

***Human Life, Action and Ethics:
Essays by G.E.M. Anscombe***

edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally

St. Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs, volume IV
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and

***Faith in a Hard Ground:
Essays on Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics by G.E.M. Anscombe***

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I

Elizabeth Anscombe's work was, and is, a paradigm of Christian intellectual life. Since the faith has realities, not myth, for its object, and since everything that can be inquired into is what it is by virtue of God's actuality, one's inquiries and every other element in one's intellectual life—whether elements on which faith bears or elements remote from the faith—can be pursued with confidence that they will not contradict faith and, if successful, will have brought one a little closer to understanding what is really so. That is the free and diligent way in which Anscombe carried out the work that is widely and reasonably judged the twentieth century's outstanding English Catholic philosophical achievement. These two volumes of her essays, put together posthumously in 2005 and 2008 (with promise of yet more) by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally, enable us to get a better sense of the paradigm.¹

¹G. E. M. Anscombe, *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe* (2005; hereafter *HLAE*) and *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics by G. E. M. Anscombe* (2008; hereafter *FHG*), ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally, St. Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs (Exeter, UK, and Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic). The books that made Anscombe's name and academic career, notably her edition and translation of Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen* as *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953) and her monograph *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957, 2nd ed. 1963; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), remain fully accessible. The three volumes of *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe* she published in 1981 (Oxford: Blackwell, and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) are scarce in bookshops but available from Blackwell on demand; four of the papers in volume III, *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, have been reprinted by Geach and Gormally, one in *HLAE* (the 2005 volume) and three in *FHG* (the 2008 volume). For Anscombe's other books and papers, see L. Gormally, C. Kietzmann, and J. M. Torralba, *Bibliography of Works by G. E. M. Anscombe*, 4th version, August 2008, <http://www.unav.es/filosofia/jmtorralba/anscombe>.

The introductions by Mary Geach reflect on the essays with a philosophical energy and style reminiscent of her mother's work, and impart some valuable information both about the genesis of some of the notable essays and, especially in *Faith in a Hard Ground* (*FHG*), about the genesis of Anscombe's faith and philosophizing and her approach to St. Thomas Aquinas. These accompany shorter prefaces by Gormally imparting helpful editorial information. The one philosophical remark Gormally allows himself is that Anscombe's understanding of the proper valuation of human life is of fundamental importance to her work in moral philosophy. This judgment must have guided the editors' decision to head up the twenty-three essays in *Human Life, Action and Ethics* (*HLE*) with seven papers under the heading "Human Life," and to open with three remarkable lectures given at the University of Navarre in 1979, 1985, and 1988. There could have been no better beginning than the first of these, given by Anscombe under the title "Analytical Philosophy and the Spirituality of Man," the great interest of which is only enhanced by the inclusion in *FHG* of a paper from two decades earlier, "The Immortality of the Soul," which wrestles with much the same matters. With these four essays, one should also take "The Causation of Action," which has been put into *HLE*'s second section, Action and Practical Reason.²

All five essays attack the delusion, called by Anscombe Cartesian, that thinking and willing (say, intending) are to be taken to be events in an immaterial (spiritual) substance or medium: soul or spirit. Explicitly or implicitly, the essays all affirm the reality of the human soul and the spiritual nature of that human life, a spirituality that belongs to man's substance. They defend, that is, a "metaphysics of the spirituality of man's nature" (*HLE*, 6). They do so with great resource: attentiveness alike to the history of philosophy and the contemporary physiology of movement, brain states, and such, and a close-in and sinewy phenomenology, holding one closely to an awareness of what one's thinking and intending is really like—really is. But their point and thrust is always to instill and enforce an awareness, and some theoretical grasp, of just how radically *different* the immaterial and spiritual is from the material, including brain states, sensing, mental imaging, and other kinds of imagining: of just how strange—relative to cause and effect in natural events, and to all that we can picture—our *everyday* thinking and intending (say, pointing to something's shape as opposed to its color [*HLE*, 7–15]) really is, when analyzed philosophically.

