Anscombe, Foot and Wittgenstein: Aristotelian Necessities and Forms of Life

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Elizabeth Anscombe (1919-2001) and Philippa Foot (1920-2010) met at the end of the 1930s. They were amongst the first women students at Oxford University. Together with a couple of other female students (Cf. Teichman 2019: 2-3, Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022, Lipscomb 2021), they disapproved of the way philosophy, and more particularly moral philosophy, was taught at British universities at the time, namely as a sort of pure confrontation of logical and formal arguments with no considerations for real life concerns such as fascism, the war and bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. 'It was clear that we were all more interested in understanding this deeply puzzling world than in putting each other down', Mary Midgley (2013) reports. According to Mac Cumhaill and Wiseman (2022), their female condition led these women to be more in touch with the practical realities and necessities of everyday life and concerns (Aucouturier 2022). This special position as women in a men's world led them to see problems that their colleagues would not consider and to approach philosophical issues from a less abstract point of view.

That is why Anscombe and Foot reinvented moral philosophy by resisting the common stances of their time (notably advocated by Alfred J. Ayer) that moral philosophy could be a mere abstract matter of conceptual analysis and that no objectivity in morality was possible. Together with Iris Murdoch, they wanted to be able to claim that:

> "Trend is a good man and Rowse is a bad man." [...] Elizabeth, in her report to the Mary Somerville Fellowship Committee, proposed to "work out [her] doubts about what is called analytical philosophy". Philippa wanted to show that "it can't just be a matter of booing and hooraying: when we say there was something absolutely wicked about the Holocaust, this is not just a personal decision, decision not to do such things, or an expression of disapproval. There is something objective here." (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 182-183)

This is one of the reasons why they ended up promoting a kind of naturalism inherited from Ludwig Wittgenstein, and more precisely from his neo-Aristotelian readings. This naturalism takes seriously his remark that '[c]ommanding, questioning, storytelling, chatting, are as much part of our natural history

as walking, eating, drinking, playing' (PI 1953: 25). It proposes to understand human action, and more specifically the normative aspects of human action, in the context of such a 'natural history'. It notably suggests understanding the value judgements regarding human action in continuity with what humans do and need in general, in accordance with their 'form(s) of life' (PI 1953: 23), i.e. not only as 'social', but also as 'natural' beings. In other words, when it comes to understanding what people do and why they do it in reference to their (human) form of life, there is not gap of any sort between what we would commonly call their 'natural' needs and behaviours ('walking, eating, drinking, playing') and other 'conventional' habits and practices (notably those requiring the possession of language) such as 'commanding, questioning, storytelling and chatting'. That kind of naturalism opens the way for a feminist approach of philosophy by grounding its perspective on the point of view of the variety of human forms of life while not renouncing to a common humanity and dignity as the source of morality.

To address this quest for objectivity in morals, Philippa Foot (2001: 15) appeals to what Anscombe calls 'Aristotelian necessities', namely 'that without which good cannot be or come to be' (Anscombe 1969: 15). Which entails that a proper understanding of this naturalism requires a proper understanding of the workings of the concept of 'good' and more specifically of the concept of 'natural goodness', that is of what is good for a certain being in accordance with its form(s) of life. In the human case, this last concept of a 'form of life' needs to be understood as reflecting what Wittgenstein calls 'our natural history'. 'Aristotelian necessities' and 'form(s) of life' are closely linked concepts, since an Aristotelian necessity is meant to grasp what is good or what it is good to do for a certain kind of individual with a certain form of life, in a certain environment.

In what follows I explore the extent to which 'Aristotelian necessities' may be seen as a useful concept for a renewed form of 're-enchanted naturalism', to echo John McDowell's (1995) concept of a 'disenchanted' or blind naturalism (i.e. blind to the teleological determinations of what happens notably in relation to human practices). A re-enchanted naturalism would consider not only the blind determinations of changes that happen in the world, but also the domain of human practices, of what humans do, of human actions (Aucouturier 2021), that is of our 'natural history' in Wittgenstein's sense.

