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**The Review of the  
Abui Abraham Abui's doctoral dissertation**

*Towards Virtue Ethics: Action and Morality  
in Elizabeth Anscombe and Karol Wojtyła*  
(Album nr 142924)

Mr. **Abui Abraham Abui's** dissertation focuses on the ethical concepts of E. G. Anscombe and K. Wojtyła, both of which the author classifies as belonging to contemporary virtue ethics. While labeling Anscombe's position as an example of virtue ethics seems obvious, calling Wojtyła a virtue ethicist represents a new perspective on his ethical stance. Anscombe proposed returning Aristotelian virtue ethics and the teleological way of grounding morality. She understood virtue ethics as the remedy to the crisis in contemporary moral philosophy. At the beginning of the 20th century, there dominated emotivism that pushed ethical debates outside of the rational discussion. Her article *Modern Moral Philosophy* (*Philosophy* 33/1958) has been very influential; nearly every publication on virtue, whether by its advocates or critics, refers to this article. However, Karol Wojtyła's work is widely recognized not as virtue ethicist but as representing personalist ethics, the foundation of which is constituted by the metaphysical and anthropological notion of the person.

Although the author of *Towards Virtue Ethics: Action and Morality in Elizabeth Anscombe and Karol Wojtyła* does not explicitly point at the aim of his dissertation, one can reconstruct it based on reading the whole thesis. The title suggests that the work is focused on the comparative analysis of the ethical works by Anscombe and Wojtyła, both being examples of virtue ethics. Besides, the author asks a few critical (from the point of view of virtue ethics) questions, the answers to which he tries to find in the works of the two ethical thinkers. The questions are: *How can man achieve goodness? How possible is it to attain a virtuous character? Which are the anthropological foundations of*

*moral virtue?* Mr. Abui emphasizes that his aim is not to deliver “a conclusive solution to the theoretical and practical challenges of constructing a suitable theory of virtue for today but rather to modest open-up new vistas as well as raise new questions [...]”.

The methodology of his research is the critical analysis of the works by Anscombe and Wojtyła, as well as the publications of other authors regarded as belonging to the stream of virtue ethics. In the dissertation, one can also find comparisons of Anscombe’s and Wojtyła’s concepts.

The dissertation consists of three chapters, and its structure is relatively simple. Chapter 1 is a general introduction to what the author calls *Philosophical Traditions of Virtue Ethics*. Chapter 2 contains an analysis of Anscombe’s understanding of a human being and morality. Chapter 3 focuses on Wojtyła’s personalistic ethics as foundational to virtue ethics.

In the first chapter, Mr. Abui devotes a considerable part to the classical tradition of virtue ethics. He focuses on presenting the views of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas (1.1, pp. 18-28). The presentation is accurate, although one may wonder why the author omitted the Aristotelian doctrine of the unity of virtue, which, equally to the doctrine of golden mean presented in the dissertation, is essential for an adequate understanding of Aristotle’s virtue ethics. Much less satisfactory is the second section of the chapter (1.2) devoted to the *Contemporary rediscovery of virtue ethics*. The selection of authors and literature here seems poorly considered, resulting in an incomplete picture of contemporary virtue ethics. Although the presentations of the views of Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michel Slote, Thomas Hurka deserve positive estimation, there is a lack of equally deepened reference to the views of authors such as Rosalind Hursthouse or Julia Annas. The views of Daniel Russel, an important representative of contemporary virtue ethics, are not mentioned at all.

I understand that this objection may be refuted by emphasizing that the virtue ethics literature is vast. Therefore, it is hard to include all the relevant publications in one doctoral dissertation. However, to make reasonable limitation of literature, one first needs to decide whether one wants to write a short historical outline of virtue ethics, to merely compare the main similarities and differences between contemporary and classical virtue ethics, or to point at the main characteristics of classical and modern virtue ethics. The author offers a mixture of the above possible approaches; none completed satisfactorily.

It is not clear what the goal of the first chapter is. Generally, the dissertation does not contain passages that would satisfactorily summarize or gather some conclusions about the analyzed or presented views, which would give the reader some orientation, for example, about the essence of virtue ethics. The passage which is supposed to do such a summary, entitled *Concluding remarks*, does not fulfill this function.