The proto-treatment, "Immortality of the Soul," never published by Anscombe, proposes that "the spirituality of the human soul is its capacity to get a conception of the eternal, and to be concerned with the eternal as an objective" (*FHG*, 74), and notes that from a certain point of view this non-reliance only "on sensible things, physical probabilities, and purely conventional procedures," this "acting as if something unseen were there," is a kind of "insanity" (*FHG*, 82). The later treatment, "Analytical Philosophy and the Spirituality of Man," holds that "the immateriality of the soul consists at bottom in the fact that you cannot specify a material character or configuration which is equivalent to truth" (*HLE*, 15). Anscombe immediately adds, rightly, "This thought is more like a chapter heading for many thoughts, the fruits of many investigations, than a conclusion of one. But it is already implicit in the

²The twenty-three essays in *HLE* are grouped into three sections: (i) Human Life, comprising seven essays, including two on the ontological status of human zygotes, papers which should be taken along with essay 20 in *FHG*, "The Early Embryo: Theoretical Doubts and Practical Certainties"; (ii) Action and Practical Reason, comprising four essays, among them the ambitious fifty-page "Practical Inference"; and (iii) Ethics, comprising twelve essays on moral philosophy, intention, "double effect," conscience, euthanasia, and nontreatment of controls in clinical trials. The twenty-five essays in *FHG* are not grouped, but about half are on faith and matters of, or proximate to, faith, including immortality, transubstantiation, and sin, and about half are on matters of morals, including contraception, nuclear weapons, simony, and usury.

consideration that the physical act of pointing, considered purely as a material event, is not even an act of pointing—it is just the fact that a finger, say, has a certain line.” At least this is so where the pointing is, say, to color *rather than* shape. “Now if that is so we can say that man *qua* body can’t be described as pointing to the color rather than the shape. For his act of pointing is certainly a bodily act; but it is not *qua* bodily act that it is determined as pointing to the color. This does not mean that we have to postulate a different, *another* act of pointing by a *different sort* of substance, an immaterial one. . . . But we can say that this bodily act is an act of a man *qua* spirit” (HLAE, 15–16). In these and various other respects the later paper is better, as well as being in its own right a superb introduction to Anscombe’s thought, to its relationship to Wittgenstein’s and the ancients’ thought, and to the strangeness that is at the root of human dignity.³

Still, the earlier essay provides a valuable clue to one of the several diverse springs of Anscombe’s thought, her way of doing philosophy. The essay’s one authorial footnote (FHG, 80) remarks that Christians, unless superstitious, do not believe that spirits (the angels) hear them, *nisi in Verbo*. This is one of the relatively few references the editors have not identified, but it is certain that it alludes to Aquinas’s argument in *De Veritate* q. 8, a. 13c, that angels cannot know the secrets of our hearts, “unless one or another *cogitatio* is revealed to an angel in the Word [*nisi in Verbo ei reveletur*].” (Nowhere else does Aquinas use the phrase she quoted.) And this place in Aquinas, which Anscombe thus surely read with attention, is one which most strikingly asserts what I am calling this strangeness of commonplace human thinking and willing. For in the three sentences preceding the one she quotes from, Aquinas gives his reasons for taking angels to be naturally unable to read our thoughts; and the two key reasons are (i) that to think about something requires an *intentio* of one’s will (so as to focus on the matter and one’s ideas about it), and (ii) that such “movements of [human] will have *no dependence on or connection with any natural cause*.” True, one’s acts of will, as Aquinas explains here and in later writings,⁴ are not independent or unconnected with divine causality operating both as the creative and sustaining cause of everything and as the truly universal good that is the good to which one is responding when one[’s will] responds to particular intelligible goods. But no chain of causality in the created world known to science and experience embraces or accounts for them.

In a lecture she gave in 1989, “Sin: Voluntariness and Sins of Omission,” Anscombe resumes her critique of the “quasi-Cartesian” “doctrine of an act of the will, which is *willing*” (FHG, 129). She worries that Aquinas may hold this doctrine, but in the end is doubtful that he differs so widely from her about all this (FHG, 137–138). Be that as it may, this late lecture is one of the very rare occasions when she raises the question how far she agrees with or dissents from Aquinas. Overall, it seems to me clear that the influence of Aquinas on her thought was greater than she made clear. Mary Geach says that Anscombe “devised a method, which she recommended to me, of mining Aquinas for helpful philosophical points” and “philosophically

³I am not saying that Anscombe’s view is strange. On the contrary, the author of the article on “action” in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* reports, “Many philosophers reject more than just reason-to-action laws. They believe, more generally, that there are no laws that connect the reason-giving attitudes with *any* material states, events, and processes, under purely physical descriptions. As a consequence, commonsense psychology is not strictly reducible to the neural sciences, and this means that reason explanations of action and corresponding neural explanations are, in the intended sense, ‘independent’ of one another.” George Wilson, “Action,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2008, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/action/>.

