

## Reviews

### References

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*The Anscombean Mind* by Adrian Haddock and Rachael Wiseman (eds.) (Routledge, 2022). *Routledge Philosophical Minds* series.

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On their website, Routledge introduce their *Philosophical Minds* series as follows:

In philosophy past and present there are some philosophers who tower over the intellectual landscape and have shaped it in indelible ways. So significant is their impact that it is difficult to capture it in one place. The Routledge Philosophical Minds series presents a comprehensive survey of all aspects of a major philosopher's work, from analysis and criticism of their major texts and arguments to the way their ideas are taken up in contemporary philosophy and beyond.<sup>1</sup>

Elizabeth Anscombe undoubtedly fits this bill. Anscombe made contributions – many important; some groundbreaking – across an amazingly broad span of the philosophical literature. These range in historical time from the presocratics and ancient Greeks, through

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Philosophical-Minds/book-series/RPM>.

medieval and modern philosophy, to early and contemporary analytic philosophy. Thematically, she wrote on topics within logic; metaphysics; epistemology; philosophy of mind, action, language, and religion; political philosophy; legal philosophy, and ethics – although much of her work is impossible to neatly categorise within a single subdiscipline.

Despite this range, Anscombe is still commonly viewed much more narrowly – as a philosopher of action and ethicist. Anscombe *was* an especially important figure in both these areas: her *Intention* (1957) and her ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ (1958) are seminal texts in philosophy of action and ethics respectively, and she made numerous other important contributions to both. But the emphasis on Anscombe’s importance in these places has tended to come at the expense of a widespread recognition of – and engagement with – the full breadth of her work.

Including Anscombe in the *Philosophical Minds* series is thus a welcome opportunity to clarify her importance not simply as a moral philosopher, or a philosopher of action (or a woman philosopher), but as, simply, *a philosopher*. Haddock and Wiseman’s *The Anscombean Mind* (*TAM*) joins other recent collections (e.g., Teichmann 2022) in making major strides in this direction, along a number of dimensions.

Firstly, *TAM* contributes to broadening the selection of topics usually addressed in serious consideration of Anscombe’s work. This includes papers dealing with Anscombe’s thinking on the metaphysics of time (in the papers by Anselm Müller and Colin Johnston), existence (Chakrabarti), modality (Teichmann), ‘linguistic idealism’ (Hamilton, Teichmann), and legal philosophy (Bierseon & Schwenkler, Duff).

Anscombe’s contributions beyond action theory and ethics are best acknowledged in the literatures on the semantics of “I”, on Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, and on perception. Yet her work in these areas has often been misunderstood. At times one suspects this might be down to the difficulty of her writing, which may have encouraged superficial engagement from readers more interested in first-order issues than exegetical concerns. But various chapters of *TAM* reveal the rewards of more detailed engagement with these aspects of Anscombe’s work. Wiseman, for example, brings out precisely why lumping Anscombe’s philosophy of perception in with ‘representationalist’ theories is not just an oversimplification, but a fundamental misreading. Wiseman, Haddock, and Mac Cumhaill all link Anscombe’s work on the first person to her philosophy of perception, giving the lie to the simple (standard) reading of her ‘The

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First Person' (1975) as making only a narrowly semantical argument for the conclusion that "I" does not refer.

Another important pair of themes concern Anscombe's connection to other philosophers. Although she is widely known to have been influenced by the methodologies and some of the core commitments of particular philosophical figures – Aristotle, Aquinas, Wittgenstein, Frege, Plato, and (if a foil can be an influence) Hume – there is less work drawing on Anscombe's writings to do detailed history of philosophy. The papers by Arindam Chakrabarti and Peter Sullivan do just this. Chakrabarti appeals to Anscombe's analysis of Anselm's argument for the existence of God – as *not* an 'ontological' argument – to urge a reconsideration (rejection) of the standard narrative, on which Kant is usually thought to have refuted Anselm. Sullivan considers in detail Anscombe's change-of-mind about Ramsey's interpretation of Wittgenstein on universals, between her *Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (when she thought Ramsey wrong) and her later paper 'Retraction' (when she thought him in at least one respect 'righter than I ever realized' ('Retraction', p. 33; quoted in *TAM*, p. 60)). Sullivan then uses this to shed light on Anscombe's disagreement with Erik Stenius about how to interpret Wittgenstein's conception of universals.

Other papers consider Anscombe's own philosophical heritage. The secondary literature contains different understandings of the relative importance of her various influences, (very) roughly splitting between primarily Wittgensteinian, and primarily Thomist or Aristotelian readings of Anscombe. Yet she is strongly influenced by both traditions, and by additional thinkers too. Although this is recognised on all sides, more of a direct consideration of how these influences interact, constrain each other, and perhaps even clash in her philosophy is welcome. Christopher Frey's paper, considering how Aristotelian and Wittgensteinian elements come together in Anscombe's metaphysics, should act as a touchstone for this kind of work in the future. Matthias Haase's and Clare Mac Cumhaill's chapters contain important sub-discussions of the limits to Anscombe's Aristotelianism (Haase: Anscombe is not an Aristotelian ethical naturalist; Mac Cumhaill: an overly Aristotelian understanding of Anscombe's approach in *Intention* is belied by her explicit claim that she 'did not realise the identity' between her 'A-D series' and Aristotle's practical syllogism, 'until [she] had reached [her] results' (Anscombe, 1957, p. 80)).

