting.

The Question "Why?" (Reasons for Action)

Intentions are constituted by a particular kind of reasoning. To offer to someone what my intention was in some action I performed is to explain that action to him or her in a particular sense—it is to answer "the special question "Why?" with regard to it.[26] Yet Anscombe is aware that reasons come in all varieties, and even reasons given in the context of a single human action may reveal important differences in character. She therefore sets out to specify the *kind* of reason-giving that is constitutive of the agent's intention. How does Anscombe go about showing that an intention is a special kind of reason—that is, that it is a reason with a unique form?

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26. "What distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not? The answer that 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. But this is not a sufficient statement, because the question "What is the relevant sense of the question 'Why?'" and "What is meant by 'reason for acting'?" are one and the same" (Anscombe, *Intention*, 9).

To understand Anscombe's procedure, it is important to be aware of one of her major worries. She wishes to avoid the temptation to picture intentions as things "in the head"—i.e., a species of mental entity that is only contingently related to visible human behavior. With Wittgenstein, she believes this temptation is due to the "mythological" influence Cartesian psychology has had in shaping our picture of the mind. The way Anscombe's method seeks to avoid this pitfall is by locating her search for reasons in the context of *actions* themselves. Beginning our study with *intentional actions* helps us as investigators to avoid endless ruminations about intention as some mysterious and private entity.[27]

Anscombe's approach to elucidating the nature of reason for action (intentions), then, consists in beginning with concrete examples of intentional actions and proposing the question "Why?" with respect to them. We might imagine interrogating someone who says, "I am going to be sick." When asked "Why?" she tells us that she has begun to have a nauseous feeling in her stomach which always precedes a bout of sickness. By pointing to these signs, she offers evidence. Afterwards, she may offer further reasons, such as "that yogurt I ate must have been bad." Here, the reason names a *cause*.[28]

On the other hand, suppose when we asked the same woman, before her bout of sickness, she replied, "I have to make a major report at work tomorrow, for which I am unprepared. If I feign sickness that day, it will give me time to get the report in shape." The reason given in this

27. Having briefly explored the verbal expression of intention, she announces that "We need a more fruitful line of enquiry than that of considering the verbal expression of intention, or of trying to consider what it is an expression of." And, after some further musings, she decides to "turn to a new line of enquiry: how do we tell someone's intentions?" "Well," she answers, "if you want to say at least some true things about a man's intentions, you will have a strong chance of success if you mention what he actually did or is doing" (Anscombe, *Intention*, 6–8).

28. The question "Why?," it should be noted, can elicit different kinds of reasons in response insofar as there are a number of distinct contexts for its use. To appropriate one of Anscombe's examples, imagine being on a tour and asking your guide why he claims a civil war battle took place here. He answers that letters at the time seem to refer to it as a site of a planned battle, and excavations show signs of the conflict. Imagine further that your spouse asks you why you gave that sudden jerk while you were drifting off to sleep, and, being a physiologist, your reply refers to a certain chemical reaction in the body. In both cases, the respondent offers a reason, but in neither is the reason the kind of reason that gives an intention. In the first case, the guide's response mentions evidence. In the second, you respond by offering the cause.

answer is what we might call a "reason for action." How does it differ from the previous reasons?

Insofar as it asks the *agent* about her or his action, the procedure utilizing the question "why?" zeroes in on the agent's perspective. Part of what sets off reasons for acting is that they involve the agent in a deeper way than other kinds of reason-giving. Yet it would be a mistake to confuse the notion that the agent's perspective is important with the idea that it is a fundamentally privileged perspective. For it is not the case that the agent can simply invent the answers. As we shall see, these must conform to a type of reasoning that is in an important sense public.

When the question "Why?" elicits a response that mentions something future or offers an interpretation of the action, then a reason of the requisite kind is being offered. What distinguishes this kind of reason-giving from the kind that gives a cause is that it presupposes that the agent plays some role in making true what she is talking about. What distinguishes it from the kind of reason-giving that mentions evidence is the presupposition that the action bears some significance for the agent. In short, a reason for action can be defined by the notion that intentional actions have an object that matters for the agent. It articulates some goal or end that the agent seeks to bring about through her or his own power.

Mentioning something future implies that the agent has some end or goal in mind that makes sense of what she or he is doing. A neighbor asks me, "Why are you closing up all your shutters?" and I respond, "A hurricane is coming through." My reply suggests that there is some future state of affairs to which my action will be meaningfully related—in this case, as a "response" to what is going to happen. That is, what I do will shape this state of affairs, even if only in a reactive way.

A reply to the question "Why?" may also offer an interpretation of the action. "Why did you go and sit through his hearing before the military tribunal?" "I so admire his courage in standing up against the regime." To say with this answer, in effect, "I did it out of admiration," tells us the spirit in which the action was done.[29] (It is not, as we may be tempted to think, to *explain* the action causally, by giving its root cause or motive.) In expressing the spirit in which it was done, it also reveals

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29. Anscombe gives the example of signing a petition out of admiration for its promoter. See Anscombe, *Intention*, 20.

that the action bore meaning for the agent. The action was purposefully chosen by the agent as one fitting to show the feelings harbored. It might be seen as the result of a deliberation of the form, "What could I do that would appropriately express the admiration I feel for this person?"