⁴*De Malo* q. 16, a. 8; *Summa theologiae* I, q. 57, a. 4; q. 105, a. 4; q. 106, a. 2; I-II, q. 9, a. 6. *Summa contra gentiles* III, 88–91 (e.g., c. 88, n. 2: “No created substance can act on the will, or be a cause of our choice, except by acting as a suasive [*nisi per modum persuadentis*]”).

usable bits in the *Summa theologiae* by considering to what Catholic doctrine her particular philosophical problem was relevant" (*FHG*, xiv). Still, Anscombe set her own philosophical problems for herself, and even when her conclusions approximate Aquinas's fairly closely, as in *Intention* and the essays I have mentioned, her argumentation is her own. It is just that she thought of Aquinas as "a strikingly good philosopher" (*FHG*, 135), from whom help is always on the cards albeit, like everything else in philosophizing as such, never guaranteed.

The bearing on human dignity and worth of Anscombe's position about the radical difference between one's thinking and willing, on one side, and one's sensing, feeling, imagining, digesting, and such on the other, is not extensively articulated. On the one hand, it seems in a sense clear: To possess dignity is to be somehow raised above a common level, and the considerations she brings out so well do show how each human being, just as having the *capacity* for the thinking and willing that are quite above the brain states and other natural processes that are this spirituality's human substrate, is raised above the other animals and creatures of every kind of which we have experience. We have all the levels of reality they have, and much more—in a sense, infinitely more, as knowers and choosers. On the other hand, if we ask how this dignity is also a worth, a matter of intrinsic and generic value, we reach considerations that Anscombe, especially perhaps in her writings from the 1980s and after, was wont to call *mystical*.

In one essay she explores the ways in which knowing this worth is "connatural." As she says, this is not how Aquinas uses "connatural"; it is a (neo-)scholastic application of the term whose source she does not claim to know (*FHG*, 200; *HLAE*, 60): a kind of knowledge that "is not unavailable to those of us who are not virtuous but may be restrained by shame from misusing people we have the power to misuse[, but] is strong only in good people" (*HLAE*, 66; similarly *FHG*, 200). I heard her deliver that address in 1981 and thought then, as now, that this sort of taxonomizing of knowledge, while it has its truth, does little to convey the truth at issue, even when the categorizing is given the vigorous work-out she gives it. She does not go in for it much. "Mystical," though formally a category, and one taken from another context, has the advantage that it directs the mind to what I have called the strangeness of the spiritual, its radical difference from the material which nonetheless it forms and animates. This strangeness Anscombe also profitably calls wonderful. In doing so, she deliberately appropriates the prayer from the canon of the Tridentine Mass: *Deus, qui humanae substantiae dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti* [O God, who didst wonderfully create/establish the dignity of human substance/nature] (*FHG*, 197; see also *HLAE*, 72). In her most full-dress treatment of the issue she links the dignity to both origin and end:

But men, being spirit as well as flesh, are not the same as the other animals. Whatever blasphemes the spirit in man is evil, discouraging, at best trivializing, at worst doing dirt on life. . . . It is irreligious, in a sense in which the contrasting religious attitude—one of respect before the mystery of human life—is not necessarily connected only with some one particular religious system. . . . A religious attitude may be merely incipient . . . or it may be more developed, perceiving that men are made by God in God's likeness, to know and love God. . . . Such perception of what a human being is makes one perceive human death as awesome, human life as always to be treated with a respect which is a sign and acknowledgment of what it is for. (*HLAE*, 269–270)

II

Some main reviews of *HLAE*, and the publisher's blurbs for both *HLAE* and *FHG*, give special prominence to Anscombe's "classic" essay, "Modern Moral Philosophy" and one of its several theses gets special attention. Simon Blackburn, a successor of hers in Cambridge University's chair of philosophy, rightly points to the influence of two of the essay's theses. Her essay "initiated the return to the idea of virtues as the central concepts needed by moral thought. It was enormously influential, turning firstly most of her Oxford generation, and then

probably a majority of philosophers worldwide, against utilitarianism as a moral and political theory, but also against the then-prevailing view that ethics is at bottom a matter of personal commitment or choice, a tool for voicing persuasions or exchanging social pressures.”⁵ Blackburn then turns to the further thesis, also emphasized in Michael Dummett’s review;⁶ it is expounded in *Faith in a Hard Ground* (175–194), and I would paraphrase it thus: The modern sense of “moral,” “moral duty,” “morally ought,” and “obligatory” are derived from an ethic of divine law, and ought not to be used by—because their meaning is essentially unavailable to—those who believe that we know of no such divine law. Blackburn’s paraphrase is that “Anscombe’s thought was a version of the Dostoievskian claim that if God is dead everything is permitted.” Blackburn comments that this is poppycock and was refuted by Plato.

