

“See, Its Eye is Fixed on It”: Anscombe and Wittgenstein on Animals and Intention

Duncan Richter

Virginia Military Institute
richterdj@vmi.edu



Reception date: 25-10-2019
Acceptance date: 28-1-2020

Abstract

Elizabeth Anscombe criticizes Ludwig Wittgenstein for talking about the “natural expression of an intention” in his *Philosophical Investigations*. I consider recent responses to this dispute, especially those by Richard Moran and Martin Stone (writing together) and by Martin Gustafsson. Moran and Stone explain why Anscombe rejects talk of non-human animals expressing intention, but emphasize the importance of language so much that it becomes hard to see on what basis intentions can ever be non-arbitrarily attributed to animals. Gustafsson notices this problem, and offers a solution based on biology and, in particular, knowledge of what is and is not conducive to the flourishing of members of each species. However, this goes beyond what Anscombe says, and introduces other problems. I propose that we can sometimes simply see what an individual intends to do by observing its behavior, without reference to what is good or bad for members of its species. This is true to what Anscombe says and appears to avoid the problems faced by the other views considered.

Keywords: Anscombe; Wittgenstein; animals; intention; expression; behavior

Resum. «*Guaita, l'està mirant fixament*»: *Anscombe i Wittgenstein sobre animals i intenció*

Elizabeth Anscombe critica Ludwig Wittgenstein perquè parla de l'«expressió natural d'una intenció» en les seves *Investigacions filosòfiques*. Considero unes respostes recents a aquesta disputa, especialment les de Richard Moran i Martin Stone (com a coautors) i de Martin Gustafsson. Moran i Stone expliquen per què Anscombe rebutja parlar de la intenció d'expressió dels animals no humans, però emfatitzen tant la importància del llenguatge que resulta difícil de veure sobre quina base les intencions poden atribuir-se no arbitràriament als animals. Gustafsson se n'adona i ofereix una solució basada en la biologia i, en particular, en el coneixement del que és i no és propici perquè prosperin els membres de cada espècie. Tanmateix, això va més enllà del que diu Anscombe i introdueix altres problemes. A vegades podem veure el que un individu pensa fer simplement observant el seu comportament, sense fer referència al que és bo o dolent per als membres de la seva espècie. Això és fidel a les paraules d'Anscombe i sembla evitar els problemes que afronten els altres punts de vista considerats.

Paraules clau: Anscombe; Wittgenstein; animals; intenció; expressió; comportament

Elizabeth Anscombe famously criticizes her teacher Ludwig Wittgenstein for talking about the “natural expression of an intention” (Anscombe, 2000: 5) in *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 2009: §647). I will consider recent responses to this dispute by Mikel Burley, Richard Moran and Martin Stone, and Martin Gustafsson. Burley’s response, I will argue, is incomplete. A fuller understanding of the issue can be gained by learning from both Moran and Stone and from Gustafsson, who disagrees with them. The two papers by these three authors are very largely correct, but each contains a significant flaw. Anscombe is less concerned about defending Aristotelian or Thomist metaphysics than Gustafsson takes her to be, while Moran and Stone are wrong to argue that intentions must be verbalized in order to be judged correct or incorrect. More positively, I argue that Anscombe’s criticism of Wittgenstein is correct and, more importantly, that understanding both why this is and exactly what she is, and is not, saying helps us understand the concept of intention. Like Wittgenstein’s work, Anscombe’s can be rather compressed, and working through the details implicit in it, details which are brought out very carefully by Moran and Stone and by Gustafsson, gives a fuller and clearer view of the concept of intention.

