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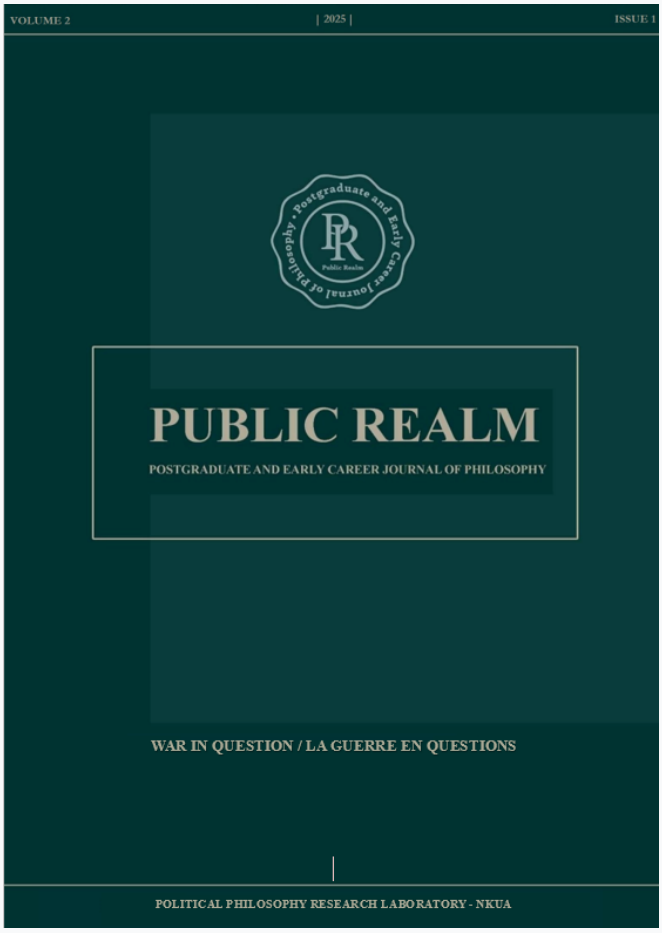

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Elizabeth Anscombe on Just War, Legitimate Killing, and Double Effect

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Abstract

This paper examines Elizabeth Anscombe's just war theory and argues that her central thesis is that nothing can justify the deliberate killing of innocents in wartime. I first outline Anscombe's seven conditions for just war theory and demonstrate how she employs these conditions to a specific conflict. I then analyze Anscombe's distinction between the innocent and the non-innocent in warfare, leading to a discussion on the justification and limitations surrounding legitimate killing. At last, I present Anscombe's examination of the principle of double effect within her action theory, particularly her distinction between intentional, foreseen, and accidental consequences, highlighting the misuse of this principle as a justification for civilian casualties in war. My aim is to demonstrate how Anscombe's action theory addresses controversial issues in war and provides new perspectives on just war theory.

Keywords

Anscombe, Just War, Legitimate Killing, Innocence, Double Effect, Intention

Introduction

Elizabeth Anscombe, one of the most significant philosophers of the twentieth century, is renowned for her contributions to action theory and ethics. Her influential monograph, *Intention* (1957), has been described by Donald Davidson as "the most important treatment of action since Aristotle". In ethics, her article "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958) is recognized as the revival of contemporary virtue ethics. Despite her significance, Anscombe is often regarded as challenging to understand—some prefer to use the word "notorious". I believe this negative reputation stems from a misunderstanding of her work, largely due to a failure to appreciate the historical context in which she wrote.

In recent years, there has been a growing number of studies focusing on the historical context of Anscombe's writing. These studies often use this context as a starting point for examining her action theory and ethics, providing a valuable framework for clarifying common misunderstandings about her work.[1] These studies unveil a crucial historical context for Anscombe's writing of both *Intention* and "Modern Moral Philosophy". Specifically, she vehemently opposed Oxford University's decision to award Harry S. Truman an honorary degree in 1956. Truman, the former president of the United States, was infamous for ordering the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Anscombe argued that an honorary degree represents "a reward for being a very distinguished person". By nominating Truman, she contended, Oxford was effectively endorsing a distorted notion of "distinguished person" by recognizing someone she described as "a notorious criminal responsible for two massacres".