"Descriptions"

In the previous section I followed Anscombe in isolating the kind of reason that is a reason for action—as opposed to naming causes or giving evidence—using a particular sense of the question "Why?" I now turn to a second theme of *Intention*—namely, the presupposed descriptions in our talk of intentional actions that make reference to the agent's point of view.

The agent's knowledge of her action presupposes a particular description of that action. For instance, when asked, "Why are you doing X?"—the agent might respond, "I was not aware I was doing *that*." Her reply refuses the description ("X") of what she was doing. If the question "Why?" referring to an intentional action applies at all, she knew her action under a different description. This section seeks to show a connection between an agent's reasons and a particular kind of description of his or her action. Establishing this connection furthers the claim that philosophical psychology informs practical reasoning, and ultimately moral theories. It is possible to elucidate the character of these descriptions through further investigation using the question "Why?"

We might consider the following example to get at the difference between an observer's knowledge and an agent's knowledge. On a quiet Sunday morning in the city, I am watching traffic lights turn from red to green as a pedestrian steps out into an intersection where the lights are controlled automatically by a mechanism that senses pedestrians. Catching up with the person, I ask her, "Why are you making the lights change like that?" But she gives me a baffled look, unaware that the lights were pedestrian-sensitive. To her, what she was doing—that is, her intention—came under the description "crossing the street." ("Crossing the street," that is, was the description under which she knew her action. My question, of course, shows an unusual degree of unfamiliarity with this sort of behavior.)

Reasons for action correspond to a particular form of description and that form is informed by the character of agent's knowledge. Just as

reasons for action were identified by their significance for the agent, so the descriptions of intentional actions are informed by the character of the agent's knowledge of them. For example, if asked by my wife why I jerked with a spasm while I was drifting off to sleep, it is hard to imagine how my reply would give the kind of action description we want to isolate here. In such a circumstance, I would probably interpret the question "Why?" as a request for an *explanation.* Explanations tend to rely on a different sort of description of an event, e.g., "chemical reaction 'C' triggers response mechanism 'M' which sends a pulse down the left side of the body." This kind of description is at home in a physiology laboratory, but not in the context of intentional actions. How could such a reaction have significance for me?[30]

If the kind of description we are after is a description under which the agent knows what he is doing, the question may arise whether any action has just one description. This question is important because we have spoken of "knowledge" here, albeit the particular kind called "practical knowledge." But, the skeptic will say, can the agent know what he is doing under several descriptions at once? In a widely noted example, Anscombe gives us a case where a man is performing an action that may come under a variety of descriptions. For our purposes, then, her example gives rise to the question, "What is *the* description of what the man is doing?"

> A man is pumping water into the cistern which provides the drinking water of a house. Someone has found a way of systematically contaminating the source with a deadly cumulative poison whose effects are unnoticeable until they can be no longer cured. The house is regularly inhabited by a small group of party chiefs, with their immediate families, who are in control of a great state; they are engaged in exterminating the Jews and perhaps plan a world war.—The man who has contaminated the source has calculated that if these people are destroyed some good men will get in power who will govern well, or even insti-

30. Another way to put the point about the form of descriptions typical of intentional actions is the following. If a reason for action implies an object that the agent hopes to achieve or bring about through her action, such objects come under a certain kind of description. That the object named in a particular 'reason for action' must be "under a description" is because the reason must have some form in order to be intelligible—that is, it must be a reason for doing *this* or *that.* The very structure of "action" implies such limits.

tute the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and secure a good life for all the people; and he has revealed the calculation, together with the fact about the poison, to the man pumping . . . The man's arm is going up and down, up and down. Certain muscles, with Latin names which doctors know, are contracting and relaxing. Certain substances are getting generated in the nerve fibers— substances whose generation in the course of voluntary movement interests physiologists. . . . [31]

As mentioned, there are several descriptions here, some of them superfluous for our purposes. Anscombe notes that such descriptions as, "He is generating those substances in his nerve fibers" can be weeded out by the previously developed notion of "reasons for action." For instance, "[T]he description in 'Why are you generating those substances in your nerve fibers?' will *in fact* always be ruled out . . . unless we suppose that the man has a plan of producing these substances (if it were possible, we might suppose he wanted to collect some) and so moves his arms vigorously to generate them."[32]

Yet, after narrowing the field, there remain multiple descriptions that are both true and fit the form of intentional actions, i.e., "he is pumping," and "he is replenishing the cistern." A skeptic may object here that our inability to reduce these descriptions to a single action description casts a shadow over our talk of "knowledge." If we are going to say that there is a description under which the agent knows his action, we have to show that there is a form that unites the several descriptions. This form is given by the question "why?" itself.

