Language, Morality, and Legitimacy

4

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Contents

Abstract

In this essay we will try to highlight the interweaving of language and morality and also the principle of legitimacy that derives from it. In her famous essay *Modern Moral Philosophy* (written in 1958 and which later became the modern manifesto of a neo-Aristotelian type of ethics), Elizabeth Anscombe highlights the need for a philosophy of psychology as well as the abandonment of a specific language in moral philosophy. Taking a position against the consequentialist conception of morality, she implicitly stands opposed to the principle that consequences define legitimacy; it is precisely when the binomial language-morality fails that the principle of legitimacy loses its substance; a political authority can lose its moral legitimacy if she/he betrays the common good. Starting from a specific language adopted, a morality is derived from it. In fact, depending on what is considered to be a good or an evil, a specific moral action follows. In this perspective, responsibility and awareness of which goods need to be shared in common play a central role, and an ontological foundation is discovered.

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Introduction

In the first place, we will analyze the principle of legitimacy, where this expression originates, what it consists of, and the variations to which it is subject given the historical-social context in which it is used. Then, working from the conclusion of the logical process in order to arrive at the point of origin, we will investigate the concept of "epistemological realism" and then retrace the deconstruction with respect to the language used in the moral field proposed by Anscombe and the relative exhortation of the importance of a philosophy of psychology. Finally, we will analyze the Anscombian proposal of a virtue ethics, as an expression of human "flourishing" – a term of Aristotelian inspiration – where the same legitimacy finds its home.

On the Principle of Legitimacy

Among the many elements that mark the development of the history of a people, an essential element is the development of the power of the ruling legislator within that society. The grounds for the justice of that ruler attaining the power they possess is referred to as the principle of legitimacy. Throughout history, even granting the fact of the legitimacy of the ruler, the source of that legitimacy has been a constant point of inquiry – and when there is no longer a consensus about the fundament of power, this inquiry becomes a catalyst for political change. An ever-present example of this fact might be seen as follows: one can ask how power has been attributed to a monarch or a political party, criticize with respect to the adopted process, and then work to effect change. If there is no mechanism for effecting that change, the corporate frustration of the people may even boil over into revolt. Thus, the "legitimacy" of the conferral of power is ultimately the basis for the stability of a state and its progress.

In order to see that this is so, we need not look only at political structures. Consider a lottery winner: the win is valid if all the rules are respected, the procedure, the authenticity of the ticket, the price, the place where it was sold, etc.; if everything is in order, the victory is legitimate. Or even in sport, think of the "lawful" concession of a penalty kick; it is awarded as an act of restorative justice in order that the contest might be held legitimately. A moment's glance to any aspect of our social interactions manifests the centrality of the existence of a "principle of legitimacy." This principle has as its object "the justification of the work of power and, in a more general sense, the title on the basis of which a political power is

accepted." (Vd. Sorgi (2006). Sorgi is the reference used for the historical analysis of the principle of legitimacy, proposed in the following paragraphs, as will be mentioned in the text.)

Giuseppe Sorgi recalls that the principle of legitimacy is to be understood in the historical context in which power tends to transform itself into a state order with a juridical-administrative structure, at the same time as the Enlightenment project of the so-called codification: that is, it passes "from a criterion of moral, theocratic and customary legitimacy, to a title of legitimacy understood formally, in which the state as a body is authorized to be the source of the law because it is legitimated in this by a hypothetical original agreement between individuals. Thus, we pass from a "cognitivist" conception of the political-juridical order (justice) to a "non-cognitivist" conception (validity) as in Hobbes' contractualism" (*Ibidem*).

How to understand the post-Enlightenment movements requires some unpacking. We overlook here the different nuances that the principle of legitimacy has assumed following the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Empire, and the Restoration. Instead, our area of inquiry is that of the emergence of the liberal-democratic system between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here, we see in the emergence of new economic and social classes the increased gap between a legal-formal legitimacy of the liberal rule of law and a substantial legitimacy (see Marxism and sociological doctrines, elitist, and currentist). Sorgi observes that it would be necessary at this point to consider Hans Kelsen's pure doctrine of law or Carl Schmitt's theorization of a legitimacy of a "material" type as opposed to that of a "formal" type. For the purposes of our analysis, it is sufficient to recall the correction made to the formal legitimacy following the world wars of the twentieth century and the different forms of totalitarianism: with Gustav Radbruch and Hans Fritz Welzel, we witness the rebirth of natural law, and therefore we temporarily return to a reassessment of a morally founded principle of legitimacy.

