Nordic Wittgenstein Review Special Issue 2022|pp. 16–33|DOI 10.15845/nwr.v11.3638

Valérie Aucouturier
valerie.aucouturier(at)usaintlous.be

Philosophy of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Role of Philosophy with the Oxford Quartet (Anscombe, Foot, Midgley, Murdoch)

> As a survivor from the wartime group, I can only say: sorry, but the reason was indeed that there were fewer men about then. The trouble is not, of course, men as such – men have done good enough philosophy in the past. What is wrong is a particular style of philosophising that results from encouraging a lot of clever young men to compete in winning arguments. These people then quickly build up a set of games out of simple oppositions and elaborate them until, in the end, nobody else can see what they are talking about. (Midgley 2013)

Abstract

At Oxford University, in the context of WW2, when men were largely obliged to abandon the university benches to take part in the war effort, four women philosophers, Iris Murdoch (1919–1999), Mary Midgley (1919–2018), Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001) and Philippa Foot (1920–2010), formed a group of philosophical reflections that would become a competitor, after the war, to John L. Austin's famous 'Saturday Mornings'. At the heart of the concerns of this 'wartime quartet': putting the importance of being human back at the centre of ethics. They opposed "modern moral philosophy" and its many presuppositions, including the claim that ethical questions are independent of the facts of human life or concern a purely rational subject abstracted from everyday issues and from its belonging to the human species. By putting the importance of being human back at the heart of their ethical reflections, these philosophers came to reflect on issues that directly concern human life, far from the philosophical abstractions that interested their men homologues. In this paper, I explore the extent to which this re-inscription of philosophy into

everyday life and into ordinary human concerns, opens the way to a feminist philosophy and ethics.

Keywords: ethics; Elizabeth Anscombe; Mary Midgley; Philippa Foot; Iris Murdoch; women philosophers

This is a story about four women philosophers and friends who made their way through the academic world of Oxford University in the 1940's and 1950's. For the moment, this story is not told much in the history of analytic philosophy courses, but things are changing[1]. This is the story of a quartet of women philosophers who met at Oxford University in 1938 (it is only in 1920 that women were authorised to enrol as full students at Oxford[2]), became life-long friends and started working together more closely after the second world war.

Now, at Oxford University, during WW2, when men were largely obliged to abandon the university benches to take part in the war effort, these women philosophers formed a group of philosophical reflections that would become a competitor, after the war, to John L. Austin's famous 'Saturday Mornings', to which, Foot reminds us, women philosophers were not invited[3]:

> He [Austin] had something that got called Austin's Kindergarten. On Saturday morning he would just informally ask everyone his own age, or younger, hence the Kindergarten, round to a discussion of philosophy. Everyone was asked who had any teaching post in Oxford but the women were not asked. That was a place where work was being done. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 166)

This quartet of women philosophers was composed of Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001), Philippa (Bosanquet) Foot (1920–2010), Mary (Scrutton) Midgley (1919–2018) and Iris Murdoch (1919–1999) and they all became professional philosophers.

[1] See the two recently published books on the 'wartime quartet' (the expression is from Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman on their philosophical Blog Women in Parenthesis [URL: https://www.womeninparenthesis.co.uk/]): Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022 and Lipscombe 2022.

[2] And still there were quotas (no more than one quarter of women students). We had to wait until 1948 for Cambridge to follow suits (see Lipscomb 2022: 24).

[3] Apart from Mary Wilson (future wife of Geoffrey Warnock).

My interest in the quartet, in the present paper, will focus on the following questions:

1. What difference did it make philosophically, at the time, that they were all *women* philosophers?
2. What does the influence of Wittgenstein have to do with the special shape of their philosophies? And to what extent does it show that the sort of revolution in philosophy brought about by Wittgenstein opens a path for feminist thinking?

I will not deal with these two questions separately. Rather, I propose to show how Wittgenstein's philosophy appeared then as one way of 'bringing philosophy back to life' (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022) and how this mission was made possible by their women's look at a post-war British philosophical landscape.

