



ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE

# Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe 1919–2001

ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE, who became a Fellow of the British Academy in 1967 and an Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1989, was born in Ireland on 18 March 1919 and died in Cambridge on 5 January 2001. She is survived by her husband Peter Thomas Geach, formerly Professor of Logic in the University of Leeds, and their seven children. There are also several grandchildren.

Elizabeth Anscombe was the third child and only daughter of Allen Wells Anscombe who in 1919 was serving with a British regiment stationed in Ireland. Captain Anscombe and his wife Gertrude Elizabeth (née Thomas) were living in Limerick when their daughter was born. After the end of the First World War and the spell in Ireland Allen Anscombe returned to his civilian career as a schoolmaster, teaching physics at Dulwich College.

## I. Academic life

Elizabeth Anscombe attended Sydenham School and then went up to St Hugh's College, Oxford with a scholarship. In 1939 she was awarded a Second Class in Honour Moderations and in 1941 a First in Literae Humaniores. The main elements in the courses for Hon. Mods. and Lit. Hum. are the philosophy, history and literature of ancient Greece and Rome.

Between 1941 and 1944 Anscombe was a research student first in St Hugh's College and then at Newnham College, Cambridge. In 1946

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Somerville College, Oxford elected her to a Research Fellowship and in 1964 to an official (teaching) Fellowship. In 1970 she was appointed to the Chair of Philosophy in the University of Cambridge.

Anscombe received many academic honours. She was an Honorary Fellow of Somerville College (from 1970), of St Hugh's College (from 1972) and of New Hall, Cambridge (from 1986); an Honorary Doctor of Laws of Notre Dame University, Indiana (1986), Honorary Doctor of Philosophy and Letters, Navarra University, Spain (1989) and Honorary Doctor of Philosophy, University of Louvain-la-Neuve (1990). In 1978 Austria awarded her its Ehrenkreuz Pro Litteris et Artibus. In 1979 she received the Prize for Research from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

In Oxford, Elizabeth Anscombe gave tutorials to Lit. Hum. undergraduates studying logic and/or the works of Plato and Aristotle and supervised graduate students enrolled for the degrees of Doctor of Philosophy and Bachelor of Philosophy. Her lectures and seminars, usually held in Somerville, were attended by visiting academics from Europe and America as well as students of the university. In 1971, shortly after her appointment to the Chair of Philosophy in Cambridge, she gave an Inaugural Lecture entitled 'Causality and determination' which is reprinted in the second volume of her *Collected Papers*. Some of her Cambridge lecture courses also dealt with causation, others with philosophical psychology and issues in ethics and political philosophy.

Those who have studied with Anscombe include Eric D'Arcy, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Hobart; Nicholas Denyer, of Trinity College, Cambridge; Michael Dummett, FBA; the photographer Flash Q. Fiasco; Rosalind Hursthouse, formerly of the Open University and now at Auckland; Hide Ishiguro, formerly at Columbia University and now at Kyoto; Anthony Kenny, FBA; Anne Lonsdale, President of New Hall, Cambridge; and Onora O'Neill, Principal of Newnham College.

One of Anscombe's duties as professor was to chair meetings of the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club. In this role she attempted, too often unsuccessfully, to enforce the club's Rule 5 which 'in the interests of discussion' asks that papers be kept short. Invited speakers were told of 'the 30-minute rule' but a surprising number chose to ignore it.

## II. Personal life

There can be no doubt that the two most important events in Elizabeth's personal life were her marriage to Peter Geach and her conversion to

Roman Catholicism. It is not possible to fully understand her intellectual development without coming to know something about her religious faith and something, too, about her husband.

Peter Geach collaborated with Elizabeth Anscombe in three publications: an edition and translation of works by Descartes; the book *Three Philosophers*; and the editing and translating of Wittgenstein's *Zettel*.

On the other hand the philosophical trajectories of husband and wife turned out to differ in some respects. Geach is a distinguished logician, an authority on McTaggart and the author of four books on the philosophy of religion; Anscombe wrote about metaphysical questions, was an authority on Wittgenstein and published important papers on ethics.

Anscombe discovered Catholicism at the age of 12 when she read a book about the works and sufferings of recusant priests in Elizabethan England. (It was fitting, therefore, that her memorial service in Cambridge took place in the Church of Our Lady and the English Martyrs.) She began taking instruction, from a Dominican, during her first year in Oxford and became a Catholic in 1938. Meanwhile Geach too was taking instruction from the same Dominican. The two new converts met for the first time at a Corpus Christi procession in the summer of 1938. They were married in London, in the Brompton Oratory, on Boxing Day 1941.

Peter Geach is the only child of a Polish mother and a Cambridge-trained teacher of philosophy stationed in India. After the couple separated the wife left India and Peter was born in England. He lived in this country with his Polish mother and grandparents until he was four, after which the father was given custody. As a teenager the younger Geach was instructed in logic by Geach senior, using Neville Keynes' *Formal Logic* and Bertrand Russell's *Principia Mathematica* as textbooks. In later years when Peter decided to learn Polish he found that he had retained faint memories of the language from his infancy. He has published philosophical papers in Polish and has visited Poland on a number of occasions, sometimes accompanied by Elizabeth.

