New Books

Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G.E.M. Anscombe
Edited by Mary Geach & Luke Gormally.
Exeter and Charlottesville: Imprint Academic, 2005, 300 pages, £35.00

However well-versed anyone might be in the literature of ethics, no one can possibly fail to learn a great deal, both as regards moral philosophy as well as about what the moral life involves, from this hugely rich, profound and absorbing collection of articles and lectures by Anscombe.

Their author's extraordinary philosophical acumen, combined with her extreme moral earnestness and passionate engagement with the issues about which she writes, is evident on its every page, as is her acute sense of what is at stake in getting matters right about the several issues that form their subject-matter. These qualities of their author make this collection of her writings one every serious student of the subject will want to read closely—or, at least, should, in every sense of that vexed word—and with all the attention that the rigour and density of the argumentation they contain demands. The collection reveals Anscombe to have been in a class of her own among her contemporaries, and incomparably by far the best moral philosopher to have thought and written about the subject in the Anglo-American analytic idiom, anywhere in the world, in the second half of the twentieth century.

With all that said in recognition of and in tribute to the author's undeniable merits as a moral philosopher, it must also to be added that some of the articles in this collection, above all its far best known and most anthologised and influential one, contain some of the most egregious and misleading errors about the subject ever to have been seriously propounded by any world-ranking professional philosopher in modern times. The widespread acceptance of them on the strength of the authority of their source has inflicted upon the subject untold, possibly irreparable, damage. Generations of scholars and students of the subject have been misled by on the strength her say-so into accepting them as true and thereby led into forming a woefully mistaken view of the history and nature of the subject, as will be argued below.

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Before identifying what these most damaging errors are for whose widespread dissemination as truths Anscombe can be considered responsible, it is worth high-lighting some of the many genuine and profound original insights to be found in some of the lesser known contributions to this collection of which some are published here for the first time, at least in English.

First, there is the profound insight contained in Anscombe's insistence that, despite there being innumerably many action-descriptions that fail severally to imply or suggest any moral epithet attaches to whichever actions might satisfy them, or whichever agent might perform one, in practice there are no genuinely indifferent human actions morally speaking. All, *in concreto*, are either good or bad, no matter how trivial or inconsequential they might at first sight appear from these descriptions.

That upon which Anscombe here insists might seem at first glance so counter-intuitive as to be positively paradoxical. 'Surely' one wishes to ask 'if someone goes out for a walk after lunch on a Sunday, or reads the newspaper whilst commuting to work on the underground, neither they nor their action merit any commendation or condemnation for having doing so.'

It is to Anscombe's enormous credit to have drawn attention to the error of this way of thinking. Take the seemingly trivial action of going for a walk after Sunday lunch. Is it purely indifferent, neither good nor bad? Well, it will certainly be positively bad, if someone had gone for such a walk, leaving his or her beleaguered spouse with all the washing-up to do, or without at least offering to help. Still worse would it have been for them calmly to have gone out for the walk after having murdered their spouse for having served up the gravy cold! Or suppose the person had previously promised to visit a sick relative at the time of the walk. Was their having taken it then so morally indifferent now? Surely, it has now become a bad thing for them to have done in the circumstances.

If, however, there is nothing morally untoward in the antecedent and surrounding circumstances of the walk, and, if the willingness to have taken it was conditional upon the agent's knowledge or justified belief there wasn't,—if, that is, that is, the walk had been taken only in the knowledge or belief of its being a purely innocent pleasure, then surely that walk that was taken was something that was good, as equally was the whoever had been willing to taken it only as such?

Such considerations as these, offered by Anscombe almost as asides in the course of pursuit of other quarries, make her book so instructive. They provide the basis for a wholly novel way of

thinking constructively about moral agency and virtue and their relations to human action. It is much to Anscombe's credit, and a sign of how great were philosophical gifts, that she is able to throw out such insights as asides.

Equally as instructive as this one was Anscombe's equally casually delivered reminder that none of what Aristotle called the moral virtues are possible without also possessing some modicum at least of that intellectual virtue he called *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Example: for someone to possess the moral virtue of justice is for him or her to be disposed to choose, gladly and without harbouring any inner reluctance or unwillingness borne of residual inclination to pursue some contrary unjust alternative, whichever course of action is just in the various circumstances in which he or she finds themselves placed and called upon to act. Clearly, no one can opt for whichever course of action is just in any circumstances without knowing which of the alternatives that is. Such moral knowledge is what *phronesis* provides.

Equally, of course, a person cannot have even a modicum of this intellectual virtue without their also possessing in some modicum at least the corresponding moral virtues. Unless, for an example, a person possesses in some modicum measure all the various main moral virtues, such as temperance, courage, and justice, he or she would be most unlikely to be at all concerned with knowing which course of action in their circumstances was just, let alone to be concerned to opt only for such a course of action.

What confers worth on this point of Aristotle's, otherwise fairly obvious and banal once attention is drawn to it, is her further insight that knowing which course of action is the just one in concrete circumstances often calls for having mastered quite a bit of empirical information that is relatively easily available, but which nonetheless is equally avoidable, and which, all too often, we can culpably easily avoid acquainting ourselves with to avoid having to face up to the need to revise and adjust any acquired habits or life-styles of ours that would become morally necessary for us to revise upon becoming apprised of this information.

