investigation we do in fact find ourselves siding with Dennett – at least in relegating the foreknowledge conundrum to the box labelled 'intellectual amusements', filled with interesting puzzles that, for all their perplexities, have little bearing on real life.[13]

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Notes

1 Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 180), quoted by William Hasker in his 'The foreknowledge connundrum' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol. 50 (2001), p. 98.

2 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

3 Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

4 *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 81 (1984), pp. 553–565.

5 I must stress that in adopting Dennett's strategy in this regard, I am in no way intending to side with Dennett in any of his other philosophical positions.

6 Augustine, *On Free Will*, Book III, chap ii.

7 William Hasker, 'The foreknowledge connundrum', p. 98.

8 Ockham, historically one of the main contributors to the debate over the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge, held that the past is necessary in a specific sort of way – it is *necessary per accidens*. That is to say, it is necessary in a contingent way – past events were not always necessary, they *become* necessary, and the necessity is therefore accidental. Hasker points out that this is the point of leverage for several attempts at resolving the dilemma, including Ockham's own, but he argues that these attempts are ultimately unconvincing.

9 I'll leave it to the reader to follow up on why we generally *think* this is an important question, by reading Dennett's chapter 'Could have Done Otherwise', in *Elbow Room*.

10 It does, however, leave the residual problem of explaining how God, in foreknowing, does not accrue some degree of guilt for hurtful, damaging and evil actions, even if he does not desire the ends of those acts. But here we enter into the arena occupied by the problem of evil – this is no longer the dilemma of *free will* and foreknowledge. I think that this, in the end, is what Augustine's worry (above) boils down to.

11 'Could have Done Otherwise', in *Elbow Room*, pp. 131–152.

12 Logical fatalism, roughly speaking, is the idea that it is true of any future event x that that event either will or will not happen. But as this fact's being true is part of the event x's past, and the past is necessary, then event x either happens or does not by necessity. To put it another way, it is the foreknowledge conundrum, but without anything or anyone actually foreknowing anything!

13 Though, of course, our conclusion here is based on taking the question seriously, rather than dismissing it offhand, *a la* Dennett.

MORALITY WITHOUT GOD?

Anglo-American moral philosophy has spent fifty years recovering from logical positivism and emotivism, and now has important things to say. Its recovery is owed above all to the rediscovery of Aristotle and Aquinas, which has enabled philosophers to move beyond the limitations not only of A. J. Ayer and C. L. Stevenson, but also of Hume's focus on sentiment, on the one hand, and Kant's focus on reason on the other. Contemporary ethics is about the whole human being, seen as biological, social and cultural, emotional and reflective. Moral philosophers read Jane Austen and Jane

Goodall, Primo Levi and Lévi-Strauss. The subject is alive, it is rich, and it is serious. Although Catholic authors have been among the most influential in this revival, many thinkers are explicitly attempting to do moral philosophy on the assumption that 'God is dead'. What seems to me interesting for theologians is not whether they succeed in this, but what believers might have to learn from their efforts.

Philippa Foot's career has spanned this half-century, and her two collections of essays, originally published from 1957–1977 and 1978–1995 respectively,[1] reveal in microcosm the heroic struggle to challenge the sterile systems inherited by her generation, to identify and expose their lurking influences, and to construct something positive in their place. The essays chart her progress in this struggle, including several false moves which she later diagnoses herself with candid clarity. Her writing is refreshingly lucid, and she has a gift for the telling distinction. But what is most impressive, perhaps, is the sheer doggedness of her assault on both emotivism and utilitarianism and of her efforts to discover a serious alternative.

Foot has been continuously fascinated by the issues of virtue, of the relation between moral evaluation and motivation, and of moral dilemmas. Because of the explosion of interest in virtue ethics, in part due to her own work, her classic essay 'Virtues and vices' (1977) calls for little discussion. On the issue of moral dilemmas, she wishes to resist those such as the late Bernard Williams who argue that it is possible through no fault of one's own to find oneself in a situation where any of the choices available would incur shame or guilt. Moral failure is never, she thinks, in this sense due to bad luck. She resists the attempt to argue from feelings of guilt – 'I had to miss the appointment, but I still feel bad that I did' – to actual guilt. She also argues that in situations where someone could not in good conscience keep an appointment, for example, they have no duty to apologize, only to explain.