Geach had conscientious objections to the Second World War and was directed to forestry work. For six years following the end of the war he was engaged in private research, during which period he published 15 papers on logic. His occupations in those years included helping to care for his children and since he had no objections to the task he was angered when a headmistress tried to commiserate with him about his supposedly difficult home life.

Between 1941 and 1945 Elizabeth was carrying out philosophical

research in Oxford and Cambridge and Peter was working in a pine forest in the south of England. In 1946 Elizabeth moved into lodgings in Oxford while Peter and the children, Barbara and John, remained in Cambridge. When Elizabeth acquired the tenancy of 27 St John's Street, Oxford, Peter and the children moved there too, though he soon afterwards accepted a lectureship in Birmingham. Because of these separations Anscombe and Geach liked to say they practised telegamy, marriage at a distance—which was something of an exaggeration because they were together at weekends and during university vacations.

In 1951 Elizabeth inherited a small rural property from her mother. It was in Shropshire and consisted of two houses, some fields and a little wood on the edge of a stream. One house was occupied by a tenant farmer and the other is a primitive building in which Peter and Elizabeth and their children spent the holidays. Its non-modern inconveniences included a cooker fuelled with paraffin, a log fire for heating, and oil lamps for light. When I saw the place in the 1970s the lavatory (outdoors) had no door and no roof. One of the bedrooms doubled as a storeroom and contained a lot of horsey gear, including a side-saddle that had belonged to Elizabeth's mother. The family owned horses and everybody could ride though Peter chose not to. The children rode rather badly, I thought, in that they were often unable to make their ponies obey them. They assumed, I think, that the human–horse relationship is necessarily a battle of wills. The animals became confused and recalcitrant because of the shouting, the yanking at the reins, the sawing at the bits and the rocking to and fro in the saddles. Elizabeth was a better rider though somewhat too relaxed; she said that she once fell off a horse when it was standing still.

A distinguished Oxford don has described the way in which the Geach children exhibited their lack of horse sense, or perhaps their addiction to practical jokes, on a day when they suggested they teach him to ride. The young people put the poor man up on a mare and led him into a field occupied by an amorous stallion whose attempts to make love to the mare must have seriously inconvenienced her rider.

During the winter the tenant farmer kept an eye on the house and the horses, in the spring he planted potatoes for the family to dig up and eat in the summer, and each December his mother sent a Christmas goose down to Oxford or Cambridge.

Elizabeth's world-wide circle of acquaintance consisted mainly of academic folk, including a sprinkle of learned priests. She was willing to discuss philosophy, or anything else, with people of different faiths or no

faith at all, but tended to avoid ex-Catholics who had openly disavowed their former beliefs.

Some of her admirers were clerical bigwigs. Pope John Paul II became a friend after meeting Peter and Elizabeth in Poland in the days before he was Pontiff. The Cardinal Archbishop of Amargh, Cahal Daly, who gave a moving homily at her memorial mass, wrote in 1994:

I had both chastening experience of Elizabeth's frankness and encouraging experience of her generosity. Once she wrote to me in reference to something I had written about Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and bluntly and rightly named it the nonsense that it was. Another time, in reference to something which I wrote about British moral philosophy, she was so kind as to say to a novice philosopher such as I was that she wished she had written a sentence she cited from my piece . . . I felt hugely flattered.

Another friend, Michael Dummett, wrote an account of what it was like to study philosophy with Elizabeth Anscombe:

Tutorials with her, which I was lucky to have for a brief period, were more stimulating than with anyone else. They might last for three hours (one hour is the regulation time). If I wrote anything with which I thought she might agree she attacked me more vigorously than ever. I owe an immense amount to her.

An obituary notice by her Somerville colleague, Philippa Foot, included the following words:

We were close friends in spite of my atheism and her intransigent Catholicism . . . she was an important philosopher and a great teacher. Many say 'I owe everything to her' and I say it too on my own account.

Nicholas Denyer, a former pupil, said:

To me she was kindness itself.

Susan Haack wrote:

My most vivid memory of Elizabeth is of New Hall lunches [in Cambridge], from the time when I was a very young Fellow, and she newly arrived to take up her chair. She would arrive at lunch, look around to see if I was there, and then say something provocative like 'nobody ever wrote anything interesting in the philosophy of science', knowing I'd rise to the bait . . . I got indigestion but also a valuable informal philosophical education.

Cora Diamond attended Elizabeth's Oxford lectures and later met Anscombe and Geach at conferences. She said:

I have never seen anyone as visibly thinking as Elizabeth did. If you asked a question she would think for two or three minutes and then say something much deeper than you had thought the question implied.