In order to decide whether Anscombe’s criticism of Wittgenstein is correct we should first consider the evidence. Wittgenstein asks: “What is the natural expression [*Ausdruck*] of an intention? – Look at a cat when it stalks a bird; or a beast when it wants to escape” (Wittgenstein, 2009: §647). In his remarks before this passage, Wittgenstein was considering the idea of intention as an inner experience or sensation, and he does not appear to think much of this idea. Instead of looking narrowly in order to find the particular thing that an intention might be, Wittgenstein wants to look more widely at the context in which one acts with a certain intention. In §643 he writes that, “If I now become ashamed of [an] incident, I am ashamed of the whole thing: of the words, of the poisonous tone, and so on.” In the following section, in response to a claim that I might be ashamed not of what I did but of the intention with which I did it, he asks, “And didn’t the intention lie *also* in what I did? What justifies the shame? The whole background of the incident.” So he is drawing our attention, repeatedly, to “the whole thing” and the “whole background.” In §647 itself, after the remark that Anscombe criticizes, he adds, “(Connection with propositions about sensations.)” Wittgenstein does not deny that sensations exist or that they are particular things (although he might regard that way of putting the point across as potentially misleading), but he does think that if we want to understand propositions about sensations then we ought to examine the role of such propositions in our lives, including the way we learn to use and respond to them. Famously, he points out that inner processes need to have outward criteria if we are to be able to talk about them (see Wittgenstein, 2009: §580). This might apply to intentions just as much as it does to sensations. So generally speaking, Wittgenstein diverts attention away from a narrow focus on intentions themselves, as if they were inner objects of some kind that we might understand better if we were to scrutinize them more

closely, and instead encourages us to look more at the wider context in which we talk about intentions and the background against which we do so.

Responding to the first, non-parenthetical part of §647, Anscombe writes:

Intention appears to be something that we can express, but which brutes (which, e.g. do not give orders) can *have*, though lacking any distinct expression of intention. For a cat’s movements in stalking a bird are hardly to be called an expression of intention. One might as well call a car’s stalling the *expression* of its being about to stop. Intention is unlike emotion in this respect, that the expression of it is purely conventional; we might say ‘linguistic’, if we will allow certain bodily movements with a conventional meaning to be included in language. Wittgenstein seems to me to have gone wrong in speaking of the ‘natural expression of an intention’ (*Philosophical Investigations* §647). (Anscombe, 2000: 5)

Wittgenstein refers at different times to the natural expression of sensation and the natural expression of intention. This, like the parenthetical remark in §647, might suggest a similarity between sensation and intention that Anscombe wants to deny. Wittgenstein’s §647 is reminiscent of *Investigations* §256, where he asks: “But suppose I didn’t have any natural expression [*Außerungen*] of sensation, but only had sensations?” The word for expressions here suggests linguistic expression, which is what Anscombe seems to have in mind, but the qualifying adjective ‘natural’ suggests that Wittgenstein is not talking about anything merely conventional. In §257 he talks about groans and grimaces as manifestations of pain. Presumably this is the kind of thing he has in mind in §256 when he refers to natural expressions of sensation. He uses a different word for expression in §647, and indeed the movements of a stalking cat seem further from language proper than a groan of pain. But it still seems right to say that these movements show something about what the cat is up to, something that will help us to predict and understand its movements. Why *not* call this an expression of intention?

Burley’s view is that the disagreement between Wittgenstein and Anscombe is due to an ambiguity in the word ‘expression’ (Burley, 2012: 170). His point is that a cat cannot voluntarily reveal its intention. However, it might nevertheless, non-voluntarily, exhibit or display its intention. This seems right, but Anscombe does not deny it. Her claim is that unlike emotion (and, I would think, a sensation such as pain), intention has only conventional, not natural, expression. In order to see why Burley’s plausible suggestion does not solve the problem, we need to be clearer about exactly what Anscombe’s point is.

Perhaps it might be best to clarify what Anscombe is and is not saying by attending to the exegesis offered by Moran and Stone and then to Gustafsson’s response to this. Each of these papers is mostly, but not completely, right, and the two together provide almost all the illumination that I think we need. The point of the present paper is to provide the rest. Moran and Stone start by asking why Anscombe brings up expression of intention at all in her initial account of three contexts in which we make use of the concept of intention.