In contrast, section 1.2.7 (*Critique of Contemporary Virtue Ethics*) deserves positive evaluation. Here the author discusses various objections to the virtue ethics approach, such as the objection of 1) concentrating exclusively on the evaluation of the agent; 2) the lack of codified principles (No action-guidance); 3) the lack of the concept of the right action; 4) a wide diversity of the catalogs of virtues, depending on culture or tradition; 5) the lack of tools to solve moral dilemmas; 6) egoism – i.e., pointing that virtuous action is ultimately to lead to self-flourishing; 7) empirical inadequacy of virtue ethics (situationist criticism).

Having read section 1.2.7, a conscientious and advanced reader may reconstruct the main assumptions of virtue ethics as 1) ethics concentrated on the moral condition of an agent; 2) avoiding a formulation of general ethical principles, 3) taking a particularist approach, 4) antitheoretical; 5) teleological in grounding morality (in Aristotelian eudaimonia). One may add (although it would not be easy to find it in the reviewed dissertation) resignation from metaphysics. Contrarily to the Aristotelian model of virtue ethics, its contemporary advocates avoid references to so-called metaphysical biology.

Although an advanced reader may find the above points, they are dispersed in various places in the dissertation. Additionally, they are not sufficiently explicated to give the reader a consistent picture of virtue ethics. And only such a clear and consistent picture would allow the author to analyze the ethical concepts offered by Anscombe and Wojtyła and try to answer whether Wojtyła's personalism belongs to the virtue ethics approach and to what extent it differs from the latter.

The second chapter focuses on the ethics of Elisabeth Anscombe. The author starts with analyzing the three claims presented by Anscombe in her *Modern Moral Philosophy*. The claims are as follows: 1) We should ground moral philosophy in moral psychology; 2) We should avoid such notions as a *moral obligation*, *moral duty*, or *morally right* or *wrong* because they have no grounding. They require reference to some law-giver like God, which, according to Anscombe, has been rejected in modern moral philosophy; 3) all modern English philosophies of morality come down to consequentialism, and as such, they are in opposition to Judeo-Christian religions.

The author of the dissertation first criticizes Anscombe for inconsequence, consisting in using the notion of moral psychology, which is essential in her view to building any ethical theory, without answering what moral psychology actually is. What is more, she allegedly ignores moral psychology's indispensability by developing her ethical thought without waiting for such psychology to emerge. Later on, Mr. Abui analyses a very influential work by Anscombe, *Intentions*. There she raises the issues of intentions, reasons for action, and self-consciousness, which belong to moral

psychology. Thus, the author proves that Anscombe did take up the task of working out moral psychology and showed consistency in her research, and turned out faithful to her methodological postulate.

Concerning the second Anscombe's claim (or postulate), namely that we should avoid deontological moral notions, the author perceives another alleged inconsistency in Anscombe's thought caused by her Catholicism. As Mr. Abui notices, being a Catholic, Anscombe must have believed in the Divine Law, which constitutes the proper grounding for moral obligations and duties - duties which Anscombe postulated to eliminate from the ethical vocabulary. The author of the dissertation tries to defend Anscombe against this objection by saying that, in reality, she did not want to get rid of the deontological language. Her intention was merely to eliminate one of the ways of using deontic notions in moral philosophy and replace them with aretic concepts. Neither Anscombe nor Aristotle, to whose ethics she tries to return, denounce all use of deontological notions.

Anscombe did point at some inconsistency in contemporary ethical theories, whose authors, on the one hand, defend moral duties and obligations; on the other, they reject reference to the ultimate law-giver (or Absolute), thus depriving their theories of any grounding. As a believer, Anscombe has no problem with grounding moral obligations, but she is aware that ethics should look for convincing justification to both believers and non-believers. And for this reason, she refers to the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia, understood as the flourishing of human nature that requires perfecting ethical virtues. And the fact that Aristotelian ethics can be harmonized with the law conception of ethics or that St. Thomas successfully tied Christian divine law with Aristotle's ethics is not essential in this context.