A perfect illustration of such a piece with which, Anscombe rightly claims, many are reluctant to acquainte themselves, because to do so would force them to realise some established practice in which they do or should like to able to engage in freely is not as morally innocuous as they might otherwise wish it to be, is that fact of how human-like and fully formed a human foetus has become within only a comparatively brief time after its conception.

The moral significance of this empirical fact whose admission is so awkward for so many derives from a third insight of Anscombe's on which she is equally right to be insistent. This is the equal worth and dignity of all human beings, no matter how young, in virtue of their equally membership of a species whose normal fully-formed members are morally accountable in virtue of possessing free-will plus the intellectual wherewithal for discerning right and wrong. It is in the English version of a previously unpublished lecture originally delivered in German, entitled 'The Dignity of the Human Being', that Anscombe advances this claim. Her passionate and searing indictment in its closing paragraphs of the current overly permissive abortion laws and practices that prevail within the English-speaking world runs thus:

> Lack of reverence, of respect for that dignity of human nature ... is lack of regard for the one impregnable equality of all human beings. Lacking it, ...[y]ou may value yourself as a tennis player or a natural scientist, but without a change of heart you cannot value yourself as being a human, a *Mensch*. For you have shown the value you set on a human life as such. You are willing to extinguish it as suits you or as suits the people who want you to do so ... Each nation that has 'liberal' abortion laws rapidly become, if it was not already, a nation of murderers. (72–73)

This essay of hers alone makes the collection containing it worthy of publication and acquisition by the libraries of all universities that purport to teach ethics, which, of course, means every university worth speaking of. It should be compulsory reading for all students of applied ethics whose current staple reading all too often restricted to an un-edifying diet of Peter Singer supplemented by a dose of James Rachels and John Harris thrown in for good measure.

While much else in Anscombe's collection is equally as salutary, it also contains, as previously noted, a widely anthologised much better known article which contains a number as misleading as the insights contained elsewhere in the collection are profound. What these errors are, and why they are errors rather than the great insights so many others have taken them to be, will known be explained.

In her famous essay of 1958, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', reproduced in the collection, Anscombe advanced a certain taxonomy of ethical systems in order to propound in terms of several theses about ethics and its central concepts that have gained wide currency on the strength of her say-so, but which are false. By

'am ethical system' is here meant some fairly systematic and comprehensive account of which varieties of human action are morally right and which morally wrong.

According to Anscombe's taxonomy of ethical systems, each such a system either employs or embodies what she calls 'a law-conception of ethics' or it does not.

According to her, an ethical system employs or embodies a law conception of ethics when its account of which varieties of human conduct are morally right and which are wrong is made to rest on the conformity or lack of conformity of actions with some set of moral requirements that themselves ineliminably employ the *deontic* vocabulary of obligation or other cognate terms.

For an ethical system not to employ or embody a law conception of ethics, the account it gives of which varieties of conduct are morally right and which wrong must be otherwise based. One of Anscombe's most central claims in her famous article is that, in this sense, the *eudaimonistic* ethics of Aristotle, in which the notions of human flourishing and of the virtues as dispositions of choice and action needed to achieve such an end-state figure centrally, is an ethical system that does not employ or embody a law conception of ethics.

In relation to those ethical systems that do employ or embody a law conception of ethics, Anscombe makes a further distinction between those that are expressly theistic in character and those that not. An ethical system employing or embodying a law conception of morality is expressly theistic in character if and only if the set of moral requirements, on conformity or lack of conformity with which it claims right and wrong conduct stems, satisfies one or other or both of the following conditions: Either the set is held to derive whatever authority it has over humans from its being the will of God or the set contains one or more requirements that the system regards as having originated in a decree by God as a requirement and would not be one were God not to have expressly decreed it.

The instances of ethical systems that embody a law conception of ethics and which are expressly theistic, according to Anscombe, are all those associated with traditional Judeo-Christian belief and practice, plus the systematically articulated and philosophical elaborated versions of these systems as found in the ethical writings of such figures as Aquinas and Maimonides.

The instances of ethical systems that embody a law conception of ethics that is not expressly theistic in character are those many that have developed in Europe in the wake of the Enlightenment and

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which are purely secular in character, yet still purport to derive their own notions of which varieties of human action are right and which wrong from some posited set of moral requirements by which human beings are claimed to be bound but which are not held to derive their existence or authority from being the will of God. Examples of ethical systems that embody a law conception of ethics that are not expressly theistic in character, according to Anscombe, include practically every philosophical system of ethics propounded since Hume delivered his fateful assault upon theism and ethical rationalism. They include utilitarianism in all its several guises such as were propounded variously by Mill, Sidgwick, and G.E.Moore. They also include such species of non-cognitive ethical theory as that which Richard Hare propounded under the name of Universal Prescriptivism which purports to supply a decision procedure for generating acceptable moral requirements purely from considerations of what one finds one can and cannot consistently universalise as a set of imperatives for action.

Having explicated Anscombe's taxonomy of ethical systems, and seen how different ethical theories line up in terms of it, it is now possible to state the several theses she advances in her seminal article that have become widely accepted as a result of her so doing, but which nonetheless, it will now be argued, are demonstrably false.

The first thesis of hers was that no ethical system ever embodied a law conception of ethics that did not derive its *deontic* vocabulary from a Judeo Christian source.