To explore the extent to which Aristotelian necessities can help conceive of a re-enchanted form of naturalism, I shall first briefly consider why it is presented as an alternative to an empiricist or post-empiricist account of the origins of morals. I then turn to the concept of 'good' as it appears in the characterization of Aristotelian necessities, notably in relation to what Foot calls 'natural goodness'. In the third part, I examine how some facts can create duties and how humans can come to learn non-natural necessities, such as rules, rights and promises. In the fourth and final part, I consider the extent to which such a concept of 'natural goodness' can account for 'what is good for a human being' and as such be a good candidate not only to understand our 'natural history' but also to provide, as it aims to do, some kind of objectivity for ethical and normative judgements and duties.

1. Against Psychologism

Foot and Anscombe's quest for objectivity in morals is first of all a reaction to what is wrong with the philosophical tradition that seeks to root moral judgements either in our psychological inclinations (as David Hume and his empiricist followers would tend to do) or in a number of abstract rational principles deducted from pure reason (as Immanuel Kant advocates). Anscombe famously undermines deontological conceptions of morality in 'Modern Moral Philosophy' (1958) by showing that their concept of duty is dependent on the alleged existence of a legislator that dictates and enforces the moral law. But, in our secularized societies, in the absence of such a legislator, this conception can no longer ground moral duty. Besides, the idea that moral principles could be deducted from pure reason rests on a mistaken conception of human action, completely abstracted from will, desires, and circumstances (Anscombe 1957, 1958, 2005).

This criticism however does not lead to reduce people's attitudes and motives to mere psychological inclinations (Foot 2001: 37) and, consequently, to prevent any possible rational discussion over what is or would be good or bad to do in given circumstances, or even whether some actions (such as killing innocent people) can be absolutely right or wrong. Moral judgement cannot be a mere matter of individual or even cultural preferences. But neither can it be deducted from pure reason. For, again, morality has to do with actions and therefore with intentions, will, desires and emotions.

Even if values are not facts existing independently of us human beings, we must recognize that certain things are good for us, just as it is good for a certain plant to receive enough sunlight or for a

lioness to know how to hunt. So, certain standards of good (not exclusively moral) are dictated to us by the kind of being we are, by our 'form of life'. Foot and Anscombe argue that, far from being purely relative, moral values are in continuity with all those things that are good for human flourishing, including certain natural needs and social behaviours. This is a form of naturalism in morality, as it involves understanding norms in continuity with a certain form of life, with our 'natural history'. Therefore, moral philosophy not only requires a philosophy of action, but it also requires a proper understanding of what is good or bad for a human being. Moral philosophy must seek a third path between deontologism and psychologism.

According to Foot, 'natural goodness' is meant to do the job that psychological terms were meant to do in post-empiricist philosophy of psychology. But the sort of naturalism in morality she argues for, inherited from Anscombe and Wittgenstein, has nothing to do with the naturalism fashionable in certain contemporary areas of analytic philosophy. The latest kind of naturalism is mostly an *epistemological* and/or an *ontological* thesis, according to which all phenomena in the world must be explainable by means of the natural sciences (epistemological thesis), and that consequently all these phenomena (including social or psychological phenomena) must be considered as at least related to natural, physical or biological phenomena (ontological thesis). By contrast, what we may, from now on, call Aristotelian naturalism does not think, as for instance evolutionary theory would, in terms of the adaptation of a species to its environment. It rather considers, on an individual scale and in relation to its form of life, what is good for an individual in an environment (both from the point of view of its physical constitution — e.g. the roots of an oak tree — and of its actions). By contrast with 'natural selection', the idea of 'natural goodness' is *teleological*. It is introduced in relation to certain *purposes*, and therefore to certain norms specific to the interests of an individual or group of individuals according to their form(s) of life.