This argument seems to me to be half-right. We do speak differently about a missed appointment that was simply our fault ('I do regret not coming') from one missed because of a conflict of obligations ('I do regret that I *couldn't* come'). At the same time, *pace* Foot, people regularly and naturally apologize in the second type of case, and also try to make up for the obligation they could not discharge. Often, too, the unease that we feel at having been caught in the moral dilemma is worth taking seriously. We think to ourselves, 'Perhaps someone quicker-thinking or more saintly would have found a way out. Perhaps we shouldn't have got into the situation in the first place'. After all, every dilemma has a history. We might think of Williams' example of Gauguin abandoning his family in order to be able to paint; he might have done well to ask himself with painful regret, 'Should I have got to this point?'

Analysis of moral dilemmas leads Foot to distinguish two meanings of 'I ought to do X', that is, 'I have *some* reason (reason^1) to do X' and 'I have *overall*, *conclusive*, reason (reason^2) to do X'. In a moral dilemma, one may have both reason^1 to do X and reason^1 not to do X. However, one can only have reason^2 *either* to do X *or* not to do X. Reasons^2 do not override reasons^1, but rather make them disappear. This distinction between reasons within a context and overall practical reasons is also used by Foot for a devastating critique of utilitarianism, 'Utilitarianism and the virtues' (1985). She argues that both its attractiveness and its error lie in its consequentialist claim that we should aim to achieve 'the best state of affairs'. She points out that this phrase makes little sense except in limited contexts; and that 'acting for the best' is quite appropriate as the goal of benevolence. However, benevolence is not the whole of morality. 'To act for the best' is a reason *within* morality, where benevolence should be integrated with other virtues such as justice. To assume that it is also a reason *outside* morality, which gives the latter its grounds, is, precisely, to smuggle in consequentialism rather than to argue for it.

Foot once or twice wobbles uncharacteristically between the richer meaning that virtues such as prudence and temperance carried in the middle ages and their

impoverished modern versions. It is important for her argument against utilitarianism that benevolence or charity is not an overarching virtue, the 'form of the virtues' as Aquinas puts it, but a specific virtue with a limited province. Utilitarianism, as opponents have suspected, may draw some of its attraction from a lingering post-Christian sense that charity is the virtue to which all others should be reduced. (Joseph Fletcher's muddled but still worryingly influential *Situation Ethics* exploits this association.) It matters, therefore, to distinguish between Christian *caritas* – the love first of God, then of neighbour and oneself, and then of other created things in due order – and the modern charity or benevolence, an undifferentiated goodwill towards the collectivity of human beings. It makes sense to say that the proper ultimate goal of keeping a promise or of rescuing someone from a fire is love for the neighbour in question (seen as a child of God). But that lends no aid to consequentialism. As well as underpinning the other virtues, *caritas* can also assist in integrating a proper care for self within morality. Foot remarked in 'Virtues and vices' that 'there is no general virtue of self-love as there is a virtue of benevolence or charity'. Augustine and Aquinas would not quite have agreed.

The question of moral motivation has proved the toughest challenge for Foot, and it is fascinating to watch her attempts over the years to escape from the entanglements of the legacy of Hume to embrace, finally, a broadly Thomist explanation of practical rationality. Hume's problem was the apparent truth that ''Tis one thing to know virtue, and another to conform the will to it'. He bridged the gap between the two by arguing that the feeling of pleasure motivates us to act virtuously. Indeed, he *identified* virtue with a 'pleasing sentiment of approbation'. Already in 1963, Foot was criticizing Hume and his emotivist successors by pointing out that people are not *necessarily* influenced by their moral judgments. But if there is no logical connection between virtue and the will, if we can recognize something as good but be unwilling to do it, what is it that motivates us to act well?

Foot had already discovered the basis of the answer she would develop over the years, an analysis of the meaning of moral terms that exploited Peter Geach's explanation of the *attributive* use of the word 'good': in the phrase, e.g., 'a good deckchair', what counts as good depends on what a deckchair is. (This is unlike, e.g., 'red', which means the same when applied to deckchairs, strawberries and football strips.) We understand what a good action or a good person is because we have shared public criteria for judging this, connected with the sort of lives that human beings lead. In this way, the alleged gap between 'facts' and 'values' can be closed; as Foot explains in 'Moral arguments' (1958) and 'Moral beliefs' (1958–59), words like 'rude' and 'pride' are 'logically vulnerable to facts'.