Anscombe published a pamphlet called "Mr Truman's Degree"[2] in 1957 to clarify her views. This was not her first public stance on the war. In 1939, she co-authored "The Justice of the Present War Examined"[3] with Norman Daniel, responding to Britain's entry into the war against Germany to restore Poland's frontiers and independence. Later, in 1961, she wrote an essay titled "War and Murder"[4] for the collection *Nuclear Weapons: A Catholic Response*, where she reiterated similar moral arguments but clearly with Catholic audience in mind.[5] As a result of Anscombe's engagement with these issues, the just war theory, which had fallen into obscurity during World War II, gradually regained acceptance across various segments of society. Anthony Kenny contends that the revival of just war theory "is due

[1] See Duncan Richter, *Anscombe's Moral Philosophy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 3; Rachael Wiseman, *Anscombe's* Intention (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 28–36; John Berkman, "Justice and Murder: The Backstory to Anscombe's 'Modern Moral Philosophy'", in *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, ed. Roger Teichmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 225–231.

[2] Elizabeth Anscombe, "Mr Truman's Degree" (henceforth TD), reprinted in *Ethics, Religion and Politics Collected Philosophical Papers Volume III* (henceforth CCP3), (Oxford: Blackwell, and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 62–71.

[3] Elizabeth Anscombe, "The Justice of the Present War Examined" (henceforth JPW), reprinted in CPP3, 72–81.

[4] Elizabeth Anscombe, "War and Murder" (henceforth WM), reprinted in CPP3, 51–61.

[5] See the introduction of CCP3, vii; Lucy Brown, "Intentions in the Conduct of the Just War", in *Intention and Intentionality: Essays in Honour of G. E. M. Anscombe*, ed. Cora Diamond and Jenny Teichman (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1979), 133–145; David Goodill OP, "Elizabeth Anscombe on Just War", in *The Moral Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, ed. Luke Gormally, David Albert Jones, and Roger Teichmann (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2016), 154–171.

more to Elizabeth Anscombe than to any other individual".[6] Despite being written in different historical contexts, Anscombe's three papers on war present a continuous and coherent line of thought. For example, they all address the topics of "the attack on civilians as a means of warfare" and "the applicability of the principle of double effect in relation to attacks on civilians". Not only were these issues significant during her time, but they also remain crucial questions that we must confront in today's conflicts.

In this paper, I will explore Anscombe's theory of war and argue her central thesis that nothing can justify the deliberate killing of innocents in wartime. In Section 2, I will outline Anscombe's seven conditions for just war theory, grounded in natural moral law, and demonstrate how she employs these conditions to evaluate the conflict of 1939. In Section 3, I will analyze Anscombe's distinction between the innocent and the non-innocent in warfare, leading to a discussion on the justification and limitations surrounding legitimate killing. In Section 4, I will first present Anscombe's examination of the principle of double effect within her action theory, highlighting its misuse as a justification for civilian casualties in war. What delved into then is her concept of intention, aimed at addressing challenges regarding the applicability of this principle to the context of civilian killings in warfare.

Just War

In both pamphlets, Anscombe takes a stand against the war of her time and the specific means used in that conflict, but she is not a pacifist. Instead, she argues that pacifism is a false doctrine[7] that is not only wrong but also extraordinarily harmful. Normally, a wrong idea might not lead to particularly bad consequences, and a false doctrine would not typically encourage people to do anything harmful. However, pacifism is an exception. It arises in situations where evil is occurring, and good outcomes cannot be achieved without resorting to some evil means. Anscombe thus contends that war can be necessary in certain circumstances and can be just under specific conditions. Her objections to certain wars and the means employed in them are not a rejection of war itself, but rather a critique of those wars that do not meet her criteria.

Anscombe gives seven conditions that must all be fulfilled for a war to be just:

(1) There must be a just occasion: that is, there must be violation of, or attack upon, strict rights.
(2) The war must be made by a lawful authority: that is, when there is no higher authority, a sovereign state.
(3) The warring state must have an upright intention in making war: it must not declare war in order to obtain, or inflict anything unjust.
(4) Only right means must be used in the conduct of the war.
(5) War must be the only possible means of righting the wrong done.

[6] Anthony Kenny, "Elizabeth Anscombe at Oxford", in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, ed. John Haldane (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2019), 12–13.
[7] Anscombe claims that "pacifism is a false doctrine" in both WM and TD. She explains it in a religious way in WM, 55–58; what I discuss here is her argument in TD, 69–70.