In §116 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes, "[w]hat *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use", and thus raises the philosophical question of *what* this everyday use refers to. As we know, Wittgenstein did not oppose the everyday use to the scholarly, the theoretical or the poetic uses, but to pseudo-uses (which only have the appearance of use). Everyday use, or rather everyday uses, refer to the infinite variety of possible and real situations in which uses of language are meaningful. This in turn leads to the question of *whose* everyday this is.

This is precisely the question that the 'wartime quartet' wanted to bring back at the centre of philosophizing. They were fighting a view of philosophy according to which philosophy (like science) would be the expression of a pure logical rationality independent of any consideration concerning those who make it or of the implicit values that it could embody. Their fellow male philosophers tended to forget that philosophy was a human activity and that logical questions were of *human* interest. By contrast, these women philosophers wanted to go back to what *we* are interested in. This is the reason why they were concerned with ethics and their main mission was to put the importance of *being human* back at the centre of ethics. These women opposed 'modern moral philosophy' – the one that was taught and discussed at Oxford before and (strangely,

to their eyes) still after WW2[4] – and its many presuppositions, including the claim that ethical questions were independent of the facts of human life or would concern a purely rational subject abstracted from everyday concerns and from its belonging to the human species.

It is by putting the importance of being human back at the heart of their ethical thinking that these women philosophers came to reflect on issues that directly concern human's and women's (animal) lives (as various as the possibility of the holocaust, what it means to be rude, and later abortion, euthanasia, etc.), far from the philosophical abstractions on the meaning of moral concepts that interested their men homologues.

In this paper, I would like to question the extent to which this re-inscription of philosophy into everyday life, especially that of women, and into ordinary human concerns, while it does not expressly call itself 'feminist'[5], opens the way to a feminist philosophy[6] and ethics (cf. Boldrini 2019).

I will proceed by focussing on three important aspects that intellectually unite these four philosophers: being a women (section one); being human (section two); ethics (section three).

[4] "Iris Murdoch observed that French and British philosophers seemed to respond very differently to post-Nazi reality. The French experience of Occupation infused French post-war philosophy and literature. […] Instead, in 1945 Oxford's men returned from their war work, rolled up their sleeves, and picked up where they had left off" (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: xii).

[5] The most obvious exception being the late work of Mary Midgley. See e.g. Midgley & Hughes (1984).

[6] Of course, one can, for obvious reasons, be rather sceptic about the possibility of linking Wittgenstein to feminism. The obvious reasons are well known and exposed, for instance, by Naomi Scheman in her introduction to the 2002 collection of Feminist Interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein (2002), where we can read that "Wittgenstein is widely known as someone who did not much like women (apparent exceptions to this dislike, notably Elizabeth Anscombe, were, so the stories go, precisely exceptions that proved the rules)" (Scheman 2002: 1). Not to mention possible 'conservative' readings of Wittgenstein, where the recommendation to 'leave everything as it is' is read not as a mere remark addressed to philosophers and concerning the nature of philosophical activity, but as a sort of political recommendation – which I think it is not.

1. Being a woman, being a philosopher

What is the point of bringing these four philosopher friends together? It is a legitimate question, for, despite their friendship and common interest in analytic philosophy, Wittgenstein[7] and moral philosophy, each of them was a very singular thinker[8] and character[9]. But it is interesting to regard them as a quartet, the 'wartime quartet', in their relation to philosophy, its practice and its purpose[10]. The interest of considering them together it that it helps identify a common enemy (namely a certain way, detached from reality, of doing philosophy at the time), common grounds for philosophising, a genuine group of discussion within the manly world of Oxford in the 50's. As some version of the story goes, it is a "Joint 'No!'" against the way male philosophers came back to work after the war as if nothing had happened in between that really strengthened their philosophical affinities:

