

## Reviews

**THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE** edited by Roger Teichmann, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, pp. 520, £ 97.00, hbk*

The twenty-two chapters in this addition to the excellent Oxford Handbook series certainly do justice to the work of the philosopher G.E.M. Anscombe (1919-2001), laying out its originality, testifying to its continuing significance in professional philosophical circles, and extending well beyond the academy in virtue of her beliefs as a Catholic. The dust wrapper carries a fine photograph that must date from the years when she had the chair at Cambridge (1970-1986) once occupied by Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose work she did so much to make available after his death, as one of his literary executors.

Born in Limerick, where her father was then serving in the British army, she moved with the family within weeks to Sydenham, where she grew up. By the time she was fifteen, she had read herself into Roman Catholicism, to the dismay of her parents. She had hit on Bishop Challoner's *Memoir* about the English martyrs, then on *The Everlasting Man* by G.K. Chesterton, and finally on the English translation of *Natural Theology*, a typical neo-Scholastic classic by the Dutch Jesuit Bernard Boedder, with the puzzle about divine foreknowledge to which she eventually credited her interest in philosophy. In 1937, when she got to Oxford to study the Classics (taught Greek by her mother, an Aberystwyth graduate, determined her daughter should go to Oxford), young Anscombe sought instruction at Blackfriars in St Giles' and was received into the Church by Fr Richard Kehoe, an Old Testament scholar. As a Dominican he was amused to agree with her, so she reports, that the Molinist doctrine of *scientia media* as the solution to the problem of God's knowledge of *futurabilia* is absurd. In 1939 she engineered two terms of tutorials on Aquinas with Kehoe's colleague Fr Victor White, who was delighted by her work (see John Berkman, *New Blackfriars*, September 2021). These tutorials were completely unrelated to the 'Greats' examination agenda. Presumably his three-part article, "Thomism and "Affective Knowledge"" (*Blackfriars* January 1943: 8-16; April 1943:126-131; and September 1944: 321-328), represents the line that he took with her. He positions Aquinas's thought in 'the radical and revolutionary criticism of the whole tendency of the main stream of modern philosophy since Descartes' (April

1943: 126). This retrieval of pre-Modern understanding of human nature anticipates Anscombe's famous 'Modern Moral Philosophy' (1958), the paper in which, in a characteristic turn of phrase, she mocks philosophers who taught Aristotle's ethics but without highlighting his lack of interest in the concept of *moral* obligation: such readers 'must be very imperceptive if they do not constantly feel like someone whose jaws have somehow got out of alignment: the teeth don't come together in a proper bite'.

In 1941, with a First in Greats, famously awarded for her philosophy answers, despite her avowed ignorance of the prescribed historical questions, Anscombe received funding for post-graduate research. Somewhat mysteriously, the refugee Austrian Friedrich Waismann was appointed her supervisor. After being interned for three months as an enemy alien, the Oxford authorities no doubt thought it decent to give work to Waismann, one of the logical positivists in pre-Nazi Vienna. The research proposal had a daunting title: 'An enquiry into certain problems of numerical identity and difference and, subordinate to these, of extension and space, with an examination of the solutions proposed to them by the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, in the light of logical and epistemological method' (see Mac Cumhaill and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*, page 86). Later, applying for further funding, she re-titled the thesis as 'The Identity of Bodies', focussing on 'the traditional definition of man as a rational animal' (ibid pp. 102-3). Marriage, children, and her meeting in 1942 with Wittgenstein, meant that she never completed the dissertation. A final application for funding in 1945 was turned down, on the basis of a report by John Wisdom, the research now said to be on 'the concept of the soul', engaging with Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Wittgenstein (ibid p. 131), with no mention of Aquinas. By then she must have known of the collapse of the friendship which Waismann had (or thought he had) with Wittgenstein. The reference to 'the Aristotelian philosophical tradition' evidently took Leonine Thomism as the framework for her research. She certainly agreed with the radically anti-Cartesian implications of the English Dominican version of Thomism.