Subsequent political-legal theories, however, have highlighted the risk of a legality that was merely formal, underlining the importance of a system of shared values. Consequently, critical issues are raised: those who advocated a return to the critical-rational roots of Enlightenment modernity, those who called for a contractual model, those who stressed the importance of a reference to local authorities, those who made realistic criticisms in the wake of Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer, or those who called for the integration of minorities in political decision-making. With regard to this last point, Hannah Arendt's proposal of "civil disobedience" is significant. She writes: "it would be an event of great significance to find a constitutional niche for civil disobedience – of no less significant, perhaps, than the event of the founding of the *constitutio libertatis*, nearly 200 years ago." (Vd. Arendt (1972). Also in this passage, the force of Arendt's thought emerges. As Boella points out: "Arendt loved conceptual counterpoint because it allowed her to think of reality from the contradictions that tear it apart," from the "Introduction" to the Italian edition, p. XIV.)

It is a fact that the legal-formal system became established by renouncing any prelegal legitimacy. With the progressive dissolution of the traditional seat of the principle of legitimacy, that is, the state and its passage to global or local centers of

power, there are no longer any formal legal principles of a general or material nature. What happens – observes Sorgi – is therefore the emergence on the one hand of "theories that transpose on a supranational level the juridical-formal principle of the legitimacy of the work once of the individual states" and on the other hand "critical theories of such a "universalism" that propose a model of continuous negotiation between states and powers" (Sorgi 2006, p. 6305). There is also the hypothesis of a legitimacy based on nonnegotiable confessional authorities, as happens, for example, with the Muslim religion. In this regard, it is significant to note the difficulty of arriving at the definition of a human right that can be universally accepted: the history of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), which in fact did not find immediate consensus in many Arab states (see "Cairo Declaration", 1990) (Vd. Grimi 2019a), is such a case in point.

In outlining the complexity with which the principle of legitimacy has been understood over time, it is interesting to shed light on the comparison and related analysis of the binomial "legality-legitimacy." In *Treccani* we read as a definition of "legitimacy": "Being legitimate, that is, conforming to law, to the provisions of the juridical system" ; and according to *Treccani*, "legality" is "being conformed to the law and to what is prescribed by it" or "a situation conforming to the laws". If we want to deepen the relationship between legality and legitimacy, the analysis proposed by P. Jean-Louis Bruguès O.P. in the *Dictionnaire de morale catholique* (Bruguès 1991, pp. 203–204) is particularly interesting and already anticipates the final part of the present essay (in the analysis of the term "legitimacy," the theme of the "common good" is already included, a theme which we will come to at the end of the reflection). We read: "legality is a characteristic of law. A legal precept is considered legal when it has been adopted by the competent authority, in full respect of the constitutional forms that govern the political life of the group in question. In a democratic regime, for example, a text takes on the value of a law when it is voted on by the legislative power, promulgated by the executive power and declared in conformity with the spirit of the laws by the judicial power," (Id., p. 203) while "legitimacy is a property of law and ethics; sometimes this ambivalence can cause confusion. Political authority is said to be legitimate when it receives its power according to the forms provided for by law (an election, a designation by the higher authority, etc.). However, legitimacy means first of all conformity with moral value. In this case, authority is said to be legitimate if the measures taken by it are aimed at promoting the common good. A legal provision is morally legitimate when it respects that objective" (*Ibidem*).

Bruguès introduces a decisive variable in the definition of "legitimacy." If, in fact, legality is placed on the level of law, then when dealing with legitimacy – in addition to law – ethics must be considered. In this light, legitimacy means "conformity to moral value." Going back to the analysis, it means that if we define what is legitimate, we do it by virtue of what is considered good/bad; if legitimacy concerns the political sphere, the nature of this good will be common, that is, universal. In essence, Bruguès, in proposing a definition of "legitimacy," outlined the criterion of acting. Following his reasoning, he goes so far as to affirm: "The harmony of community life requires that a positive predisposition of moral legitimacy be

recognized to what is prescribed by law. The principle is to obey the positive law. However, the individual conscience can reach the certainty that a certain legal norm can damage a moral value. In such a case, legality and legitimacy are at odds with each other." Bruguès then goes on to observe how legality and legitimacy can obviously not coincide, as in the case of a political authority, which came to power in perfectly legal forms but loses its moral legitimacy when it betrays the common good in a serious and repeated manner. Once again, the fact that there is a good that can be put in common and therefore be valid for all plays a key role in its analysis.

We must now analyze the relationship between the language we assume and morality. Let us therefore reflect on the concept of epistemological realism.