> In her version of the story (Mary never lost her flair for drama) she cast Richard Hare as the anti-hero. "As with many philosophical schools," she told us, "the starting-point was a joint 'No!'." (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022:183)

The reunion of the four is not historically artificial either. They were genuine close friends engaged in intense and frequent philosophical discussions at various times of their studies and life, about the reality of the past, the good and the bad, the fact-value distinction and what it means to be human. And their relationship

[7] Of these women, the one who was the most inspired by Wittgenstein's work was Elizabeth Anscombe, who became very close to the Cambridge philosopher so that he trusted her enough to become one of her literary executors and one of the official translators of the English version of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

[8] Each found different solutions to the practical, intellectual and psychological problems of philosophising while female. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: xvi)

[9] "A Bohemian novelist and spiritual seeker [Murdoch]; a zealous catholic convert and mother of seven [Anscombe]; an atheistic daughter of privilege [Foot]; and a stay-at-home mother who finally wrote the first of her 16 books in her 50s [Midgley]", writes Lipscomb (2022: xiii).

[10] About this remark I owe to the work of Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman (who have put together the website "women in parenthesis" to explore the work of these philosophers) but also to the work of Miranda Boldrini on Murdoch and Vincent Boyer on Foot.

was also shaped by the intense twists and turns of authentic friendship (see Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022).

But to understand what brought them together philosophically, we need to understand what stroke them as problematic and utterly unrealistic (i.e. detached from the actual life of human beings and historical events that characterised the period of world war two and the few decades that followed). In what sense was then mainstream analytic (linguistic) philosophy problematic and detached from what appeared to them as crucially important issues of the time, as what *'really matters*' (cf. Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 182)?

Analytic philosophy was born on the Continent, notably under the influence of the Vienna Circle and its *Manifesto*, largely influenced by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The project was not only philosophical but political. Its aim of clarity of discourse was embedded in the hope that it could "inoculate readers against the dangers of manipulation" (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 47), for instance of propaganda, as Susan Stebbing (who had met Schlick in England in 1930) argued in *Thinking to some Purpose* (1939)[11]. But the major influence of Alfred J. Ayer's *Language,Truth and Logic* (1936) dramatically detached philosophical thinking from any political or ethical considerations, which were reduced to subjective preferences or otherwise "nonsense!". Logical analysis thus became a caricature of itself and, despite Ayer declaring that philosophy had "come to an end", Ayer's stance generated many discussions, discussions that went on and on after the war. However, to the dismay of the quartet, it had already done much harm. And some questions[12] had simply been banished from philosophical thinking. No argument could compete with the accusation of "nonsense!".

[11] Susan Stebbing is Britain's first female professor of philosophy (cf. Mac Cumhaill and Wiseman 2022: 46).

[12] For instance, the quarrels between the British idealists and realists or R.G. Collingwood's metaphysics: "An unspoken consensus began to develop, sustained in the journal *Mind* (now edited by Ryle himself) about 'who was and who was not a "negligible back-number"'. Discussion papers on Urmson, Woozley, Austin, Ayer, Ryle, Ewing, Carnap and Strawson filled its pages; but no one 'would have felt it worthwhile even to disagree with, say, Joseph or Collingwood.' Some time around the late 1940s, J. L. Austin would feign faint recollection of the previous Waynflete Professor of Metaphysics – 'Some kind of historian wasn't he?'" (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 140).

The "Joint 'No!'", that, according to Midgley, brought Anscombe, Foot, Murdoch and herself together after WW2, was precisely a rejection against this strangely abstract and unrealistic way of conceiving of philosophical activity as a kind of pure exchange of philosophical arguments, leaving aside as nonsense and not trying to understand (as, for instance, Wittgenstein would), things that we are actually inclined to do or say. What was it that these women saw and that the others did not?