(6) There must be a reasonable hope of victory.
(7) The probable good must outweigh the probable evil effects of the war.[8]

These conditions are grounded in the concept of natural moral law.[9] According to Anscombe, natural law reflects the principles of human nature, guiding individuals on how to act in ways that fulfill their inherent functions, all while respecting their free will. In the context of relationships between individuals, societies, and nations, justice stands as the core principle to uphold. War, being one of these relationships, is also governed by this principle, serving as the only means to achieve the happiness of humanity.

According to some of the seven conditions mentioned above, Anscombe claims that Britain's entry into the war against Germany in 1939 had some justice. Condition (1): The invasion of Poland made it a just occasion, as the rights of Poland had been infringed. Condition (2): The war was declared by a lawful authority, the British government. Condition (5): It is possible that the wrong done could not have been righted by peaceful means. Condition (6): There is a reasonable hope of victory.[10] However, Anscombe argues that the remaining three conditions have not been fulfilled. Given that all the conditions must be met for a just war, this war is not just.

Aside from condition (3), where Anscombe questions the sincerity of the British government—arguing that it never genuinely cared about Poland and merely used it as a pretext to confront Germany[11]—and condition (7), where she sees little hope for a just and lasting peace in Europe[12], the discussion throughout the pamphlets from 1939 to 1956 primarily focus on the right means required by condition (4). These means are mainly concerned with the issue of civilian casualties, including the distinction between civilians and combatants in modern warfare, the likelihood of civilian attacks, and the differentiation between direct and accidental killings in cases involving civilians.[13] The discussions cover two main topics: first, the justification and limitations of legitimate killing, which will be addressed in section 3; second, the application of the principle of double effect in relation to civilian causalities, which will be examined in section 4.

Legitimate Killing and Murder

David Goodill OP notes in his article "Elizabeth Anscombe on Just War" that while all three of Anscombe's essays on the war were written in particular historical contexts, they continue to tackle the same moral questions, one of which is the issue of legitimate killing, including both the justification for such killings and the limitations that should apply.[14] Anscombe argues that legitimate killing in war should be directed only at combatants, and that the distinction between combatants and non-combatants aligns with the concepts of non-innocence and innocence in a moral sense.

[8] Anscombe, JPW, 73. These conditions are not Anscombe's original idea, she gives sources in the footnote.
[9] *Ibid*. Anscombe also contends that the natural moral law is what modern men have lost, and they cannot live in peace without it. This claim echoes Anscombe's criticism in "Modern Moral Philosophy".
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] See Anscombe, JPW, 74; Duncan Richter, *Anscombe's Moral Philosophy*, 28.
[12] See Anscombe, JPW, 80–81; Duncan Richter, *Anscombe's Moral Philosophy*, 29.
[13] See Anscombe, JPW, 76–79; Anscombe, TD, 66–68.
[14] See David Goodill OP, "Elizabeth Anscombe on Just War", 169–170.

The first thing that needs to be discussed is whether there are innocent people in war, specifically the definition of combatants and non-combatants. Supporters of the indivisibility of modern warfare argue that civilians and combatants are equally important because a country's military strength is realized through its overall economic and social strength; thus, every member of a society shares a collective responsibility. Therefore, it is senseless to draw any line between combatants and non-combatants, that is, legitimate and illegitimate objects of attack. Anscombe finds this view ridiculous. She mockingly suggests that this theory implies that anyone who bought a taxed article, grew a potato, or cooked a meal has contributed to the war effort, and she finds it hard to believe how children and the elderly fit into this narrative—perhaps because they cheered up the soldiers and munitions workers.[15]

Anscombe admits that the line between combatants and non-combatants might be difficult to draw, but that does not mean we should give up doing so, especially since "wherever the line is, certain things are certainly well to one side or the others of it"[16]. In Anscombe's view, combatants—those who are non-innocent—are engaged in an objectively unjust proceeding that causes harm; for instance, they wrongfully attack the rights of others or retain what they have wrongfully gained. They can be the target of legitimate killing because killing them stops the harm. Similarly, supply lines and armament factories can also be legitimate targets, as they provide combatants with direct means to cause harm. In this sense, killing combatants is a means of defending or restoring rights. Therefore, the most important condition for legitimate killing is that its purpose must be to stop the harm. That is to say, a surrendered army cannot be killed because they are no longer causing harm; punitive killings are not legitimate either, as their purpose is not to stop harm.[17]