Some of my own early experiences with Elizabeth Anscombe resembled Cardinal Daly's first encounter with her. For instance I once wrote an essay which I privately thought was pretty profound; after I had read this production to Elizabeth she rose from her chair, walked across the room, turned around and said, in a sepulchral voice: 'I'm afraid **That Kind of Stuff** is no good at all'. It was not my impression that she intended to cause pain. Anyway, tutors, like doctors, should tell the truth.

It has to be admitted, though, that Anscombe was not invariably benign. (Is anyone?) To one or two people she said things which she must have known were harsh and unkind.

Elizabeth was a fearless individual and cared little for public opinion. Moreover she had a knight, Peter, whose fury when she was attacked in print was something to behold.

The intellectual climate of the late twentieth century was such that Anscombe's views on sexual morality provoked more disagreement than her arguments about justice in war. Her paper 'Contraception and chastity', which appeared in *The Human World* in 1972, inspired two rejoinders: a polite one from Peter Winch and an unusually impolite one from two Cambridge dons, Michael Tanner and Bernard Williams.

In her essay Anscombe had said that societies which accept contraception will come to accept abortion and the downgrading of marriage; that Christian authors, both Catholic and Orthodox, have repeatedly condemned the practice; that the use of contraceptive barriers is akin to perversions such as sodomy; and that philosophical considerations about the nature of intention show that even oral contraceptives must be condemned.

Winch took up the last point, arguing that preventing conception by taking a pill which reduces fertility is no different from taking advantage of the naturally occurring infertile safe period. For the intention is the same in each case. Anscombe rejected his objection, though (strange to say) she once remarked to me that eating a natural food which temporarily reduced fertility might not be wrong, just as it is not wrong to prolong lactation.

Tanner and Williams accused Anscombe of happily accepting 'rotten thinking' when it comes from Pope and Church. They said her reasoning was 'offensive and absurd'. They accused her of sophistry and bluffness and shallowness and of being ridiculous. They stated that her essay included 'higher order absurdity, or even indecency'. They asked 'how dare she assert that some homosexual [acts] are "rewardless"?' They said 'it becomes increasingly difficult . . . to suppress feelings of outrage at

some of her attacks on the spirit of the age'. Elizabeth addressed her response, rather wryly, to 'my friendly neighbourhood philosophers'.

A few years later, when Anscombe published a short paper on voting in *Analysis* (1976), someone wrote a response entitled 'Lies, damned lies and Miss Anscombe'. The editor quickly apologised for allowing the statement that Elizabeth Anscombe was a damned liar, and worse than a damned liar, to appear in his journal; the author, however, churlishly refused to apologise for the insult.

Many anecdotes have been told about Elizabeth Anscombe. A particularly silly story was perpetrated by a German author who stated, in print, that Elizabeth married Peter Geach 'in spite of her former relationship with Wittgenstein'. The implication seems to be that Anscombe had a romantic or sexual relationship with Ludwig Wittgenstein before her marriage. The suggestion is silly because she was already married to Peter Geach when she first met Wittgenstein; moreover it is widely believed, and is probably true, that Wittgenstein's romantic and sexual inclinations, if any, were not directed towards women. On the other hand it is clear that he admired Elizabeth's abilities and regarded her with affection. He once said to a friend, a sculptor, that she had 'ein schöner Kopf', a beautiful head.

An anecdote recorded by John Geach, who had it from his parents, concerns an occasion when Wittgenstein called on the Principal of Newnham College and tried to persuade her to extend Elizabeth's one-year research studentship. He disliked wearing ties but donned one for his visit to Newnham. On meeting Elizabeth and Peter a few hours later he pointed to the tie and said 'Look what I have done for you!' Newnham's archives confirm that Elizabeth spent more than one year in residence but not, it seems, because her studentship had been extended. It would appear that the Principal of Newnham, unlike many other people, felt able to ignore the demands of Professor Wittgenstein.

Another story was told by a Proctor's 'bulldog' (or whatever those officers are called in modern times). Bull-dogging for a Proctor is a part-time job and the man's main work was as a clerk in the university's administration building. In 1970 one of his duties was to make arrangements for the payment of salaries or wages to newly appointed people. The recently appointed Anscombe wandered into his office, no doubt wearing her usual slightly scruffy slacks and tabard, and was greeted with the query 'Are you one of our new cleaning ladies?' There was a slight pause before she replied ('quite softly', he reported) 'No, I am the



Professor of Philosophy.’ ‘She wasn’t angry, she didn’t go through the roof’ (he said) ‘but *I* wanted to sink through the floor.’

Elizabeth always wore trousers. She was once accosted by a university Jack-in-office who insisted that ladies must wear dresses when giving lectures. Thereafter, it is said, she carried a plastic bag containing a skirt to the lecture room, pausing outside the door in order to pull on the garment—*over* the trousers of course.