Regarding the third Anscombe's claim, in which she radically rejects consequentialism, Mr. Abui even accuses her of some form of dogmatism that would go against her general philosophical attitude. Anscombe radically opposes instrumentalizing human beings - i.e., killing, accusing and punishing innocent people. If her stance is problematic to someone (e.g., consequentialists), she does not even want to discuss with such a person because she thinks this person's mind is corrupted. Anscombe believes that moral deliberation over certain types of action, such as treachery, murder, apostasy, or sodomy, also shows the corruption of one's mind.

I consider the third chapter essential for the whole dissertation. It brings some novelty to the debate over K. Wojtyła's ethics by attempting to present his work as part of the aretic tradition. Mr. Abui starts the chapter with the analysis of Wojtyła's *Love and Responsibility* which he interprets in the spirit of virtue ethics. The key argument for such an interpretation is, according to Abui, ascribing the virtue of love a central role in Wojtyła's ethics. Love, as Wojtyła says, „encompasses all other virtues and elevates

them all to its own level. "Besides, Wojtyła claims that the only right attitude towards a person is love understood as an affirmation of a person for her own sake (as a person). This affirmation becomes the basis of the personalist moral norm. Mr. Abui emphasizes some convergence of Wojtyła's thoughts and Anscombe's claims. The Polish personalist meets Anscombe's postulate of developing moral psychology through his phenomenological analysis of the lived experience of the dynamics of moral virtue. Additionally, his analysis of using in the context of love and sexuality seems analogous to Anscombe's criticism of consequentialism. As Wojtyła says, all kind of using a person as a mere means to achieve one's own goals is contrary to human dignity and abuse of her freedom.

While analyzing Wojtyła's *The Acting Person*, the author of the reviewed dissertation argues that Wojtyła's philosophy of a person may constitute the foundation for virtue ethics. Wojtyła, by closely looking at human action, discovers the person's essence. However, this "looking" is not the analysis of human activity from the third-person perspective, but from one's subjective experience, the first-person perspective which Wojtyła took from the phenomenological tradition. Thus, Wojtyła not only concludes that virtues make our actions better but also emphasizes the moral value of the person. Additionally, the development of virtues is, in Wojtyła's ethics, closely related to the personal fulfillment of each individual as a person.

In this context, one needs to refer to a pair of Wojtyła's key terms, namely „transitiveness" and „intransitiveness" of moral action. No morally loaded action leaves the agent "untouched," but it leaves its mark or shapes the agent's moral condition. It is a critical remark from the perspective of virtue ethics, as it also focuses on developing one's moral condition.

Another important affinity between Wojtyła's thought and virtue ethics is his concentrating on the role and significance of self-determination in one's achieving the autonomy of action. The Polish philosopher pays a lot of attention to analyzing human will and its development. He distinguishes between a person's (free and conscious) acting and the dynamisms that only happen in humans. Through their actions, in Wojtyła's view, human persons can self-determine and thus transcend their nature. Although written in a different philosophical language than the works of modern virtue ethicists, Wojtyła's analysis is similar to the considerations over virtues of will-power, self-control, patience, workfulness that virtue ethicists propose – although, instead of making references to philosophical anthropology and metaphysics, they often look up to the results of empirical research in the domain of psychology. Mr. Abui looks for such and other similarities, some more significant and some less, between Wojtyła's works and virtue ethics.

In his summary, the author claims to have discussed Anscombe and Wojtyła's contribution to the foundation and development of virtue ethics. However, they

differently saw that foundation: Anscombe looked for it in moral psychology, while Wojtyła in metaphysics and philosophical anthropology. There are other differences. To Anscombe, the crucial role in understanding and evaluating action was played by intentions. To Wojtyła, in turn, action reveals the character; from the person's action, we can grasp who the person and her nature is. Both are very critical of the utilitarian approach built on consequentialist assumptions. However, they differently view the deontological approach. While we may call Wojtyła's ethics a combination of virtue ethics and deontology, Anscombe rejects the deontological (law) conception of ethics.