Another important point in Anscombe's arguments is that the state "has the authority to order deliberate killing in order to protect its people or to put frightful injustice right."[18] It is also noted in the principles of a just war that the war must be waged by a lawful authority. This means that while specific individuals are fighting on the battlefield, they do so on behalf of their respective states. In war, the identity of the individual tends to disappear, becoming an abstraction that represents the state. Therefore, those who are authorized to conduct legitimate killing and those who can be legitimately killed should be the combatants fighting for their states, rather than individuals acting on their own.

As for the meaning of "the unjust preceding that cause harm", Anscombe raises a possible question: Does her theory imply that a soldier can only be killed when he is actually attacking? If so, this would mean that it would be impossible to sneak attack a sleeping camp. Anscombe's answer is that "what someone is doing" can refer either to "what he is doing at the moment" or to "his role in a situation". Therefore, a soldier under arms is

[15] See Anscombe, JPW, 76–77; Anscombe, TD, 63.
[16] Anscombe, TD, 67.
[17] See Anscombe, JPW, 77; Anscombe, WM, 53; Anscombe, TD, 67.
[18] Anscombe, TD, 68.

"harming" in the latter sense, even if he is asleep, and a sneak attack also falls under the category of legitimate killing.[19]

Accordingly, civilians do not fulfill the conditions under which a person can be legitimately killed in war, because they are neither carrying out any wrongful actions against those who are defending or restoring rights, nor are they engaged in providing supplies to those who have the means to fight. Therefore, they are non-combatants and innocent. The civilian population that supports the economic and social strength of a nation, in the theory of indivisibility, is not considered combatants. Even though these strengths may eventually be used to support the war unjustly, it is an action of the state and has nothing to do with these civilians. Anscombe gives the example of a farmer growing wheat that may be eaten by the troops; he is not supplying them with the means of fighting, so it is ridiculous to consider this farmer a combatant.[20]

According to these limitations on legitimate killings, particularly the distinction between the innocent and the non-innocent, it is clear that, under condition (4), an attack on civilians is absolutely unjust. In her 1939 pamphlet, Anscombe criticized the British government's ambiguous stance on aerial and blockage attacks against civilians, as well as its reservations about a promise not to target them. She argued that these ambiguities suggest that, under certain circumstances, the government might indeed attack civilians.[21] The example she provided in her 1956 pamphlet highlights the British government's true intentions behind this veiled approach. During World War II, the British government bombed the dykes of Zeeland to trap fleeing German military forces. It is a Dutch island where people had nowhere to escape, and eventually, the entire population of the island was drowned—children, women, farmers, and so on.[22] In her 1956 pamphlet, the main target of Anscombe's criticism is Truman, who ordered the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where most of the local population were not harming anyone and were therefore evidently innocent. Since they do not fulfill the conditions for legitimate killing, attacking them is murder. Anscombe claims that "choos[ing] to kill the innocent as a means to their ends is always murder, and murder is one of the worst of human actions."[23]

Double Effect and Intention

Double Effect

One justification for Truman's actions claims that the deaths of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were accidental.[24] In other words, the purpose of Truman's order to drop the atomic bombs was to end the war, not to kill innocent people; thus, the deaths of civilians were not intentional but

[19] See Anscombe, TD, 67.
[20] See Anscombe, JPW, 78; Anscombe, WM, 53; Anscombe, TD, 67.
[21] See Anscombe, JPW, 76.
[22] See Anscombe, TD, 66.
[23] Anscombe, TD, 64.
[24] See Anscombe, WM, 59.

merely accidental, meaning Truman does not need to take responsibility for consequences that were not his purpose. Anscombe regards this as a misuse of the principle of double effect, and the reason for this misuse lies in the unclear distinction between "intentional", "foreseen", and "accidental" consequences.

The principle of double effect appears in all three of Anscombe's articles on war, and I argue that it is a crucial element of her just war theory, especially regarding the analysis of "intention". My analysis will start with her action theory, focusing primarily on her article "Action, Intention and 'Double Effect'"[25], as I examine how this principle can enhance our understanding of the conditions for a just war.

