



The Teology of Human Agency as a Basis of Flourishing: Some Hints from Anscombe and MacIntyre

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1. Anscombe on Natural Facts and Meaning

In the last few decades there has been an increasing amount of bibliography regarding subjects common to moral philosophy and psychology. Important writings in psychology suggest and implement proposals to establish the different contexts that will allow humans to develop within an ordered structure. These shared ideas imply that there is some common understanding regarding the most suitable conditions for growth. Some of those proposals have been influenced by philosophy and literature in their endeavor to deal with the sense of growth and meaning in life.¹

One of the most influential philosophers in this context was Elizabeth Anscombe. In the late 1950s she proposed a renewal of philosophical ethics, suggesting an application of the disciplines to tangible every-day life concerns.² She urged turning attention to the “natural facts” to understand their coherence in connection with human development. The British author demonstrated from a simple illustration; the fact that humans have a certain number of teeth on average offers an indication as to what is suitable for their development. This fact must therefore be connected with their nutritional capacity and growth, etc., and clearly evidences that there exists an optimal state for human beings.³ As many other authors, Philippa Foot and MacIntyre have profiting from these insights to link the key characters of humans to explain human flourishing and social life.⁴

Additionally, Anscombe “rediscovered” the role of intentions: in ethics, it is truly counterproductive to limit oneself to the description of events that are externally perceivable. In short, intentions matter.

Anscombe’s work in the field of ethics restored the connection between physical facts and the role of intentions. Furthermore, in the field of philosophy, psychology has reconnected intentions in theory and applied them to the therapeutic field.

2. MacIntyre’s Reluctance to Accept Aristotle’s Natural Teleology

¹ A. Sison, A., G. R. Beabout and I. Ferrero (eds) (2017) *Handbook of Virtue Ethics in Business and Management* (2 vol). Springer, pp. 789-843.

² E. Grimi, *G.E.M. Anscombe. The Dragon Lady*, Cantagalli, Siena 2014. J. Sanford, *Before Virtue. Assessing Contemporary Virtue Ethics*, CUA Press, Washington D.C. 2015.

³ “Modern Moral Philosophy”, «Philosophy», 33, 1958, pp. 1-19 (hereafter abbrev. MMPH in footnotes), pp. 9 and 18. See also “On Brute Facts” (1958), in *The Collected Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe*, v. 3, pp. 22-25, and A. Sison, A., G. R. Beabout and I. Ferrero (eds) (2017) *Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, pp. vii-viii.

⁴ P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2001, p. 28; 35, and *Moral Dilemmas*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2002, pp. 165-166 on similar remarks by Peter Geach. In the following paragraphs, we will sketch some theses from Anscombe regarding our capacity to know the good and act in accordance with it.

A significant stage in MacIntyre's intellectual evolution was his encounter with “Modern Moral Philosophy”. In 1959 he wrote “Hume on is and ought”, based on Anscombe's remarks about the meaning of natural facts.⁵

It took decades to the Scottish Philosopher to assimilate the biological aspects of the Aristotelian teleology. Despite that, in his *A Short History of Ethics* (1966), he already stated that human beings are embedded naturally in a network of relations that imply the non-artificiality (in the Humean sense) of rules because they were necessary to foster human relations.

Yet the human nature specified is individualist human nature, unamenable to moral rules. And are we not, in any case, back again with a new form of the error committed by the sophists and by Hobbes? Can we actually characterize individuals apart from and prior to their adherence to certain rules?⁶

Before displaying his interpretation of the “metaphysical biology” of Aristotle in *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999), he relied very much on the shreds of evidence of social life, i.e. his explanation of the practice-based community.⁷ He therefore precluded his reader from concluding that the teleological pursuit of human life proposed by *After Virtue* constitutes a quest to live according to nature, as understood, for instance, by Aristotle himself.⁸