Finally there is the true story about Elizabeth’s final *viva voce* examination. Because of her intense interest in philosophy she tended to neglect the rest of the syllabus and consequently flunked the Roman History paper. The philosophy examiners wanted to give her First Class Honours but the Roman History man objected, and objected even more, no doubt, when his questions in the *viva* met with a blank face. He eventually asked: ‘Miss Anscombe, can you name a governor or procurator of a Roman province? *Any* Roman province?’ to which she replied ‘No’, having forgotten all about Pontius Pilate. The historian, in despair, asked: ‘Miss Anscombe, is there *any fact at all* about the history of Rome which you would like to comment on?’ But again the answer was ‘No’ and a mournful shake of the head. However the other examiners insisted that Elizabeth deserved a First and a First was duly awarded. For that to have happened her philosophy papers must have been very very good indeed.

### III. Philosophy: translations

Anscombe first became well known as a translator. Her work on Wittgenstein’s *Philosophische Untersuchungen* was begun a year or two before he died (in 1951) and the English version of Part I was produced under his guidance. In 1949, as part of that project, he arranged for her to spend some time in Vienna so that she might become familiar with the nuances of the German language as it is spoken in that city.

Wittgenstein’s Will named three literary executors: Elizabeth Anscombe, G. H. von Wright, and Rush Rhees.

The Oxford publisher Basil Blackwell described receiving a visit in 1952 from ‘a young woman’ who offered him the opportunity to publish a work by Wittgenstein. He of course agreed and in 1953 the German text of *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (edited by von Wright) was published *en face* with G. E. M. Anscombe’s translation into English. This edition

of the *Philosophical Investigations* has been reprinted many times. There are also editions of the German original alone and the English version alone.

Anscombe's other Wittgenstein translations include *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*; *Notebooks 1914–1916*; *Zettel*; *Philosophical Remarks*; *On Certainty* (with Denis Paul); and *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology I*.

Translators are easy targets and are not often praised. Yet some of their works have never been surpassed but have become classics in their own right. C. K. Scott Moncrieff's version of *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is one example and Constance Garnett's translations of Chekov's short stories are others. In my opinion Anscombe's version of the *Philosophical Investigations* is just such a classic. There will be new translations in the future but it is not likely that hers will be superseded.

#### IV. Philosophy: original books and essays

Anscombe's original works comprise two books, *Intention* (1957, 1963, 2000) and *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (1959) and part of a third, *Three Philosophers* (1961, with Peter Geach). She also published approximately 70 papers, 48 of which were reprinted in 1981 in a three-volume collection. Essays written during the last two decades of her life appeared in journals and books published in England, the United States, Austria, Italy, Latin America, France, and Germany.

Elizabeth Anscombe gave an account of her earliest philosophical ideas in the 'Introduction' to *Collected Papers II*:

My first strenuous interest in philosophy was in the topic of causality . . . As a result of my teen-age conversion to the Catholic Church . . . I read a work called *Natural Theology* by a nineteenth-century Jesuit. . . . I found it most convincing except for two things. One was the doctrine according to which God knew what anyone would have done if, e.g., he hadn't died when he did. . . . I found I could not believe this doctrine: it appeared to me that there was not, quite generally, any such thing as what would have happened if what did happen had not happened . . . But it was the other stumbling block that got me into philosophy. The book contained an argument for the existence of a First Cause, and as a preliminary it offered a proof of some principle of causality according to which anything that comes about must have a cause. The proof had the fault of proceeding from a barely concealed assumption of its own conclusion . . . I thought it just needed tidying up. So I started writing improved versions of it . . . each one of which I then found guilty of the same error.

These topics remained in her head all her life. Causality, the second ‘stumbling block’, is the subject of her inaugural lecture, it is mentioned in the book *Intention* and discussed in the essays on Hume in *Collected Papers I* and throughout Part 2 of *Collected Papers II*.

Elizabeth Anscombe spent the best part of seven years as Wittgenstein’s friend and student and several decades soaking herself in his ideas. A different kind of pupil might have written nothing except commentaries on the ideas of the master but that was not the case with Elizabeth who published only a handful of items about the works of her Mentor. Moreover there are some notable differences between her writings and his. Wittgenstein hardly ever referred to the philosophers of the past but Anscombe, an Oxford-trained scholar, produced important essays on the Greeks (Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle), on mediaeval authors (Anselm, Aquinas) and on Hume and Brentano and Frank Ramsey. Secondly, Wittgenstein’s general remarks on first-order moral questions were for the most part somewhat brief and cryptic; nothing could be less like them than Anscombe’s essays about war and murder and sexual morality. As to ethical theory, Wittgenstein stated in the *Tractatus* that ‘there can be no ethical propositions’. His insistence that the world can only be described by science now looks very vulnerable—partly because of Anscombe’s papers ‘Modern moral philosophy’, ‘On brute facts’ and ‘On promising and its justice’.

However she did follow Wittgenstein in certain other matters. She rejected the idea that the nature of mind can be discovered through introspection, a mode of enquiry which he had often denounced. She agreed with his view that in order to solve a philosophical problem it is useful to acquire an overview of ordinary concepts and to ask the questions ‘How is such and such a concept learned? How do children acquire it?’ and ‘What concepts would we have if certain very general features of the world were radically different from what they are?’