Epistemological Realism

John Haldane in his essay *Mind-World Identity Theory and the Anti-Realist Challenge* (Haldane 1993) defends epistemological and metaphysical realism. In this essay Haldane refers to Thomas Aquinas, pointing out on the one hand that the intellect is directly in tune with reality (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*) and that the forms or natures that give the world a structure and concepts that "form thought" have an identity. It is therefore possible to speak of epistemological realism – as opposed to an epistemological idealism – for which the world exists ontologically independent of thought, and the concepts and what they represent are intrinsically connected. From this perspective, there is a link between mind and reality, the latter being ontologically independent. Therefore, the mind is not needed for reality to exist; it exists in itself: it is the famous "primacy of *esse*" of this properly Thomist perspective. Haldane also underlines the irreducible character of the intention (or concept) (Vd. De Anna 2001), a theme that also recurs in the thought of G.E.M. Anscombe and which, starting with Thomas, reveals a formal identity between the mind and the world. Mario Micheletti, one of the leading scholars of philosophy of analytic religion in Italy, wrote a sharp analysis in this regard: "Aristotelian-Thomist theory [...] is not *exclusively* an externalist theory because "reflexive consciousness" is an internalist criterion, and it is a naturalized epistemology because it takes as its starting point the natural operations of cognition, but it is nevertheless a decidedly normative theory, because of its teleological character: the cognitive faculties function in the way they function because they are ordered to achieve the truth" (Micheletti 2017, p. 41).

And it is to this understanding in particular that Anscombe's theory of action is ordered toward. In this Aristotelian framework for action, truth is not a neutral observation of reality, but on the contrary, it judges the value of reality by evaluating what is good and what is bad, without a renunciation of the ability to know "practical truth" (that is to say, the knowledge of how things are actually) (Carli 2003, p. 175). Practical truth is a practical judgment, a judgment that ends with an action. Aristotle's practical syllogism is for Anscombe a strong area of interest for understanding practical reasoning and human action. (Vd. Aristotle, *De Anima*, III, 10, 433 a 15; *De motu amimalium*, 7, 701a. For further information, please read: Grimi

(2012a).) She says that it is "one of Aristotle's best discoveries" (Anscombe 1963, § 33). Even still, Anscombe is also critical of the practical syllogism: while for Aristotle practical syllogism also applies to cases in which the conclusion of reasoning is abstention from action, for her it is instead only that in which the conclusion is an action and it is demonstrated by the premises that are therefore so to speak "in active service" of action (*Ibidem*).

As I observed recently in my guide to reading Intention (Grimi 2019b), a practical syllogism only regards the judgment of the intellect about some action, that is, when desire arises, and it consists of the reasoning that the agent does to achieve what she/he wants. In this sense, the desired object is the principle of action that moves the agent, and the reasoning must terminate in it. One does not reason to know how to reach the desired object, but rather to actually reach it. Anscombe, referring again to Aristotle, points out that when the reason says that an action is immediately practicable and desire tends to it as it is good, the individual acts immediately. Aristotle writes: "For in the case of things produced the principle of motion (either mind or art or some kind of potency) is in the producer; and in the case of things done the will is the agent – for the thing done and the thing willed are the same" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VI (E), I, 1025 b 20–30). Correct action is therefore the truth of the *phronesis*, for which the aim is to act well – and this is what desire tends to. Along with Anthony Kenny, it seems safe to conclude that the theoretical reasoning is the one that moves from "true to true," while the practical one moves from the goodness of something mentioned in the premises to a good conclusion, so it moves from "good to good" (Grimi 2019b, p. 82; Kenny 1979, p 146).

In the Anscombian analysis, therefore, one finds a criterion of action. Intentional action means a directionality and judgment of the subject on what he considers to be good. The other criterion is the choice, the decision, and the intention that moves to action. What is emphasized from the perspective of "epistemological realism" is the fact that we are faced with a reality in which it is presupposed that there is something we call good or evil in it. In such a conception, the premise of morality is likened to a language; consequently, the premise of legitimacy is morality. Language-morality-legitimacy are intrinsically connected. It should be noted, however, that the perspective of epistemological realism is far from a situation ethics which starts with a subjective feeling as the basis of legitimacy. If, in fact, we act by virtue of something that we believe to be good or bad, legitimacy is an element recognized by a multitude of subjects. Without an epistemological realism, the passage from the single to the multiple would in fact be very difficult.

In fact, reality is ontologically independent. Otherwise, legitimacy would be subject to continuous variation, while its statute is an objectively recognizable validity. Such a state would be a de facto anarchist government. In this light, Arendt's concept of "civil disobedience" deserves further consideration: paradoxically, it would propose itself as legitimate, if not even as legally necessary. It is no coincidence that an epistemological idealism generates a vision of the idealized state, for instance, the conception of the German state developed by German idealism.

