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A REVIEW OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS WRITTEN BY ABUI ABRAHAM ABUI ENTITLED
TOWARDS VIRTUE ETHICS: ACTION AND MORALITY IN ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE AND KAROL WOJTYŁA
WRITTEN UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ALFRED MAREK WIERZBICKI

The main goal of the research project presented in the dissertation of Abui Abraham Abui is a philosophical analysis of the contemporary importance and justification of a virtue ethics. This is a real philosophical problem, especially in the light of a so called “aretaic turn” in the British and American ethical debates. Since the mid-twentieth century Anglo-Saxon philosophy has paid much attention to the theory of virtues. There is a lot of literature devoted to the modern interpretations of classical virtue ethics (undoubtedly, the most important has been presented by Alasdair MacIntyre). Unfortunately, there are not many followers of this revolution (often called “the aretaic turn”) in the Polish philosophical thought.

It should be said that although the topic is not new – classical virtue ethics is two and a half thousand years old, and was renewed more than sixty years ago – in Poland it is still *terra incognita*. Very popular in English-language discourse has launched a powerful argument on the foundations of ethics, human nature and the philosophical psychology. It is obvious that a similar debate should begin in Poland, especially as the original approach to this problem in the context of a broad Polish tradition of virtues. The current state of knowledge on virtue ethics basically stopped in Poland on the repetition of Thomism (mainly in the “neothomism” version). Achievements of “the aretaic turn” movement are starting point, or rather: paradigm which should be inculturated into Polish tradition and Polish philosophical, political or historical discourse.

PhD Candidate has written the thesis (rather moderate volume – 184 pages) which aim is not only to enter the above-mentioned dispute, but also to help resolve it in a quite innovative way. He was looking for his guideness on contemporary virtue ethics not only among recognized representatives of this trend (Ph. Foot, A. MacIntyre, M. Slote), but also from a thinker who had never been associated with virtue ethics. This leads to a surprising, but also interesting comparison of the ethics of the “aretaic turn” “mother”, that is Lady

Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, with one of the Polish pioneers of personalism, the later Pope, Karol Wojtyła. While this idea itself seems really original and inspiring, its implementation by the Author leaves a lot to be desired.

First of all I would like to mention a huge disadvantage of the dissertation, which should actually disqualify the text as a candidate for the title of scientific work. I mean the scientific apparatus in the form of footnotes, bibliography, text format, etc. In my opinion correct and consistent use of this apparatus (primarily footnotes) is a *sine qua non* condition for being a scientist, and thus: a holder of a doctoral degree. In the case of the reviewed dissertation, we are dealing with such a sloppy formatting of the work, with typos, with an incredible chaos in the use of footnotes, that personally I feel not only embarrassed, but even offended by the fact, that this thesis – or rather “a working draft of the thesis” – was admitted to the review procedure. As an occasional thesis supervisor, I would never allow such bachelor's thesis (not to mention master's or doctoral dissertation) to be approved by the university or be read by an external reviewer. For this reason, I blame the Supervisor (in Latin: “promotor”, someone who moves – puts *in motus*) for such a low-quality form of work rather than the Author, who is still learning scientific methods and has the right to make mistakes. From my point of view, the form of a scientific work is as important as its content. In order not to be groundless, below I will mention only a few of the most glaring mistakes, although I assure that you can find similar errors, carelessness and a confusion on almost every page.

Let's start with the *Table of content* (sic!, page 2). On page 18 we find paragraph 1.0, which cannot be found in the table of contents. Paragraph 1.1 is entitled *Classical Traditions of Virtue Ethics* (plural), while in the table of contents can be found the phrase *Classical Tradition of Virtue Ethics* (singular). The page numbers do not match the actual page numbers where each chapter begins (e.g. *Concluding remarks* of chapter I start on page 71, not 68; *Chapter II* starts at 74, not 71 etc.).

On page 5 we find *Abbreviations*, containing the list of sixteen abbreviations. Apart from defining such obvious abbreviations as e.g., etc or i.e., what is the point of creating the list of abbreviations that Author hardly uses in his work? For example, the acronym AP (intended to mean the title of Wojtyła's book *The Acting Person*) was used only 2 or 3 times, while in an endless number of cases he uses the full title. Abbreviation list only makes sense if it helps to format the footnotes or significantly reduce the volume of the book – PhD Candidate probably did not understand it, automatically repeating the solution found in one of the books he read.