It would be wrong to suggest that either the philosophy of Wittgenstein or the philosophy of Anscombe contains nothing except descriptions of language. It is true that some philosophers who came after Wittgenstein stopped short at the first question, that is, they asked only ‘What do we say?’ but not ‘How did we acquire those concepts?’ and certainly not ‘What might we have said if . . . ?’ Thus conceptual elucidation degenerated into linguistic analysis, a tedious enterprise.

The following sections will each describe one of Anscombe’s books and some of her most characteristic papers.

### *Intention*

The American philosopher Donald Davidson has described *Intention* as the most important contribution to the topic of practical deliberation since Aristotle.

The difference between intentions and predictions and motives and causes, Anscombe argues, can be best understood if one considers the several different ways in which actions are explained and justified.

She introduces the idea of non-observational knowledge, an example being knowledge of the causes of certain rather special movements of one's body: 'as when I say why I gave a start'. The cause in such cases is a mental cause and cannot be analysed as constant conjunction. Mental causation is not important in itself but needs to be distinguished from intention and also from motive. 'Motive' is a wider notion than 'intention' and can look to the past as well as to the future (as in the case of revenge). What would intention be like if there was no such thing as an expression of intention? In such case the answer to the question 'Why did you . . . ?' would always be: 'For no particular reason'. If there are intentional actions there must be chains of reasons.

Is there any such thing as *the* intention behind a particular action? Here Anscombe introduces the idea of 'under a description', which she wrote about again in 1979, in a paper with that title. Her imaginary example has become well known; it can be paraphrased as follows: Suppose a man is employed by a group of people to pump water from their well to their house. Suppose the well has been poisoned by someone else who seeks the deaths of the people in the house. Suppose the man at the pump knows nothing about the poison or the would-be poisoners. Is there one single correct description of his, the pumper's, action? Many things are going on: he is using his muscles, casting a shadow, pumping water, making a clicking noise with the machine, earning his wages, and causing the deaths of the people in the house. Anscombe says all these descriptions are correct if they are true. But we can only locate his *intention* by asking him the right kind of question, which is a why-question or a set of why-questions falling within a certain range. The range of questions must be such as to exclude answers which refer to mental causes such as for example 'I am marching (or pumping) to keep time to the music of the band'. As to 'how' questions, those will not locate his intention but might locate ordinary causal conditions.

In short, the man's action, in the case as described, will be intentional under some descriptions (pumping, earning) and not intentional under others (clicking, poisoning).

**Collected Papers I: 'Parmenides, contradiction and mystery'**

This essay dissects an argument formulated by Parmenides from which he thought to reach several conclusions, all of which are incredible. The argument runs:

It is the same thing that can be thought and can be  
What is not cannot be  
Therefore what is not cannot be thought.

(In this inference the idea of being covers states of affairs, i.e., what is the case, as well as the existence of things.)

Anscombe was interested in the argument for its own sake. But it is reasonable to suppose that she was also aware of its bearing on the last sentence in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: 'That whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent.'

She remarks that the second premise of Parmenides' argument is incredible because it implies: If *p* is false it is *necessarily* false.

As to the first premise, she notes that it will be false either if that can be thought which cannot be or if that can be which cannot be thought. She is interested in the second alternative because mysteries seem to be states of affairs which can exist but which 'cannot be thought'. Mysteries 'cannot be thought' in so far as they cannot be described in sets of sentences which are demonstrably consistent.

If Parmenides' first premise is true then only what can exist can be thought of. But that seems to be refuted, she says, by the fact that it is possible to draw pictures of impossible states of affairs.

Can we ever say of a particular proposition 'this is true but what it states is irreducibly enigmatic'? Or should such an assertion be dismissed on the grounds that 'whatever can be said at all can be said clearly'? The second alternative implies the conclusion that all mysteries, including of course the central mysteries of Christianity, are mere illusions.

Anscombe does not deny that conclusion in so many words. She says, instead, that there doesn't appear to be any ground for the view that nothing can be the case which cannot be grasped in thought—'It is a sort of prejudice.'

**Collected Papers I: 'The early theory of forms' and 'The new theory of forms'**

Plato's early theory of forms is the version to be found in *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Phaedo*. Anscombe in her discussion of the early theory compares forms and particulars first with types and tokens and then with

classes and their members. According to the notion of class as it occurs in modern logic classes are not to be identified with their members: in modern logic a class is something besides the things of which a certain predicate holds—which is just how Plato thought of the forms.

In the second paper, which is largely exegetical, Anscombe argues that Plato revised the theory in his later works (*Parmenides*, *Sophist*) as the result of coming to consider the possibility of there being forms not only of the beautiful, the large, the tall and so on but also of being and not-being, oneness and number, sameness and difference.

### Collected Papers II: the essay about C. S. Lewis

In 1946 Elizabeth Anscombe read a paper to the Oxford Socratic Club which was subsequently printed in *The Socratic Digest*. This paper, a discussion of chapter 3 of C. S. Lewis's book *Miracles*, was her first publication in a philosophical journal.