Their whole paper is an answer to this question, and I will not summarize all of it here, but a key part of their answer is this:

with the verbal expression of intention a discontinuity with natural manifestation arises, and it is this that Anscombe seeks to mark. Such expressions introduce something new: a characterization of what one is doing—what larger action one's actions are part of or toward which they are aimed. Expressions of intention are thus "world-directed," but not just in the way that expressions of states like belief or hope are: they make possible the application of the notion of "mistake" to performances, and they express practical commitments. (Moran and Stone, 2017: 271)

Emotions such as fear or joy can be naturally manifested, and we can learn to say, for instance, "I am afraid" or "I am happy" to supplement or replace these manifestations. Expressions of intention, however, are different, because they involve a kind of commitment. If I said I was happy but am now sad then my mood has changed. I have not made a mistake. Whereas if I said that I intend to catch a certain train and then do not, unless my intention has changed, either I lied (as I might equally do about being happy) or, and this is the important difference, I failed to do what I intended to do. We can if we want call certain forms of behavior "expressions of intention", but it is important not to lose sight of the difference between verbal expressions of emotion and verbal expressions of intention. Moran and Stone put the point this way:

Rather than standing in for performances [...], expressions of intention have a force that no bit of natural behavior could have. Specifically, they make contradictable claims, and they require that something else one does then be regarded as correct or mistaken. (Moran and Stone, 2017: 266)

Verbal expressions of intention are especially important, they argue, because of the importance placed by Anscombe (see Anscombe, 2000, §5) on the question of why an agent is behaving as they are (the question seems to require a verbal response); because an intentional act can be performed correctly or incorrectly, which seems to require an independent standard by which to judge it, and a verbal expression of intention provides such a standard; and because "only a verbal expression of intention can directly display the unity of 'intention' as it occurs in 'intending to X' and 'an intentional action'" (Moran and Stone, 2017: 272).

One might wonder, given the importance of verbal expressions of intention as just outlined, whether non-verbal beings can have intentions. Anscombe clearly believes that they can, or at least that there is nothing the matter with ascribing intentions to them as we often do. In her paper "Under a Description" she gives the example of a bird that lands on a twig that has been smeared with bird-lime in order to peck at bird-seed. Under the description "landing on the twig" the bird's action was intentional, she says, but it was not so under the description "landing in bird-lime" (see Anscombe, 1981: 209-210). Moran and Stone note that in such cases "we apply the descriptions

under which the creature's action is intentional" (Moran and Stone, 2017: 264). That is, the bird need not think of any such descriptions. Rather, language-users apply them to the bird's behavior, partly on the basis of what we believe to be good for the animal in question. Unfortunately, they do not explain fully the basis on which we apply such descriptions, and what they say on the subject leads them into trouble, as Gustafsson points out. I will spell out his objection more fully below, but begin with an example of a problem in what they say: "Just as the engine's behavior indicates that the car is going to stop only if the car *is* going to stop, so the movements of the cat indicate only what it actually goes on to do" (Moran and Stone, 2017: note 54). However, if what the cat goes on to do is to walk into a trap, rather as the bird in Anscombe's example lands in bird-lime, then its previous movements did not only indicate what it actually goes on to do. They indicate, if anything, some other intention. And this intention might be quite obvious, as when an animal takes the bait in a trap.

Anscombe's understanding of intention, as Gustafsson understands it, is significantly influenced by Aristotle and Aquinas (see Gustafsson, 2016: 208). He argues that she understands animal intention partly in terms of the ends proper to each species. It is doubtful, however, that Gustafsson's Aristotelian reading of Anscombe is quite right. Certainly Anscombe's work on intention was influenced by Aristotle as well as by Wittgenstein, as she makes clear in her book. But the nature of this influence does not appear to me to be as Gustafsson presents it. I will preface my criticism by saying that it is possible that Gustafsson would largely agree with my position. Much depends on exactly what he counts as knowledge of the ends of a species. His reference to Aristotle and Aquinas in this connection, however, suggests that he has in mind something more metaphysical or technical than the knowledge by simple observation and common sense that I will focus on.

Gustafsson rejects the account offered by Moran and Stone of what Anscombe says about the bird that lands on a twig coated with bird-lime. According to them, when we say that the bird landed on the twig in order to peck at seed we want a description of the bird's behavior that makes it intelligible, given what we know the bird is seeking and what it regards as good for it. This seems quite right, but Gustafsson disagrees:

All we get is unhelpful circularity: we are supposed to seek a description of what the bird did which is comprehensible within what we *already know that the bird is seeking*, whereas the problem is to give an account of how the latter knowledge is possible in the first place. (Gustafsson, 2016: 218. Emphasis in the original.)