At this stage, Foot held firmly that every person has a reason to act morally, but her (penetrating) account of the meaning of moral language left her with a problem. Could not someone accept the criteria of a good action (agreeing, say, that breaking a promise is unjust), but then reject the practical conclusion: 'I should not break this promise'? It is easier to argue that the other virtues are in the agent's interest; justice is the problem, and Foot is driven briefly to argue that if acting justly cannot be shown to be in the agent's interest, then justice cannot be a virtue. In 'Morality as a system of hypothetical imperatives' (1977), she tries another tack, arguing (against Kant) that 'ought' only has force for those who have other reasons for wanting to be moral. By the 1980s Foot is focusing more closely on practical rationality, and in 'Locke, Hume and modern moral theory' (1990) she exposes the continuing influence of Hume's assumption that morality can only motivate us *by means of* a desire or something similar. Rather, she argues, we should realize that moral considerations just are reasons for action; there is no need to invoke some extra desire to be virtuous. It makes sense to say, simply, 'The reason I want to keep the promise is because it is just to do so'.

By 1995, in the essay 'Does moral subjectivism rest on a mistake?', Foot has been able to integrate her key insights into a coherent and robust account, which later became the first chapter of her own manifesto, *Natural Goodness* (2001, reviewed in these pages by Hugo Meynell[2]). She argues that human goodness should be seen as analogous to the goodness of a plant or an animal; just as we can say that there is something wrong with an oak tree that fails to produce acorns, because there are capacities that a species needs in order to flourish, so we can say that there is something wrong with a person who has no interest in, for example, keeping promises; for promise-keeping is needed in human life because of the kind of creatures we are. To be a virtuous person, Foot argues, is to be the sort of person who recognizes certain types of reasons as reasons for action. In other words, to be virtuous is to be practically rational. There is no need to provide an extra type of motivation for moral behaviour; shameless or immoral people can be seen as failing in rationality because they mistake or ignore reasons for action.

There might be a temptation for a follower of Thomas Aquinas to say at this point, 'A heroic struggle indeed, but what a waste of effort! Foot has spent fifty years moving from Hume to Aquinas; if only she had simply begun with Aquinas – what might she have achieved then!' That, however, would be to underestimate both the difficulty and the importance of her penetrating diagnoses of errors that are still disturbingly influential. The Thomist might also, however, be a little puzzled by her account of the relations between virtue, rationality, goodness and the will. Although she is often alert to the role of the emotions in moral behaviour, her final definition of virtue is curiously intellectualist: 'Those who possess these virtues possess them in so far as they recognize certain considerations ... as powerful, and in many circumstances compelling, reasons for action'. This does not seem adequate for courage, for example: I could very well recognize compelling reasons for tackling a gunman yet fail to do it through cowardice. The definition of some virtues, at least, need to include a reference to dispositions and emotions.

Foot's new definition is most convincing for justice, oddly enough the very virtue that her younger self found most intractable. Perhaps that is not so surprising after all: for Aquinas located justice, but not courage or temperateness, in the *voluntas*, i.e., in our very capacity to be motivated by rational considerations. In other words, reasons for acting justly can motivate us without any reference to other emotions. Aquinas' elaborate psychology of the virtues did not see *prudentia*, or practical wisdom in Foot's way as *identical* with the other (non-theological) virtues, but rather as both governing and presupposing them. That makes it possible to distinguish in theory between the intellectual aspect of the virtues – being the sort of person who recognizes X as a reason for action – and the willingness and ability to act upon such judgments – being the sort of person who *responds* to recognizing X as a reason for action – while at the same time holding that the two are inseparable. Foot's phrase 'for them certain considerations count as reasons for action' runs the risk of capturing only the first of these, although she wants her virtues to do the jobs of both. In Thomas, of course, rational judgment and rational motivation, *intellectus* and *voluntas*, are intimately interdependent: the will responds to the judgment that something is good to do by wanting to do it. At the same time, however, the intellect is dependent upon the will: we can, for example, refuse to think. Attention to Thomas' subtle account of this interplay might have helped Foot to explain rather than merely acknowledge the existence of shameless and immoral people.