Lewis himself was present at the meeting of the Socratic Club.

In *Miracles* Lewis had attempted to prove that there is an inconsistency between the theory that human thought is always the product of natural ('irrational') causes and a belief in the validity of reason. Anscombe pointed out that the non-rational is not the same as the invalid or the irrational and that physical states such as delirium are not irrational causes but the causes of irrational thoughts. Lewis's idea that thoughts must be either caused by physical events or caused by reason is based on a confusion between the concepts of reason and cause which arises because the expressions 'because' and 'explanation' are both of them ambiguous. Lewis, she said, held that there is a single fixed place for 'the explanation' so that when the place is filled the subject of explaining a thought has been closed.

The different descriptions of what went on at the meeting are incompatible with one another and show the dangers associated with anecdotal history. Lewis's biographers, Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, were not present but described the events nevertheless:

The meeting is said to have been the most exciting and dramatic the Socratic has ever seen. According to Derek Brewer, who dined with him two days later, Lewis was 'deeply disturbed' and described the meeting with real horror. His imagery was all of the 'fog of war, the retreat of infantry thrown back under heavy attack.' . . . Even the contestants said different things: Lewis told Walter Hooper that he was not defeated, and Miss Anscombe told Hooper that he was. One certain result of the disagreement was that Lewis revised chapter 3 of *Miracles* before it was published as a Fontana paperback in 1960.

Anscombe's own account is rather different:

The meeting . . . has been described by several of his friends as a horrible and shocking experience which upset him very much. Neither Dr Havard (who had Lewis and me to dinner a few weeks later) nor Professor Jack Bennett remembered any such feelings on Lewis's part. My own recollection is that it was an occasion of sober discussion of certain quite definite criticisms . . . some of his friends seem not to have been interested in the actual arguments or the subject-matter . . .

She remarked, too, that the manner in which Lewis carried on his side of the discussion showed that he was open-minded and quite prepared to adapt his ideas. The revised version of chapter 3 of *Miracles*, she said, is more interesting and more profound than its original.

### ***Collected Papers II: 'Causality and determination'***

Is everything which is caused determined? Anscombe's replies to that question depend partly on examples, partly on a discussion of indeterminism in physics and partly on considerations resembling those of chaos theory.

She begins by asking: does 'cause' mean 'determine'? And answers No, because nothing is caused until it happens, whereas an event can be determined in advance. 'Determined' means 'pre-determined'.

Her other questions and answers are as follows:

What does the word 'cause' mean? There are many different kinds of cause, hence 'cause' is highly general. It could be added to a language which already had a lot of special causal concepts (e.g. *make*, *burn*, *hurt*, *carry*, *push*) but not to one which had none.

Are causal connections necessary connections? No—there are necessitating causes like rabies (you can't survive if not treated) and also non-necessitating causes like the Geiger counter which detonates a bomb but only when the random action of radioactive molecules happen to affect it. Anscombe says that here *the causation itself* is 'mere hap', adding 'and it is difficult to explain this matter any further'.

Are effects always dependent on their causes? No. When two different causes are able to cause the same effect the effect is not dependent on either.

Are 'causal laws' exceptionless generalisations? No, because 'Always, given A, B follows' is never true. To make it true you would have to explicitly exclude an endless, i.e., an impossible, list of the circumstances in which A does not cause B. The most neglected topics in philosophical speculation about causality, she says, are *interference* and *prevention*. It is supposed that

one can always give a finite list of exceptions to a generalisation, beginning with the word ‘unless’—but that is a mistake.

Are laws of nature generalisations about what always happens? No. Such laws as, for example, ‘The freezing point of mercury is . . .’ never have the form ‘Always when A occurs, B follows.’

The accuracy of measurement is not infinitely extendable. Classical Newtonian mechanics cannot be used to calculate real results such as the movements of balls in a pinball machine because in such cases the multiplicity of impacts leads to loss of information.

It is one thing to say that there are clear-cut situations (e.g., in astronomy) in which the outcome is determined and another to suppose that in the hurly-burly of many crossing contingencies whatever happens next must have been pre-determined.

Newton’s system is deterministic but does not entail determinism. The paths of the planets are determined but the paths of animals are not.

To see choice—any choice—as a predetermining causal event now appears as a naive mistake in the philosophy of mind.

Either Kant’s reconciliation of freedom and physical determinism is gobbledegook or its account of freedom is wholly inaccurate. For physical indeterminism is indispensable if we are to make anything of the claim to freedom.

Yet physical indeterminism, though indispensable, is not sufficient, because freedom is the power to act according to an idea. And what is the subject of un-pre-determinism in indeterministic physics? Not something moved by ideas.

The physical haphazard might be the only physical correlate of human free action and the voluntary actions of animals. But neither freedom nor voluntariness is the same thing as the physical correlate. And they are not effects of the correlate, they are not produced by it.

### ***Collected Papers III: ‘On brute facts’***

This essay has an obvious bearing on the so-called is–ought problem, which indeed it might be said to have solved.