The principle of double effect is often used to explain when an action that causes serious harm as a side effect is permissible, alongside the intended effect. In other words, a double effect is indeed a result of the action, but this harm should not be the aim or the chosen means. It is neither intentional nor foreseeable, but purely accidental. It would not be permissible to cause such harm as a means to achieve the same good outcome.

Anscombe describes the scenarios that apply to this principle as extreme situations, such as dangerous surgeries or closing doors to contain fire or water. In these situations, "we are helped by thinking of the deaths as either remote or uncertain". The term "remote" and "uncertain" indicate that the death should be neither intended nor foreseeable.[26]

An example involving a potholer is used by Anscombe to explain the principle of double effect. A potholer is stuck with people behind him, and water is rising to drown them. There are two options: first, the potholer can be blown up, allowing the people behind him to escape; second, a rock can be moved to open another escape route, but this rock will crush the potholer's head, resulting in his death.[27] Anscombe argues that, in this example, the principle of double effect suggests that people may move the rock, but they must not blow up the potholer. In the first option, the death of the potholer is the means to escape. In the second option, even though the potholer will be killed, his death is neither the end nor the means, but merely a side effect of moving the rock.

However, Anscombe argues that "[we] cannot deduce the permissibility of moving the rock from the principle of side-effects"[28]. She explains that, in the example, the condition states that "moving the rock will crush the potholer's head," making the death of the potholer so immediate that the action cannot simply be considered as "taking the risk that [the death] would happen."[29] In this scenario, there is also an intention behind the potholer's death; therefore, the effect of death is neither unforeseeable nor accidental.

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[25] Elizabeth Anscombe, "Action, Intention and 'Double Effect" (henceforth AIDE), in *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G.E.M. Anscombe*, ed. Mary Geach & Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), 207–226.
[26] See Anscombe, AIDE, 220.
[27] *Ibid.*, 221.
[28] *Ibid.*, 222.
[29] *Ibid.*, 223.

Anscombe draws on McCormick and Bentham's ideas to clarify the distinction between "direct" and "indirect" intentions. Bentham describes a situation where you aim at one target but end up hitting another. He suggests that if you are aware this could happen, it reflects "indirect intention." McCormick echoes this, explaining that "indirectly intended" means "unintended, but the possibility was foreseen"[30]. In this light, neither option in the potholer example can be justified by the principle of double effect, because both involve causing death with either direct intention or indirect intention—essentially, intentionally or foreseeably.

Accordingly, in the context of war, Anscombe refutes the argument that it is justifiable to attack civilians on the grounds of double effect. She argues instead that only "if a military target is being attacked and in the course of attack civilians are also destroyed, then their destruction is not wicked, for it is accidental."[31] She outlines three scenarios: first, accidentally harming a group while targeting another; second, directly attacking a group; and third, attacking a group as a means to eliminate part of that same group, which may be legitimately targeted. The principle of double effect clearly applies to the first scenario, as Anscombe notes, "killing the innocent, even if you know as a matter of statistical certainty that the things you do involve it, is not necessarily murder."[32] For example, when attacking military targets, such as munitions factories and naval dockyards, as carefully as possible, we cannot avoid killing some innocent people, but this is not considered murder. There is little doubt that the second scenario constitutes pure murder. It is in the third scenario that people hold differing opinions. Some argue that attacks can target a whole group of people, including both civilians and combatants. However, according to Anscombe, civilians are not legitimate military targets. If the death of a group of people (including non-military targets) is a means to an end, then this death is foreseeable (indirectly intentional) and not accidental, meaning that the principle of double effect does not apply.[33]

Therefore, Anscombe argues that "it is nonsense to pretend that [Truman does] not intend to do what is the means [he] take[s] to [his] chosen end."[34] It is clearly foreseeable that the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki would result in civilian deaths; no one can claim that these deaths were merely accidental. Thus, Anscombe's objection to awarding Truman an honorary degree is not based on the fact that he caused death (targeting soldiers could be deemed justifiable), nor is it because he harmed the innocent (accidental killings might be forgiven). Rather, it is because he deliberately ordered the dropping of atomic bombs with the explicit aim of killing innocent people to achieve his objectives.