There is a second way in which Foot's account seems to fit justice better than the other virtues. If you ask the question, 'Why bother keeping your promises?', then 'Because if no one did, society would fall apart' seems a reasonable answer. But the same answer would be disconcerting if the question was, 'Why bother to feed your children?' A mother who fed her children primarily for that reason would not seem to

possess the virtue of maternal love. Foot may reply that there are indeed different types of practical reasons appropriate to different virtues; what 'we can't get on without', to use her phrase, is people recognizing those different types of reasons in different contexts. In other words, the explanation of why a virtue makes its possessor good will in some (but not all) cases be different from the agent's explanation of why he or she acts in a virtuous way. St Thomas' analysis of the relations among *caritas*, *prudentia* and the other virtues might once again be useful for articulating the relation between different levels of explanation.

Foot has challenged us to explore the idea that our shared biological and cultural nature provides the criteria for our practical rationality. Robert Hinde's *Why Good is Good*[3] looks as if it might be exactly the sort of book to assist us in this. Written by a biologist who has read widely in developmental psychology and anthropology, it aims to explain how morality has arisen without needing to posit any 'transcendental origin', as he puts it. The idea seems to be that if we can show how our moral sense might have evolved, then we need no longer believe in God. Hinde does not here consider the possibility that there may be other reasons for faith, and his treatment of religion will seem naively crude to any educated believer. At the same time, both philosophical and theological ethics ought to be able to learn from a serious and wide-ranging account of the biological bases and cultural and psychological histories of our moral intuitions, and Hinde's footnotes point us to some rich resources. Biology, for example, can remind us that there are clear limits to the possible ways in which we might flourish; psychology, with its Freudian attentiveness to our capacity for self-deception, can help us better to understand and to deal with temptation. Unfortunately, for all its erudition Hinde's book is marred by its lack of conceptual clarity. In particular, he repeatedly conflates evolutionary with moral explanation; sometimes, for example, a 'beneficial' trait is one that has developed because it increased the 'genetic fitness' of its possessor's ancestors, at other times it is one that gives its possessor material advantage in his or her present life. Similarly, he fails to distinguish sharply between evolutionary 'purpose' and the actual purposes that men and women have as they go about their lives.

Although Hinde insists that one should not simply read off morals from nature – what we are does not tell us what we ought to be – he gives no clue as to why we ought, for example, to approve reciprocal behaviour because it is found in almost all human groups, but not welcome male dominance of the public sphere, which on his account is equally widespread. Hinde sees himself, in an oddly dated way, as a Darwinian warrior against superstition. Ironically, his method will cause more problems for the secular philosopher than for the theologian, who might appeal to higher authority to explain when to trust and when to distrust nature. The biggest difficulty with his reductionist account is that it gives no authority to rational thought: we just happen to have inherited a preference for having a consistent 'self-concept', but no reason is given to trust consistency rather than inconsistency, or some accounts of what is good rather than others. Hinde assumes that morality is based either simply on our natural and cultural history or on a transcendent authority. In other words, he asks the question, 'Can there be morality without God?' and answers it by proposing morality without moral truth. At the same time (as his repeated, and unselfcritical, use of 'ought' and 'must' reveal), he wants there to be moral truth. The question he fails to ask is, 'Can one move from morality to moral truth without God?', a question that challenges not religion, but the contemporary project of secular philosophy. Its answer is far from obvious, and theologians might be grateful that it is not their job to discover it.

Foot handsomely acknowledges her debt to both Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach as well as to Aquinas. She defends Christianity against Nietzsche's extravagant charges, and she appeals at a crucial point in the argument of *Natural Goodness* to the

example of certain Christians executed in Nazi Germany. (She also quotes the illuminating response of a priest, who on being asked what he had discovered from thirty years of hearing confessions replied, 'There are no grown-ups'.) Honest secular philosophers recognize what they can learn from Christians. What can theologians, in return, learn from them?

The first thing would be clarity. Too much contemporary theology treats obscurity as a virtue, and assumes that the reader rather than the author should do the donkey's share of the work of communication. Jargon and complexity can conceal sloppiness of thought as well as of style, and in any case if one of the duties of theology is to account for faith, it desperately needs books that are accessible. As it is, many of the best Catholic writers come from other disciplines. The scrupulously careful writing characteristic of analytic philosophy can provide us with a salutary model, and Foot in particular shows the potential fruitfulness of the precise distinction.