In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre underscores the tight relationship between teleology and the conscious effort to give unity to one's life:

because my life is to be understood as a teleologically ordered unity, a whole the nature of which and the good of which I have to learn how to discover, my life has the continuity and unity of a quest, a quest whose object is to discover the truth about my life as a whole which is an indispensable part of the good of that life.⁹

In his work of 1999 he explained that in *After Virtue* he wanted to give an account of the place of the virtues, understood as Aristotle had understood them, within social practices, the lives of individuals and the lives of communities while making that account independent of what I called Aristotle's ‘metaphysical biology’.¹⁰

And he continues explaining the explanatory power of the metaphysical outlook:

But I had now learned from Aquinas that my attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding. It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do. So I

⁵ A. MacIntyre, “Hume on ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’”, «Philosophical Review» 68 (1959), in *David Hume Critical Assessments*, T.L. Beauchamp and T.A. Mappes (eds.), Routledge, Oxford 1995, v. 4, pp. 485-499.

⁶ Cf. A. MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics. A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, MacMillan, New York 1966, repr. Routledge and Kegan Paul, New York 1987, p. 176. Cf. C. Lutz, “Narrative and the Rationality of Traditions. MacIntyre's Metaphysical Stance”, «Acta Philophica» 28-2, 2019, p. 214.

⁷ In *Whose Justice. Which Rationality?*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1988, MacIntyre presupposes an inherent and underlying nature, determinative of teleology as the measure of human flourishing. In the Chapter “Aquinas on Practical Rationality and Justice”, he dialectically develops Aquinas' understanding of the purpose of human life in accord with nature in an open debate with different Thomist scholars.

⁸ Cf. R.A. Gahl, “MacIntyre on Teleology, Narrative and Human Flourishing: Towards a Thomistic Narrative Anthropology”, «Acta Philophica» 28-2, 2019, p. 282.

⁹ A. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry. Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, Duckworth, London 1990, p. 197.

¹⁰ A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals. Why Human Beings need the Virtues*, Open Court, Chicago 1999, p. x.

discovered that I had, without realizing it, presupposed the truth of something very close to the account of the good that Aquinas gives.¹¹

In *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* he renews his comprehensive view of human nature in continuity with that of non-rational animals:

Nonhuman animals function well or badly. And as with machines or wolves, dolphins and gorillas, so too is it with human agents and societies. They too function well or badly.¹²

For humans, i.e. for *dependent rational animals* or *reflective agents*¹³ to function well or badly is of course to act in accord or in contrast with ones' own nature with its inherent purpose.

3. *Willing and Meaningful Choices*

Anscombe pointed out that the moral value of certain actions depends on a conditional, that is, "if you want something". If you want to obtain the fruit of a plant, you have to cultivate the vegetable, water it, and so forth, respecting specific "duties" that do not depend on us.¹⁴ The original situation of external objects begins to be less determining, and the natural conditioning acquires a meaning.¹⁵ So, in order to establish new ties, the human will enters into "dialogue" with natural determinations.

Appearances give clear signs that the configuration of beings "has something to do" with their way of being and that it is not the work of our imagination to associate this with a particular idea of perfection or normal state of the different types of beings. These regular manifestations determine our judgments about the individuals of that species (e.g. complete or defective), and, above all, their conduct and the achievement of certain ends. In short, what we intend and what nature determines creates an integrated framework that conditions our actions, in which our coherent knowledge can grow.

MacIntyre is quite clear about the rational requirements to deal with own desires:

If I am to answer the question 'What shall I do' I had better first pause and pose the question 'What is it that I want' [...] 'Is what I now want what I want myself to want' and 'Do I have sufficiently good reasons to want what I now want?': within who I am and the history of my desires.¹⁶

He goes ahead with this first person perspective in ethics, i.e. an *agent centered morals* posing the relation between desiring and willing within the wider question of "what kind of person I want to be", or "what kind of person I want to become by doing such and such".¹⁷ In other words, he connects the willful behaviour with what is good for me, here and now:

To have a good reason for desiring something – when that desire is not an idle wish – is to have a good reason for acting in some particular way. So what is to act for a good reason?"