Her second thesis was that this idea of moral obligation makes no sense apart from and outside of a theistic framework. Thus, according to her, no ethical system that embodies a law conception of ethics can offer, for whichever set of moral requirements it posits as being the basis of right and wrong conduct or for this set of requirements having any authority over us, any support that does not purport to derive the requirements and their authority from their being the will of God and having been divinely sanctioned by having had attached to them some earthly or heavenly rewards or punished for compliance or non-compliance with them.

On Anscombe's view, no ethical system is capable of offering a sound account of which forms of action are morally right and which wrong, or why human beings should act morally rightly, that does not embody a law conception of ethics that is expressly theistic or else which embodies some non-law conception of ethics

utilising some notion of human flourishing and the virtues needed to attain this end-state, such as Anscombe claims Aristotle espoused.

Anscombe's third thesis is that a deadly legacy of the detachment of the ideas of moral obligation and moral right and wrong from any expressly theistic framework, without their being then grounded in some eudaimonistic ethical system that does not embody or employ a law conception of ethics, has been to have left ethical thought in general, and moral philosophy in particular, defenceless against, save by some groundless act of refusal to accept, a moral outlook Anscombe considers deeply flawed and potentially corrupting and to which she gives the name *consequentialism*.

According to this moral outlook, there are no moral absolute rights or wrongs, save, at most, the absolute wrongness of not always maximising, or seeking to maximise, some postulated *desideratum* or set of *desiderata*, such as pleasure or human happiness. Moral rightness and wrongness, on this view, are always entirely dependent or consequential upon the consequences of the various possible forms of action open to moral agents at any given time, including the course of inaction. There are none, according to it, that are right or wrong in themselves and apart from and irrespective of whatever their consequences are.

A prime reason Anscombe is so opposed to consequentialism is that, in her view, it is at variance with the notion of the dignity of human beings and what she takes to be a corollary of it—viz. the fact that there are certain ways of acting that are wrong in themselves and apart from their consequences, because they involve treating humans, oneself or others, without the due respect for one's own or their dignity as a human.

These three doctrines of Anscombe's have been immensely influential. Nonetheless each and every one of them is demonstrably false.

So far as the first is concerned, as many others have pointed out before, it is by no means clear that Aristotle did not employ a concept of moral obligation in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, nor even one that was not theistically-grounded. After all, in an ethical system such as his which equates the highest form of human flourishing with a life given over as its supreme end to the activity of contemplating God, and which also made their engaging in this activity the final cause or purpose of God's having created human beings, Aristotle can hardly be supposed to have had any metaphysical need to avoid espousing a law conception of ethics,

even one that was expressly theistic in character. [See David Conway *The Rediscovery of Wisdom* (London: Palgrave, 2000) for reasons for ascribing these views to Aristotle.]

That, in the absence of having been exposed to any form of Judeo-Christian ethics, Aristotle would not have been able to deploy such a concept of moral obligation, or at least one grounded in a theistic framework, is falsified by a second historical example, who, far less contentiously than does Aristotle, serves to refute Anscombe's first thesis. As Charles Pigden pointed out in an article that appeared in the *Philosophical Quarterly* in 1988, Cicero manifestly employs a notion of moral obligation in his ethics without his having undergone any such form of exposure to Judeo-Christian ethics. Thus, for example, in Book 111 of his *De Officiis,* when discussing the moral obligation conferred upon someone by having made a promise, Cicero writes:

> in the taking of an oath we ought to bear in mind not so much the consequences of breaking it as the obligations we have brought upon ourselves. A solemn promise should be considered ... not in the light on non-existent divine anger [at its non-fulfilment], but of justice and good faith ... Is there any worse evil than wrongdoing?
> [Cicero, *on Moral Obligation*, trans. John Higginbotham (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), Book 111, ch. 29, 104–5, 176]

Since Cicero certainly, and possibly Aristotle too, appears to have succeeded well enough in utilising a notion of moral obligation to enunciate a system of eudaimonistic ethics not grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition in the way Anscombe claims any law conception of ethics must be to avoid being arbitrary, it follows the example of Cicero also refutes her second thesis as well as the first.

Finally, Anscombe's third thesis is seemingly refuted by the following two facts. The first is the existence of several ethical systems that embody non-theistic law conceptions of ethics that are yet decisively non-consequentialist, such as the deontological systems of David Ross and H.A. Prichard. The second is the existence of several ethical systems that are theistic in character yet also consequentialist, such as those of Francis Hutcheson and William Paley.

More importantly, in relation to consequentialism more generally, in so far as and to the extent there is moral need to recognise and do justice to the dignity of all human beings, plus all that follows from that dignity, there are varieties of consequentialism that seem able to accommodate such a recognition. One case in

point is that form of indirect ideal utilitarianism espoused by Franz Brentano who posited a supreme consequentialist principle as the source of all moral rightness and wrongness and of all secondary moral rules, yet rightly saw that adherence to this principle demanded human beings to acknowledge side-constraints on their action of exactly the sort Anscombe claims the dignity of all human beings imposes on them. Brentano wrote:

> To further the good throughout the great whole [that is comprised of the whole area that is affected by our rational activities insofar as anything can be brought about within it] so far as this is possible – this is clearly the correct end in life, and all our actions should be centred around it. It is the one supreme principle upon which all the others depend. [Franz Brentano, *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, originally published 1889, English edition edited by Roderick Chisholm (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 32.]