[30] See Anscombe's interpretation of McCormick and Bentham in Anscombe, AIDE, 221–222.
[31] Anscombe, JPWE, 78.
[32] Anscombe, TD, 66.
[33] See Anscombe, JPWE, 78–79.
[34] Anscombe, WM, 59.

Intention

One challenge to Anscombe's analysis is figuring out how we can know people's intentions, since we usually think of intentions as something internal. For instance, how can we really know what Truman intended? Duncan Richter raises a similar point: "if I drop bombs on an enemy tank, for instance, my motive might be anything from sadism to love of justice, the proper effect of my act is damage to the tank, and the completed act is the dropping and exploding of bombs on or near the tank."[35] So, how do we uncover someone's true motive?

Anscombe acknowledges the importance of this challenge, and she reformulates it within her action theory by stating that an action can be intentional under one description and not intentional under another. So, how can we know if a consequence is intentional or not? I will return to Anscombe's action theory and the example of the potholer to clarify her reformulation.

In the example of the potholer, a key element is the description that "moving the rock will crush the potholer's head." This description allows us to see that the death is foreseeable rather than accidental. However, under a different description, the agent might argue that he intends to move the rock but does not intend to crush the head, as he is unaware that moving the rock will lead to that outcome; for him, it is unforeseeable.[36] Anscombe then tweaks the example to make it more thought-provoking. What if the death is not immediate? For instance, if we move the rock, it will follow a path, and during that journey, it will eventually crush the potholer's head. In this case, it becomes harder to judge, as there is room to argue that we did not intend that result, even if we could foresee it. Here, the principle of double effect might come into play.

In light of this new example, multiple possible descriptions arise. In other words, for a given situation, there are actually many ways we can describe what happens. Anscombe has a famous example involving a pumping man that illustrates these various descriptions:

> A man is pumping water into the cistern which supplies the drinking water of a house. Someone has found a way of systematically contaminating the source with a deadly cumulative poison whose effects are unnoticeable until they can be cured. The house is regularly inhabited by a small group of party chiefs, with their immediate families, who are in control of a great state; they are engaged in exterminating the Jews and perhaps plan a world war. — The man who contaminated the source calculated that all if these people are destroyed some good men will get into power who will govern well, or even institute the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and secure a good life for all the people; and he has revealed the calculation, together with the fact about the poison, to the man who is pumping. The death of the inhabitants of the house will, of course, have all sorts of other effects; e.g., that a number of people unknown to these men will receive legacies, about which they know nothing.
>
> The man's arm is going up and down, up and down. Certain muscles, with Latin names which doctors know, are contracting and

[35] Richter, *Anscombe's Moral Philosophy*, 28–29.
[36] See Anscombe, AIDE, 223.

> relaxing. Certain substances are getting generated in some nerve fibres – substances whose generation in the course of voluntary movement interests physiologists. The moving arm is casting a shadow on a rockery where at one place and from one position it produces a curious effect as if a face were looking out of the rockery. Further, the pump makes a series of clicking noises, which are in fact beating out a noticeable rhythm.[37]

Anscombe claims that "any description of what is going on, with him as the subject, […] is in fact true". This list of descriptions includes what he intends ("operating the pump"), what he knows ("clicking out a rhythm"), and what he does not know ("generating certain substances in some nerve fibres"). If the list is classified by consequences, it includes what is intended ("poisoning the inhabitants"), what is foreseen ("earning some money"), and what is unforeseen ("causing some unknown people to receive legacies").

Here comes the challenge that one action is intentional under one description, and not intentional under another description, so how could we know a consequence is intentional or foreseeable? If we go back to Truman's case, as there are multiple descriptions of his order of dropping atomic bombs, which description should be judged? If someone claims that "among all descriptions, his only action is signing a paper"[38], is it a persuasive defense?

Anscombe introduces a traditional answer to the challenge posed by Cartesian psychology, which claims that people's intentions are purely within the realm of the mind. She lists three reasons that support this traditional view. First, we are not only interested in a man's intention *of* doing what he does, but also in his intention *in* doing it; the latter can often be obscured by merely observing his actions. Second, the question of whether a man intends to do what he does would not typically arise, and if it does, this question can be answered by asking the man himself. Third, a man can form an intention without taking any action to carry it out; in such a case, the intention remains purely an internal phenomenon.[39] These reasons lead us to believe that if we want to know a man's intention, we must investigate the content of his mind. Only by examining something purely within the realm of the mind, can we understand what intention is. This traditional view maintains that what physically occurs—what a man actually does—is the last thing we need to investigate.

