

On Thursday we will look at the re-birth of Virtue Ethics. The philosopher who brought this about was Elizabeth Anscombe. Anscombe is counted as one of the great philosophers of the 20thC.

The Stamford Encyclopedia of Philosophy says this of her:

“G. E. M. Anscombe’s work ranged over many years and many different areas in philosophy. The breadth of her work is impressive. She was systematic in her thinking, seeing and developing connections between metaphysics, moral psychology, and ethics that exhibited not simply a grasp of one particular problem, but a world view. Much of her works remains unpublished, although newly accessible through the Anscombe Papers Project at the Collegium Institute for Catholic Thought & Culture. Anscombe’s legacy is one of the broadest and deepest left by a 20th century philosopher.”

We cannot consider every aspect of her thought in one session. We will confine ourselves to her contribution to ethics.

I thought you might like to know a little about her as a person. This is from Wikipedia

After her fellowship at Cambridge ended, she was awarded a research fellowship at [Somerville College, Oxford](#),^[8] but during the academic year of 1946/47, she continued to travel to Cambridge once a week to attend tutorials with Wittgenstein that were devoted mainly to the [philosophy of religion](#).^[10] She became one of Wittgenstein's favourite students and one of his closest friends.^{[11][12]} Wittgenstein affectionately addressed her by the pet name "old man" – she being (according to [Ray Monk](#)) "an exception to his general dislike of academic women".^{[11][12]} His confidence in Anscombe's understanding of his perspective is shown by his choice of her as translator of his *Philosophical Investigations* (for which purpose he arranged for her to spend some time in Vienna to improve her German^{[13][7]}).

Anscombe visited Wittgenstein many times after he left Cambridge in 1947, and travelled to Cambridge in April 1951 to visit him on his death bed. Wittgenstein named her, along with [Rush Rhees](#) and [Georg Henrik von Wright](#), as his [literary executor](#).^[7] After his death in 1951 she was responsible for editing, translating, and publishing many of Wittgenstein's manuscripts and notebooks.^{[7][12]}

Anscombe did not avoid controversy. As an undergraduate in 1939 she had publicly criticised Britain's entry into the Second World War.^[14] And, in 1956, while a research fellow, she unsuccessfully protested against Oxford granting an honorary degree to [Harry S. Truman](#), whom she denounced as a mass murderer for his use of [atomic bombs](#) against [Hiroshima](#) and [Nagasaki](#).^{[15][16][17]} She would further publicise her position in a (sometimes erroneously dated^[18]) pamphlet privately printed soon after Truman's nomination for the degree was approved. In the same she said she "should fear to go" to the [Encaenia](#) (the degree conferral ceremony) "in case God's patience suddenly ends."^[19] She would also court controversy with some of her colleagues by defending the Catholic Church's opposition to [contraception](#).^[21] Later in life, she would be arrested protesting outside an abortion clinic, after abortion had been legalised in [Great Britain](#) (albeit with restrictions).^{[16][20]}

Having remained at Somerville College since 1946, Anscombe was elected Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cambridge in 1970, where she served until her retirement in 1986. She was elected a [fellow of the British Academy](#) in 1967, and a Foreign Honorary Member of the [American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#) in 1979.^[21]

In her later years, Anscombe suffered from heart disease, and was nearly killed in a car crash in 1996. She never fully recovered and she spent her last years in the care of her family in Cambridge.^[8] She died peacefully on 5 January 2001, aged 81, with her husband and four of their seven children at her hospital bedside just after praying the [Sorrowful Mysteries](#) of the [rosary](#).^[7] Anscombe's "last intentional act was kissing Peter Geach," her husband of sixty years.^[22]

She had not said where she was to be buried and the family chose what is now the [Ascension Parish](#) burial ground, as it was the nearest one to their home. There was some difficulty in getting a full-size plot, where she could be buried without being cremated first. This was not possible in the new part of the cemetery, so the site finally obtained – after negotiation with Ely diocesan authorities – was that of an old grave, corner-to-corner with the plot where Wittgenstein had been buried half a century before. ^[citation needed]

Debate with C. S. Lewis^[edit]

As a young philosophy don, Anscombe acquired a reputation as a formidable debater. In 1948, she presented a paper at a meeting of Oxford's [Socratic Club](#) in which she disputed [C. S. Lewis's](#) argument that [naturalism](#) was self-refuting (found in the third chapter of the original publication of his book *Miracles*). Some associates of Lewis, primarily [George Sayer](#) and [Derek Brewer](#), have remarked that Lewis lost the subsequent debate on her paper and that this loss was so humiliating that he abandoned theological argument and turned entirely to devotional writing and children's literature.^[23] This is a claim disputed by [Walter Hooper](#)^[24] and Anscombe's impression of the effect upon Lewis was somewhat different:

The fact that Lewis rewrote that chapter, and rewrote it so that it now has those qualities [to address Anscombe's objections], shows his honesty and seriousness. The meeting of the Socratic Club at which I read my paper has been described by several of his friends as a horrible and shocking experience which upset him very much. Neither Dr Havard (who had Lewis and me to dinner a few weeks later) nor Professor Jack Bennet remembered any such feelings on Lewis's part ... My own recollection is that it was an occasion of sober discussion of certain quite definite criticisms, which Lewis' rethinking and rewriting showed he thought was accurate. I am inclined to construe the odd accounts of the matter by some of his friends – who seem not to have been interested in the actual arguments or the subject-matter – as an interesting example of the phenomenon called "[projection](#)".

— *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind: The Collected Philosophical Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe, Volume 2 (1981) p.x.*

As a result of the debate, Lewis substantially rewrote chapter 3 of *Miracles* for the 1960 paperback edition.^[25]