To this paragraph, Brentano added a foot-note which reveals how his supreme principle can be made to accommodate due recognition of the moral side-constraints Anscombe rightly claims the dignity of all human beings impose:

> The possibilities we have for promoting our own good is vastly different from the possibilities that we have for promoting the good of other. Similarly, we can help, or harm, some people much more than others. If there are people on Mars, we ought to wish them well, but it is not our duty to work for their good in the way in which we ought to work for ourselves and our fellow men upon earth ... The obligation to look first toward the welfare of wife, child and country is...recognised. (ibid., 32)

Why need or should one consider there to be any moral side-constraints any more absolute or stringent than such as are imposed by our ultimate moral obligation being always to comply with the moral principle Brentano considers to be supreme?

In the final analysis, for all her immense gifts as a philosopher and her fine qualities as a moral agent, Anscombe appears to have lacked sufficient of one moral quality that, given her other gifts, she needed to have prevented her falling victim to one serious shortcoming that had a profoundly baneful effect on her work. This was enough humility to appreciate the supreme importance of never making any historical or sociological claim about ethics without adequate supporting evidence for them.

One parting illustration of this failing: In her most famous and influential article, Anscombe summarily dismisses Joseph Butler as a moral philosopher by stating 'Butler exalts conscience, but appears ignorant that a man's conscience may tell him to do the vilest things' (170). In his third sermon on human nature, Butler explicitly states 'superstition and partiality' may themselves cause a person to believe it alright for them to act in a way they would strongly and rightly condemn as unjust and oppressive were another so to act. If this is not explicitly recognising a man's conscience may tell him to do the vilest things, or at least permit him to, what is?

Had she had a bit more intellectual humility, she may have avoided, besides this one, the many other errors she made and caused others to make through making them that continue to plague the subject of ethics to this day.

David Conway

Hume, Reason and Morality: A Legacy of Contradiction
by Sophie Botros,
Routledge, 2006, pp.x+252.

Botros's work is concerned with Hume's argument to show that morality cannot be derived from reason alone. The first part is mainly historical, dealing with Hume's argument itself. The second discusses the influence of Hume's argument on contemporary moral philosophy. The work is serious and painstaking. But Botros's style might have been calculated to test the stamina of her readers. She discusses any given issue by debating alternative views in the secondary literature. One finds, therefore, on any issue that one has to retain alternative positions in mind. The difficulty of retaining them is compounded by one's finding in the midst of the struggle that one has lost the issue that divides them. Here is an example of her style.

> It looks as though Williams' 'external reasons' theorists' are far closer to our 'more radical' externalists than to Korsgaard's 'externalists' who are essentially accidentalists (208).

There are difficulties also in her interpretation of Hume. His argument is that morality cannot be derived from reason, since it is essential to morality that it influences action but reason in itself cannot exert such an influence. Hume, however, phrases his

argument in different ways. Sometimes he says that it is inert or wholly inactive. Botros claims that this involves a contradiction. To say that reason alone cannot move us implies, or at least suggests, that it cannot move us at all. In the first part, Botros attempts to explain the contradiction by showing that Hume was combining in a single argument an attack on very different opponents.

In fact, however, the above contradiction seems merely apparent. To say that reason in itself is inert or wholly inactive implies only that it cannot move itself. It does not follow that nothing can move it, or that once in movement it cannot move other things. A brick is inert or wholly inactive, but one can move it easily enough if one throws it, and one can use it to move other things if one throws it against them. Hume's point is that reason, so far as it moves us, depends for its activity *wholly* on passion or desire. The proof—or so he assumes—is that the same reasoning can lead to entirely different acts. Suppose a person reasons that a certain water is poisoned and that if he drinks it he will die. He will avoid the water, if he wishes to preserve his life. But if he wishes to end his life, he will drink it. The reasoning is the same in both cases. But the acts are entirely different. Since the reasoning is the same, it cannot in itself produce the different acts. In short, it is *wholly* on passion or desire that reason depends in moving us. That, roughly, was Hume's view. It does not seem in involve a contradiction.

It does not follow, however, that it is correct. Hume treats the passions in quasi-mechanical terms. Reason is related to passion as a brick is related to the force that moves it. The relation, in short, is contingent or accidental. But take pride as an instance of passion. It presupposes that a person has the concept of self, can distinguish himself from others and has *dwelt in thought* on the differences. Here the relation between reason or thought and passion is not contingent. It is integral to the passion itself.

In this respect, it is interesting to compare Hume with Hutcheson, whom Botros discusses in some detail. Both adopted some form of naturalism. But for Hutcheson the relation between passion and the world is not mechanical but intentional or teleological. Now to say that thought or reason is integral to pride is only to say that pride takes an object or that in its structure it is intentional rather than mechanical. In short, there is an *internal* relation between the passion and reason. That was precisely Hutcheson's view. In consequence, his account is free from the difficulties that beset Hume's.