¹¹ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 2007, p. xi.

¹² *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016, p. 29. MacIntyre refers to Anscombe twice in the first chapter: pp. 5 and 38.

¹³ A. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 56 and *passim*.

¹⁴ Cf. MPh, p. 7.

¹⁵ Cf. P. Foot, *Moral Dilemmas*, cit. pp. 199-201.

¹⁶ A. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 4.

¹⁷ The terminology was coined by Giuseppe Abbà, who summarised the arguments of Julia Annas, Martin Rhonheimer and others in the 1990s. Cf. G. Abbà, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù. Saggio di filosofia morale*, LAS, Rome 1995², pp. 271 and ff., *Quale impostazione per la filosofia morale*, LAS, Rome 1996, pp. 50-53; 209-211, *Costituzione epistemica della filosofia morale*, LAS, Rome 2009, p. 142. Abbà suggests that the moral theories of this kind are rather clearly distinguished from those in which the reference point is the external evaluation of actions; these are ethical positions in which a judgment of situations is sought with objective parameters outside of the conscience of the individual who acts

[...] “we have a good reason to want some particular object of desire only if and when to act so as to achieve the object of that desire is to act so as to achieve some good.”¹⁸

4. Anscombe on the Natural Roots of Rules

Anscombe devoted several studies to link rationality to the comprehension of the sense of human regulations. She often uses Wittgensteinian *language games* in order to highlight some of the presuppositions of the dynamics of social exchanges. Participation in a game implies the adoption of rules that allow interaction and dialogue between the people involved. Here arises a plot in which the validity of the moves depends on several factors: that the agent be one of the “players” and that he know the rules of the activity. In this way, we know that we are generating expectations and calculations related to the decisions we make, which implies the recognition of the other participants.¹⁹ This understanding explains that the agent is not “pushed” by the nature of things or by the images of his mind, but, that after having understood a set of rules, he or she elaborates reasons (*logoi*) to make one move over another,²⁰ moves that are meaningless outside the context of the game.²¹

This ability to assimilate instructions in specific contexts proves we are suited to live in systems of rules. It leads us to understand when a sign is a matter of courtesy, a promise, or a sacrilege. Without the human ability to learn the answers due to the prohibitions of modal verbs such as “should” or “can”,²² these same verbs would not exist as tools of the language. Additionally, this conclusion regards the whole range of linguistic environments and normative systems such as etiquette and courtesy, traffic codes, and human rights statements.²³

The understanding of the reasons within a thread of norms gives ground for the possibility to ask for compliance.²⁴

A rule and a promise can thus be distinguished from mere regularity because the latter is a fact, while the former two require that obligation described above, namely, one that is created and accepted. The freedom with which the rules of a game are accepted, one of which can be formulated as a promise, is another feature that cannot be applied to merely regular successions.²⁵ For Anscombe, the distinction between a rule and a promise is not so clear; both imply the inclusion in an interlacement by which the relations make us responsible for something.²⁶

Anscombe concludes that:

¹⁸ A. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 8.

¹⁹ A. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 17.

²⁰ Cf. G.E.M. Anscombe, “On Promising and its Justice and Whether it need to be Respected in *Foro Interno*” (1969), *The Collected Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe*, v. 3, B. Blackwell, Oxford 1981, p. 16 and “Rules, Rights and Promises”, in *The Collected Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe*, v. 3, p. 101.

²¹ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Rules, Rights and Promises”, cit. On the frequency of the negative forms of the verbs (*should not, cannot*) and why Anscombe calls them *stopping modals*, see also P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit., p. 50.

²² G.E.M. Anscombe, “Rules, Rights and Promises”, cit. pp. 100-101.