This raises the question of the extent to which such an approach aims to account for or describe facts about moral life and the logical operation of concepts relating to the evaluation of action, and to what extent it aims at grounding morality — to what extent it seeks to ground morality in the absence of the religious foundation that Anscombe notes has disappeared at the beginning of 'Modern Moral Philosophy' (1958: 27). In other words, to what extent does it seek elsewhere what Hume and his successors placed in inclinations, and what Kant placed in reason, i.e. grounds for moral judgement?

2. Good: The Grammatical Stance

Following in Anscombe's footsteps, Foot aims to show that moral philosophers are wrong to think that there is a separate realm of morality, of moral values and moral judgements, which should be accounted for by a theory of how these moral values come to exist on the background of empirical facts. Hence 'Aristotelian naturalism' requires some kind of continuity between the uses of the adjective 'good' as it applies to any life form, including the human life form:

> My general thesis is that moral judgement of human actions and dispositions is one example of a genre of evaluation itself actually characterized by the fact that its objects are living things. (Foot 2001: 4)

By contrast with the empiricist tradition in philosophy, Anscombe and Foot reject the idea of a separated domain of values and moral judgement, while facing the difficulty of accounting for the existence of such values and of their importance in human practices. To do so, they propose to start from considerations that fall short of the traditional Humean distinction between facts and values, between descriptive and evaluative judgements, which has more or less structured all contemporary debates in moral philosophy. In order to undermine the fact-value distinction and break with the image of a gulf between facts and values, they display some *continuity* between what we may call factual normative judgements and ethical or moral judgements proper, and eventually end up dissolving the very distinction.

The observation of such continuity is not the result of some epistemological argument regarding human cognitive capacities and faculties. It is not the result of a psychological investigation but rather appears in the very logic of the language of evaluation and normative judgement, in the 'logical grammar of evaluations' (Foot 2001: 2). This notion of 'grammar' is borrowed from Wittgenstein: uncovering the rules of language use, the differences and similarities between various sensible uses of evaluation (cf. Wittgenstein 1953). But, more precisely, Foot takes as the starting point of her work an observation made by Anscombe's husband, Peter Geach, about the adjective 'good' in his 1956 article 'Good and Evil':

> [H]e puts 'good' in the class of attributive adjectives, to which, for example, 'large' and 'small' belong, contrasting such adjectives with 'predicative' adjectives such as 'red'. Such a colour word operates in independence of any noun to which it is attached, but whether a particular F is a good F depends radically on

> what we substitute for 'F'. [...] Seen in the light of Geach's distinction, thoughts about good actions, which are fundamental to moral philosophy, appear with thoughts about good sight, good food, good soil, or good houses. (Foot 2001: 3-4)

For example, we can determine whether a piece of cloth is red simply by seeing what colour it is, but we cannot determine whether it is good until we have decided what it is meant to be good for. So, the criterion of goodness will depend at least in part on the noun to which it is attached. This is a logical or grammatical feature of the use of 'good'.

The philosopher's task, as Foot indicates in the second part of this quotation, is to *show that there is no logical gap* between evaluations such as 'it is good to eat' or 'it is good to help someone in distress' or, to consider Anscombe's own examples, 'the athletes should keep in training, pregnant women should watch their weight, film stars their publicity, [...] one should brush one's teeth' (Anscombe 1957: §35) and *to display the logic of these evaluations*.

But the point is not self-evident. Or at least it does not follow directly from Geach's remark, which does not aim to conceal the varieties of good or goodness but rather to indicate that their properties are relative to the noun to which the adjective refers. If this is a grammatical remark about the adjective 'good', it is not enough to show the continuity that Foot and Anscombe wish to demonstrate, but simply the dependence of the use of the adjective on the noun that accompanies it. The task remains to specify a type of evaluation (or use of 'good' and 'bad') that applies equally to e.g. good sight and good deeds:

> My constructive task is therefore to describe a particular type of evaluation and to argue that moral evaluation of human action is of this logical type. (Foot 2001: 3)