Gustafsson's concern is that Moran and Stone allow us to project intentions onto animals that they do not actually have. If we rely on Aristotelian ideas about what is good for members of a specific species, however, then we can avoid arbitrariness and be true to Anscombe's preferred metaphysical commitments. In Gustafsson's version, then, we rely on ideas about what kind of

activity is good for birds of this sort whenever we attribute a certain intention to one of them, and:

Conversely, in saying that the bird's behavior is *unintentional* under the description "landing on a twig with bird-lime on it," we are presuming that getting stuck in bird-lime is a hindrance rather than conducive to the fulfillment of aims that the bird has *qua* a bird of its kind. (Gustafsson, 2016: 217-218. Emphasis in the original.)

Gustafsson agrees with Moran and Stone about the normativity of intention. That is, "if I intend to do something, I might succeed or fail to do what I intend to do" (Gustafsson, 2016: 214). Where he disagrees with them is on their suggestion that this normativity must be linguistic. A bird that lands on a twig coated with bird-lime has done something that it did not intend to do, something that may well result in its death. But it gives, and can give, no verbal expression to its intention according to which its behavior can be judged as correct or mistaken. As Gustafsson observes:

There is no reason—and Anscombe sees no reason—to argue that nonlinguistic, behavioral manifestations of intentions do not exhibit or convey the relevant standards of correctness. Her conclusion is the opposite one: *since* certain bits of natural behavior manifest intentions, those bits of behavior *do* exhibit the relevant standards of correctness. (Gustafsson, 2016: 216-217. Emphasis in the original.)

Gustafsson notes that Moran and Stone might be aware of a difficulty in their position here, since they acknowledge that we sometimes see that someone is making a mistake. The example they give is of someone brushing a wall with a paintbrush that they have forgotten to dip in paint. They also use the expression "barking up the wrong tree" to describe such actions, which suggests another case, namely that of a hunting dog barking as if its quarry were in a tree that is actually empty (Moran and Stone, 2017: 266, quoted in Gustafsson, 2016: 217). Moran and Stone go on to say, though, that, "here it is important that we grasp a particular description of what they are doing or intending to do, one which a human being could give in answer to the question 'why?'" (Moran and Stone, 2017: 266). This is correct, but the description need not actually be verbalized, and certainly not by the agent. If the behavior alone, without a verbal expression, does not make the intention involved clear then it seems, Gustafsson notes, arbitrary what intention is attributed to the agent in such a case. When the agent is human they could correct false descriptions of what they are up to, but if the agent in question is a dog then there is no such possibility. In that case, Gustafsson says, "Strictly thought through, [Moran's and Stone's] sort of view entails that animal intentionality is just a piece of anthropomorphic fiction" (Gustafsson, 2016: 217).

This, it seems to me, is an excellent diagnosis of the one point on which Moran and Stone go wrong. But in trying to correct their view, Gustafsson himself errs. He writes that:

according to Anscombe, in saying that the bird is acting with the intention to peck at bird-seed, we are relying on the conception that pecking at bird-seed is a good thing to do for birds of this sort (so it is evident that the bird in the example cannot be a sea-eagle, for example). (Gustafsson, 2016: 217)

Anscombe does not say this, however, and it is a problematic position to take. One problem with the view that Gustafsson attributes to Anscombe is that it seems to require us to know what kind of bird we are talking about, and know something about the needs and behavior of that species. But it might be perfectly obvious that a given bird is pecking at seed, or trying to do so, without one's knowing whether it is a sea-eagle or not. It might, similarly, be clear that a dog is chasing a ball, even if doing so is not particularly good for it *qua* member of its species. It might even be clear that an animal is trying to do something that is very bad for members of its species, as when a dog tries to eat chocolate (which can be toxic for dogs) although it will not be trying to do so under a description of the act as one that is bad for the animal.