1.1 They saw something that men did not

This is exactly the puzzlement Anscombe expressed after courageously and publicly speaking out against Oxford University's decision to grant an honorary degree to former US president Harry Truman:

> Almost unanimously, the dons disagree and Truman is feted. Elizabeth is puzzled: what does she see that they do not? If they are inclined to honour a man famous for the merciless killing of tens of thousands of innocent people, she says, they have lost their way. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: xvii)

And a great part of Anscombe's philosophy was then dedicated to what she saw and they did not: there are things we cannot, consciously, as human beings, overlook. We ought, as human beings, to be able to say that some actions or happenings are right and others are wrong, that, to quote Murdoch, "Trend is a good man and Rowse is a bad man" (quoted from: Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 94). This will be the topic of this paper's last section.

Still, to put it more broadly, one important lesson we can draw from Wittgenstein is that the philosophical standpoint is not a view from nowhere, a pure logical abstraction from life and reality. First, we start with language, and language itself has a history and a certain plasticity to context. So, any philosophical remark about any issue at all ought to be situated within a variety of language games and situations where words and sentences are meaningful. This is a crucial aspect of bringing "words back from their metaphysical to

their everyday use". Now it is true that when he was pointing to the irreducibly contextual dimension of meaning and its relation to a variety of uses, Wittgenstein was not exactly thinking that what he was doing was meant to exhibit the variety of views one can take on language depending on their social, historical, institutional, etc. situation towards the language one uses. However, as it has been widely acknowledged – notably by Stanley Cavell (2015) – , he made us, philosophers, aware of the situated character of what we said. Any philosopher's expertise on language is the expertise of someone who occupies a certain position with regards to language.

Now, this idea has been very important for our quartet, in various ways. Murdoch, for instance (cf. Boldrini 2019; Broackes 2014), wanted to unveil the political and anthropological presuppositions which lie behind traditional philosophical approaches to knowledge, ethics, etc. And she thought that one of the main tasks for philosophy was to become aware of the standpoint from which one philosophizes. A topic which is also very important in feminist philosophy, in relation to standpoint epistemology and the reflections about situated knowledge (cf. Harding 1991). Now, the women of the quartet also share the idea that such an awareness does not necessarily weaken philosophical thinking (or, for that matter, knowledge in general), but rather reinforces it. This non-abstract self-consciousness makes philosophical discourse more situated and accurate.

1.2 An anthropological gaze

Of course, it is not that being women made them "naturally" prompt to see things that men did not. It is rather that, as women at Oxford at that time, there were things they could not, and would not, by contrast with the men, take for granted. They were outsiders of sorts and would look at their male counterparts with the eye of a puzzled ethologist:

> Peggy [Torrance] and Mary [Midgley] stood together agog in the Senior Common Room at mid-morning break and surveyed their colleagues. (…) In later years, when asked why so many women were put off pursuing careers in philosophy, Mary would reply:

> 'Don't ask what is wrong with the women, look at what is wrong with the men.' (…) Mary studied this strange 'tribe' with an ethologist's eye, hypothesising a range of underlying motives for their silence ranging from shyness to fear to sexism. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 123)

Their position of exteriority, as women, allowed them to be surprised by what their male peers took for granted, most notably the common Modern view that philosophy was an activity detached from our condition as embodied, sensitive beings. Already in 1953, Midgley pointed the notable fact that "Practically all the great European philosophers have been bachelors" (quoted from: Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: xi):

> Mary argued that the solipsism, scepticism and individualism that is characteristic of the Western philosophical tradition would not feature in a philosophy written by people who had shared intimate friendships with spouses and lovers, been pregnant, raised children, and enjoyed rich and full and varied human lives. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: xi)

Opposite to this disembodied philosophy, detached from daily interests and worries, and in a fashion very much akin to Wittgenstein's view of philosophy, Midgley saw philosophy as plumbing:

> Plumbing and philosophy are both activities that arise because elaborate cultures like ours have, beneath their surface, a fairly complex system which is usually unnoticed, but which sometimes goes wrong. (Midgley 2005: 146)