In the *Bibliography* (pp. 174-184) we find a similar chaos. *Primary Sources* have been correctly limited to the cited works by G.E.M Anscombe and K. Wojtyła, and it is understandable that the author's name may be omitted. But PhD Candidate – for unknown reasons – sometimes gives the name of the translator, sometimes omits it; sometimes he writes the place of publication, sometimes it is limited to the name of the publisher, sometimes he does not even mention it. These mistakes and this carelessness are typical the other three parts of the bibliography. I will not mention the complete inconsistency in the use of italics, quotation marks or commas, but including articles published in paper journals or collective works published in print to the *Internet Sources* (Author even gives the number of volume, issue and date of publication) makes me conclude that the Candidate does not understand what the essence of internet sources is and how they differ from classical printed sources.

Let's move to the most embarrassing part of the work: to the footnotes. They are constructed without any rule, consistency, or taste. The ability to correctly and comprehensibly construct footnotes is the first condition to become a scholar, especially in the field of the humanities. It seems that Author certainly focuses much more on the content of the main text, treating the footnotes as a necessary evil. This is a very serious mistake, because for this reason (not only from it) his dissertation at times resembles an essay or a popular science text, and not a doctoral dissertation.

Unfortunately, these formal errors are not the only disadvantage of the Abui Abraham Abui's dissertation. We can also find a lot of factual and substantive errors in it. I will mention only the most important of them, discussing them in the order in which they appear in the dissertation.

On pages 15-17, Candidate discusses “the alternative conceptions of virtue ethics”. This is a complete misunderstanding! Deontology, consequentialism, utilitarianism or “circumstantialism” (which in philosophical literature we rather refer to as “situationism”) are not “alternative conceptions OF virtue ethics”, but concepts alternative (or even rival) TO virtue ethics! Each of these meta-ethical theories is based on the completely different anthropology, epistemology, first principles and so on. It is hard to believe, how Author could consider e.g. utilitarianism as one of the systems of virtue ethics. And where he would see fundamental similarities between the duty to maximize the overall good or the principle of utility, and e.g. the recognition that each of our actions influences subsequent actions and shapes our character in the good (virtue) or bad (vices) way?

On page 18 the author incorrectly defines the Aristotle's "virtue" (ἀρετή). Its essence is neither the golden mean rule (μετρίότητα) nor taking into account the emotional and dynamic nature of the human person. It is of course very important and strictly connected with the idea of virtue, but it is not its essence. The foundation of Aristotle's (and ancient) concept of virtue is that each being has a specific goal (τέλος) that it must pursue in order to remain itself, to preserve its nature. Virtue is nothing but the ability to achieve this goal – that is: to achieve its fulfillment (εὐδαιμονία). Therefore, we can speak of both the virtue of a man and the virtue of a horse or a knife. Human virtue (e.g. magnanimity, prudence or fortitude) differs from sharpness of a knife or speed of a horse in that a person can acquire these virtues consciously, while shaping his character.

In the chapter devoted to Aristotle (1.1.1 *Aristotle's notion of virtue*) another weakness of dissertation is clearly revealed. Author reaches for to discussions and comments much more willingly than for sources. Out of the twenty two footnotes to paragraph 1.1.1, only six refer directly to Aristotle's texts. Unfortunately, this is a big problem today – probably partly due to the easy availability of Internet texts, but a candidate for a doctoral degree in philosophy should be aware that the study of sources is always better than using the knowledge mediated in the commentaries. Moreover, in the section analyzing Aristotle's views on virtue, the Author cites only one work by the Stagirite (*The Nicomachean Ethics*), even calling it "his book on ethics" (p. 22), as if he did not see that Aristotle wrote at least four books on ethics. Fortunately, in the analysis of the views of Anscombe and Wojtyła, above mentioned problems are not so noticeable.

The author also made mistakes with regard to the MacIntyre's philosophy. On page 45 he has written: "his [MacIntyre's] latest book, *Dependent Rational Animals*". Scottish philosopher wrote *DRA* in 1999; after that he published three more books (*Edith Stein* in 2005, *God, Philosophy, Universities* in 2009, and *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* in 2016 – all of them were translated into Polish) and three volumes of his essays. Was Abui Abraham Abui aware of them? In footnote 113, the Author completely misunderstands MacIntyre's notion of "incommensurability". It is not about "criticism of the modern ethical theories that are not in conformity with the ethical foundation of Aristotle", but about complete impossibility to conduct any rational debate BETWEEN contemporary ethical theories, such as utilitarianism, nihilism, rationalism or emotivism. This is very well explained in *After Virtue* (especially pages 8-10 in 3rd edition). On the other hand, in footnote 116 the quotation does not refer to Carden's work, but to the MacIntyre's own words (*After Virtue*, p. 8).