A second problem is that in saying that a bird's behavior is unintentional under the description "landing in bird-lime" one might mean either that the bird has no idea that any such thing as bird-lime exists, or that it is landing on that particular twig despite the fact that it is covered with some funny-looking substance. In the first case, the bird is simply oblivious; in the second it is knowingly engaging in risky behavior. It is true that, if we know what bird-lime is (i.e., an artificial product made to trap birds), we know that landing in bird-lime is a hindrance to the fulfillment of the aims of birds of that, or any other, species. But knowing is not presuming. (Gustafsson says, remember, that in saying that a bird's action is unintentional under a particular description we are presuming that the action so described is a hindrance to the fulfillment of its aims.) And not every act that is unintentional under a certain description is a hindrance to the fulfillment of the agent's aims. If I withdraw cash from an ATM that is both the nearest one to me and the second one ever installed in the city I am in, then I am probably withdrawing cash unintentionally under the latter description (I am oblivious) but intentionally under the first. It does me no harm to use a machine with this historic property, however. And something similar could go for birds and the twigs they land on. They intentionally land on twigs that have properties relevant to their goals, but under descriptions that make no reference to those goals, their landing there is unintentional. It need not therefore be detrimental to them in any way. (Perhaps in Anscombe's example the bird-lime does not actually work, and the bird gets away unharmed.)

A third problem with what Gustafsson says about this is his insistence that "the problem" is to explain how we know what the bird is seeking. It is very tempting to say that we can *see* what it is seeking, in which case this problem would not exist. If a bird flies until it reaches a twig, then lands on it and moves along it until it reaches some seed, which it then pecks at, then its end, in the sense of both its stopping-point and its goal, was that seed or pecking

at that seed. But perhaps there are cases where it is not so simple. If the bird is a sea-eagle, say, and we know that they do not peck at seeds. So, this one might be unusually hungry, or brain-damaged, or trying to do something else entirely. To work out what is going on in a case such as this, or to know that it really is a sea-eagle, it might help to know some biology. Even then, we would still need to keep in mind that birds, like people, can be very stupid, and do not always behave in ways that are conducive to their well-being. If we want to know what a given animal is trying to do then we should, first and foremost, look and see. If it is chasing a ball or trying to eat chocolate, then catching the ball or eating the chocolate is what it intends to do, and those are the correct, non-arbitrary, non-projected descriptions of its behavior. We do not need metaphysical commitments to do this and Anscombe does not insist otherwise.

Gustafsson raises the question of how we know what a bird, say, is seeking, and suggests that we might need to refer to knowledge of what is good and bad for members of its species in order to know and not simply project our own ideas onto its behavior. This is an understandable line of thought, but it does not appear to be Anscombe's. She explains in *Intention* how it is that intentional action can be defined in terms of language and yet intention-dependent concepts can be applied to animals:

The reason is precisely that we describe what they do in a manner perfectly characteristic of the use of intention concepts: we describe what *further* they are doing *in* doing something (the latter description being *more* immediate, nearer to the merely physical): the cat is stalking a bird *in* crouching and slinking along with its eye fixed on the bird and its whiskers twitching. (Anscombe, 2000: 86)

This is why Gustafsson rightly says that Anscombe rejects talk of the cat's behavior *expressing* its intention. Its movements *are* its stalking the bird, and its stalking the bird *involves* or *includes* the intention to catch it. That it is *stalking* the bird, rather than, say, merely walking near it, *means* that the cat is trying to catch the bird. Describing the action as stalking tells us what the cat intends. How, though, do we know that this is the right description to use? Anscombe answers this with reference not to thinking about what is good and bad for cats but to looking:

Just as we naturally say 'The cat thinks there is a mouse coming', so we also naturally ask: Why is the cat crouching and slinking like that? and give the answer: It's stalking that bird; see, its eye is fixed on it. We do this, though the cat can utter no thoughts, and cannot give expression to any knowledge of its own action, or to any intentions either. (Anscombe, 2000: 86-87)

We also do this without any reference to special knowledge of what is conducive or harmful to the flourishing of cats.

Gustafsson argues that Anscombe equally regards intention in animals and in human beings as cases of intention but of different kinds of intention.

Human intention is connected with language in a way that animal intention is not. Unlike human intention, "the cat's intention to catch the bird exists only *qua* the cat's stalking" (Gustafsson, 2016: 225). This is what makes it like the car that is about to stop. The car has no intention, so it is also importantly different from the cat, but the symptoms of its being about to stop are not really separable from the fact that it is about to stop. Or at least, not as separable as a human being's intention to do something is from the expression of that intention, which might, after all, be a lie. Unlike cats, human beings are also quite capable of acting against their biological interests. We sometimes do things *because* they are bad for us, when one wants to commit suicide, for instance, as Anscombe notes (see Anscombe, 2005: 116).