²³ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Rules, Rights and Promises”, cit. p. 101: “It is part of human intelligence to be able to learn the responses to stopping modals without which they wouldn’t exist as linguistic instruments and without which these things: rules, etiquette, rights, infringements, promises, pieties and impieties would not exist either.”

²⁴ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Rules, Rights and Promises”, cit., p. 102. Anscombe observes that this implies the capacity to distinguish a mere rehearsal from the actual ‘game.’

²⁵ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Rules, Rights and Promises”, cit., pp. 97-99: The spouse who regularly comes home at the same hour does not necessarily break a promise by suddenly and wilfully failing to do so once.

²⁶ G.E.M. Anscombe, “On Promising and its Justice”, cit., p. 17.

These ‘musts’ and ‘can’ts’ are the most basic expression of such-and-such’s being a rule; just as they are the most basic expression in learning the rules of a game, and as they are too in being taught rights and manners. But they aren’t, in Hume’s phrase, ‘naturally intelligible’. The mark of this is the relation of interdependence between the ‘you can’t’ and the ‘reason’ where this is what I have called the theme or logos of the ‘you can’t’. These musts and can’ts are understood by those of normal intelligence as they are trained in the practices of reason.²⁷

Taylor, Foot, Spaemann, and MacIntyre also point out the importance and the natural character of the comprehension of these networks of relations.²⁸ MacIntyre and Foot emphasize the similarities of human and animal behaviour in learning rules for acting according to their natural goals.²⁹

Robert Spaemann readdressed specific ideas very similar to those used by Anscombe. He leads the discussion on statistically normal facts in the direction of a reflection on human nature. He considers that normality is a manifestation of how we are made, that this structure must have to do with our behaviour, and that such a reflection cannot be done without a teleological conception of human life.³⁰

5. *Natural Goods and Social Structures*

Foot claims that, as reality shows, beings develop into forms of life that suppose perfections and, in the case of human beings, demand structures which are based on norms that facilitate their attainment.³¹ Foot considers that, if these facts are accepted, it would be impossible to avoid a notion of order and natural purpose which are no longer imposed on us as dogmas of a tradition³² but as minimal elements of a reflection to save appearances.³³ In this case, phenomena are not the object of mere contemplation, but are the axes of social life.

Philippa Foot proposes that the relation between natural phenomena and natural order has important consequences for social interaction. The aim of this atheist colleague and friend of Anscombe is not to elucidate the convenience of human activities similar to those of animals, e.g. the building of houses versus the construction of nests. It is “rather what goodness in performance of these and other activities may have to do with the manner of living and the good of our own species”.³⁴

Foot, perhaps due to her long experience as a Humean scholar, affirms with greater ease than Anscombe that the same principle that leads us to judge a physical lack as a defect in

²⁷ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Rules, Rights and Promises”, cit., p. 103. Cf. P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, p. 69.

²⁸ Ch. Taylor, “To Follow a Rule,” in *Philosophical Arguments*, Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge (MA), 1995, pp. 165-180.

²⁹ P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit., pp. 40-42, *Moral Dilemmas*, cit., pp. 141; 163-168; 198-199 and “Rationality and Goodness”, «Philosophy», 2004, (Suppl. 54), pp. 1-13. A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, cit., pp. 25-34; 63, etc. See MacIntyre’s insightful remarks about rationality in his review to Foot’s book, *Virtues in Foot and Geach*, cit., pp. 626-628.

³⁰ R. Spaemann, *Glück und Wohlwollen: Versuch über Ethik*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1989; R. Spaemann and R. Löw, *Natürliche Ziele*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2005. A. Sison, G.R. Beabout and I. Ferrero (eds.), *Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, cit., p. vii.

³¹ This is the primary assessment of *Natural Goodness*, summarized again in “Rationality and Goodness”, cit., pp. 9-11.

³² This refers to a significant argument within MMPH and Humean scepticism.