Foot's approach is therefore logical. It aims to describe the logic of what she calls 'the "natural" excellence and defects' (Foot 2001: 3) of living beings. As the statement of her thesis, quoted above, indicates, the type of evaluation she is interested in concerns *living* beings as opposed to, e.g., a good washing machine or a good bicycle. Her argument is based on a grammatical remark about the meaning of good in that case:

> [T]here is no change in the meaning of "good" between the word as it appears in "good roots" [for an oak tree] and as it appears in "good dispositions of the human will". (Foot 2001: 39)

The grammatical understanding of this thesis echoes both Anscombe (1957: §1) and Wittgenstein (1953: 551-570) on the relation between meaning and use. Their point is that we should not confuse the fact that the same word has several *meanings* with the fact that it has several *uses*. To describe the meaning of a concept or a word in Wittgenstein's sense is to display the grammatical (logical) features of its various uses in a variety of languages games (i.e. situations of use). The grammar (meaning) of the concept exhibits the resemblances between occasions of use, how it functions in various contexts of use and how these uses are relates. Grammar in this philosophical sense resembles school grammar in that it points some features characteristic of the meaning of a word. Uses are examples, concepts in their environment, contextual applications of concepts.

In other words, the uses of a word are not necessarily as many meanings of that word, if they obey the same grammar, i.e. the same logic of use. Once again, the logic is the one highlighted by Geach (1956) and on which Foot bases the thesis of the book: namely, that in order to determine what is good, we must first know what this quality is attributed to. It is to the extent that the standards of what is good varies with what is qualified as good, that 'good roots' are not the same thing as 'good dispositions of the will'. But Foot argues that we have not necessarily *used* 'good' in two different *meanings* here. We have simply made two uses of 'good' that are characteristic of the adjective: one to qualify the roots, the other to qualify the will.

What distinguishes the kind of evaluation that focuses on a living being from that which focuses, for example, on a good bicycle, is the type of purpose involved in the evaluation. A bicycle is a good bicycle if it works well and takes me safely and comfortably where I want to go; the bicycle serves *my* interests, it has no interest of its own in being a good bicycle. On the contrary, the good roots of an oak-tree serve the interests of the oak-tree itself, they are good for it and not for some function whose purpose is outside its interests.[1]

It should be noted that the thesis according to which 'there is no change in the meaning of "good" when it is used in the "good roots" and in the "good dispositions of the human will"', has important

[1] This is an important distinction for the philosophy of action and a precondition for the introduction of a non-metaphorical use of the notions of voluntary and intentional. We can only attribute intentions and a certain knowledge of what one is doing to an agent who acts spontaneously and according to her own interests. For example, we cannot say of a car's stalling that it expresses the car's intention to stop (Anscombe 1957: §2).

consequences. Notably, it undermines the distinction between fact and value, which purports to distinguish a 'pure' domain of morality, of values properly speaking, of the good will, from the domain of facts. By pointing to the logical unity of the variety of uses of the adjective 'good', the classic distinction between fact and value, which has been a stumbling block in debates on moral philosophy by urging us to distinguish between what is specifically morally good, is called into question in at least two ways.

First, to assert a continuity of meaning between 'good roots' and a 'good will' is to assert that there are facts that are normative: roots are good in relation to a norm that makes it possible to say what good roots are for an oak tree, for an orchid, etc. It is to assert that there is a continuity of meaning between 'good roots' and a 'good will'. Second, it entails that there is no *intrinsically moral* norm, but rather a continuity between the normativity of what is good for a form of life (including the human form of life) and what is 'morally' good (to do or aim at) for a human being.

To support these two theses, however, it is not enough to note certain similarities in the use of 'good' and 'bad' in evaluations of living beings or their parts; it is necessary to be able to account for the practical consequences of these evaluations. This is where the concept of an Aristotelian necessity comes into play. Indeed, the advocated continuity in the meaning of 'good' which underpins the concept of 'natural goodness' further requires to understand how, in the domain of human action, such evaluative judgments (as 'good' and 'bad') may create obligations. It is only insofar as they do, that they are liable to undermine the fact-value distinction. This is what leads Anscombe, in her texts on moral philosophy, to consider the concept of 'duty'. How can a certain situation or a certain value judgement create a duty? To what extent does this duty constrain the actions of living beings? These questions will occupy the next part of this paper.