For example, if we ask our man "Why are you making that motion with your arms?" he may reply "I am pumping." "Why are you pumping?" we then ask. "To replenish the water supply of the house." "If this was his answer," Anscombe writes, "then we can say 'He *is* replenishing the water supply'; unless of course he is not." Here we have two action-descriptions, vis., "pumping" with the intention of "replenishing the house's water supply." Yet there is something unifying them. Once we have come to this point in our imagined dialogue it becomes appropriate to say he *is* replenishing the house water-supply. "This will appear a tautologous pronouncement," Anscombe goes on, "but there *is* more to it. For if after his saying 'To replenish the water-supply'

31. Anscombe, *Intention*, 32.

32. Ibid., 38.

we can say 'He is replenishing the water-supply', then this would, in ordinary circumstances, of itself be enough to characterize *that* as an intentional action."[33]That is, we no longer need to refer to the more primitive components which simply tell us in what "replenishing the water-supply" consists.

The relation of a series of true intentional action descriptions is often expressed verbally by speaking of the intention "with which" an action, or action*s*, is done. When the question "Why?" is applied to an action under a given description and answered by the intention with which it is done, the role of the new description to the former description is that of "end" to "means." The intention with which something is done, as the ultimate end in a series, "swallows up" the intentions implied in the previous descriptions. We can see the relation between each member in the series A–D by noting that, with reference to the ultimate term D, A, B and C provide answers to the question "How?" E.g., "How are you poisoning the inhabitants?" "By replenishing the water supply with poisoned water," and so on. This way of understanding the relation also points up the limits of a proper action description. As Anscombe notes, ". . . the less normal it would be to take the achievement of the objective as a matter of course, the more the objective gets expressed *only* by 'in order to.'" Consequently, she continues, "though in the case we've just described there is probably a further answer, other than 'just for fun,' all the same this further description (e.g., to save the Jews, to put in the good men, to get the Kingdom of Heaven on earth) is not such that we can now say: he is saving the Jews, he is getting the Kingdom of Heaven, he is putting in the good ones."[34]

Anscombe helps us understand the unity between descriptions of intentional actions by steering us around a common error.[35] If we think of a series of such action descriptions A–D, where each is dependent on the previous one yet independent of the following one, we may be tempted to think that A and B are related in that B (e.g., he is pumping) is another description of A (e.g., he is moving his arm up and down) in the sense that both descriptions are verified by the same "happenings." Anscombe argues rather that what relates the two are *circumstances*:

33. Ibid., 39.
34. Ibid., 40.
35. Ibid., 41.

i.e., given the circumstances, moving his arm up and down just is operating the pump. "Operating the pump," given further circumstances, is replenishing the house water supply. There is no foundational event on which all the other characterizations are based (i.e., of which they are descriptions). Noting the role played by circumstances here also frees us from believing that to unite these descriptions requires locating a mental entity that accompanies both of them.[36]

Now, our skeptic may remain unconvinced. To him, the notion that a series of action descriptions gets its limits through a common sense of what is appropriate to say in the circumstances will seem arbitrary. The rule for making such judgments ought to be capable of formulation in abstraction from such cases if we are to speak of knowledge here. From Anscombe's perspective, however, this just shows the extent to which the agent is involved in the knowledge called practical.

Practical Knowledge, Knowledge in Action (Performance), Guiding Reasons

In the last section we saw that reasons for action imply a certain form of description to be intelligible. In this section we will explore the kind of knowledge that is knowledge of intentions.

It has already been made clear that the reasons that constitute intentions are necessarily reasons of an agent. A reason for action makes reference to an objective (or, "end")—which the agent knows under a description. Intentions are shaped by the way in which the agent knows them. Following others we might call this mode of knowing "agent's knowledge."[37]

Anscombe seeks to show us what agent's knowledge is because she believes it is largely neglected in modern philosophy.[38] We may link

36 The role played by circumstances here reminds us of Anscombe's discussion of the "brute relative" relation between facts. See Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, 22–25.

37. The notions of "agent's knowledge" and "practical knowledge" are interchangeable and I will use them as such. Working from Anscombe's terms, we might also have used "non-observational knowledge."

38. One of the real difficulties for understanding the notion of a distinct mode of knowledge that is practical knowledge stems from the notion that such knowledge must have its own object. Early in *Intention* Anscombe explores the distinction by speaking of "observational knowledge"—characteristic both of the way we know something we see, and of knowledge produced by inference—with "non-observational

this neglect to the problem with Sidgwick's moral philosophy raised earlier. Because Sidgwick is unable to recognize agent's knowledge—or because he has substituted a more contemplative mode of knowing in its place—his moral theory recommends judgments so out of step with common wisdom. In this section I hope to show how discernment of the mode of knowing called agent's knowledge makes attention to the action descriptions embedded in a common form of life more likely.