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Mr. Abui Abraham Abui's dissertation has its strong and weak sides. It is hard to evaluate, mainly because the author has not clearly formulated his goal. Not clear are the passages on the psychological and metaphysical foundations of virtue ethics offered respectively by Anscombe and Wojtyła. The argumentation for the claim that Anscombe does belong to virtue ethics and has a significant contribution to its development seems unnecessary. These facts are widely recognized, and nobody denies them. It is not so, however, with Wojtyła's ethics. Labeling it as belonging to virtue ethics tradition can be seen, as far as I know, as a new interpretation of Wojtyła's thought. Thus, Mr. Abui has set an interesting direction of analysis, which is worth deepening and developing. It may indeed result in an interesting publication. To do it, however, the author would have to first thoroughly answer what virtue ethics is and what its advocates mean by virtue. Then, and only then, it would become possible to answer how much Wojtyła's personalism can fit this tradition and whether Wojtyła's metaphysical and anthropological assumptions can be reconciled with the postulates of contemporary virtue ethics. It is essential because, in his conclusions, the author declares that in his opinion, Wojtyła's assumptions are „more fruitful for virtue ethics than analytical analysis of Anscombe's psychological experience of moral intentions” (173). Such a claim may be difficult to accept for virtue ethicists who intended to depart radically from metaphysics. A. MacIntyre clearly states this intention.

Although Mr. Abui correctly identifies some of the affinities between Wojtyła's ethics and virtue ethics, he seems to neglect features that differ the former from the latter. I take the remarks on „self-determination,” „self-governance,” and „self-possession” to be accurate. The three terms may be collected together under “the virtues of willpower,” designating virtues necessary for one's developing a morally good character. As equally accurate, I estimate the author's attention to what Wojtyła labels as “transitivity” and “intransitivity” of action. From the perspective of virtue ethics, it is important to become aware that each of our actions shapes (to some extent) our moral condition.

However, the dissertation lacks one crucial distinction between virtue ethics and virtue theory. The author himself notices that Wojtyła's personalism is a combination of deontology and virtue ethics (p. 166). In my opinion, it would be more appropriate to say that the Polish philosopher's ethics is mainly deontological, complemented by a theory of virtue. The same could be said of Kant's ethics and its various continuations. However, to form such a claim (as a conclusion), one first needs to establish the criteria deciding when a given view belongs to widely understood virtue ethics. It is a pity that the author did not refer to valuable studies on virtue ethics that would allow him to grasp a holistic look at this tradition. Then, also his comparisons Wojtyła's thought with virtue ethics might have been different.

In the dissertation, there are also missing several important issues. Firstly, virtue ethics focuses primarily on the moral agent. Can we say the same about Wojtyła's ethics? Is his fundamental question the question of the moral condition of the agent? Indeed, his starting point is the analysis of human action, which the author of the dissertation widely comments on. However, even when saying that love is the most important virtue, Wojtyła has in mind one's attitude towards another person rather than a character disposition. Mr. Abui himself, when citing Wojtyła, takes love to be rather a special relation between persons than a feature or disposition of character (p. 122). It would be valuable to confront what Wojtyła had to say about the love of other persons (understood as *agape*) with what virtue ethicists have in mind when speaking of benevolence. The latter clearly take virtues to be dispositions of the agent's character, not characteristics of the action or interpersonal relationships.

Secondly, virtue ethics has resigned from formulating one supreme principle. And for this reason, among other reasons, virtue ethicists criticize utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. It seems that personalism does assume a supreme principle: unconditional affirmation of the person for her own sake, from which all other, particular duties follow.

Thirdly, it would be interesting to ask whether Wojtyła's ethics fits the antitheoretical model of ethics. Provided that Wojtyła formulates the supreme principle of ethics, it seems improbable. Virtue ethicists adopt particularism in their evaluation of moral rightness or goodness of action; they refer to what they take to be the supreme virtue, namely *phronesis*.

Finally, it should be noted that the reviewed dissertation is in great need of eliminating numerous editorial mistakes. It seems that the author has little experience in composing long academic texts. A dissertation like this one requires a series of introductions to various parts (e.g., chapters) and their summaries, which would help the reader navigate through the meanders of the author's thoughts. The summaries provided in the dissertation do not come across as sufficient.

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Despite the above critical remarks, I estimate the dissertation by Mr. Abui Abraham Abui to meet the formal and substantial requirements of the doctoral thesis. Thus, I think that the author should be allowed to pass to further stages of the doctoral procedure.

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