In her discussion of Hutcheson, Botros emphasizes, quite rightly, that he was not a subjectivist. But she seems to me to miss what is

vital in his view. On the basis of his analogy between perception and the moral sense, she argues that he was a moral realist. He held, in short, that moral qualities, like sensory ones, belong to the object not to the subject. But that is a dichotomy one finds in Hume, not in Hutcheson. For Hutcheson, sensory qualities belong neither to the world out of relation to the subject nor to the subject out of relation to the world. They are one of the ways in which the world appears to us. We are dealing, in short, with a relation. This relation is the product neither of the subject nor of the object but of nature more generally. It has an implicit logic or reason. For example, it is through sense perception that we are enabled to survive. But it is not the product of *human* reason or will. Without such a fundamental relation to the world we could not reason or will at all. Similarly the sense of good and evil belongs to human nature. It is not the product of human reason, will or contingent desire. Thus it belongs to our nature that we can lament that we are not as we ought to be. What we ought to be cannot be the product of how as it happens we are, of contingent desires. For that is what we lament.

In her second part, as we have said, Botros is concerned with Hume's influence on contemporary philosophy. Her discussion, once again, is extremely detailed and—at least to this reader—somewhat confusing. Yet it does not seem so difficult to indicate Hume's Contemporary influence. The truth is that the majority of contemporary philosophers would reject Hutcheson's account as the product of an out-dated metaphysics. They do not believe that the relation between passions and the world is intentional or teleological. Their view is not naturalist but *naturalistic*. They hold that nature is to be understood entirely through the concepts of the natural sciences. Thus passions are wholly the product of chance and blind or mechanical causation. In short, they agree with Hume on his mechanistic side. They agree with him also in holding that reason in itself cannot move us. Ultimately we are moved by passion or desire. But there is a difficulty. The demands of morality, in its traditional sense, are categorical. Yet they cannot be categorical if it is passion or desire and not reason in itself that moves us, for the passions are wholly the product of contingent or accidental causes. Any demand, not based on force, must be relative to what a person can be expected to desire. This difficulty, however, can be avoided. For one can hold that morality, in its traditional sense, is itself that product of outdated metaphysics. That was the position adopted, for example, by Mackie and, in certain respects, by Williams. One can admire their consistency.

That, however, is not the position Botros herself adopts. Her claim is that with the assistance of Wittgenstein she can show the categorical nature of morality whilst rejecting not simply the naturalistic view but also any element of the metaphysical. Her argument, in Wittgensteinian terms, is that morality is a language game which is played so that to show its categorical nature, one has only to elucidate what it involves. But that as it stands is plainly fallacious. She is assuming that what applies within a practice must therefore apply to the practice as a whole. Since the demands of morality are categorical, there is a categorical demand to submit to morality itself. The fallacy in this argument was well exposed by Foot, some forty years ago. As she said, the rules of social etiquette, for example, are no less categorical then those or morality. Yet it is evidently intelligible to ask why it is in one's interest, at least in all circumstances, to submit to their demands. Botros responds to this arguments by rejecting the comparison between morality and social etiquette. She points out that Foot herself acknowledges that the two are different. But it is irrelevant whether they are different. The point is that they are not different *in the relevant respect*. Indeed of the two it is precisely morality that is likely to conflict the more disastrously with one's own interest. Morality may demand that one lay down one's life. The rules of social etiquette are not likely to be so demanding. On any naturalistic view—it is obvious—the demands of morality cannot be categorical for one who is primarily concerned with his own interest. No doubt the naturalistic view may be mistaken. The question is how one can show this, whilst eschewing every element of the metaphysical. I cannot see that Botros has an answer to that question.

H O Mounce

Ethics Done Right: Practical Reasoning as a Foundation for Moral Theory
By Elijah Millgram
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005. pp. xii + 344.
£16.99, £45.

Moral reasoning is a species of practical reasoning; the relationship between practical reasoning and moral reasoning is, ideally, that of process to product. Such is the claim made by Elijah Millgram near the start of the final chapter in this book. Get the practical reasoning right and, even if the moral theory does not present itself

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in quite such short order as one might hope, at least one would have a valuable tool in deciding what to do—and practical reasoning can be the engine of a strong moral theory. A version of this claim is made near the start of the introductory chapter. With this in mind, the bulk of what Millgram is up to here is to investigate and reconstruct the theories of practical reasoning that lie behind the canonical moral traditions; if moral reasoning is a species of practical reasoning, a full understanding of the former demands that we pay attention to the latter.

The majority of Millgram's book reproduces papers published elsewhere: only two chapters are new. Beyond the desire to investigate the practical reasoning behind canonical moral theory, there is no core thesis on display. Inasmuch as Millgram seems to be sympathetic to a particularistic or non-systematic model of practical reasoning, this is perhaps how it should be. (He acknowledges problems with particularism, but suggests too that Iris Murdoch's thought is a promising place to start thinking about it; Murdoch, he thinks, hasn't got things right, but her notion of deliberative idiosyncrasy has roughly the right look and feel (190).) The non-systematic approach manifests itself most clearly in the final couple of essays, in which Millgram advances the idea that, faced with problems arising from the apparent incommensurability of ends, there is something to be said for accepting incommensurability, rather than treating it as a problem for or a failure of practical reasoning. Rather as a cubist painting purports to see objects from several perspectives simultaneously but is useless as a straightforward guide to the world, so, 'while a practical rendering of the world that saw things from more than one vantage point at a time might complicate and even impede one's decision making, it could nevertheless allow a kind of personal advantage that one would not want to sacrifice' (306). Incommensurability of ends is, in Millgram's picture, a practical problem, not a theoretical one; our stake in being a unified agent means that we are pretty good at solving the problem and reconciling or negotiating competing perspectives (288); having said this, '[o]nly persons whose lives have gone distressingly awry have arrived at "reflective equilibrium" about what matters' (296).