In the example of the previous section, the form of description marked out as characteristic of intentions was implicitly related to agent's knowledge. In addition to being true descriptions, they were ones under which the agent was aware of what it was doing. Yet we must note that to speak of an "agent" here is not just another way of talking about the human subject. For the very term 'agent' implies the context of action. Practical knowledge is knowledge that guides action.

A widely discussed example Anscombe employs in section thirty-two helps illuminate the nature of action-guiding reasons by distinguishing agent's knowledge from that of an observer. She has us

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knowledge." A main example she uses of the latter is the knowledge we normally have of the positioning of our limbs. The intuitive problems seem to arise with more complex examples, such as "I am painting the wall yellow." This is the description of an intentional action, yet does it make sense to say that I know am doing *that* non-observationally? But then, what else could my knowledge be about but that there are such and such movements with such and such consequences?

It is here that one is tempted to imagine that an intention is an extra-physical (e.g., mental) entity of some kind. Yet Anscombe pits herself strongly against this temptation. Efforts to uncover the separate object correlative to non-observational knowledge, she notes, sometimes push backward toward the very beginning of an action. The idea is that we know without observation the initial contracting of the muscles, or the "willing" of the act, and the *results* are known observationally, like most things we know. But this approach falls prey to the kind of infinite regress—is there a separate action that gets the willing motion by willing it?

Whereas the approaches just mentioned try to fuse an "internal" entity such as "will" to a set of "external" results, Anscombe's alternative seems to involve eliminating the contradiction that arises in our minds between the notion of an intention and that of a public occurrence. "I do what happens," she writes. (Anscombe, *Intention*, 53) Furthermore, Anscombe implies that there is no incompatibility between practical knowledge and knowledge based on observation, inference and so forth. The two kinds of knowing can co-exist without becoming blurred. As she puts it, "when knowledge or opinion are present concerning what is the case, and what can happen—say Z—if one does certain things, say ABC, then it is possible to have the intention of doing Z in doing ABC; and if the case is one of knowledge or if the opinion is correct, then doing or causing Z is an intentional action, and it is not by observation that one knows one is doing Z. . . ." (Anscombe, *Intention*, 50).

imagine "a man going round town with a shopping list in his hand." "Now," she goes on, "it is clear that the relation of this list to the things he actually buys is one and the same whether his wife gave him the list or it is his own list[39]; and there is a different relation when a list is made by a detective following him about." In other words, we are to imagine a man with a shopping list being followed by a detective noting what he does.

Now she suggests that we compare these relations by asking how we would describe an error—i.e., a discrepancy between what the list says and what is in his basket—in each of the cases. Her answer: "[I]f the list and the things the man actually buys do not agree, and if this and this alone constitutes a *mistake*, then the mistake is not in the list but in the man's performance . . . whereas if the detective's record and what the man actually buys do not agree, then the mistake is in the record."[40]

To speak of a "mistake in performance" implies that sometimes, when there is a discrepancy between what an agent says and what an agent does, it is what is done that becomes the subject of correction. The action itself becomes the target of our scrutiny for failing to correspond with what is said. This implies that some descriptions are meant for bringing about something in the world through one's own agency, rather than for reporting on what has happened. The claim contained therein is "on active duty;" its purpose is to come into being. When such a description and "what happens" fail to correspond, we don't change the description, but say that what happened was done in error. Anscombe notes that, "if his wife were to say: 'Look, it says butter and you have bought margarine,' he would hardly reply: 'What a mistake!

39. "If he made the list itself, it was an expression of intention; if his wife gave it him, it has the role of an order" (Anscombe, *Intention*, 56).

40. Anscombe approaches this problem in another way by asking how an intention is *contradicted*. She compares the contradiction of an intention with the contradiction of an order, finding an example of the latter in a reported case of a soldier who was court-martialled for insubordinate behavior during his medical exam. Upon receiving the order, "Clench your teeth!"—the man removed them from his mouth and placed them on the table before the examiner. The point is that the court-martial is probably inappropriate because the order itself is problematic—a set of circumstances in the case make it fall to the ground, not the man's behavior. In a similar way, the contradiction of the expression of intention, "I am replenishing the house water-supply," is not, "no you aren't, for there is a whole in the pipe." Rather, it is "Oh no you aren't," said by a man with an axe poised to cut a hole in the water pipe. Ibid., 55.

we must put that right' and alter the word on the list to 'margarine.'"[41] Such are the descriptions of a person's intentional actions. Knowledge of such descriptions is distinct in kind. It is engaged knowing, or "knowing how." Anscombe describes this by contrasting it with "observational knowledge" whose essence is a disengaged and reflective point of view.

How does all this relate to Sidgwick? Sidgwick's picture of practical deliberation seems not to recognize that practical knowing is a special kind of knowledge geared toward performance. By saying that our intention in doing something amounts to what we "foresee" coming about as a result of the action, Sidgwick imagines our knowledge of what we are doing to be analogous to the way an impartial observer contemplates an event. Yet this picture of practical deliberation yields a figure characteristic of modern philosophy—i.e., the disengaged subject. As Anscombe noted above, the disengaged subject has a curious ability to exculpate itself from responsibility for what it actually does.