3. Fact and Duty

3.1 The Relativity of Brute Facts

According to Anscombe, certain facts create obligations of their own accord: if I have ordered potatoes and you have delivered them to me, I must pay you for them; I have incurred a debt to you (Anscombe 1958: 27). This is how, according to Anscombe, a 'factual' obligation can arise from a banal situation in everyday life. It would be very awkward if (based on Hume's conception of knowledge and truth)

one said the following to the grocer: 'Truth consists in *either* 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 does not apply to such a proposition as that I *owe* you such-and-such a sum.' (Anscombe 1958: 28).

Of course, one could refuse to pay one's debt, but one would still owe it to the grocer. This type of duty, like that associated with a promise, emerges from a certain form of social life and even from certain recognised and shared conventions. It is nonetheless a duty relating to a *de facto* situation. In the same way, the need for the lioness to hunt stems from the fact that she needs to feed herself and possibly her cubs in order to survive and for them to survive. It must hunt to feed itself and its young. This is certainly a natural and unconventional necessity, but it is a duty relating to a factual situation.

The point here is not to enter into a discussion with a defender of the fact-value distinction, who would probably not accept this second example as a refutation of the distinction, because what she means by 'value' is not just any kind of duty, but a specifically moral duty (if there is such a thing). However, if we manage to uncover the continuity between the example of the debt and that of the lioness, then we will have weakened the distinction by calling into question, as Anscombe does, the very idea of a *logically* separate domain of moral good or duty.

Of course, the case of debt is more interesting for the philosopher because it is much more complex, insofar as it involves specific circumstances, than a 'simple' vital need. Indeed, a set of facts can only consist in contracting a debt in given circumstances, and only if the protagonists in the affair are both familiar with the rules of exchange. This is why Anscombe puts forward the idea that the 'brute' character of a fact is always *relative*:

> If xyz is a set of facts brute relative to a description A, then xyz is a set out of a range some set among which holds if A holds; but the holding of some set among these does not necessarily entail A, because exceptional circumstances can always make a difference; and what are exceptional circumstances relatively to A can generally only be explained by giving a few diverse examples, and no theoretically adequate provision can be made for exceptional circumstances. [...] Further, though in normal circumstances, xyz would be a justification for A, that is not to say that A just comes to the same as "xyz" [...]. (Anscombe 1958: 28)

So, under normal circumstances, ordering potatoes and having them delivered means incurring a debt. Of course, it is always possible to consider a society in which exchange does not exist, or where

exchanges are gifts; or a society in which we could order potatoes and have them delivered, without thereby incurring a debt (or not a debt in the sense that we understand it in a market society). We could also imagine a misunderstanding, where the person who ordered the potatoes thought they had won them; and so on. The fact remains that in such-and-such circumstances these *facts* create an *obligation*. And a fact is brute relatively to a description of the obligation that it creates (or another kind of norm to which it is relative). In other words, the relativity of brute facts should be opposed to the idea that there are absolutely brute facts, or descriptions that as such refer to brute facts. The bruteness of a fact is always dependent on another description from which its bruteness is derived. Thus the existence of a debt, is dependent on a set of descriptions of facts that created the debt, a contract, a promise, etc. as well.