³³ On Aristotelianism as a methodology to “save appearances” against an explanation as an imposed *forma mentis* on reality, cf. L. Polo, *Introducción a la filosofía*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1995, pp. 189-193; *Nominalismo, idealismo, realismo*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1997, pp. 32-34.

³⁴ P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit. p. 40. She also refers to the necessity of communitarian activities such as learning to hunt. See a similar explanation in *Moral Dilemmas*, pp. 163-166; 198-199.

different types of beings also helps us to understand the goodness or badness of human actions. Some serve the human good, and others do not. Vices are evils concerning nature and involve defects in knowledge. In her words, they are “contrary-to-reason-ness”.³⁵

Foot does not undertake an explanation of the nature of the virtues,³⁶ but instead focuses her reflections on the evaluation of virtuous or vicious human activities based on what the human good can be, and the way each person appropriates it. Within this framework, she incorporates Anscombe’s thesis on promises, emphasizing the human capacity to create systems of diverse practices, e.g. spoken language, singing, dancing, mourning, as authentically human phenomena, all of which are rational and traceable to the search for a good according to a mode of being.³⁷ In other words, one can say that man naturally creates cultural structures.³⁸

Within these creations, some have a foundational character:

men and women need to be industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves, but also to pursue human ends having to do with love and friendship. They need the ability to form family ties, friendships, and special relations with neighbours. They also need codes of conduct. And how could they have all these things without virtues such as loyalty, fairness, kindness, and in certain circumstances obedience?³⁹

In this sense, Anscombe’s reflections on the need to be faithful to promises are useful,⁴⁰ since goods of the utmost importance depend on the ability to bind the will of another, asking for a promise to do something. The entire social structure, along with the goods derived from it, lean on this possibility.⁴¹ The ability to recognize the goods involved in the actions themselves becomes *necessary*, in the sense explained above, that says our natural structure requires certain qualities in order to be able to exercise specific activities.

Anscombe and Foot, among other authors, recognize in the Aristotelian *ergon* their model for interpreting the perfection or activity more typical of a certain kind of being.⁴² It is related to the contemporary notion of *flourishing*, understood as the fulfilment of “normal” development.⁴³

While humans assume the stages of development of other living beings, they also have a sphere of their own, namely rational action, which is as natural for them as automatic

³⁵ Cf. P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit., pp. 13-14, 27, 63.

³⁶ In “Rationality and Goodness”, cit., pp. 1-2 claims her position cannot be called a variety of “virtue ethics” and stresses the fact that her view departs from activities.

³⁷ Cf. P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit., pp. 43-44, and the parallel in *Moral Dilemmas*, cit., pp. 165-166.

³⁸ Neither Anscombe nor Foot respond to Rousseau’s provocation about the origin of the sciences and arts, and ultimately of social life.

³⁹ P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit., pp. 44-45.

⁴⁰ Cf. P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit., p. 15. She refers to Anscombe’s “On Promises and its Justice”, “Rules, Rights and Promises”, and “On the Source of the Authority of the State” (1978), in *The Collected Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe*, v. 3, pp. 130-155.

⁴¹ Cf. P. Foot, *Moral Dilemmas*, cit., pp. 168-169 and *Natural Goodness*, cit., pp. 45-46.

⁴² On the “proper activity” or *ergon* of species, cf. *Nic. Ethics* 1, 1094a-b; 1097b-1098a; 6, 1144a6. Cf. J.M. Torralba, *Acción intencional*, cit., pp. 178-181. P. Foot explains her interpretation of this notion in *Natural Goodness*, cit., pp. 97-98.

⁴³ MMPH, pp. 18-19. MacIntyre develops the argument in several works: *After Virtue*, Duckworth, London 1985, pp. 160; 219; *Dependent Rational Animals*, cit., *passim*, esp. c. 7. P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit. *passim*. On the question of the final end of humans and their flourishing, cf. J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford 1993, c. 1, and A. Vigo, *Action, Reason and Truth. Studies in Aristotle’s Conception of Practical Rationality*, Peeters, Louvain-La-Neuve, 2016, 33-34n17.

determination is for the animal.⁴⁴ One may connect this with the perception of the rationality of linguistic practices, and be able to glimpse the role that promises have in this process of improvement, which now depends mostly on the assimilation by the agent of the rules that promote its perfection. The subjective element of a promise is essential, but not neutral.

