

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*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2005, Pp. 300, £35 hbk.

Three volumes of Elizabeth Anscombe's collected essays were published by Blackwell in 1981 and – astonishingly – are no longer in print. The present volume includes a further seventeen essays that have already been published elsewhere plus five that have never previously appeared in English. It also reprints 'Modern Moral Philosophy', first published in 1958, which has preserved for nearly half a century its capacity to provoke and stimulate. In 2002–3 the Royal Institute of Philosophy held a series of lectures of the same name, in which a number of distinguished philosophers responded directly or indirectly to issues raised by Anscombe; the papers have recently been published by Cambridge University Press.

Most of the essays in this book explore themes that were central to 'Modern Moral Philosophy': A section entitled 'Action and Practical Reason' contains the most philosophically demanding essays in the book, based on the close reading of other twentieth century philosophers such as Chisholm and von Wright. These develop ideas explored in her work on intention, such as the relation between mental and physical causation, the importance of the description under which an act is chosen, and the best way to characterise practical reasoning.

Several other essays are motivated by Anscombe's concern that philosophy should be capable of protecting absolute prohibitions, in particular that against killing the innocent. 'Murder and the Morality of Euthanasia' was her contribution to the working party for a report by the Linacre Centre entitled *Euthanasia and Clinical Practice*. It argues that the fact that human beings are spirit as well as flesh makes sense of the prohibition upon murder, which is 'so basic that it is difficult to answer the question as to why murder is intrinsically wrong'. It also provides a lucid analysis of key concepts such as 'responsibility' and 'omission'. Finally, here and elsewhere in this volume, Anscombe is sensibly cautious about the 'Principle of Double Effect'. She prefers to talk of 'side-effects' and protests, quite rightly in my view, against appeals to Aquinas's authority which read far too much into his brief discussion. In this context, she points out that it should not be assumed, as it regularly is assumed, that one has the obligation in a particular situation to save as many people as possible; if I fail to save five people because I am busy saving three, there is no one that I have wronged.

The question of whether innocent human beings can ever be killed leads, via consideration of abortion, to the question of what counts as a human being. In three of the essays here, one with the beautiful title 'Were you a zygote?', Anscombe explores, in a style more tentative than is usual for her, the status of the early embryo. In particular, she asks whether it is correct to describe a zygote as 'a human being'. One obvious objection to doing so is that one zygote may become not one but two human beings. Anscombe concludes, against many Catholic proliferators, that a zygote is probably not *a* human being, but that since it is a living human thing with the directed potential to become a human being, its life should still be fully protected.

Anscombe conveys a passionate sense that philosophy matters, and that this is so in part because of the connection between how we think and how we behave. This connection works in a complex way. In a radio talk from 1957 entitled 'Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt Youth?' Anscombe argues (with a certain irony that one hopes was not lost on the original listeners) that the philosophy taught to undergraduates, corrupt as it was, merely reflected (and flattered) the corrupt mores of its society; it did not cause them. If that were the whole story, however, Anscombe would have been less eager to provide a philosophical critique of the argument and

assumptions of such influential figures as the lawyer Glanville Williams and the doctor John Harris, both of whose work aims to weaken the traditional ethic of respect for human life as such. (Her trenchant review of Williams's book was not published by the law journal that had commissioned it; readers will enjoy speculating as to why not.) A short lecture entitled 'Knowledge and reverence for human life' distinguishes knowledge of 'indifferent truth' from the kind of knowledge possessed by someone who has a certain virtue, say justice. The just person will know certain things as if by nature, for example the intrinsic worth of a human being. Conversely, the refusal to notice or acknowledge certain truths (such as the fact that four-week-old fetuses are small human beings) is characteristic of injustice. This lecture left me wishing for a fuller exploration of the connection between the two types of knowledge, and, relatedly, between doing practical philosophy well and living well.

Anscombe's prose style is, as her daughter Mary Geach memorably puts it in the Introduction, 'like the confection *panforte*, all fruit and no dough, very chewy and tough'. Sometimes her readers will wish that she had indulged their limitations by spelling out what she had argued, and in particular by explaining why this is significant within the wider debate. (For this reason, Mary Geach's Introduction is particularly helpful.) Anscombe makes her readers work hard; on the other hand, she never uses unnecessarily technical or over-elaborate language. Like *panforte*, her texts are not only chewy, but rich and nutritious. Above all, whether or not you agree with her, and whether or not you fully grasp her point, Elizabeth Anscombe makes you want to go on doing philosophy – to go on thinking, as she puts it, 'about the most difficult and ultimate questions'. We should be grateful to the editors, and to the series editor of St Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs, for making this posthumous collection possible, and we might hope that there will be more to come.

MARGARET ATKINS

WHY THE JEWS REJECTED JESUS. THE TURNING POINT IN WESTERN HISTORY by David Klinghoffer. *Doubleday*, New York 2005. 247 pp. \$24.95

This brief, difficult and disturbing book covers the entire subject of the relationships between Judaism and Christianity, encompassing also the engagements of Jews with Christians and Christians with Jews. It is intellectually the most ambitious book on its topic that I know, and, rich in original ideas, it also is one of the most engaging. Even though I find its historical thesis wrong and its theological thesis racist, I also think that it should be read by everyone who wants to know why Judaism flourishes among Jews, and why Christianity's mission to Israel after the flesh, to the Jewish People, fails ignominiously.

Klinghoffer's historical thesis, announced in the title, is that Judaism could not have won over the vast populations that adopted Christianity, so that only Christianity Judaism without the law or Torah and Halakhah could have accomplished the civilizing mission that accomplished by Christianity yielded the Christian West. No advocate of Judaism has ever before written so shocking an indictment of Judaism, confirming the accusations of its most bitter enemies, for instance the apostle Paul and the prophet Muhammad, that it was a forbidden ethnic island with no message for humanity. And that is only one of Klinghoffer's propositions – no wonder it is a book with a troubling message.

Klinghoffer narrates the history of Jews and Judaism's response to Christianity, here meaning the claim that Jesus was and is the Messiah: "The disputation has been going on ever since, as I will show in this book the first to tell the story of this ancient debate in the form of a historical narrative. Beginning with how Judaism looked in