According to Gustafsson:

In the cat case, as conceived by Anscombe, the cat's intention (to catch the bird) is constitutively bound up with the cat's nonconventional behavior (its stalking the bird), and this constitutive nexus is intelligible in view of what sort of creature a cat is. The characterization of the behavior *qua* directed at an intended goal—"stalking the bird"—is applicable because cats are creatures for which it is good to catch birds and because they have the biological equipment (sense organs, etc.) needed to aim at particular things (like birds). If [I am] correct, the reason why Anscombe does not want to call the cat's behavior an expression of the cat's intention is that the constitutive interrelationship between intention and behavior is too tight to make the notion of "expression" applicable. (Gustafsson, 2016: 226)

This is different from Moran and Stone's view that expression of intention needs to be verbal because only a verbal expression can provide a criterion of correct execution. Behavior does not express intention, according to Anscombe, because the connection between behavior and intention is too tight, to use Gustafsson's word. What I do to achieve my intended goal *embodies* my intention in a way that cannot lie (see Gustafsson, 2016: 231). I might walk down a certain street in order to make you think I am going to a museum, say, but then this walking embodies my intention to deceive you. It is not merely a deceptive act regarding my unreal intention to go to the museum. It is also a real act that shows, unavoidably if unwittingly, my intention to deceive.

Might we not, even so, choose to say that actions embodying a certain intention *express* that intention? Gustafsson's view is that Anscombe means to stipulate that we ought not to speak this way when doing philosophy, because of the danger of our doing so leading us astray in a Cartesian or empiricist way that treats intentions as mental states that are not very different from sensations such as pain (see Gustafsson, 2016: 235). This is precisely the kind of danger that Wittgenstein was concerned about avoiding. Gustafsson also notes that in colloquial use we only call something an expression of X if it is distinct from X itself (see Gustafsson, 2016: 224). A cat's stalking a bird, which consists of its walking towards it in a certain way, is not appropriately distinct from its intention to catch the bird, however, since without this intention these movements

would not amount to stalking. I can form an intention but not act on it yet, and, if I change my mind, I might never act on it. But we cannot seriously attribute this kind of intention to an animal. It makes no sense to ascribe an intention to an animal whose behavior reveals nothing of the intention in question. Unlike human beings, animals cannot reveal their intentions through language, so apparently intentional behavior is the only criterion for the ascription of intentions to them.

However, I am not certain that Gustafsson is quite right about Anscombe's desire to distinguish non-linguistic animal intention from human intention. In her paper "Under a Description," which Gustafsson discusses, she addresses the following question:

Animals that have no language can have intentions too: how then, it is asked, can it be right to say that an intention is always 'under a description'? (Anscombe, 1981: 209)

To answer this question she brings up the example of the bird that did want to land on a certain twig, but did not want to land in bird-lime. So in doing both it did what it wanted under one description, but not under another. Anscombe now asks another question, and answers it right away:

If it landed on the twig in order to peck at the bird-seed, can't we say it took landing on the twig to be a way of getting into a position to peck at the bird-seed? We can, if we say that a bird thinks it can escape into the open by flying towards the daylight that comes through a glass barrier. (Anscombe, 1981: 209)

On the one hand, this way of talking seems perfectly normal. On the other, it might seem to require the bird to be thinking to itself, perhaps in its own language, something along the lines of, "Landing on this twig will be a way for me to get into position to peck at that bird-seed." Anscombe denies this, however:

This way of talking [i.e., the way exemplified in the passage quoted above] does not presuppose that the bird has any thoughts about descriptions. If there is a difficulty, it concerns ascribing those other thoughts to the bird; it is about passing from the bird's intentions or aims, to the ascription of belief to it. But someone who says the bird's action was intentional (or voluntary) under one description, not under the other, need not enter into *that* dispute at all. "It took landing on the twig to be a way of... but not a way of..." is merely a rather roundabout way of saying that, e.g., the bird meant (wanted) to land on the twig, but not to land on the bird-lime. Landing on the twig was landing on bird-lime – we aren't considering two different landings. So, if we form definite descriptions, "the action (then) of landing on the twig", "the action (then) of landing on a twig with bird-lime on it", we must say they are definite descriptions satisfied by the same occurrence, which was something that the bird did, but under the one description it was intentional, under the other unintentional. That the bird is not a language-user has no bearing on this. (Anscombe, 1981: 209-210)