A trick that Millgram performs a couple of times is to take a line of argument, show how it's valid, but show too how that validity is beside the point, because the premises are unreliable. A startling example of this strategy comes in his defence of Mill's (in)famous proof of the principle of utility in chapter 4 of *Utilitarianism*. Mill's claim that desire proves that something is desirable is

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allowed room to breathe (it's not all that different from the way an RAF bomber crew might use 'I see the target' and 'the target is visible' interchangeably: since Mill is a thoroughgoing empiricist, there is little room to avoid this conclusion). The scaling-up of the proof to the aggregate of all persons is invalid only if we misconstrue it: Mill is making an appeal to an experientially privileged group able to provide the test of desirability (rather as we might appeal to people with good vision to test whether something is visible, I suppose). This does not mean that Millgram is a Millian, though: Mill's argument is still not sound. For an appeal to the experientially privileged seems to imply that desires can be corrected; but the idea of a corrected preference damages the pure instrumentality of the practical reasoning with which Mill associates himself (and Millgram uses this point alongside a more general anti-instrumentalist argument). Put another way, while Mill claims that there is nothing to be said about desirability beyond desire, this will mean that there is nothing sayable about *correcting* desires. But the appeal to the experientially privileged that is crucial to scaling up implies that this is false. The two stretches of argument cannot make sense together (75). Mill's 'proof' is valid, but unsound.

Whether or not Millgram is always convincing is another matter. For example, he notes in 'The Categorical Imperative and Contradiction in the Will' that, although Kant championed autonomy, any one agent's decision to act for his own reasons implies, via the claim that reasons are universally causally efficacious, a decision that others should act for those reasons, too, rather than their own (117). Yet we might wonder whether one's reasons for acting are one's 'own' or whether they are, in fact, simply what practical reason *in abstracto* looks like when squeezed into a particular situation—in other words, whether acting autonomously for one's 'own' reasons amounts to acting according to the reason *in* one, or simply as it is expressed *within* one. Sure, I might say, I am willing that everyone act according to reason as it is expressed within me; moreover, if anyone were in exactly my position, this would be indistinguishable from acting for 'my' reason. But if he is in exactly my position, any other person would be, in fact, me—so we don't have to worry. For as long as I can distinguish between myself and another, actions caused by reason are actions caused by reason manifested in different places and in correspondingly different ways; they don't threaten others' autonomy.

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Elsewhere, Millgram claims that understanding Hume's scepticism about practical reasoning involves locating its crux in a semantic theory that was, to his contemporaries, too obviously true to merit comment, but the obscurity of which today hides what more recent thinkers would take to be its equally obvious falsity ('Was Hume a Humean?', 211). Without doubt, this is a bold claim, and there is plenty of room for controversy. One might also ask whether it is true that utilitarians believed utility to be the sole bearer of value—surely *happiness* or something like that is the bearer of value, and utility is simply a measure of ... well, *utility*. But in all these examples, it is Millgram who is in control of the argument: it is he who, having paid close attention to the texts under consideration, is able to bring to the reader's attention aspects of arguments that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Granted the way that Mill defined utility, for example, this, that and the other follow naturally; like them or not, it's up to the reader to ensure that his criticisms of Mill play the game in the way that Mill defined the rules.

The strategy on display in the previously unpublished essay 'Hume, Political Noncognitivism and *The History of England*' is different from some of the others in this volume, inasmuch as it is less reconstructive. Instead, Millgram here uses Hume's *History* as a jumping-off point for an extended meditation on the nature of political argumentation. So, for example, whereas under normal argumentative conditions, conclusions follow from premises, in political argument, it is adherence to a conclusion that determines, in a large part, what a person accepts as a premise in the first place. Moreover, Millgram points out, while we might expect a line of reasoning about, say, the nature of the mind to yield a new and surprising outcome, novelty and surprise are not common characteristics of the outcome of a political argument. 'Ergo,' he claims, 'political argumentation isn't real reasoning or argument.' (252) It is instead much more emotivist, sharing important aspects with Hume's nihilism about practical reason (discussed at length in the other Hume chapters): reason doesn't feature in political argument to anything like the extent that considerations such as the party line do (262). Public political disputants are often only '*pretending* to think'; but '[i]f choices which are made for good reasons are normally better than choices which are made without reasons, and if public debate really does shape policy, this is a practical disaster' (254). Well: we might not think it a *disaster* —maybe Millgram overeggs things a touch here—but we certainly have something to ponder.

Some points might be raised that have less to do with whether one finds Millgram's conclusions palatable than with whether one finds him consistent. For example, consider one of the arguments in the essay 'Hume on "Is" and "Ought" '. In this piece, Millgram's case is that Hume's eponymous law is, in its own terms, weak—no argument is offered in support—unless one looks to Hume's representational theory of mental content. Under such a theory, there would be no way to distinguish a state of affairs' holding from its being obligatory—obligation could only ever be represented by a picture of a "brute" state of affairs with "obligatory" skywritten across the top, which would add nothing: the difference between the two pictures would be simply that one had a slogan. What we would have to do to get obligation if we accepted Hume's account of mental content—and what Hume does do—is simply to adjoin a nonrepresentational impression such as the impression of obligation. So we can't get an *ought* from an *is*, though we might be able to staple one on, as it were. As with the Mill paper mentioned above, the implication is that Hume's law can be defended by making an appeal to the rest of Hume's thought —but the sting is that those parts of Hume's thought that are most germane to this kind of appropriation are, in the light of more recent philosophy, queasy-making. So, before we parrot (and get students to parrot) the mantra that you can't get an *ought* from an *is*, we ought to consider why not. Valid as Hume's argument is, it's not necessarily reliable.