Anscombe argues that certain facts can be ‘brute’ relative to other facts and also less brute, or as it were non-brute, in relation to a third set. She illustrates her idea with examples.

Hume said that truth consists in agreement with matters of fact or agreement to relations between ideas. Now, the truth of the statement ‘X owes the grocer £1 for potatoes’ consists neither in relations between ideas



(as that 100 pennies make one pound) nor with what Hume would have allowed to be facts (as that the buyer asked for potatoes and the grocer supplied them and sent a bill). So if Hume was right the statement ‘X owes the grocer . . .’ is neither true nor false. Nor does the statement ‘X owes . . .’ state an *extra* fact or an *extra* relation that can be deduced from the ones referred to (in brackets) above.

Yet it is clear that ‘X owes . . .’ might be true or might be false. How so? Anscombe answers: Its being true consists in the ‘brute facts’ (about the movement of potatoes and so on) in the context of an institution—the institution of buying and selling. She points out that exactly the same thing is true of the facts themselves as they have been described. For events only count as ordering and supplying in the context of an institution, a piece of paper only counts as a bill in the context of an institution. And this means that we can’t say that ‘owes’ refers to a special mysterious non-factual relation because then we’d have to say the same thing about ‘supplies’, which would be absurd.

‘The grocer carried potatoes from A to B’ is a brute fact in relation to ‘The grocer supplied X with potatoes’ which is brute in relation to ‘X owes the grocer money for potatoes’. At the other end we can say that ‘X owes . . .’ is brute in relation to X’s not being bankrupt.

The implied conclusion is that there is no simple distinction between the factual and the non-factual, no simple difference between facts and values.

### ***Collected Papers III: ‘Modern moral philosophy’***

We might ask: what facts would Anscombe regard as ‘brute’ relative to ‘X (morally) ought/ought not do such-and-such’? An answer can possibly be gleaned from the essay ‘Modern moral philosophy’: perhaps the injunction against murder is non-brute in relation to a brute fact about the will of God.

Anscombe makes four suggestions.

One is that the differences between modern moral philosophers, from Sidgwick to the present day, are quite unimportant. Presumably Wittgenstein’s *Lecture on Ethics* (1929) is one of the works she intended to include among those described as modern.

Another suggestion is that philosophers should stop trying to do moral philosophy ‘until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology . . .’.

Thirdly, the concepts of the morally right and wrong, and the moral sense of ‘ought’, should be jettisoned because they are hangovers from a

lost view of ethics, the view that morality stems from a divine law-giver and His law.

Finally, we should look again at Aristotle because he studied the virtues rather than the moral sense of 'ought'.

That last suggestion has been taken up by Philippa Foot, Alasdair Macintyre, Rosalind Hursthouse and N. J. Dent, all of whom, in their various separate writings, have re-introduced the philosophical study of virtue after a considerable interregnum.

### ***Collected Papers III: the two papers on promising.***

In 'On promising and its justice' Anscombe says that it is *prima facie* difficult to give a non-paradoxical explanation of the need to keep promises. For if a promise is to be genuine the agent must know that he is making a promise and that seems to create a paradox like the following: if a certain type of bottle was only a genuine example of the type when it had a picture of itself on it then the picture would have to have a picture which would have to have a picture . . . ad. inf. Here Anscombe decides that . . . '[the bottle example] need not trouble us if we say that to think something is *also* to think that you think it' (my italics).

Promising and its justice, she argues, can be explained in terms of two kinds of necessity. The first she calls 'Aristotelian necessity', the other is 'language game necessity'. Actions and institutions have 'Aristotelian necessity' when they are needed in order to produce human good. Human beings invented promises and contracts and testaments because it is necessary for human good that we should sometimes be able to bind another person's will without recourse to force or fear or love. There are for example many good states of affairs which cannot be gained by force; you cannot use simple physical force to make people look after your children for you when you are in prison or dying. The other kind of necessity appears when someone asks: 'But why should I keep promises?' The answer to that question can go no further than a description of the language game.

In 'Rules, rights and promises' (1978) Anscombe remarks that the expression 'you must not . . . because . . .' (and its translations) are accepted and understood by everyone who speaks a human language. She names such expressions 'stopping modals' and in another paper 'The source of the authority of the State' she uses the notion to explicate the concept of rights.

***Collected Papers III: the essays on war***

Anscombe's papers on warfare deal with the traditional Christian doctrine of justice in war, with the Catholic doctrine of double effect and with the nature of intention. Two of the three essays strongly condemn pacifism.

Towards the end of 1939, during the period of the so-called phoney war, Elizabeth Anscombe, then aged 20, and another student, Norman Daniels, published a pamphlet with the title *The Justice of the Present War Examined: a Catholic View*. Anscombe's section is called 'The war and the moral law'. She outlines seven conditions needed before a war can be just and insists that even if only one is absent then the war is morally forbidden.