Philosophy, as much as plumbing, is "needed. It isn't optional" (Midgley 2005: 146), she writes. It is vital and it requires training. We can see how this vital view of philosophy could have been at odds with the logicism of mainstream early analytic philosophy. So the quartet really proposed an internal critique of philosophy and of traditional ways of philosophising, which are actually still very much in place in philosophy. A critique which brings to the fore issues that, as human beings, we ought to be dealing with. A critique which forces us, philosophers, to bring back philosophical thinking to the 'rough ground' (cf. PI: §107) and to never take any philosophical presupposition for granted:

> 'No second rate philosophy is any good,' Elizabeth [Anscombe] told [Iris Murdoch] gravely. 'One must start from scratch – & it takes a very long time to reach scratch.' (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 188)

All four women philosophers thought there was something wrong with traditional philosophy and the way it was done and they shared the idea that an internal critique of philosophy was necessary, particularly in view of its blindness to the issues raised by recent events. Wittgenstein, "a philosopher's philosopher" (Anscombe 1990: 414) says Anscombe, provided the right tools for such a critique, for helping philosophers out of the fly bottle (cf. PI: § 309).

2. The importance of being human

2.1 What we are interested in

So they saw the importance of being human as central to philosophical activity. The importance of being human is indeed a key to understanding 'what interests us' (cf. PI: § 570), what ought to strike us (holocaust, Truman's bombing) and what failed to strike some philosophers who happened to have been detached from reality or abstracted from their human condition by philosophy:

> [I]f the task is to discover what *we* are, then it is one that we must attempt in company, as these women did; in college rooms and dining halls, tea shops and living rooms, by post and in pubs, among nappies and babies. Their habitat a patchwork of walled gardens, rivers, art galleries, refugee camps and bombed-out buildings. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: xv)

So, they put back the question of what it means to be human and what in entails regarding our ways of looking at philosophical, ethical, political, logical issues, back at the centre of philosophical thinking. This issue had worried Elizabeth Anscombe before she really encountered Wittgenstein's thought. Thinking about us as humans, also meant thinking about us as living creatures, just like cats and turnips. A thought that would soon echo in Foot's own views on moral philosophy and what she would call "natural goodness" (Foot 2003):

> "I have listed 'men' with such objects as 'cats' and 'turnips'," Elizabeth Anscombe wrote in 1944, insisting that any attempt to understand ourselves must begin from the fact that we are living creatures. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: xv)

This is how Elizabeth Anscombe became very attentive to "what we are interested in" – a phrase she borrows from Wittgenstein (Anscombe 1963: § 46). The gist of the idea is that our words and practices are expressions of our interests and develop and vary as our interests do. According to her, philosophy of action and moral philosophy should not be regarded as areas of philosophy concerned with some sort of "ready-made" object, namely, actions or values or the good and the bad. On the contrary, the concept of action (and more particularly of human action), is a concept which is built and thus dependent on our interests. And our interests are, for that matter, issues of responsibility, of intentionality, on the one hand, of carelessness, negligence and omissions, on the other. So, the domain of human action does not at all reduces to the movements of human beings but rather concerns what people do or do not do, for what reasons or not, etc. All matters which are of interest to us.

Of course, a background question to this philosophical perspective is "who is 'us'?" What makes us human and our concerns human ones? Cora Diamond walking into this tradition's footsteps has a rather simple (though not at all simplistic) answer: "A human being is someone who has a human life to lead, as do I, someone whose fate is a human fate, as is mine" (1991: 59).

To this respect, Anscombe and her fellow philosophical friends make a difference in comparison with traditional moral philosophers of their time (obsessed with A.J. Ayer's fact/value distinction and the issue of the impossibility of truth in the domain of morals). In fact, Anscombe's way (and Foot's as well) of looking at what interests us in the domain of moral philosophy is really peculiar and important. They wanted to understand what motivates us in judging an action as good or bad. For instance, how do we actually decide what belongs to the scope of an agent's responsibility and what not? So, they had very concrete questions about our ways of judging human action and this is what motivated Anscombe's project to describe, what we may call the "grammar of action". She and Foot

had a very different conception of "what interests us" from their fellow moral philosophers who were either trying to provide some sort of ontology or ground for moral values or desperate that such a thing could actually exist (or content that it could not exist).