Anscombe's response to the objection, where she says both (1) that animals have intentions but lack language and (2) that intention is always under a description, says nothing about animal intention being different from human intention. Instead she says that the bird's not being a language-user is irrelevant. The objection, she says in a part of the passage above that I omitted, supposes that her claim about intentions being under a description implies that a description "is in some sense written into something inside the agent." But the implication is that Anscombe denies any such thing. So human intention and animal intention do not appear to be two different things. At least, this seems to be a misleading way of speaking. The difference is that humans, having language, can express their intentions while animals, whose intentions may well nevertheless be visible, cannot.

Anscombe accuses Wittgenstein not so much of doing something bad but of choosing words that are likely to mislead. This might seem a somewhat minor criticism, especially given both that Wittgenstein refers to natural expression of intention only once and that there is no known case of anyone having been misled by this use of words. Nevertheless, her criticism of Wittgenstein is of interest beyond the question of whether Wittgenstein was right or wrong. Coming to understand her criticism, which we can perhaps best do with help from both Moran and Stone and from Gustafsson, helps us see what is, and is not, involved in expressions of intention, and why this matters. As Moran and Stone make clear, an agent can fail to do what they intend to do, which makes intention different from emotion and belief. A sincerely verbalized intention thus provides a criterion by which future action can be judged. As Gustafsson points out, however, ascriptions of intention to animals by humans will be arbitrary unless there is some basis in the animal's behavior for such ascription. Moran and Stone assert, problematically, that, "Considered apart from their verbal expressability, intentions are sunk in facticity. [...] [T]he movements of the cat indicate only what it actually goes on to do" (Moran and Stone, 2017: note 54). This fails to account for the kind of mistake we see when a dog barks up the wrong tree or a bird lands on a twig coated with lime. To avoid this mistake, Gustafsson posits that Anscombe relies on our knowledge of what is good or bad for members of various species. But this seems to complicate matters unnecessarily, and is not what Anscombe actually says. What she says, and what seems right, is that at least sometimes we can simply see what an animal is trying to do. In this way, Gustafsson, having perceived the flaw in Moran and Stone's account, takes a wrong turn himself. Going back to what Anscombe says helps to reveal a simpler solution to the problem. For what it is worth, she also appears to be right to criticize Wittgenstein on this point. Talk of a natural expression of intention is potentially misleading, making it harder to see the subtleties brought out by Anscombe and the commentators on her work that I have discussed in this paper.

Bibliographical references

- ANSCOMBE, G. E. M. (1981). *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe, Volume 2: Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- (2000). *Intention*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- (2005). “Practical Inference”. In: GEACH, Mary and GORMALLY, Luke (eds.). *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*. Charlottesville (VA): Imprint Academic.
- BURLEY, Mikel (2012). “Wittgenstein, Wonder and Attention to Animals”. In: FORSBERG, Niklas; BURLEY, Mikel and HÄMÄLÄINEN, Nora (eds.). *Language, Ethics and Animal Life: Wittgenstein and Beyond*. London: Bloomsbury.
- GUSTAFSSON, Martin (2016). “Anscombe’s Bird, Wittgenstein’s Cat: Intention, Expression and Convention”. *Philosophical Topics*, 44, 207-237.
- MORAN, Richard and STONE, Martin (2017). “Anscombe on the Expression of Intention: An Exegesis”. In: MORAN, Richard. *The Philosophical Imagination: Selected Essays*. Oxford: University Press.
- WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig (2009). *Philosophical Investigations*. Translation by Anscombe, G. E. M.; Hacker, P. M. S. and Schulte, Joachim. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Duncan Richter. Charles S. Luck III '55. Institute Professor at Virginia Military Institute. Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies.

Duncan Richter. Charles S. Luck III '55 Institute. Professor al Virginia Military Institute. Departament d'Anglès, Retòrica i Estudis Humanístics.