Further, because of the close relation we have now seen between intentions (as reasons for action) and descriptions that refer to agent's knowledge but are given first in an inter-subjective form of life, Sidgwick's account of moral deliberation tends to ignore the action descriptions sustained in ordinary language use. Thus, we find Sidgwick's agent giving serious consideration to the most vicious of actions available to him with the idea that in the larger picture things will turn out for the best. To properly take intention into account in a theory of moral judgment implies action descriptions matter.[42] Moral judgment is not merely about contemplating a world where the good is maximized.

The Form of Practical Reasoning and the Logic of Desire

We have seen in the last sections that intentions (reasons for action) are constituted by a certain form of description and, in turn, constitute a particular mode of knowing. We now turn to the issue of desire or motivation. This topic was already implicit in the discussion of reasons for action, insofar as some account of how we are "moved" into action

41. Ibid., 56.

42. For an illuminating discussion of the radical ("up-rooting") nature of modern moral theories in regard to their ignoring ordinary moral language, see Pinches, *Theology and Action*, 199–203.

is necessary. Desire is included implicitly in the form of description and mode of knowing we have been outlining.

As we recall from our discussion of "Modern Moral Philosophy," Hume raised the problem of desire when he noted that whether judgments of need will have any effect on action depends upon what the agent "wants." He thus called our attention again to the nature of psychological concepts and their complex logical relation to other kinds of concepts and descriptions.

The conception of practical knowledge we developed in the previous section may already be of some help in responding to Hume's puzzle. For it suggested that practical knowledge, while being knowledge of reasons, is tied to action in some essential way. Its reasons, we recall, are on active service in an actual or anticipated performance. The idea of practical knowledge challenges the penchant in Hume's psychology to dichotomize reason and passion, and may help bring to light the logic of passing from judgments concerning needs (i.e., what someone needs) to intentional action itself.

Here we will examine the resources Anscombe finds in the logical form of practical reasoning for responding to Hume's puzzles regarding desire and human psychology. Hume objected that no judgment about what is the case could by itself lead to an action. Anscombe further showed that even when the logical permissibility of moving from something's characteristics to a judgment of what it needs (e.g., from the nature of plants to the judgment that they need sunlight) is displayed, a follower of Hume will interject that action can only be explained by adding that the agent "wants" what is necessary. One way to articulate the upshot of Hume's psychology and of the gap it places between desire from reason, is that it becomes difficult to say what limits or directs desire, so that the specter of desire as an untethered capacity comes into view. If it does not take its direction from reason, can it be directed at anything at all.[43] This becomes an urgent question.

Anscombe tries to show how the logical form of practical reasoning itself helps us understand where desire is limited within intentional action. And in showing how desire participates in a practical kind of logic, she at the same time begins to reveal a psychology that bridges the divide between reasons and passions present in Hume.

43. It is hard to imagine that Hume wanted this. His notion of moral sentiments seems to assume an order and intelligibility within human passion.

How does the form of practical reasoning help uncover the logic of, or the reasoning inherent in, desire? Can we show that psychological concepts of intention and practical knowledge offer any insight into the nature of desire's reasonableness? That is, do these concepts show us the way desire is integrated in the forms of human reason-giving, and thus rescue it from isolation and arbitrariness? Through her examination of practical reasoning, Anscombe shows that it is the very nature of such reasoning to attribute to desire a certain shape.

There seems to be agreement among theorists that practical reasoning leads to action, and this implies that it includes desire within its form. But how is desire included? To answer this question we must examine how the character of practical reasoning differs from that of typical demonstrative reasoning.

Anscombe turns to Aristotle here because he seemed to discern the distinctive character of practical reasoning in relation to other kinds of reasoning.[44] His practical syllogisms, Anscombe implies, demonstrate his sensitivity to the distinctive character of practical reasoning. We therefore turn with her to these in our consideration of the question above—how does desire participate in practical reasoning? The following example of a practical syllogism comes from the *Nichomachean Ethics*.

> Dry food is suitable for any human
> Such and such food is dry
> I am human
> This is a bit of such and such food . . .

Anscombe notes that Aristotle often leaves the conclusion off these syllogisms, but also assumes that the conclusion is an action—e.g., taking some of the dry food. In this, Aristotle's syllogisms reflect that practical reasoning takes place where there is deliberation that leads to action.

Her discussion implies that desire enters in Aristotle's first premises where something desirable is mentioned. That desire is included in the form of desirability characterization is itself important. It means that the desire is already formed as the end or objective for someone (or class of persons) in particular. In Anscombe's terms, this end is the

44 Anscombe, *Intention*, 58ff. For the classic discussion of the distinction of practical and theoretical wisdom, see Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics* 1139a, 35–1141b, 20.

object for which we calculate.[45] This is distinct from having a separate premise that merely asserts "wanting." If desire's inclusion were represented by a premise of the form "I want X," we are more likely to conceptualize desire as raw feeling—i.e., the very picture of desire we found problematic in Hume's psychology.