3.2 Learning Practical Necessities

When Anscombe introduced the notion of the relativity of brute fact, her concern was precisely to understand how we come to incorporate duties and obligations which are not the product of causal or straightforwardly *natural* necessities, but which belong to the domain of rules (moral or other). In a Wittgensteinian spirit, Anscombe suggests that learning these duties and obligations does not simply amount to the learning of more or less explicit conventions, but that it is a kind of *training* in Wittgenstein's sense (PI 1953: 5). Her analysis of the way in which a duty can emerge from a given situation enables us to understand the possibility of a continuity between a duty related to a causal or 'natural' necessity and a duty related to a rule, moral or otherwise:

> Think of the game played with very small children where several players pile their hands on top of one another. Then, if one of them doesn't pull his hand out from the bottom, you say "You have to put your hand on top"; if he pulls it out too soon you say "No, you can't pull it out yet, so-and-so has to pull it out first". [...] At the beginning the adults will physically stop the child from doing what they say he "can't" do. But gradually the child learns. With one set of circumstances this business is part of the build-up of the concept of a rule; with another, of a piece of etiquette; with another of a promise; in another of an act of sacrilege or impiety; with another of a right. (Anscombe 1978: 101)

What Anscombe has in view in these remarks on the learning of what she calls the use of 'stopping modals' is precisely the observation that there is no logical discontinuity between a necessity or a duty that comes from physical barring and a necessity or duty which is learned in accordance with a rule or

convention. Moreover, she adds, the second kind of duty is no less important and no less characteristic of a form of life than the earlier one. Our learning of duty, Anscombe suggests, is not based solely on abstract conventions, but is a direct continuation of physical impediment. In other words, there are forms of duty that are purely conventional and do not come from any 'natural' necessity, such as keeping one's promises. However, this does not mean that it is any less important or any less 'vital' (to use Foot's naturalist vocabulary) to respect these types of duty. The notion of 'Aristotelian necessity', which Foot (2001: 15) borrows from Anscombe, is meant to grasp this idea:

> Aristotle in his dictionary says that in one sense of 'necessary' the necessary is that without which good cannot be or come to be. (Of course the 'cannot' in that sentence, as he later indicates, is not the negation of the possibility that is correlative with this sense of 'necessary', but of the possibility that is correlative with absolute or 'simple' necessity; for *this* it does hold that 'necessarily p' implies 'p'.) He is evidently right; cf. 'Is your journey really necessary?' (Anscombe 1969: 15)

An Aristotelian necessity is not, then, a *causal* or even a *logical* necessity[2] in the sense that something would either compel us causally (as in the case of physical force) or by means of some kind of logical compulsion to act in such and such a way — in the sense that 'necessarily p' implies 'p'. In other words, it is always possible not to do what is necessary, e.g. not to comply to a rule. An Aristotelian necessity is a form of practical necessity[3] which concerns the fulfilment of the goals of an agent in accordance with her (human, women, child, or perhaps postman, nurse, etc.) form of life. This is the reason why Anscombe takes as an example the war-time posters in train stations which challenged the would-be travelers with the following question: 'Is your journey really necessary?', urging the public not to make unnecessary use of the railway, just as we are now advised to be cautious with our use of energies, such as electricity or not to travel by plane. These necessities imply no compulsion to turn off the lights or not to fly, they are not even an order to do so, but they enter into a reasoning about what would be good to do given the circumstances, which condition some of our behaviors and actions.

The norms dictated by Aristotelian necessities must exert their normative power while remaining descriptive, i.e. while merely stating what is good for, say, a human being, without exerting any kind of

[2] See Anscombe's discussion with G.H. Von Wright on practical reasoning (Anscombe 1989).

[3] See Anscombe on 'practical reasoning' (1989) and 'practical truth' (1965, 1989), cf. Aucouturier 2021.

causal or logical force on her or his actions. It is precisely in this sense that Aristotelian necessities have nothing to do with the pressure of natural selection. Not only because natural selection ought to be blind to any teleological determination, but also because natural selection is not supposed to be something that imposes any norms on anyone. It just happens. It just exerts its *causal* power on the living.