6. *When the Search for the Good Becomes Demanding*

An essential part of the reformulation of the ethical language advocated in “Modern Moral Philosophy” and expressed too briefly in its pages can be found in the explanations of the facts of language. Even if Anscombe does not refer to it in these works, Philippa Foot makes a very fitting remark concerning the facts-values debate:

the grounding of a moral argument is ultimately in facts about human life—facts of the kind that Anscombe mentioned in talking about the good that hangs on the institution of promising, and of the kind that I spoke of in saying why it was a part of rationality for human beings to take special care each for his or her own future.⁴⁵

Among the characteristics that Aristotle assigns to these different types of willful actions, his remarks on wisdom are of particular weight, i.e. that it is “a true and reasoned state or capacity to act concerning the things that are good or bad for man”. Wise men “can see what is good for themselves and what is good for men in general”.⁴⁶ If one considers the action as performed by someone wise, it means that he knows what is good and useful for a happy life in a global sense. Anscombe asserts that in the sphere of practical reasoning, “goodness of the end has the same role as the truth of the premises has in theoretical reasoning”.⁴⁷

The wise man is one who can synthesize *hic et nunc* the integrity of his desires and the truth of his judgments, harmonizing the ends of his actions with a higher purpose.

All of this constitutes the basis of the idea that there is an activity specific to the human being that structures its behaviour, i.e. like an architect in the design of his or her development intended as continuous improvement (*flourishing*).⁴⁸

For Anscombe, this principle is fundamental to avoid falling into a logic of mere internal coherence, that is, the perspective in which it is sufficient to have principles that act as understandable “major premises”, which conclude in correct reasoning.⁴⁹ Even though the

⁴⁴ P. Foot, “Rationality and Goodness”, cit., p. 12.

⁴⁵ P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit., p. 24. Foot claims that every spontaneous activity implies a fundamental requirement of the individual. It seems clear that she is developing the hints given in MMPH on the significance of connecting the language regarding necessity in beings—e.g. water for the plant—to the expression of desires and the reasons to act, already underscored by MacIntyre in “Hume on ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’”, cit., p. 494. There is another brief reference to the ancient Greek belief about the meaning of necessity and duties in “Good and Bad Human Action” (n.d.), in *Human Life, Action and Ethics*, cit., p. 197.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Nic. Ethics* 6, 1140b5-11 and 1143b18-29. Anscombe’s paper “On Wisdom” remains very much speculative and presents no hints of this fundamental thesis. Cf. “On Wisdom”, «Acta Philosophica», 2 (1993), pp. 127-133, repr. in *Faith in a Hard ground. Essays on Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics*, G.E.M. Anscombe, M. Geach and L. Gormally, Imprint Academic, Exeter (UK)-Charlottesville (VA), 2008, pp. 258-266.

⁴⁷ “Practical Inference”, cit., p. 146.

⁴⁸ See note 43.

⁴⁹ Anscombe indicates the limits that the theory of language games has for understanding the ability to associate a sign with an affirmation to do something. It makes the rationality of the network evident, but it cannot determine its bases; the descriptive approach of the linguistic game helps one to understand the necessity of internal coherence, but it cannot go beyond this observation and establish the goodness of its own rules.

philosopher explicitly tries to avoid encroaching on the field of ethics on more than one occasion,⁵⁰ at different times she refers to an inescapable ethical framework for acting.⁵¹