Anscombe predicted, correctly, that the Allies would eventually use aerial bombardment to attack the civilian populations of Germany. She inferred this from the fact that the British government stated that it would adhere to international law, i.e., would not attack civilians, but 'reserved the right "to adopt appropriate measures" if the Germans should break it'. Attacking civilians, she argued, is a mortal sin, it is murder, and the fact that the enemy too is a murderer does not make it all right. Her other prediction, that the Allies would impose an unjust peace on Germany, turned out to be wrong. And she did not foresee the Holocaust.

The premises of her arguments come from Aquinas and, according to a footnote, from '... any textbook of moral theology'—implying, rather naively, that the authors of Catholic textbooks never disagree with one another about the topic of warfare. Another footnote refers to a papal encyclical which was translated first in the Vatican and then by Mgr Ronald Knox. Anscombe remarked 'comparing these with the Latin original we have often found cause to alter the translation ourselves'. One cannot but admire the insouciance of that word 'often'.

The subtitle of the pamphlet, 'A Catholic View', caused the Bishop of Birmingham to tell the young authors that only works carrying an *imprimatur* may rightly be called Catholic. He did not give it an *imprimatur*.

Another paper about war, 'Mr Truman's Degree', was published privately in 1957. Its origin was as follows: in 1956 the University of Oxford proposed that Harry S. Truman be given an honorary degree. Elizabeth held the view that President Truman's decision to drop atomic bombs on Japanese centres of civilian population was very wicked. She decided to make a formal protest at a meeting of Congregation. She asked the Senior Proctor how she might do that, and he referred her to

the Registrar, who informed the Vice-Chancellor of her intentions, as was his duty. She says that ‘cautious enquiries’ were made as to whether she had ‘got up a party’, to which she said No. It seems that word got round, so that very many dons turned up to the meeting, some in order to support Mr Truman, others to foil what they suspected of being a mysterious plot concocted by mysterious females. When the proposal for the honorary degree was put to the meeting Elizabeth said *non placet* (it does not please), the formula used both for demanding a vote and for voting No. Alan Bullock, of St Catherine’s College, had the task of defending Mr Truman in a speech at which Anscombe later poked some rather grim fun. When the matter was put to the vote a large majority were in favour of giving the President his degree. Four people voted against: Elizabeth herself, her colleagues Philippa Foot and Margaret Hubbard and a man with a fine war record, the historian M. R. D. Foot, *croix de guerre*. In 1957 Elizabeth published the pamphlet which explains the reasons behind her *non placet*.

A third paper, ‘War and murder’, first appeared in 1961 in R. J. Butler (ed.), *Nuclear Weapons; a Catholic Response*. Anscombe later wrote: It was ‘written in a tone of righteous fury. . . . I don’t much like it, not because I disagree with its sentiments but because, if I was torn by a *saeva indignatio*, I wish I had the talent of a Swift in expressing it.’ Her tone of voice in this paper is more like the Prophet Jeremiah’s than Jonathan Swift’s.

### Papers published after 1981

Papers published by Elizabeth Anscombe after 1981 include ‘On private ostensive definitions’ in the *Proceedings of the 6th International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Vienna, 1982; ‘Experience and truth’ in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1988; ‘Wittgenstein, whose philosopher?’ in *Philosophy*, 1990; ‘Why Anselm’s proof in the Proslogion is not an ontological argument’ in *The Thoreau Quarterly*, 1985; and ‘Russell or Anselm?’ in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 1993. There are also essays on first-order moral questions including ‘Were you a zygote?’ in *Philosophy* (supplementary volume), 1984 and ‘Why have children?’ in the *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 1990. Much of *Euthanasia and Clinical Practice* (Linacre Centre, London, 1982) was contributed anonymously by Anscombe. ‘Making true’ was published in the collection *Logic, Cause and Action* (Cambridge, 2000) and an essay on Proclus and Wittgenstein entitled ‘Grammar, structure and essence’ in *Arete* (Peru, 2000).

Manuscripts which have not yet appeared in print include her Stanton Lectures delivered in the Divinity School in Cambridge in the 1980s.

Elizabeth's last years were clouded by misfortune, first when her daughter Barbara suffered a dreadful illness, and then when she herself was involved in a terrible accident. In 1997 a car driven by her son More in which she was a front seat passenger collided head-on with an American vehicle travelling in the opposite direction and on the American side of the road. More's sternum was broken on the steering wheel and Elizabeth's skull was fractured on the windscreen. After an operation to remove clots of blood from her brain she appeared to be making a slow recovery and felt able to accept an invitation to give some lectures in Lichtenstein but after delivering only three of her prepared talks she fell ill again and had to return to Cambridge. From that time on her health gradually worsened, her memory grew erratic and she began to suffer from delusions.

Elizabeth Anscombe died peacefully in Addenbrooke's hospital in the presence of her husband and four of their children. Her funeral mass took place in the Dominican chapel in Buckingham Street, Cambridge, and her grave is close to Wittgenstein's in St Giles' cemetery in Huntingdon Road.

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