Secondly, the work of Foot's generation in challenging scepticism and utilitarianism, in persuading neo-Kantians to think seriously about the virtues, and in reviving serious interest in Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas has been of incalculable benefit to theology. Not only can Christian thinkers now embrace their own intellectual heritage with confidence, and avoid the temptations of incompatible philosophies, but there is also now far greater scope for collaboration and dialogue between moral theology and the best of secular ethics. That is something for which Catholics in particular should be grateful.

To what extent, though, does theology stand to learn from the *content* of secular moral philosophy? Here, Foot's work, for all its lucidity, may disappoint: reading her will help you more in seeing how ethics hangs together than in deepening or challenging your understanding of how good or bad people behave. That is partly because her concern to justify morality to potential sceptics means that she tends to discuss issues from an outsider's perspective; she is more concerned with what 'we' say about other people's actions than about what they themselves say. Moreover, she relies heavily on conventional (though usually perfectly respectable) intuitions for her arguments: what 'we' say is unlikely to rock the average boat. So, for example, she takes on Nietzsche by showing that his views are incompatible with a normal understanding of justice, and that he provides no intellectual defence against the horrors of the Third Reich.

It is interesting to contrast Foot in this respect with Raimond Gaita, who also acknowledges his debt to writers in the Christian tradition, in particular to Simone Weil for whom he has a profound respect. His recent books *A Common Humanity*[4] and *The Philosopher's Dog*[5] give a rich sense of the texture of actual moral thinking – of what it actually feels like to care and think deeply about how one lives. Gaita writes philosophy through narrative, including autobiography, always seeking to see morality from the point of view of the agent. His focus is not on conventional intuitions, but on impressive examples of goodness, or on instructive cases of failure. In particular, he is struck by characters (including his own father, whom he celebrated in *Romulus, my Father*[6]) whose generosity or honesty or belief in human dignity show up the limitations of the rest of us; we learn, he thinks, in large part by acknowledging their authority. It is not a coincidence, it seems to me, that this philosopher, whose work is (in the best sense) edifying and not merely explanatory, argues that justice must be grounded in the love of the individual in all his or her uniqueness.

Foot aims to explain how we have reason to be moral. Gaita makes a sharp distinction between reasoning, which explains by incorporating an instance under a general rule, and understanding, or discovering meaning, which 'proceeds in the direction of the particular'. Thinking about morality, he argues, is found 'in the realm of meaning'. Of the latter Gaita remarks, 'Nothing whatsoever compels us to value it. Nothing in reason or science underwrites it'. Despite this, we are in a different world

from Foot's emotivists. Their denial that reasons can support morality was intended to undermine claims to moral truth, Gaita's to explain the kind of truth that morality possesses. To make moral progress, we might say, is to learn to see the world in a certain way. No reasoning can force you to want to do this until you have already begun to do it, and seen for yourself that you can see the world better that way. At the same time, you really can see the world better that way; 'the realm of meaning', as Gaita puts it, is genuinely 'a gift'.

For Foot, the mother who fails to recognize that 'This is your child' is a compelling answer to the question, 'Why should I feed her?', is failing in practical rationality. For Gaita, she is failing to grasp what it means to be a mother, to have a child. Gaita seems to be right that if she were persuaded to respond appropriately by explanations of what good mothers ought to do, that would not be enough to make her a good mother. She needs simply to see her child as one she should feed, in love. If Foot were to accept that, she would be agreeing that 'practical rationality' must include ways of seeing things as well as ways of reasoning. Gaita himself might not be too uneasy with that way of putting things – it would cohere, for example, with his interesting argument that it would be unreasonable to engage with the reasoned positions of certain 'cranks', such as David Irving on the Holocaust. In either case, we need to trust in the ways that decent and reflective men and women have learnt to see the world. The believer, prompted by Gaita's references to Simone Weil, might wonder whether that counts as a 'form of the implicit love of God'.

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Notes

1 *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*. Pp. xvi, 213, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, second edition 2002, £35.00/£14.99; *Moral Dilemmas and Other Topics in Moral Philosophy*. Pp. 218, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002, £35.00/£14.99.

2 HeyJ XLIV (2003), p. 101.

3 *Why Good is Good: The Sources of Morality*. Pp. xiv, 241, London: Routledge, 2002, £60.00.

4 London: Routledge, 2000.

5 London: Routledge, 2003.

6 London: Headline Review, 1999.