Without going through the details of the Aristotelian texts and Anscombe's no-less-demanding discussions, one can say that both the Greek and the British philosophers agree in considering that the conclusion of "correct reasoning" must be accompanied by the desire for something good. Desire is the true principle of action, and the agent, in order to have right feelings, must not only be sensible, but good. Put simply, she could understand and act incorrectly both because she is smart and also because she is incontinent.⁵² In this way, we can see an Aristotelian framework that is as demanding as that of Kant: good-will is never a fixed state or rock-solid disposition.⁵³

Foot stresses the importance of well rooted attitudes to act rightly. She poses the question "how is it possible that a young peasant from the Sudetenland would prefer to die than to enroll in the SS?"⁵⁴

The position of the Sudeten Boy seems entirely "unreasonable"; whence exactly does a duty come in such situations that are so distant from 'self-interest' or a 'prudential' theory of practical rationality? A view of the future good in which happiness is understood as mere satisfaction certainly does not match the requirements of intelligibility for this case.⁵⁵ Aristotle displays parallel ideas regarding the requirements of courage: there are situations in which it is reasonable to risk even at the stake of one's life.⁵⁶

This conception of a mature character (*ethos*) takes on the demands of Kant's good-will and highlights the distinction between natural goodness—determined by the form of being or lifestyle of a species—and personal goodness, which must be sought with the whole cluster of our powers,⁵⁷ as MacIntyre underlines in his framework for defining the Aristotelian understanding

⁵⁰ *Intention* §39. It does not deal with the question of distinguishing between lower and higher goods.

⁵¹ "On Promising and its Justice", cit., p. 19: the requirement to do what is good for the agent goes against the principle of mere utility. In "Will and Emotion" (1978), in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein, The Collected Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe*, v. 1, p. 107, in fine, Anscombe asserts that reason, through the comprehension of the "what for" of any activity, discovers the means to fulfil them with the present resources, and understands the context to distinguish the typical ends of human activity in contrast to those of animals, e.g. the intemperate and the beast regarding pleasures.

⁵² *Nic. Ethics* 6, 1145b12-1146a9. F. Inciarte, "Discovery and Verification of Practical Truth", in *First Principles*, Olms, Zürich 2005, pp. 317-336, underlines a famous Aristotelian thesis, i.e. that "the things we have to learn before we can do, we learn by doing, e.g. men become builders by building [...] so too we become just by doing just acts" (*Nic. Ethics* 1103a32-35). That is why our activity is always open to improvement, i.e. the idea that the *recta ratio* (right reason) is *co-recta ratio* (corrected reason). Cf. J.M. Torralba, *Acción intencional*, cit., pp. 170-172.

⁵³ On the lasting significance of the Aristotelian proposal, cf. P. Bobonich's "Introduction" to *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017, p. 1.

⁵⁴ In *Natural Goodness*, cit., pp. 93-97, Foot makes extensive use of the testimonies contained in the volume *Dying We Live: The Final Messages and Records of some Germans who Defied Hitler*, H. Gollwitzer, K. Kuhn y R. Schneider (eds), Harvill Press, London 1956.

⁵⁵ Cf. P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, p. 93. "We may [...] have a good reason to act in some particular way without having sufficiently good reason so to act, as when I have a good reason to act self-interestedly by fleeing from some danger, but better reason to want something to act courageously by standing fast in defense of innocent others who will otherwise lose their lives" (A. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 8).

⁵⁶ *Nic. Ethics* 3, 1116a10-15

⁵⁷ Cf. P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, cit. pp. 14; 66-67; 81, and *Moral Dilemmas*, cit., p. 198.

of human flourishing.⁵⁸ It is this harmonisation that allows one to avoid the corruptive separation of *ethos* and *logos*, as Vigo stresses in his considerations of the relation between choice, deliberation and the requirements of an ideal life.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ A. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 28: for Aristotle, human flourishing includes “the full range of human powers, physical, perceptual, emotional, rational, political, moral and aesthetic”.

⁵⁹ Cf. A. Vigo, *Action, Reason and Truth*, cit, pp. 156-161.