And what does Aristotle's way of including desire—i.e., through the characterization of something as the end of a particular agent in the first premise—tell us about how practical reasoning differs from demonstration? A good way to answer this is to turn to the ways in which modern commentators have tried to make sense of the practical syllogism. Again, it is largely agreed that the conclusion of such syllogisms is an action. "But how does an action follow from an argument or series of inferences?" these commentators ask. The presupposition of such commentators, as well as their driving concern, is that a conclusion only follows from premises when it is entailed by them, as in, "All men are mortal, Socrates is a man . . . ." In other words, the one who accepts the premises *must* accept the conclusion or be guilty of inconsistency.

A first way of constructing the premises of a syllogism with the hope that the conclusion—an action—will follow by way of entailment is to add a premise asserting the reasoner's desire, e.g., "I want X," or "Let me attain X." This ploy stems from the thought that the conclusion is entailed by the premises only when these include everything necessary for the conclusion to follow. So, if the reasoner goes through the steps in the syllogism above, and adds further, "I want what is good for me," the conclusion of taking some of the food in front of him would seem to be entailed. To accept all the premises and not take some of the food would be inconsistent.

Yet Anscombe suggests that giving the agent's desire the role of a premise in this way distorts, rather than illuminates, the form of practical reasoning. Clearly desire must have some role in a bit of reasoning that leads to action. Yet when we compare a premise modeled on this tactic—e.g., "I want dry food"—to Aristotle's own—"Dry food is suitable for human beings"—we notice that in the former, "wanting," is a somewhat random concept or operation. In other words, it is not located in a specifiable agent. We have "I" as the subject, but unlike Aristotle's syllogism, we do not know in what aspect this "I" wants what

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45 Anscombe, *Intention*, 65.

it wants. In Aristotle's first premise, the agent is reasoning according to its nature as a human being—i.e., according to what is good for it.

Other first premises found in Aristotle mention that some thing or situation "is suitable for" or "is pleasant to" some person or class of persons. For instance, in my rendition, "A cow of type X is suitable for Idahoan farmers." Such premises describe the desirability of the object in relation to the agent who desires it. The desired thing is desired in light of its being desirable by someone in particular—that is in light of its significance as someone's end. By contrast, the tactic of adding a premise of the type "I want . . ." as would Hume, suggests that desire can be made intelligible independently of who wants it and why. In Anscombe's words, "the role of 'wanting' in a practical syllogism is quite different from that of a premise. It is that whatever is described in the proposition that is the starting point of the argument must be wanted in order for the reasoning to lead to any action."[46]

That is to say, wanting is not an additional fact that, together with those named in the other premises, account's for a bit of reasoning's concluding in an action. Rather, wanting is integral to the very form of practical reasoning. If a bit of reasoning does not come to fruition in an action, it is not practical but reasoning of some other sort. In short, the trouble with adding a premise of the kind, "I want X," is that it achieves entailment at the cost of implying that desire is an additional fact and not integral to the reasoning itself. The form of reasoning represented here leads to the conception of desire as essentially arbitrary, the problem with which Hume got us started.

A second way that modern commentators have sought to make the conclusion follow by entailment involves giving the premise an imperative form with the implication of a rule that applies without regard to moment or circumstance.

To illustrate this tactic, we might turn to an Aristotelian syllogism. (It is Anscombe's attempt to bring Aristotle's "dry food" syllogism up to date.)

> Vitamin X is good for all men over 60
> Pigs' tripes are full of vitamin X
> I am a man over 60
> Here's some pigs' tripes . . .

46. Ibid., 66

The conclusion assumed by Aristotle is the action of taking some of the pigs' tripes: in verbalized form, "So, I'll have some." Yet what is *entailed* by the premises is not, "So I'll have some," but rather, "this bit of food is of a type good for me." This conclusion, in other words, is not an action, but the truth of a proposition.

In order that the action ("So, I'll have some") be entailed, the second tactic recommends changing the first premise to read, "Every man must eat all the pigs' tripes he ever sees." Given this premise, the conclusion "So I'd better have some" does indeed follow by way of entailment. The person who accepts it, together with the other premises, will be inconsistent if he or she does not go on to eat the pigs' tripes.

Anscombe shows how constructing a premise such as this distorts the character of practical reasoning by drawing out what would be implied in an agent's accepting such a premise. Consider the following example.

> Do everything necessary to avoid having a car crash
> Wearing one's spectacles while driving facilitates avoiding
>   crashes
> I am driving
> Ergo: I'll put on my spectacles

A little reflection reveals that for a person to hold such a premise in ordinary life will yield myriad and incompatible conclusions, such as "driving immediately into the private gateway on your left and abandoning your car there, and driving into the gateway immediately on your right and abandoning your car there."[47] The agent who accepts the premise must also accept the conclusion. But the agent who accepts the premises is also insane.