Blackburn has badly misunderstood Anscombe. Her thesis and argument here entail that the idea of the “permitted” is equally unavailable; if we know of no divine law, the question whether everything (or anything) is or is not *permitted* simply falls away. Doubtless, Anscombe is not confronting and explicitly repudiating what might be called the thought underlying Dostoyevsky’s claim as commonly understood, the thought that distinctions between virtuous and vicious, just and unjust, deeds are all empty—if intelligible at all, have no grip on our reason—once we take God to be nonexistent (or, as Plato in his late work would add, to be unconcerned with or thoroughly indulgent about human affairs). But nor is Anscombe proposing or sponsoring or even insinuating that thought. On the contrary, her whole discussion assumes that any non-theistic moral philosopher who followed her advice and desisted from using the terms derived (she thought) from divine-law ethics could still find real distinctions to be drawn between the virtues and the vices, the just and the unjust, and more generally the reasonable and the unreasonable in action, and could still hold that “it is in any case a disgraceful thing to say that one had better commit this unjust action” (*HLE*, 193).

But then I think it follows that this thesis of Anscombe’s lacks what one might call working importance. If the issue is not about ethical scepticism as such, but only about the precise *force* of a negative ethical predicate such as “is vicious and unreasonable,” and if it is further accepted that this could extend to “vicious and unreasonable whatever the circumstances,” then I think the issue is quite marginal. And that seems to me confirmed by these essays. The thesis makes occasional, low-key appearances (e.g., in 1974 in “Practical Inference,” *HLE*, 147), but it plays little role, and in her 1989 lectures on sin she proceeds on the basis that “against divine law” and “against right reason” each define sin. True, she says that the two definitions are “equivalent as far as concerns what they cover” only if reason dictates the worship of the true deity (*FHG*, 117–119). But this is far from saying that, if it failed to acknowledge that “dictate,” reason could have no concept of sin. I should add that I rather doubt the thesis, even when marginalized. I do not think Anscombe was right to say that *dei* in Aristotle (who, as she says, did without a notion of divine law [*FHG*, 148]) is really different from the modern “moral ought,”⁷ and I cannot see that, for example, Gaius, the second century jurist, is presupposing a divine law when he treats natural right and natural law as synonymous with what natural reason requires of us.

⁵Simon Blackburn, review of *Human Life, Action and Ethics*, *Times Literary Supplement*, September 30, 2005.

⁶Michael Dummett, “Profound Faith of a Powerful Mind,” review of *Human Life, Action and Ethics*, *The Tablet*, July 8, 2005.

⁷See J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1980), 297, 343. In *FHG*, Anscombe translates *dei athanatizein* “should be on the side of the immortal” (148), and if divine law is out of the picture, as it is for both Aristotle and modern moralists, that “should” seems to me a moral ought, even though the object(ive) to which it, in this instance, directs us (being on the side of the immortal, immortalizing) is an unusual, unfamiliar, and strategic one.

III

Mary Geach's preface to *HLE* discloses that Anscombe's profoundly and rightly influential book *Intention* came from a course of lectures given as a result of her stand against Oxford University's conferral of an honorary degree on the man who ordered the massacres at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But (in line with one of the theses or prescriptions in "Modern Moral Philosophy") that book rigorously eschews any concern with moral reasoning or with the question of what bearing the fruits of her analysis of intention would or should have for ethical analysis or moral judgment or assessment. The book ascribes a descriptive and explanatory priority to the descriptions which behavior has in the practical reasoning (the deliberations) by which the acting person shaped up the proposal he or she adopted by choosing to behave (act or forbear) in a certain way. This shaping of descriptions in practical reasoning and deliberation is not a matter of finding a description under which the behavior one is determined to carry out will be acceptable to oneself or others. Rather, it is settled by what one considers a necessary or helpful means to achieving an objective (usually a nested set of objectives) that one considers desirable, in view of the factual context as one understands its bearing on both one's ends and the means that one judges serviceable for achieving such ends. In summarizing her book's main thesis in this way, I use terminology (e.g., "proposal," "adopt") which is not altogether hers. But her favorable, albeit informal and oral, response to an exposition and analysis of intention which I gave in her presence in 1990 served, in my mind, to confirm my opinion that her main thesis was, or was in line with, what I have just set out.