Anscombe claims that this doctrine has repeatedly misused the principle of double effect. She believes that it allows the agent to describe any action as legitimate by making a little speech to oneself, such as "what I mean to be doing is…". This makes it difficult to see how an action, rather than an intention, could be good or bad, virtuous or vicious. Under this doctrine, everything becomes mysterious.[40]

Even though it seems natural to think that a man's intentions are ultimately determined by what goes on in his mind rather than by his actions,

[37] Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 37.
[38] Anscombe mentions a justification for Truman, claiming that "Mr Truman did not make the bombs by himself and decide to drop them without consulting anybody; no, he was only responsible for the decision. Hang it all, you can't make a man responsible just because 'his is the signature at the foot of the order'. Or was he not even responsible for the decision? …" (MTD, 66)
[39] See Anscombe, *Intention*, 9. Italics are Anscombe's.
[40] See Anscombe, WM, 58–59.

Anscombe argues that "what physically takes place" should be our primary focus. In *Intention* §4, she poses the question of how we can discern someone's intentions. More specifically, she rephrases this question to ask: what true statements can we confidently make about people's intentions, and how do we know they are true? Her answer is that "if you want to say at least some true things about a man's intentions, you will have a strong chance of success if you mention what he actually did or is doing."[41] Anscombe emphasizes that, no matter "whatever else he may intend" or "whatever may be his intentions in doing what he does", what we would "say straight off what a man did or was doing" will be what he intends. Rachael Wiseman notes that this perspective is evident in *Intention*, where Anscombe focuses more on "intentional action" than on "intention".[42]

Anscombe continues explaining that the situation she has in mind is that of a witness in court being asked to describe what he has witnessed, specifically in response to a question such as, "What was the man doing when you saw him?" The fact that the testimony of witnesses is admissible in court indicates that, in the majority of cases, the witness's description of what a man was doing—derived from a large number of true statements about what physically happened—may coincide with the man's own account of what he was doing. She gives the example of someone sitting in a chair writing; anyone passing by would know that this person is sitting in a chair and writing. If this passerby is asked, "What is that person doing?", the typical response would be, "He is sitting in a chair and writing".

Anscombe concludes that what she is interested in is the fact that we can "look at a man and say what he is doing." This means we can report what comes to mind directly and use it to inform someone who was not there but is interested in what happened, without needing to ask anyone.

Anscombe also presents the premise on which this example so smoothly progresses: that this passerby has "grown to the age of reason in the same world [as the person who is writing]."[43] This premise indicates that the passerby must have the ability to exercise judgment and be well-informed about the circumstances of the world in which he lives.

Now we can revisit Truman's case with Anscombe's answer. Anscombe would suggest that we say straight away what Truman did, but before giving this description, we must be well-informed about the facts and details behind Truman's decision. Without these historical facts, any justification of Truman is groundless. As Anscombe often says, "You cannot be or do any good where you are stupid."[44]

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[41] Anscombe, *Intention*, 8. Here, we need to note that Anscombe's words are "a strong chance of success". This phrase indicates that Anscombe does not attempt to provide an absolutely right answer that applies in all settings; instead, she describes an answer that is most likely to occur in reality.

[42] Rachael Wiseman, "The Intended and the Unintended Consequences of Intention", in *The Life and Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, ed. John Haldane (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2019), 148–172. Wiseman says: "Anscombe dedicates 19 of the 52 paragraphs of her book (4–12) explicitly to the topic of intentional action, and another 27 (22–49) to the intention with which an action is done. Expressions of intention for the future warrant only five sections of discussion."

[43] Anscombe, *Intention*, 8.