This problem, however, helps us see the role of circumstantial context in practical reasoning. Only in a narrowly defined context of deliberation—such as in the case of a special art (e.g., cooking)—can a rule of the form "Always do such and such" sensibly operate. Thus, Anscombe suggests, we ought to interpret Aristotle's further example of a first premise, "Always taste sweet things," as, say, a rule among undercooks. In other words, it is the sort of rule that holds only in a narrowly defined context. For when the same premise is given as one

47. Ibid., 59.

for life in general, we can only imagine a person "having a sweet tooth to the point of mania."[48]

Practical syllogisms that give an imperative first premise in order to achieve entailment suggest that the rules of practical deliberation can be more general, and independent of circumstantial context, than they can be in fact. Only when further circumstances are brought in do rules of this sort become intelligible. We ought, further, to see the form of Aristotle's syllogisms—their resistance to the temptation to make the conclusion logically compulsory—as a reflection of his ability to recognize the distinct character of practical reasoning.

To sum up, Anscombe draws from Aristotle's practical syllogisms two related points about the form of practical reasoning. First, its inclusion of desire in first premises that mention a desirable end, rather than a mere assertion of wanting, implies that practical reasoning is always the reasoning of some particular agent. An agent's perceptions of what is significant for it constitute the desired object as such. Second, by resisting the temptation to draw up first premises that are indiscriminately binding in order to achieve entailment, his syllogisms imply that circumstantial context is essential to the form of practical reasoning.

The necessity of context raises a question about how practical syllogisms are made valid. Insofar as proof syllogisms can gain their validity without going outside the premises, the implication is that practical syllogisms represent a distinct kind of reasoning. Yet the question of how the practical syllogism is made valid is only fatal if we assume with the modern commentators that the validity of a conclusion is equal to entailment by the premises. That Aristotle resists the temptation to construct the premises such that the conclusion is logically compulsory reflects his discernment that practical reasoning by its very nature requires being located in a particular person in given circumstances and with a particular objective. These last are what make the reasoning sound.

We might summarize the distinction of practical reasoning in relation to standard demonstrative reasoning succinctly. Whereas the validity of the latter is described in the formula "he who accepts the premises must accept the conclusion." The former accords with the dictum, "he who does the conclusion must accept the premises."

48. Ibid., 65.

But let us return to our starting point by asking, "What does the structure of Aristotle's syllogisms tell us about the concept of wanting (the nature of the thing desired)?" That is, what do we learn from it about how desire is incorporated into practical reasoning and thus into ordinary inferential practices? Further, how does this discussion help us overcome a Humean psychology where reason and passion are incommensurable?

The problem, as Hume posited it for us, was that wanting seemed to be something without form or limit. (If one can want anything, how can the concept of wanting submit to an order of reasons?) The preceding discussion has shown us that wanting crucially depends upon a context. The form of the practical syllogism, with premises describing something as suitable or pleasant for someone, implies that practical reasoning depends upon a particular practical reasoner. The agent gives desire its intelligibility.

Anscombe shows us another method for bringing to light the character of practical reasoning and how desire is incorporated into it. In a sense, this way examines more closely what is involved in Aristotle's first premises.

Here Anscombe looks to the basic formulation of practical reasoning as "calculating what to do." She finds such calculation to be implicit in the descriptions of intentional actions we treated above. There we discovered that reasons for action depend upon a kind of description that gives something as the "end" or "object" (objective) with a view to which the action is done. We further followed Anscombe in finding that multiple descriptions of this kind that apply to a single action are related as means to end—a further description in the series expresses the intention "with which" the previously described thing was done. Furthermore, a series of description so constituted serves not only to unite the descriptions (intentions) involved but also to place a *limit* upon them. As she put it, in asking for the description of an intention with which an action was done we eventually arrive at "a break." At this point, a further question about the action at hand ("why?" or "what for?") simply changes the subject. It embarks on a new series.

What makes these descriptions a type of calculation is their teleological structure. To have an "end" for one's action means more than responding in a spontaneous way to a stimulus. It is to see your action as something calculated to bring about what you affirm to be a good—

that is, to see it as a "means." To see one's action as "fitting" in order to bring about some desired end is to choose it through deliberation.

To break all this down once more, we may say that the descriptions, and the serial order among descriptions just mentioned, reflect two basic features of practical deliberation. First, practical reasoning is essentially reasoning with a view to action, and therefore presumes desire on the part of the agent. Second, the descriptions and their means-to-end order reflect that practical reasoning is essentially teleological. In other words, they reflect the form expressed by "in order to . . .", and always point to some object or end that the agent wishes to achieve. These two features are importantly related in that the desire implied by the descriptions is the desire for some "end," the object of calculation or deliberation.

The inclusion of desire in the descriptions and their ordering as outlined above can be seen in the close resemblance of the question that furthered the series—"why?"—to a question referring to desire—"what for?" or "what do you want to do that for?" Consider how easily, in a typical series, one can be substituted for the other.