However, her essays' discussions of intention in an *ethical* context tend to depart somewhat from that account. Characteristic is what she says (circa 1978) in judging immoral (simoniacal) the action of certain Catholic priests in Africa who have made it a condition of adult baptism that the convert first make a payment to the Church, their good motive or further intention in making this demand being to require the convert to show his "good disposition," that is, his willingness to support the Church financially. She says: "What determines what the intention is? Can you determine it by telling yourself and others 'I am not doing *this*, I am doing *that*'? No, you can't: the facts of the case, the conditions and consequences of one's act are mostly enough to determine *what* intentional *action* you are performing, they often declare it very loud and clear, and you cannot make it not be so by a story you tell or by inviting people to perform some little semantic exercise and *call* something a different name from the name that belongs to it from the facts of the case" (*FHG*, 242–243, original emphasis).

This passage offers two alternative candidate-determinants of the action-defining intention-in-the-act: (1) telling yourself something, performing a little semantic exercise, etc., and (2) the conditions and consequences of your act, "the whole context that fixes and determines the further description of the kind of act you are performing" (*FHG*, 243). But these alternatives omit what the book *Intention* treated as decisive: your real practical reasoning, in which you identified the behavior as a satisfactory means to the ends you were concerned to attain. Conditions, consequences, and context are surely determinants *as they figure in one's practical reasoning*, one's deliberating toward choice (not to be confused with some story one tells oneself or others to escape or attract some *moral* characterization of the act). Nor does it matter what words one uses in this reasoning. If, to take the case in hand, one judges that it would be good to make payment to the Church a condition of baptism, it does not matter whether one uses (thinks in terms of) the words "payment" or "condition" or their equivalent in any other language. Still less, of course, does it matter to the relevant description of what one is doing whether one knows the term "simony" or is aware that hereabouts there is a class of acts judged by the Church to be seriously wrong.

In criticizing Anscombe's ethics-oriented analysis here for overlooking the act-analysis (intention-analysis) employed in her non-ethical writings,⁸ I am resuming a criticism I have

made before, especially in relation to her essay “Action, Intention and ‘Double Effect.’”⁹ But I do not dissent from her conclusion in relation to the clergy’s well-motivated but wrongful demand in the African missions. And as Geach’s preface remarks, the essay shows how far Anscombe was from being a party-line woman. One can add that it also shows that her interest in ethics was not simply apologetical and, like her paper on usury’s injustice,¹⁰ witnesses that it was in no way limited to sex and killing.

IV

Faith in a Hard Ground has four essays, all very good, on contraception. The best is “Contraception and Chastity” (1975), published—and still in print today—as a Catholic Truth Society pamphlet of the kind you should find at the back of churches in England (and it includes advice that every young Christian contemplating marriage, or already married, would do well to read or hear). Anscombe speaks of this pamphlet-essay in the introduction to volume III of her *Collected Philosophical Papers*, and says its non-inclusion there was because she judged it “not much different in substance” from the 1966 address she did include in that volume.¹¹ Geach’s introduction to *FHG* similarly minimizes the differences between the two essays, treating even the later one as “largely—but not entirely—a sort of argument from authority: she points out that no sense can be made of traditional Catholic teaching about sex if contraception is permissible” (*FHG*, xx). But “Contraception and Chastity” in fact adds very substantially to, indeed transforms, that “argument from authority,” and what it adds has been of great benefit. Its insistent thesis that “the good and point of a sexual act is marriage” (*FHG*, 185)—a thesis you cannot find in the earlier paper—anticipates the insight so richly developed by Germain Grisez and Joseph Boyle, that *marriage* (rather than procreation, or friendship) is the basic human good at stake in all human sexual conduct and morality, an insight which in turn helped me see and show how far Aquinas, too, held that thesis (one more or less lost in the Thomist tradition).¹² Anscombe had no use for a general theory of basic human goods or reasons for action, and had an incomplete reading of Aquinas on marital acts. But these limitations detract little indeed from the essay’s lasting, many-sided value.