In 1940 she had two terms of weekly essays on Plato with the Winchester-educated Scottish Episcopalian Donald MacKinnon (aged 27, only five years older than herself). Oxford philosophy was still entranced by A.J. Ayer's highly regarded and immensely popular *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1936), against which MacKinnon insisted that we human beings are by nature 'metaphysical animals' (see 'The function of philosophy in education', his seminal article in *Blackfriars*, August 1941: 413-418). While fairly happy at being counted an analytic philosopher, Anscombe was to issue in 1981 the first volume of her collected papers, entitling it *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein*, provocatively, with a clutch of papers on Ancient Philosophy, and containing a cheeky reformulation

of A.N. Whitehead's famous remark about Plato: 'Subsequent philosophy is footnotes on Parmenides' (page xi) — not a judgment that many people, especially Oxford philosophers, then or now, would endorse. The second volume, also issued in 1981, containing her 'earliest purely philosophical writing', she entitled *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*, thus signalling explicitly her difference from anti-metaphysical philosophers such as Ayer. In 1951, moreover, Anscombe co-taught a class on Proclus with Carlotta Labowsky (1905-1991) the Jewish classicist who left Germany for Oxford in 1934, and continued to work on the transmission of ancient Greek thought to the western world, co-editing the *Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi* series. (Philippa Foot is said to have been the only person in the class.) There is plenty more evidence that Anscombe should be regarded as participating in the great tradition of Western philosophy. Labowsky is thanked, we may note, for her help, in the translator's preface to the first edition of *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), as also is 'Miss I. Murdoch'. (They may only have helped to shuffle pages of manuscript.) Of course, Anscombe cannot be separated from Wittgenstein, whom she first met in 1942 at Cambridge. Indeed, for many philosophers, especially non-readers of German, the later Wittgenstein's writings are effectively as she reworked them in English. Several of the most memorable phrases are hers — for example, when 'we can't find our feet with [people in a strange country]', the image is the translator's (*Investigations*, II, xi, p.235).

In 1956, as still a very junior lecturer, Anscombe famously attempted to stop the University of Oxford from awarding an honorary degree to Harry Truman, the US President who authorised the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki — a mass murderer, like Nero or Genghis Khan or indeed Hitler or Stalin, as she said. As John Berkman shows in his carefully documented chapter the background is to be found in the fears shared by people in Anscombe's circle in the late 1930s, that all-out war against Nazi Germany would mean mass slaughter of innocent civilians.

Only one correction seems called for in this immensely impressive and wide ranging book. In 1950, when staying with her in Oxford, Wittgenstein arranged through Anscombe to have a conversation with Fr Conrad Pepler. This led to his asking about moving to one of the Dominican priories, not however the small one in the centre of Leicester as reported here (p. 454) but rather to Hawkesyard, in the Staffordshire countryside. Predictably he insisted that no one should try to discuss philosophy with him as he pottered about in the extensive gardens— just as well, perhaps, since the community included Fr Ivo Thomas, an up and coming exponent of symbolic logic, while among the philosophy students were Herbert McCabe (who had studied at Manchester under Dorothy Emmet), Laurence Bright (a great admirer of Waismann), and Cornelius Ernst (who had heard

Wittgenstein lecture in Cambridge). Wittgenstein was already too unwell to make the move.

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**AUGUSTINE ON THE WILL: A THEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT** by Han-Luen Kantzer Komline, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020, pp. xv + 469, £90.00, hbk*

As the author explains at the start of this hefty study, much ink has been expended over the last half century in elucidating Augustine's account of the human will, in assessing its development and cogency, and in assessing its originality or indebtedness to earlier writers, in particular to the Stoic philosophers. Since Albrecht Dihle's 1981 book *The Theory of the Will in Classical Antiquity*, scholars including Anthony Kenny, Carol Harrison, Richard Sorabji, John Rist, Michael Frede, and Sarah Catherine Byers have each reached different conclusions. The task is complicated by lack of certainty as to when Augustine wrote certain texts and by the nature of many texts as polemical contributions to theological disputes in which different aspects of the will are germane to the argument. This makes it difficult to know when what is written in one place may guide interpretation of what is written elsewhere. Han-Luen Kantzer Komline addresses the subject through a painstaking analysis of the textual evidence that is careful not to attribute to Augustine at one time or in one text what he says elsewhere at another. Across eight chapters, framed by an introduction and conclusion she builds up a persuasive if scarcely surprising account of how Augustine describes the human will and the role which such descriptions play in his theological controversies. Each chapter takes a different theme but 'also finds its centre of gravity in a certain period of Augustine's thinking, with successive chapters moving forward chronologically' (p. 8).

The picture which emerges across the first two chapters is of an early period after his abandonment of Manichaeism, in which Augustine views our possession of a free will as self-evident and asserts that 'there is nothing so much in our power as the will itself' (*De libero arbitrio*, Book 3). However, after his engagement with the Pauline scriptures as a newly ordained presbyter, this gradually gives way to a 'theologically differentiated' account of the will, as originally created, as fallen, as redeemed in this present age, and as it will be in the life to come. Already by 392, in the *Contra Fortunatum*, Augustine contrasts Adam's freedom of the will before the Fall with his fallen state when he sins through ne-