> Why are you pumping?—to replenish the cistern . . . What do you *want* to do that for?—so they have plenty of water in the house.

The presence of desire indicates that practical reasoning is not mere speculation, or a classroom exercise. Rather, it is reasoning inseparably connected to action.

On the other hand, the teleological character of such a series of descriptions highlights the fact that the desire here is desire for an end taken by the agent to be good (i.e., "desirable" or worth desiring). That is to say, such a desire presupposes deliberation and choice on the part of the agent. It is not desire in the sense of unspecified feeling.[49]

In this light, we can see that the first premises of Aristotle's syllogisms offer something like the ultimate term—the "break"—in a series

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49. Here Anscombe's explanation of how primitive "reasoning's" of the form "I admire him, so I shall sign his petition" require further formation in order to specify an object of desire ("I admire him . . . what is the best way to express that . . . by signing") make the point clear. Once you have the concept "expression of admiration," the agent's desire *under that description* can be the object of practical deliberation. "We must always remember that an object is not what what is aimed at *is*; the description *under which* it is aimed at is that under which it is *called* the object" (ibid., 66).

of such descriptions. For example, if you ask me what I am doing, and I reply "eating some bran cereal," you might go on to ask "what for?" Suppose I respond, "because it is dry food." You may then reasonably ask, "Why do you want to eat dry food?" At this point, drawing on Aristotle's first premise, I reply "Because I am human and dry food is suitable for my kind." Here, a further question, "what do you want to eat suitable food for?" starts a new set of questions about new issues. My answer at this stage has been a desirability characterization. It makes no more sense to ask "why do you want what is suitable for you?" than to ask "why do you desire what is desirable?"

When desire is taken up into practical reasoning, it is no longer raw, spontaneous energy. It takes on a certain order or form. And we have just seen how the form of practical reason is reflected in descriptions characteristic of everyday life. Desire is not something "added on" to the life of action. The naturalistic fallacy—that it is impossible to pass from judgments of "is" to "ought"—is predicated upon a falsely narrow conception of "nature."

It is perhaps useful to note, moreover, how the way we have been describing the logic of desire is different from giving it a theoretical "foundation." The very nature of the first premises in Aristotle's syllogisms—offering "desirability characterizations"—implies that the logic of desire is not reducible to one form or order of inference that can be abstracted from particular instances. The admitted vagueness of these premises ("desirability characterizations") means rather that what makes these syllogisms valid lies partly outside what can be made explicit in their premises. That is, it lies in the background context of social practices. The undeniable role of background is implied in the means-to-end series of action descriptions discussed above as well. Identifying where the "break" in a series of descriptions comes requires an appreciation of what convention and circumstance require. This is why Aristotle believed practical reasoning to be bound up with practical wisdom (*phronesis*) or skill at relating general rules to particular cases.

Rather than supplying a foundation for desire in a rational model, we are better off saying that Anscombe's view of the nature of practical reasoning integrates desire into reason by locating it within the context of a social form of life. This social "home" is both constituted by our actions and gives them intelligibility. In other words, desires gain their form from participating in practices of reason-exchange that are

irreducibly social, as well as by persons who inhabit roles of a socially-recognized sort.[50] At the same time, Anscombe gives us a more holistic picture of the person where the boundaries between the operations of reasoning and desiring are less fixed.

Conclusion

We are now in a position to grasp the kind of problem that provides the lens through which I will be examining subsequent moral theorists in this book. Simply stated, theories of moral judgment are influenced by the way they conceive of practical reason, and accounts of practical reason, in turn, are both informed by and rest upon a conception of the psychology of agency. This is the significance of Anscombe's first thesis, where she asserts that it will not be profitable to do moral philosophy until we can work out a more adequate philosophical psychology. She means, in other words, that before investigating moral judgment we must get an adequate account of what a human being is in its practical, "moral" life. Such, after all, is the kind of being for whom moral judgments pertain. As I go on in the next chapter to consider Charles Taylor's anthropology and account of practical reason, I will ask how these relate to the social nature of human being and rationality—i.e., in Anscombe's terms, whether it attends to the descriptions of actions sustained in a socially particular form of life. In other words, I will ask whether his accounts of these matters are "political." In a related sense, I will ask whether Taylor's view adequately appreciates the distinct "practical knowledge" to which Anscombe drew our attention.

   I hope to show that Hauerwas's work represents a response to the challenges Anscombe raises for ethics, and that he has in fact learned what Anscombe has taught about practical reason. Her significance for theological ethics as regards practical reason connects through him.

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50. There is a further way in which Anscombe finds a "home" for desire in her discussion in Intention, and it is also quite helpful. She notes that replies to the question "what do you want?" or "for what do you want X?" can be given a more particular form when they are grounded in concrete situations of observable actions. She notes repeatedly in sections 36–37, that "the primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get.*" Thus, there is a sense in which expressions of want are open to public scrutiny through ordinary observation. This is thus another way to show that there is a social pressure on "wanting" to be intelligible.