This "shared humanity", as Diamond writes, ("not humanity in Kant's sense, but merely *being human*",1991: 57), so important to philosophical activity (as to any human activity), does not need any concept of human essence, it is a concern for what interests us, which is reflected in our practices. By abstracting from this very simple fact, philosophers make us lose a sense of what they are talking about: "This is one of many ways in which the teaching of philosophy alienates people from what unreflectively belongs to their sense of their humanity" (Diamond 1991: 57).

Or again, in Midgley's words:

> These people then quickly build up a set of games out of simple oppositions and elaborate them until, in the end, nobody else can see what they are talking about. (Midgley 2013)

In other words, as Midgley puts it, these women "were more interested in understanding this deeply puzzling world than in putting each other down" and by "putting each other down", what she means is "a particular style of philosophising that results from encouraging a lot of clever young men to compete in winning arguments" (Midgley 2013). By contrast, these women were concerned with actual ethical considerations (such as the horror of the holocaust[13], the debates about abortion and euthanasia, etc.). And they addressed very concrete questions without abandoning the tools and rigour of conceptual analysis.

2.2 Getting rid of the traditional dualisms

These philosopher's introduction of concrete practical issues within the domain of philosophy, and more particularly of moral philosophy goes together with a criticism of the Modern

[13] It is interesting that Hannah Arendt, a women philosopher at the same time, also felt concerned with understanding the very concrete horror of the holocaust in terms of a philosophy of action.

disembodied subject whose main philosophical tool would be a disembodied reason reaching for universal truths and whose opposite alter-ego would be a kind of emotion or passion-driven subject struggling with his inner or natural determinations. For that matter, Anscombe's criticisms, for instance, take Wittgensteinian tools to insist that self-consciousness and rationality are not properties of a disembodies subject, but are rather most obviously expressed in action, and more particularly in intentional action, and are not disconnected from pleasure, desires, want, and so on.

Following Wittgenstein, Anscombe was particularly interested in the plasticity and multiplicity of language uses together with the force language games can exert on our ways of seeing the world, on considering situations, etc. Focusing on action and the norms that shape our actions, she highlighted the importance of the *descriptions under which* we consider what we do.

The combination of these two observations of the variety of language uses and the importance of description leads to the following claim: any event, any situation can be the object of an indefinite variety of descriptions, but the ways in which we describe or perceive an event, a situation or a happening can have decisive consequences on the actions and judgments we take from it[14].

The remark reveals very powerful when we turn to ethical matters. For the reason why Anscombe insisted on the importance of descriptions is directly related to the question of the possibility of truth regarding ethical issues. It was important to be able to say Truman killed innocent people (and did so intentionally), and thus acted badly, and to acknowledge that such descriptions of what he did were not mere subjective judgment but true descriptions of what did happen. It is similarly important for political and indeed moral issues to be able to say that if X raped Y, the qualification of "rape" is not just a point-of-view-dependent-judgment over what happened

[14] This very general remark we can make on the basis of Anscombe's reading of Wittgenstein may constitute the guiding thread of a possible feminist reading of Wittgenstein and Anscombe. Anscombe, for that matter, is a very singular and interesting figure. For she was not in any sense representative of a feminist perspective in philosophy. She was extremely conservative and took positions against abortion and contraception. However, she was a rather ambiguous figure in the academic realm. She was indeed one of the few women who managed to get a prominent voice in philosophy.

but a genuine (true) description of what happened. Descriptions of what happens are not up to us in this sense.