⁸This distinction is not tight: In “Practical Inference,” mostly a revisiting in 1974 of *Intention*, Anscombe says, by way of illustrating an inference, “The British ... wanted to destroy some German soldiers on a Dutch island ... and chose to accomplish this by bombing the dykes and drowning everybody” (*HLE*, 122). This she says is an instance of a decision “to kill everyone in a certain place in order to get the particular people one wants.” But equally it may have been an instance of a decision to kill German soldiers by bombing the dykes, accepting the deaths of any Dutch civilians as a side effect, perhaps fairly, perhaps with vicious unfairness, depending on the context and the planners’ reasoning about its bearing on all affected. In her earlier account of this event, in “Mr. Truman’s Degree” (1956), she recounts it in a way somewhat more open to the second version, in which there simply is no intent to kill everyone as a means to killing some, but “unscrupulousness in considering the possibilities” (*Collected Philosophical Papers* 3, 66). One can agree with her that such unscrupulousness in considering side effects can “turn it into murder,” since murder extends beyond its central paradigm—killing with intent to kill—to secondary cases such as intent to seriously wound, or recklessness about the lethal side effects of one’s acts (especially, but not necessarily, unlawful acts).

⁹See J. Finnis, “Intention and Side-Effects,” in *Liability and Responsibility: Essays in Law and Morals*, ed. R.G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54–60.

¹⁰And like her notable papers on promising and on political authority in *Collected Philosophical Papers* 3.

¹¹“You Can Have Sex Without Children: Christianity and the New Offer,” *Collected Philosophical Papers* 3, 82–96.

¹²J. Finnis, “The Good of Marriage and the Morality of Sexual Relations: Some Philosophical and Historical Observations,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 42 (1997): 97–134.

This same essay speaks of the mystical more directly: “Sexual acts are not sacred actions. But the perception of the dishonor done to the body in treating them as the casual satisfaction of desire is certainly a mystical perception. I don’t mean, in calling it a mystical perception, that it’s out of the ordinary. It’s as ordinary as the feeling for the respect due to a man’s dead body: the knowledge that a dead body isn’t something to be put out for the collectors of refuse to pick up. This, too, is mystical, though it’s as common as humanity” (*FHG*, 187).

The accompanying essay “On *Humanae vitae*” (1978) discloses how far Anscombe’s thought developed by studying the encyclical’s central argumentation and thesis. She moved well beyond the “sort of argument from authority,” and not only because she realized that she had to—that people, including some Catholics, were becoming willing to embrace the consequent: any kind of sex act is in principle permissible—but mainly because her reflections on the encyclical’s (and Council’s) key notion of marital intercourse’s twin “significances/meanings” led her to a philosophically illuminating explanation of the interrelations between sex and marriage. Not a complete or fully satisfying explanation, but heading toward one.

The essay in *HLAE* on “The Dignity of the Human Being” similarly shows how far Anscombe was open to new lines of thought. The editors simply call it “undated,” but it surely dates from late 1985 or 1986. In it, she articulates the argument worked up by English-speaking Catholic philosophers after 1979, especially in the period 1982 to 1983: “Making human zygotes in a dish or test-tube is an enormity because the operator is a manufacturer—even if he uses his own sperm—not a father. . . . The child who is conceived by a mother, and who has a father, is not unequal to them” (*HLAE*, 70–71).¹³ This articulation of the argument from equality (the argument adopted as one among others in *Donum vitae* in 1987 and then relied upon in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2377) is incomplete, and too quick, no doubt, for most readers to take on board. But the argument is there, and there are even traces of the first part of it in an address she gave to clergy in Melbourne in 1978: “children are to be begotten, not produced” (*FHG*, 202).¹⁴

V

Anscombe’s “Christians and Nuclear Weapons Designed for the Destruction of Cities” begins with an enviably exact and economical exposition of friendship, concluding that friendship between states is only friendship of advantage, and very easily changed, because “upon the whole, people are not good” (*FHG*, 234). More pointedly, however, she spoke from time to time of the evils of *this* age, the horror, the madness of its murderous or idolatrous practices. More specifically, she was conscious of people’s blindness to dangers that should have been obvious to all. Among the most significant of these is the blindness to the dangers—she mentions euthanasia of the old—that will arise from the combination of willingness to kill the innocent (as in abortion) with declining population (want of young people to support the aged). In 1978, when Paul Ehrlich’s prognostications of catastrophic over-population occupied people’s minds, she spoke of the “ghastly dearth of children in the West.” Being not only a mordant critic of immoral patriotism but also decently patriotic as a Catholic should be, she urged, “Among the contraceptive populations of the West, I believe the message ought to be ‘Get having babies!—you are going to ruin your country and often your personal future, by regarding, say, two as quite enough, when you have no great excuse’”

¹³In a letter to me in February 1983, clearly accepting the gist of the argument, she comments on its formulation.