Roughly half the volume is given over to Anscombe's action theory and ethics. Although, as noted, these aspects of Anscombe's work are already widely discussed, *TAM* contains important new insights,

which broaden and deepen the existing literature. A recurring theme within these essays concerns what we might think of as the *complexity* of Anscombe's action theory. A common but simplistic view of Anscombe sees her as concerned narrowly with understanding *intentional* action in *humans*, where this in turn is viewed as taking a *single form* – always and everywhere internally structured by the agent's instrumental practical reasoning (understood in terms of the Aristotelian practical syllogism, or the teleological structure of action descriptions Anscombe calls the 'A-D series'). Both aspects of the simplistic view are challenged in *TAM*, which includes insightful analyses of Anscombe's resources for understanding *animal intentional agency* (Marcus; Bierson & Schwenkler), and the development of a form of *non-instrumental*, rule-based, practical reasoning (Faulconbridge) – as well as a number of papers on Anscombe's conception of *voluntariness* (Bierson & Schwenkler, Aucouturier, and Narboux).

This latter is an especially important theme. John Hyman (2015, pp. 88–89) has suggested that Anscombe's success in turning philosophers *on* to thinking about intention had the unfortunate side-effect of turning them *off* from thinking about voluntariness, and so also of distracting attention from the important ethical dimension of that latter category.<sup>2</sup> These essays – despite important differences of focus – make clear just how much Anscombe has to say about voluntariness, as well as how wholeheartedly Anscombe is committed to the existence of a distinctively ethical category of the voluntary. These papers therefore also add new detail and depth to a relatively recent theme in the secondary literature, which explores the interrelations between Anscombe's action theory and her ethics. Matthias Haase and Evgenia Mylonaki extend this theme to bring out ways in which Anscombe's notion of the spiritual shapes her understanding of the ideal form of human action.

A final theme worth dwelling on emerges from reading the volume as a whole. One would be going wrong about Anscombe if one thought of the breadth of her interests as the workings of a kind of philosophical magpie – collecting together a shiny button here (the claim that "I" does not refer), a lost brooch there (a description of causative verbs), into the bibliography of a life's work. What comes across in *TAM* is a sense of Anscombe's *systematicness*. This is not the systematicness of Hume, Kant, Quine, or Davidson: Anscombe is not trying to build a single coherent and overarching *theory* of

<sup>2</sup> This point of Hyman's is referenced in the chapters by Bierson & Schwenkler (p. 329n49), and by Narboux (p. 363).

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mind and world and their interrelations. Anscombe's systematicness rather lies, first, in – as Clare Mac Cumhaill nicely puts it – the fact that her diverse investigations invariably '[take] place against the same background: the whole of human life' (p. 412), and second, in her development and employment of a set of powerful analytical tools. *TAM* taken as a whole showcases the power and flexibility of these tools, as they are brought to bear on topics that may initially have seemed of limited relevance to understanding one another.

Anscombe's most famous tool – the question 'Why?' used to reveal the distinctive form of intentional action – is in Wiseman's and Mac Cumhaill's papers also shown relevant (in different ways) to Anscombe's philosophy of perception. Again, most familiar from her action theory, consider Anscombe's observation that phenomena attract certain classifications only 'under a description', where a description's correctness depends on the broader circumstances. Anscombe's application of this idea to perception is again explored by both Mac Cumhaill and Wiseman, while in their fascinating contribution, Bierson & Schwenkler clarify a distinction between *circumstantial* and *classificatory* dependency on circumstances, applying their analysis to shed important light on the distinction between human and animal agency, on voluntariness, and on different forms of moral and legal culpability. A less well-known Anscombean tool is the category of 'stopping modals' (roughly: modals internal to a language-game or practice, e.g. 'You can't move your knight diagonally!'). Roger Teichmann appeals to them to show up the limitations of possible worlds semantics, and to offer a way of de-fanging the sorites puzzle; Paul Faulconbridge employs them in developing the Anscombean account of non-instrumental, rule-based, practical reasoning mentioned above.

The collection as a whole does clearly succeed in showing Anscombe as an important philosopher *tout court* – not only an important ethicist and action theorist. But nothing is perfect, and the reader looking for what Routledge promises – a truly 'comprehensive survey' of 'all aspects' of Anscombe's work – may be disappointed to find no detailed engagement with Anscombe's thinking on Parmenides or Plato, and no chapters focussing centrally on her important work on causation, or on her various engagements with Hume.<sup>3</sup> These feel like omissions, as does the fact that her fascinating and so far under-discussed work on testimony and trust aren't covered at all. While I'm griping, I will also mention that the index

<sup>3</sup> Although her thinking about causation is brought to bear on her work on time in Müller's and Johnston's chapters, and Hume makes a cameo in Teichmann's.

is extremely thin, with its main entries largely confined to names of philosophers mentioned in and contributing to the volume. This is singularly unhelpful for the reader interested in seeing what *Anscombe* might have to say about this or that matter – an oversight which feels bizarre in a volume of this kind. (Of course most readers can be expected to access the volume electronically, but even so, the ‘Ctrl-F’ function is no substitute for a properly curated index.)

Still, overall this is an excellent collection. It contains no chaff. Each and every paper, including those I have not had space to mention specifically above, is a serious engagement, a real grappling, and the authors are often developing highly interesting and original interpretative and substantive philosophical contributions. Naturally, I enjoyed some papers more than others. Some I found overly heavy-going, especially those dealing with material in moments in the history of philosophy which with I am not independently familiar. But this seems inevitable in a collection of essays on such a broad range of issues. Indeed, it only added to the overall impression given by the collection of the remarkable capacity of Anscombe’s mind. I learned a huge amount from the essays in this collection, and I highly recommend it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Rob Trueman for discussion of the literature on the *Tractatus*, and to Alexander Greenberg for discussion of the legal philosophy literature. Thanks to Greenberg more generally for discussion of various themes covered above.