3. The urge to do moral philosophy

The historical momentum, combined with the feeling that philosophy at Oxford was going astray, led the quartet to turn to more "essential" questions:

> Confronted by the terrible knowledge of what was possible for human animals, of the uses to which they might put technology and industry, and deprived of the reassuring divisions between sanity and madness, human and beast, Philippa quietly resolved to become a moral philosopher. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 144)

Moral philosophy required plumbing.

> Hare had attempted to show that there could be a rational basis for moral disagreement, even after Ayer's ethical weedkiller had stripped reality bare of value. It was this that elicited the joint "No!" from Philippa, Mary, Iris and Elizabeth. Philippa Foot certainly couldn't stomach this repackaged version of Ayer's subjectivism. She wanted to be able to say to the Nazis: "But we are right, and you are wrong." She wanted the idea of an objective moral reality against which actions could be judged *wrong* or *bad* and not just *inconsistent* or *irrational*. Hare had settled for consistency: if a man held an internally consistent set of moral principles, and acted in accord with them, there could be no ground for complaint. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 186–7)

As I said, these women had in common the fact that they took moral philosophy seriously. And they had, in this respect, a common enemy which was the claim of the irrelevance of morality to truth and philosophy. As reminded, this claim was notably advocated by A.J. Ayer's approach to morals and his defence of the fact/value distinction, the consequence of which was that no truth could be said in the domain of values, because truth was a matter of fact and even more so of rationality. A dualism by the way, which echoes again a traditional (however caricatural) distinction between men and women where ethics, values, care, and the domestic sphere are

attached to women, while rationality and the intellectual sphere are the realm of men. The result of the dichotomy, of course, is that no claim to knowledge could be made based on domestic experience.

Hence, in addition to her concern for the issue of intentionality and responsibility of, for instance, the consequences of Truman's decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Anscombe's concern in 'Modern Moral Philosophy' (1958), for instance, was to take moral philosophy seriously. Which meant, according to her, to reject the idea of an independent sphere of values (that is independent of facts) and even more so of so-called "moral" values. This is the reason why she suggested that we look at so-called moral values in relation to norms and rules in general, in their relation to education and practices. In this respect, a rule, a norm or a value, and the sort of obligation it creates, is integral to our practices and should be understood in relation to them rather than as a kind of ontological domain separated from the realm of objectivity. And this again, in addition to its relation to Wittgenstein's remarks on rules and rule following, is also the mark of a genuine interest for what we (humans) do and of a conception of philosophy not as a kind of purely gratuitous activity of the mind but rather as concerned with what she calls, after Aristotle, human flourishing.

This is also for this very reason that Anscombe disliked, what she calls "modern moral philosophy" emerging from Kant. In particular, she takes Kant responsible for having suggested that moral duty was to be understood as the result of a struggle of the rational will against a person's interests. She says: "[D]esires and inclinations (…) are not the prostitute mother of a *'moral' ought* who seduces the pure intelligible will into begetting it" (Anscombe 2006: 206).

In other words, (moral) duty is not simply the result of a fight of reason against desires and inclinations. It is rather related to some broader understanding of human flourishing, where duties can be and are related to human needs and desires.

This is the sort of approach that was mainly promoted by Philippa Foot in her work:

> Philippa's point is a simple and elegant extension of Wittgenstein's: our evaluative language does not peel off the world, leaving behind a stripped-out, valueless scene that we

> might call 'reality' or 'nature'. Rather, an evaluative description makes sense only when it is located in a pattern of human life. (Mac Cumhaill & Wiseman 2022: 197)

Here again, although it would be oddly exaggerated to claim that this sort of remark reflects some seed of feminist thinking, such a way of putting back human needs and desires at the centre of moral philosophy is central not just for a more feminist way of doing philosophy (debarred of the old dualisms) but also for a more accurate approach of morality in general.