I found no similarly grave factual errors in second chapter, devoted to Lady Anscombe's philosophy, but also here I would like to point out two weaknesses of the text. Firstly, I don't understand why such extensive paragraph 2.2 (13 pages!) was not divided into subsections, similarly to 2.4, 3.4 or 3.5. It would not only be obvious ("three theses" and three subsections), but would also facilitate the reading of, after all, not easy analyzes. Secondly, I must note and criticize the lack of any summary of analyzes on G.E.M. Anscombe's ethics. It is hard to recognize the twelve-line *Concluding remarks* (p. 116-117) as a serious conclusion from the Anscombe's large work, presented on over 40 pages of reviewed thesis.

I also have two remarks to the third chapter, devoted to the ethics of Karol Wojtyła. Firstly, correct translation of Polish verb "normowanie" is "norming" (or "to norm"), not "normalizing" (p. 123), which erroneously suggest that Wojtyła writes about making something normal, acceptable, common, while the term used by him means applying a measure ("norm") to a given phenomenon or act and stating that it meets this criterion (i.e. it is morally good or ontologically true) or it does not. And secondly, the most important – in my opinion – Wojtyła's definition of virtue we may find on page 121 of *Love and Responsibility* (in the edition used by the Candidate). Unfortunately, I have not found it anywhere in this dissertation, nor have I found any other attempt to define the concept of "virtue" proposed by Wojtyła. Therefore, I consider the third chapter, understood as an attempt to assign the Lublin philosopher to the tradition of virtue ethics, to be missed and completely unconvincing. Consequently, I will stick to the opinion that Wojtyła and personalists from KUL basically use the theological concept of virtue, without conducting any in-depth research on this idea.

The above-mentioned errors, deficiencies and problems are not the only ones that I've found in the dissertation submitted to me for review. However, it is not that I have not noticed any valuable aspects of this work. I can briefly express my opinion in the way that a PhD Candidate deals much better with synthesis (the creative aspect of the thesis) than with analysis. A huge part of his work is just pretty weak even for a master's thesis. But these are the paragraphs in which the Author tries to analyze someone else's ethical views (Aristotle, Aquinas, Foot, MacIntyre, Anscombe etc.). The best proof of my opinion is the passage on pages 84-86, where the Author, instead of analyzing Lady Anscombe's "third thesis", basically discusses several of her articles, without trying in any way to elaborate or to extract the essence of them.

But at the same time, the PhD Candidate is doing quite well in the more creative passages in which he tries to express his own opinion on a particular topic. An example of

such very interesting considerations may be section 1.2.6 (*The Problem of Vice*), which drew my attention to the clear inequality of contemporary analyzes – closely related after all – of the idea of a virtue and the idea of a vice; or the final *Conclusion* (p. 168-173; n.b. another error: in the table of content was entitled as *General Conclusion*), in which the Author presents his own opinion on the role and problems of contemporary virtue ethics.

For this reason, I have a serious problem with how to assess this thesis submitted to me for review – especially as a young associate professor for whom this is the first review of a doctoral dissertation. As I have mentioned several times above, I am of the opinion that the ability to use a scientific apparatus (quotations, footnotes, bibliography, text formatting etc.) should be an obvious and *sine qua non* condition for applying for academic degrees. At the same time, the humanities, especially philosophy, have always been developed through interesting texts, bold claims, and a creative approach to the problem – Aristotle, Plato or even many phenomenologists did not use any footnotes, and sometimes even omitted quotations... The latter element – creatively asked questions and honestly seeking answers to them – can be found in Abraham's Abui dissertation, even if it is difficult to extract them from numerous fragments of low-quality analyzes and repetitions.

Therefore, I believe that it is possible to give a PhD Candidate a chance and accept his dissertation as meeting the minimum requirements for doctoral dissertations in our country. At the same time, I encourage the Candidate to seriously work on the philosophical tools and scholar's skills, so that his subsequent publications will have not only an interesting content, but also will be considered fully scientific works. A good paper or monograph gives the reader pleasure and knowledge, but also encourages him to argue with the author with substantive arguments, not provokes him to ruthless criticism because of the irritating deficiencies and errors.

Conclusion: the reviewed doctoral dissertation titled *Towards Virtue Ethics: Action and Morality in Elizabeth Anscombe and Karol Wojtyła* presented by Abui Abraham Abui, despite certain reservations, to a minimum extent meets the basic statutory requirements. Therefore, I state that he should be allowed to move on to the subsequent stages of the doctoral degree program.

