



Abortion in G.E.M. Anscombe (1919-2001)

Lillian M. Abadal

University of South Florida

Anscombe's views on abortion are, no doubt, informed by Roman Catholic moral theology, specifically the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas and Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968).

First, Anscombe believed in the value and dignity of human life, which she plainly states in "The Dignity of the Human Being." According to Anscombe, this value and dignity is "impregnable" or unable to be taken away. In other words, human dignity is an ever-fixed mark on the human person. She bolsters this claim by drawing on the passion for human equality, recognized in both classically liberal and Marxist traditions. Human equality, she claims, presumes human dignity. If we were to do away with the notion of human dignity, then we would also have to do away with the human equality which depends upon it. Otherwise, demand for equality is predicated upon feigned value of the human person.

Second, she believed that any intentional killing of a human life was unjustifiable. Anscombe arrives at this conclusion because she rejected the predominant consequentialism of her Oxbridge circle. Instead, Anscombe argues that some actions are unequivocally wrong, intrinsically disordered. No matter the language one uses to couch the act of aborting an unborn fetus, it is, Anscombe contends, the intentional killing of a *human* life. Thus, if abortion is intentional by definition, then it is unequivocally wrong even in spite of the favorable consequences it may produce for the mother.

Lastly, Anscombe also believed in assessing human action through the lens of virtue, not through the lens of positive rights. A person of virtue, one possessing an inclination to justice, "has a connatural knowledge of the worth of a human being" and so ought to act prudently according to this fact.

Primary Sources:

Anscombe, G.E.M. 2005. *Human Life, Action, and Ethics: Essays by G.E.M. Anscombe*. Mary Geach & Luke Gormally (eds.). Imprint Academic.

Keywords:

abortion, moral, Thomas Aquinas, virtue, dignity, equality, killing