What's important here is that Millgram claims that the principle of charity dictates that this is how we ought to approach the 'is/ ought' passage (235). We have to do some reconstructive work for ourselves. And yet Millgram also warns us that 'the principle of charity, understood as an injunction to maximise truth in interpretation ... tends to become a way of filtering out precisely those philosophical views that are most interesting and important ... It often seems that the more interesting the philosopher, the less commentators are willing to take him at his word. When this happens, nobody is doing anybody any favours, charitable intentions notwithstanding' (211–12)—which is as much as to suggest that there is a reason to take Hume's ostensible bafflement at derivations of *ought* from *is* at face value, rather than to provide it with an argument.

Yet, even having exposed an apparent tension, it remains that the point is a minor one: the claims about charity come from different papers—one from 1995, the other from 1997—and they are made in different contexts. Philosophers are allowed to change their minds,

and are allowed to be tactical even if their minds have not changed. On top of this, the claims are compatible. By and large, Millgram's arguments tessellate pretty well.

One other quibble would be this: the title is a less good clue to the content of the book than is the subtitle. Granted the dependence of ethics on practical reasoning, getting the practical reason right won't necessarily mean getting the ethics right: unless one thinks—dubiously—that one can clarify ethical points simply though an appeal to the practical reasons informing them, one can get the reasoning right and still stuff up. 'Moral reasoning,' Millgram claims, 'is practical reasoning applied to moral subject matter' (48). For sure: but moral reasoning isn't the same as ethics, which involves determining what the moral subject matter is. Still—as titles go, what *An Important Part of Ethics Done Right* gains in accuracy, it loses though sheer bulk.

Iain Brassington

Jacobins and Utopians: The Political Theory of Fundamental Moral Reform
By George Klosko
University of Notre Dame Press, 2003, xii + 200pp.

Utopianism is not an easy concept to define. It is usually taken to refer to a social or political movement aiming at the creation of a perfect, or at least radically better, society. But this includes too much, since we wouldn't want to count suffragettes or trade unionists as utopians. Moreover, Christian Europe under the Holy Roman Empire aimed at a perfect society but it was by no means utopian.

George Klosko, in his useful and informative survey of some of the main currents of utopian thought throughout the ages, adopts the terminology of F.E. and F.P. Manuel in their seminal work on utopianism: utopia is a 'new state of being' or 'the pattern for a human condition that is totally new by any standard' (4). Because of its radical discontinuity with anything that exists or had existed in the ordinary course of human events, utopianism is a fundamentally revolutionary kind of movement in the *practical* sense. Whether the revolution is to happen primarily through education (Plato in most of his moods), the miraculous advent of a supreme lawgiver (Rousseau), a spontaneous uprising by the proletariat (Marx), or a violent overthrow guided by an elite vanguard (the

Jacobins, Lenin), utopians with some interest in the practical achievement of their vision aim at an imposed, comprehensive social structure that pays little if any attention to the realities of human nature.

Perhaps this is unfair, since Rousseau for instance took his model society to return to the original virtue of the 'noble savage'. His problem was how, given the corruption of existing society, the people could ever be in a virtuous enough position to accept the laws handed down by the lawgiver: 'men would be, prior to the advent of laws, what they ought to become by means of laws' (quoted at 87). This is where the notion of utopia seems to have an ineradicably evaluative element, for the 'nowhere' signified by the term means more than a simple absence of the ideal society from the existing state of affairs. Rather, utopia is not the sort of thing any group of men could ever realize, nor should they want to. Klosko's book only reinforces that view.

Unfortunately, however, despite producing a workmanlike overview, Klosko never rises above factual observation and textual analysis to subject utopianism to the sort of critical examination it requires. He begins with a brief historical account of Lycurgus's Sparta and Solon's Athens, moving swiftly to two chapters on Socrates and Plato. The most interesting point to emerge here concerns the Platonic critique of Socrates' method of *elenchos*: in his naivety, Socrates thought that by appealing to peoples' rational natures through concentrated dialectic, he could effect a transformation whereby 'people were more virtuous and had better values, in which they refrained from injustice and concerned themselves with questions of morality and caring for their souls' (37). Klosko, somewhat puzzlingly, worries whether this ideal was 'a sufficiently dramatic break from existing Greek society to be labeled a utopia' (37). Presumably he doesn't think Greek society had already attained such lofty heights, nor does he venture that a mere concern with moral betterment does not a utopia make. Maybe his thought is that there is not in Socrates a sufficiently worked out, novel socio-political structure whereby his aims could be realized.

Plato, as we all know, made up in spades for this absence in Socratic thought. Here Klosko provides a rather tedious exposition of Plato's ideas, getting bogged down in questions of textual exegesis. The scholarship is good, and he makes a persuasive case for the traditional view that Plato was indeed concerned with the practical implementation of his ideas, contra the interpretation of Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom that some of Plato's suggestions are so wildly implausible that he could not have intended them

seriously. In addition to interpretation of Plato's words, Klosko provides some useful historical insights that counter this view, for example concerning the Academy's political aims (65–6).