4. Beyond the Non-Naturalness of Aristotelian Necessities

An Aristotelian necessity, as Foot puts it, is 'that which is necessary because and in so far as good hangs on it' (Foot 2001: 15). According to Anscombe, e.g., 'getting one another to do things without the application of physical force is a necessity for human life, and that far beyond what could be secured by [...] other means' (Anscombe 1969: 18). And here comes the 'necessity' contained in the concept of an 'Aristotelian necessity':

> What ways are there of getting human beings to do things? [...] [I]f the procedure has the role of an instrument in people's attainment of so many of the goods of common life, the necessity that people should both actually adopt the procedure, i.e. often give undertakings; and also go along with the procedure, i.e. tend to accept the necessity expressed in that reaction and also treat this as a *rule* — this necessity is a necessity of a quite different sort: it is the necessity that Aristotle spoke of, by which something is called necessary if without it good cannot be attained. (Anscombe 1969: 18-19)

The question now is whether it is possible to root moral obligations, and which ones, on these Aristotelian necessities. This is what Foot following Anscombe intends to show:

> These "Aristotelian necessities" depend on what the particular species of plants and animals need, on their natural habitat, and the ways of making out that are in their repertoire. These things together determine what it is for members of a particular species to be as they should be, and to do that which they should do. And for all the enormous differences between the life of humans and that of plants or animals, we can see that human defects and excellences are similarly related to what human beings are and what they do. (Foot 2001: 15)

'What human beings are and what they do': in other words, their form of life. In the example of the lioness, we see how a certain necessity can arise from a certain situation and certain needs of the species. We can also understand the necessity of rules, such as keeping one's promise, in the light of an examination of human forms of life. But, as Anscombe rightly points out, this does not quite give us

what philosophers, who wish to preserve the idea of a specific domain of goodness and badness, call 'morality':

> *[I]f* the term "unjust" is determined simply by the facts, it is not the term "unjust" that determines that the term "wrong" applies, but a decision that injustice is wrong, together with the diagnosis of the "factual" description as entailing injustice. (Anscombe 1958: 40)

This seems to echo the logical requirement of a standard of right and wrong for a certain form of life, which emerged from Geach's analysis. To account for it, Foot characterizes 'vice as a kind of natural defect'. But this solution also reveals a tension between the primitive dimension of the notions of nature and form of life and the attention paid to the workings of language and logic as part of human's 'natural history'. On the one hand, we must be able to tell from the description of a given situation in a set of circumstances whether it is just or unjust, for example. On the other, we must be able to say that because it is fair, it is good, and because it is unfair, it is bad in relation to human form(s) of life. In other words, we must be able to refer to the form(s) of life in question and what is good for it. To do so, Anscombe suggests we can get an understanding of a standard of the good in the Aristotelian 'norm' of the virtuous human being:

> It might remain to look for "norms" in human virtues : just as man has so many teeth, which is certainly not the average number of teeth men have, but is the number of teeth for the species, so perhaps the species *man*, regarded not just biologically, but from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice in regard to the various departments of life — powers and faculties and use of things needed — "has" such-and-such virtues: and this "man" with the complete set of virtues is the "norm", as "man" with, e.g., a complete set of teeth is the norm. But in *this* sense "norm" has ceased to be roughly equivalent to "law". In *this* sense the notion of a "norm" brings us nearer to an Aristotelian than a law conception of ethics. (Anscombe 1958: 38)

However, if the biologically "normal" human can be identified as a norm, the virtuous human is an ideal to strive for. It should be pointed out, even if it cannot be developed here, that for Foot, as for Anscombe, a good or bad action is not simply an action that is *generically* good or bad, as for instance Kant would argue about lying. *Circumstances* must be considered, including the agent's intentions and what she knows about the situation. For instance, an amputation, which is a generically bad action, can be a good action if carried out in order to save a life (Anscombe 1982, 215). Virtue is not measured, or

not merely measured, by the quantity of virtuous actions performed by an individual, but also by the spirit in which an individual acts in general.