[44] Anscombe, TD, 65. This is exactly Anscombe's criticism of the consequentialist justification of Truman. Anscombe thinks that people who support the award of Truman's honorary degree must believe that Truman's actions can be justified. While they may not advocate for the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they must consider Truman's actions acceptable and understandable because "it pretty certainly saved a huge number of lives", and if not, more serious consequences might

Anscombe introduces the historical context of Truman's case at the beginning of "Mr Truman's Degree". At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, Stalin informed the American and British statesmen that he had received two requests from the Japanese to act as a mediator in order to end the war. He had refused. The Allies were seeking the Japanese's unconditional surrender. One military option for achieving this end was a land invasion, but evidence showed that this would lead to catastrophic consequences. A month earlier, at the Battle of Okinawa, 90,000 soldiers and 150,000 civilians were killed. On the expectation that such losses would be repeated, Truman ruled out a land invasion to prevent another Okinawa from occurring. The second means of securing unconditional surrender was to issue an ultimatum to the Japanese government. The Potsdam Declaration outlined this ultimatum: if the Japanese did not surrender unconditionally, the country would face prompt and utter destruction. Anscombe mentions that when issuing this declaration, the Allies agreed on the "general principle" of using the new type of weapon that America now possessed.[45]

In this context, Anscombe claims that "It was the insistence on unconditional surrender that was the root of all evil." Truman's case is therefore never an unavoidable choice between an atomic bomb and a large-scale land invasion. Anscombe believes that aiming for an unlimited objective in war is both stupid and barbarous, and it is this unrealistic goal that led to the seemingly unavoidable choice of dropping atomic bombs. When Truman signed the order to drop the atomic bombs, the deaths of these people became the means to achieve the end of Japan's unconditional surrender. Truman intentionally made this choice, which can be considered murder. Anscombe sees Truman as a notorious criminal for committing murder because, in her own words, "for men to choose to kill the innocent as a means to their ends is always murder, and murder is one of the worst of human action".[46]

Conclusion

In this introduction and analysis of Anscombe's theory of war, I have attempted to show the consistency and coherence of her attitudes towards war in different historical contexts. I first claimed that Anscombe is not a pacifist; she agrees with the just war that conforms to the conditions of natural moral law. Then I analyzed that under the just war theory, the target of legitimate killing must be combatants, and the justification for legitimate killing is that this action stops harm to the right from occurring. This

have occurred. For example, they may think that "if those bombs had not been dropped the Allies would have had to invade Japan to achieve their aim […]. Very many soldiers on both sides would have been killed; the Japanese […] would have massacred the prisoners of war; and large number of their civilian population would have been killed by 'ordinary' bombing." (TD, 65) Anscombe does not believe that this consequentialist justification, which claims that Truman's order resulted in a relatively good outcome by ending the war and preventing more massive injuries and deaths, takes into account many facts and details behind Truman's decision. Truman's case is never an unavoidable choice between an atomic bomb and a large-scale land invasion. Instead, the real condition is Truman's insistence on unconditional surrender, which led him to take the wrong approach.

[45] See Anscombe, TD, 62–64; Wiseman, "The Intended and Unintended Consequences of Intention", 159–160.

[46] Anscombe, TD, 64.

justification also demonstrates that civilians are innocent because they are not committing any harm; therefore, they cannot be the target of legitimate killing. In the last section, I borrowed Anscombe's analysis of the principle of double effect from her action theory and presented the distinction between intentional, foreseen, and accidental consequences. Especially through the distinction between foreseen consequences and accidental consequences, I demonstrated that it is a misuse of the principle of double effect to justify the deaths of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki as merely an accident of Truman's true purpose of ending the war, since it is clearly foreseeable that the bombs would cause civilian deaths. Then I analyzed Anscombe's idea of multiple descriptions to address the question, "How do we know people's intentions?" To this question, Anscombe responds that we should try to describe what people did or what physically took place. Accordingly, I presented Anscombe's description of the historical context leading to Truman's decision to order the dropping of the atomic bombs and pointed out that Truman's true purpose was to use the killing of civilians as a means to achieve unconditional surrender.

Overall, in this paper, I analyzed Anscombe's action theory to delve into the central thesis of her just way theory: the absolute prohibition on the intentional killing of the innocent. In her three articles on war, Anscombe consistently emphasizes that choosing to kill the innocent as a means to an end is always murder, and murder is among the gravest of human actions.

One might wonder how Anscombe would respond to the question, "What if killing some innocent civilians is the only alternative to a Nazi victory?" I believe she would remain steadfast in her position, as she once stated, "If the choice lies between our total destruction and the commission of sin, then we must choose to be destroyed."[47]

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[47] Anscombe, JPWE, 79.

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