St Thomas More, Machiavelli, and Rousseau occupy a single brief chapter, and so there is little in the way of in-depth examination of their views. In spite of More's famous work being the lynchpin of utopian thought, the reader is left none the wiser as to what More actually meant by his curious book. Did he intend it seriously? In it he advocates euthanasia, yet surely this is not something the saint, a devout Catholic, actually believed? Is *Utopia* meant as satire? Klosko does not tackle these basic questions. Machiavelli fares little better, though the author dutifully highlights the paradox of power at the heart of the Florentine's thought: 'if successful reform requires that all power be in the new lawgiver's hands, then the state's future depends entirely on his good intentions ...The problem here is compounded by the means necessary to attain power' (78). What would have been interesting is a discussion of Machiavelli in relation to Savonarola, but the latter merits no more than a paragraph. Yet mightn't the Dominican have at least some right to be considered one of the few people in history who succeeded for a while in establishing a society based on utopian principles? Or if not, why not? Some analysis would have been instructive for Klosko's broader purposes.

After a more substantial treatment of Rousseau, containing an interesting account of his recommendations concerning the political organization of Poland and of Corsica, Klosko moves on to what I suspect are his main interests, namely Jacobinism, Marxism, and Leninism, where the binding idea is ruthless violence for the achievement of utopian ends. For anyone not acquainted with the political machinations of that monstrous outgrowth known as the French Revolution, in particular with its most twisted tendril, Maximilien Robespierre, Klosko's chapter is a decent place to start. Perhaps what motivates his interest is that, as he says early on in the book, 'Jacobinism is more plausible than other strategies. It is not just *a* theory of moral reform but arguably the one most likely to work in practice' (5), albeit with some of its own problems.

It is this reflection which engenders disquiet. What does Klosko mean by 'work in practice'? In one sense, the French Revolution was the most successful violent uprising in modern history: France was conquered by it and has been ruled by its principles ever since. The Bolshevik Revolution was also a spectacular 'success', albeit its lifespan was shorter. The Chinese Revolution has lasted over fifty years, and despite the pious hopes of the West that a good dose of

capitalism will eventually free up the country politically, no sign of this has as yet emerged. So in a sense, Jacobinism works in practice if carried out by the right sort of people. And the right sort of people, we know, are totally organized and dedicated to the task, soaked in the techniques of manipulation and subversion, dishonest to their bones and utterly merciless in their use of violence against anyone who would stand in their way. Yet for all his concern with the practical implications of utopianism, in particular with what he calls 'educational realism' – the use of education and conditioning (I don't think the word 'propaganda' appears once in the book) to train the citizenry for the proposed new regime – the reader gets little sense from Klosko's discussion that these features of Jacobinism not only exist but are intrinsic to the entire enterprise.

Klosko's account of Marxism is good, especially his emphasis on Marx's view that the revolution would be an historically determined, spontaneous uprising of the proletariat (if this isn't a contradiction in terms), with the Communist Party acting primarily to raise the class consciousness of the workers rather than to impose a blueprint for society by force. Perhaps the most diverting part of the chapter on Marx is the discussion of Charles Fourier. By the time of the Enlightenment, political philosophy had become so deracinated, secularised, and corrupted by wild ideas as to give rise to a thinker who believed in a 'phalanstery', or incredibly complex society based on 810 personality types and hence comprising 1620 males and females representing each type. Nobody would work at one job for more than two hours, with less desirable jobs being rotated every hour. The 'passionate series' was an organizational unit based on Harmony. '[I]n the pear growers series, the white pear group would compete with the yellow pear group and the brown pear group and so on, each group animated by a passion for its particular kind of pear' (129). And so on into the land of the sociopath. Not even Karl Marx would venture there.

What is most notable about the chapter on Lenin is the way in which his theory evolved from Marxism to Jacobinism, whereby the Party had more than a mere vanguard role but actively conspired to seize power and then ruthlessly to crush its opponents. Presumably Lenin had been disillusioned by the workers' failure to rise up in industrial Europe, as Marx had predicted, as also by the stubborn conservatism of the Russian peasantry. After all, if the workers and the peasants won't play ball, then the Party had better make them play. Again, though, the sheer unspeakable brutality of Leninism, whose theme post-1917 was simply to kill as many of the bourgeoisie as possible, plays no part in Klosko's account. Yet how

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could it be omitted in any serious discussion of the practical applications of utopianism, not least in a book primarily intended for students?

So Jacobin utopianism can work very well, as Klosko claims. In another sense, of course, it works not at all but is an abject, blood-soaked failure in all its forms – the hundreds of thousands of murdered French do not rate a mention in a chapter called 'The Jacobin Ideal' – and for which the world is still paying the price. Absent this aspect of the subject, and with no discussion of Christian attempts to reorganize society, whether they come within a suitable definition of 'utopian' or not—such as medieval Christendom, Calvin in Geneva, Savonarola, or even the various Puritan and other Protestant experiments in America—I am left thinking that *Jacobins and Utopians* is a book with limited horizons. Most of the time pedestrian in its prose, sometimes bogged down in unnecessary exegesis, studiously eschewing any moral perspective, and unduly selective in its focus, the book will be of little use to scholars and could not be recommended for undergraduates without a supplementary reading list that rounds out the picture far more fully.

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