The difficulty with the idea of a standard of virtue meant to apply to human action lies in the specific nature of human action. In 'Thought and Action in Aristotle' (1965) Anscombe points out, as Foot does too (2001: 56), that the problem of *akrasia* (weakness of the will) can only arise for rational beings. For it involves, as Anscombe points out, the *bad conscience* of having failed to keep one's resolutions or resist one's inclinations (Anscombe 1965, 67. Non-human animals (although they are not the topic of these considerations), on the other hand, would by contrast tend to act spontaneously only in accordance with their desires (without a bad conscience). It is the choice and awareness of our ends as ends and the ends we set for ourselves that introduces the possibility of a dilemma (moral or otherwise) or deliberation, and the possibility of a guilty conscience. This is a feature of human action that the concepts of action, and more specifically of 'intention', make it possible to think through. But to show that vice is 'a kind of natural defect', we need to be able to anchor concrete values and rules in a form of life, to ground virtues in reason. As Anscombe suggests:

> In present-day philosophy an explanation is required of how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one; to give such an explanation belongs to ethics; but it cannot even be begun until we are equipped with a sound philosophy of psychology. For the proof that an unjust man is a bad man would require a positive account of justice as "virtue". This part of the subject-matter of ethics is however completely closed to us until we have an account of what *type of characteristic* a virtue is — a problem, not of ethics, but of conceptual analysis — and how it relates to the actions in which it is instanced: a matter which Aristotle did not succeed in really making clear. (Anscombe 1958: 29)

If, according to Anscombe, Aristotle 'did not succeed in really making clear' 'what kind of characteristic a virtue is and how it relates to the actions in which it is instanced', it is because he misses the concept of 'intention', which is the very topic of Anscombe's main monography. Indeed, according to Anscombe, being virtuous cannot merely reduce to being a good practical reasoner, for one can make perfectly valid reasoning to act badly (the Nazis are one of her favourite examples for that matter). Besides, the one who acts with 'bad conscience' does not necessarily act irrationally or by wrong reasoning. On the contrary, the akratic is precisely the one who reasons rightly toward a goal he knows or considers to be bad: he *intends* to act badly but does not choose to do so. In other words,

understanding virtue or goodness in action, requires more conceptual work and analysis of action than merely considering a number of principles or, worse so, mere feelings or inclinations.

This is the reason why philosophers must investigate the continuity between good roots and good will, in relation to the notion of the form of life. The human form of life is such that certain things are good or bad for humans and indifferent to the rest of living things. Life in society makes the human case not self-evident. It however opens the possibility of a rational discussion regarding what is good or bad for human beings:

> The thesis of this chapter is that the grounding of a moral argument is ultimately in facts about human life — facts of the kind that Anscombe mentioned in talking about the good that hangs on the institution of promising, and of the kind that I spoke of in saying why it was a part of rationality for human beings to take special care each for his or her own future. (Foot 2001: 24)

Our values seem to rely on our moral education, on what we would agree to say (at least in certain societies) is right or wrong. And agreement is at least partly a matter of circumstances, despite the importance of being human. But the challenge for moral philosophers is to manage to think of norms and values in a more descriptive way, by asking: 'Let's see what humans do and what they are and how they live in order to determine what is good for them.' This complexity is due, of course, to the complexity of human action. But it is precisely this complexity that raises the question of moral values. Humans not only have a choice of actions, but also, to a certain extent, a choice of values.

The tension here arises from the fact that we need to be able to see the good in the always contextual articulation between the logic of language and a form of life, while at the same time admitting that the good is, from a logical point of view, what is most variable in humans, precisely because of the absence of a natural necessity — understood in the sense of what would be purely guided by the necessities of, say, survival and reproduction. What is vertiginous in moral philosophy, and which is linked to the nature of human action, is the absence of a natural or logical constraint to act rationally, as revealed by Anscombe in her text on rules (Anscombe 1978) and in her analysis of practical reasoning (Anscombe 1989). It is this absence of natural constraint that generates the impression of a gap to be filled between what would be a *de facto* necessity and what would be an acquired, conventional or social (to put it quickly) necessity. For, if to say that a norm 'is part of our natural history', to use Wittgenstein's

expression, is sufficient to account for its explanatory or rational power (particularly in relation to certain shared values), does this nevertheless make it possible to found values?

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