4. Philosophy of everyday life

Compared to the then mainstream analytic (linguistic) philosophy, the quartet's philosophy was a philosophy of everyday life concerned with what interests us as human beings (including logic and ethics). The phrase, 'philosophy of everyday life', echoes Freud's 'Psychopathology of everyday life'. Wittgenstein himself used to compare what he does in philosophy to Freud's way of making us look differently at such ordinary phenomena as dreams, lapsus and missed acts. Likewise, the philosopher invites us to look at what is familiar and obvious to us, at our most ordinary and everyday practices, from a kind of ethological perspective in order to dig out the invisible norms at play within them. Of course, Freud and Wittgenstein departed in their respective enterprises in that Wittgenstein wished to describe existing norms of language and practices, while Freud was building a new narrative which was meant to make us look at a number of phenomena as belonging to the same unified kind of explanation (namely the manifestation of some unconscious desire). In other words, Freud offered a way of looking at things, an interpretation, while Wittgenstein simply aimed to suggest that we extract the obviousness from the obvious, the familiarity from the familiar, the naturality from the natural, the ordinary from the everyday, etc. However, this way of coming to see what is before our eyes is the first step towards becoming conscious of the "immensely complicated" (TLP: 4.002) tacit conventions that accompany our practices and allowing the possibility of criticism of such conventions. This criticism however will not consist necessarily

in revising the conventions in the first place (a thing which can hardly be done by a simple fiat), but in acknowledging the contingency of these norms in order to modify our practices or view or describe them otherwise.

References

Anscombe, G.E.M., 1958. "Modern Moral Philosophy". *Philosophy*, 33 (124), 1–19.

Anscombe, G.E.M., 1963. *Intention.* 2nd edition, Harvard University Press.

Anscombe, G.E.M., 1990. "Wittgenstein. Whose Philosopher?". *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 28, 1–10.

Anscombe, G.E.M., 2006. "Good and Bad Human Action". In: M. Geach & L. Gormally, eds., *Human Life, Action and Ethics. Essays by G.E.M. Anscombe.* Imprint Academics,195–206.

Ayer, A.J., 1936. *Language, Truth and Logic.* 2nd ed., London: Gollancz.

Boldrini, M., 2019. *Éthique, imagination et réalité chez Iris Murdoch*, doctoral dissertation, Université de Picardie Jules Verne & Università degli studi, La Sapienza.

Boyer, V., 2021. *Promesse tenue. Agir par devoir*, Paris: Classiques Garnier.

Broackes, J., 2014. *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, Oxford University Press.

Cavell, S., 2015. *Must we Mean What we Say?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Diamond, C., 1991. "The Importance of Being Human". *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 29 (March), 35–62.

Foot, Ph., 2003. *Natural Goodness*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Gnassounou, B., 2019, *La parole donnée*, Paris: Classique Garnier.

Harding, S., 1991. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives.* Cornell University Press.

Lipscombe, B.J.B., 2022. *The Women Are Up to Something.* Oxford University Press.

Mac Cumhaill C. & R. Wiseman, 2022. *Metaphysical Animals. How Four Women Brought Philosophy Back to Life.* London, Chatto & Windus.

Midgley, M. & J. Hughes, 1984. *Women's Choices.* London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Midgley, M., 2005. "Philosophical Plumbing". In: D. Midgley, ed., *The Essential Mary Midgley.* London: Routledge, 146–152.

Midgley, M., 2013. Letter to *The Guardian*, Thu 28 Nov 2013.

Scheman, N., 2002. *Feminist Interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Stebbing, S. L., 1939. *Thinking to Some Purpose*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Wittgenstein, L., 1922. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge & Keagan Paul.

Wittgenstein, L., 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Biographical Note

Valérie Aucouturier is professor of philosophy at Université Saint-Louis, Bruxelles and a member of the Centre Prospéro. Langage, Image, Connaissance. She got her PhD in philosophy from Université Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne and The University of Kent. Her research mainly focusses on the philosophy of language, mind and action (Anscombe, Austin, Wittgenstein) and the philosophy of psychology and psychoanalysis. She has published extensively on the work of Elizabeth Anscombe.