¹⁴This address also elaborates on what she got from *Humanae vitae*’s teaching about meanings (*FHG*, 202). Here, however, she may in part be relying on an unsound interpretation of the “inseparable connection” of those meanings: the Latin makes clear that separation between them is impermissible, not impossible, though it doubtless entails the sexual act’s non-marital character.

(*FHG*, 204). She saw her country become, like every other that adopted “liberal” abortion laws, a “nation of murderers” (*HLEA*, 73), “rapidly becoming more and more murderous” (*FHG*, 153). Compounding the disaster was the “peculiar dreadful miasma of the present day that was spreading over the Church,” and of which she became aware, “late I am sure,” in 1963 (*FHG*, 208–209). “Among the contraceptive Catholic populations there is an awful spiritual deadness, which will last until they are weaned from their vices” (*FHG*, 203).

But of course such weaning could only be a necessary, not a sufficient, condition. Other conditions for the recovery of spiritual life include, most notably, faith itself, and much of her philosophical effort is directed, at least implicitly, toward thinking through what is needed from philosophy in relation to faith, and the faith. In an address of 1975 to seminarians—for whom I fear it was not in all respects suitable, leaving too unchallenged some of the corrosive prejudices about faith’s non-dependence upon reason to which they were doubtless exposed—she said that “the only possible use of a learned clever man is as a *causa removens prohibens*. There are gross obstacles in the received opinion of my time and in its characteristic ways of thinking, and someone learned and clever may be able to dissolve these” (*FHG*, 18; likewise 91, in the fine essay-pamphlet on transubstantiation). For an example of such obstacle-clearing, one may take not only the explications of human spirituality but also her devastating critique of Hume’s very influential arguments against the possibility of miracles and prophecies (*FHG*, 40–48).

Was she right to say that that sort of removal of obstacles is “the only possible use of a learned clever man” (such as her), and to leave everything else to revelation and faith as such? She asked, “Could a learned clever man inform me, on the authority of his learning, that the evidence is that God has spoken? No.” (*FHG*, 18). Her skepticism about the *probative* force of the traditional evidences of and preambles to faith has a good deal in common with Newman’s in the last chapter of his *Grammar of Assent*, and her “royal road to the Catholic faith” through the Old Testament (*FHG*, xxv, 34–39) has much in common with Newman’s in that chapter. But even if the learned are not in a position truthfully to say “the evidence is...” (that is, all the evidence points to this, or at least the weight of the evidence excludes any reasonable doubt), must it not still be the case that they, or the relevant specialists among them, should be (and are) in a position truthfully to say, “There is good evidence that God has spoken, and these are the elements of this evidence”?

Since Anscombe’s work, so far as I know it, does not afford materials for pursuing that question further here, I return to some of the matters I discussed in the first part of this review. Anscombe’s McGivney Lectures on sin (1989) revisit some of those matters, in a remarkable way. At the end of the lectures she says that one of her purposes in giving them was “to heighten my awareness of the amazing character of some of the things that we believe” (*FHG*, 155), a purpose in line, as I have said above, with much of her work in pure philosophy, too. But in her final reflections on the possibility of living here and now in the presence, the constant consciousness, of God, part of her purpose is to wean us away from imagining some mental experience, some Cartesian *cogitatio* within a “Cartesian consciousness” (*FHG*, 148). No, it is a matter of keeping in mind that God sees and hears us, and that there are divine commandments. And this keeping in mind is no more, in turn, than this: that a truthful account by us of the ultimate reasons for what we are at any time doing would mention those facts about divine knowledge and will. A reasonable mind ought always to have this form of divine presence to it. “The absence of it, which is all but universal in the human race, is what I call ‘God’s Exile’” (*FHG*, 149). And then she adds, disclosing an amazing depth in all that she has elsewhere written about human spirit, “Exile from what exists, even in Hell, is impossible for God. The exile of which I have been trying to speak is not an exile from our physical or mental existence: that too is impossible. It is an exile from our spiritual existence.”