Moral Deconstructionism: Anscombe and the *Modern Moral Philosophy*

Anscombe began her famous essay *Modern Moral Philosophy* (Anscombe 1958) with three theses. The first is that, considering the lack of an adequate philosophy of psychology, it does not seem fruitful to deal with moral philosophy; the second is that it would be good to abandon the concepts of "moral obligation," "moral duty," "what is morally right and wrong," and the moral sense of "duty," since the term "moral" is steeped in misleading nuances; and, finally, the third is that it suggests that moral philosophers should be omitted from Sidgwick onward as irrelevant. It can be said that for Anscombe it is necessary to return to the action itself, it is necessary in fact to provide an explanation of "why an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action is a bad action," and therefore "to provide such an explanation is part of ethics, but this cannot be initiated without having a solid philosophy of psychology." What is now of most interest to us is the second of the three theses. We will not be dealing with what a philosophy of psychology can consist of, which has also challenged many people, but we will be focusing on the consequence that follows necessarily from this need. (About the philosophy of psychology, read S. Cremaschi. According to his perspective, the psychology of philosophy to which Anscombe refers should not be subject to misinterpretation. He writes in this way, commenting on the first thesis put forward by Anscombe: "Even what is the "philosophy of psychology" is far from obvious. Psychology as a discipline is apparently out of the question, since it was the object of contempt on the part of Wittgenstein and his school as a form of pseudoscience. On the other hand, since the idea of mental acts was the focal point of the post-philosophical practice that Wittgenstein advocated and which he was supposed to "show" in the book he had designed and failed to write before he died, or that the secret after whose discovery philosophy as a discipline would finally disappear would be how the mind manages to grip the world was one of the main unwritten doctrines circulating among Wittgenstein's followers, the preliminary discipline proposed by Anscombe under the name of "philosophers of psychology" must not be hastily identified either with philosophical anthropology or with a "new" science of the mind, but rather should be left to its uniqueness" (Cremaschi 2010, p. 52). This is a lecture he gave in Rome during the conference "Intention di Anscombe e il rinnovamento della filosofia morale," February 28-29, 2008 – Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. This note refers to n.1 of the chapter I have dedicated to the essay "Modern Moral Philosophy," in (Grimi 2012b, pp. 250–251). The analysis I present of the following two paragraphs refers to the chapter of my book cited here.) A philosophy of psychology is preparatory to a real deconstruction of what was the moral language of the Oxonian University of that time. Anscombe succeeds in doing this, thus creating an "apparent" tabula rasa in the eyes of her colleagues, calling for an abandonment of those concepts – such as "moral," etc. – which no longer seem to have any effective content. In reality, hers is a tabula plena: on the one hand, she never ceases to be realistic, anchored in that Aristotelian-Thomist perspective that never ceases to be a reference in her pages; on the other hand, she exhorts the need for a philosophy of psychology, as if to say that the mind

is certainly full of content that derives from reality and that precisely for this reason, we must abandon that language used in ethics that now turns out to be devoid of content.

Facing the second thesis, Anscombe wonders if there is any possibility of maintaining a concept of ethics centered on the notion of law without having to admit a divine legislator. To do this, she examines different perspectives. According to the first, in the wake of Kant, it would be a question of dealing with the idea of self-regulation. Anscombe excludes this hypothesis as absurd; what is done for itself can be considered as something admirable, but the concept of legislation is different. A second perspective, analyzed below by Anscombe, is that of the contractual origin. This perspective deserves to be considered specifically. With regard to this source of moral law, Anscombe examines the hypothesis that language is what guarantees that we have entered into a contract (language would be proof of our commitment to various contracts). (Cf. language as proof of commitment to a contract; see Clarence I. Lewis, who proposed, at the same time of the draft of the "Modern Moral Philosophy," the idea of "pragmatic contradiction" as a source of constraints to moral judgments; Karl-Otto Apel (1929, pp 258–260), whose theory for which the contents of moral judgments are derived from the need to avoid the "performative contradiction,"; Cf. theories that argue that using language for the purpose of making promises or fulfilling linguistic acts one is led to the knowledge of the particular circumstance; see authors such as Price, Kant, and Whewell, and for a more recent study, see Searle (1964). This note refers to n.10 of the chapter I have dedicated to the essay "Modern Moral Philosophy," in Grimi (2012b), p. 256.) To prove the validity of such a theory, it would be necessary to develop it, but it suggests to Anscombe that it would remain something approximately formal and it would be difficult to arrive at "more specific issues such as the prohibition of homicide or sodomy" (Anscombe 1958, p. 38). So the question seems to emerge that in the language used, there is already intrinsically a sort of moral orientation, precisely what is good and what is bad or rather – Anscombe will specify developing the third perspective – what is right and what is unjust. As a third hypothesis, Anscombe puts forward the idea that human virtues are the source of norms, and the "man" who possesses the complete series of virtues is the "norm," just as the fact that a "man" who has, for example, a complete series of teeth is a "norm" (*Ibidem*). In this sense, however, the term "norm" would not be very different from the "law," approaching an Aristotelian vision rather than a legalistic conception of ethics. In this Anscombe finds nothing negative, even if it would be good to recognize that she is conceiving the notion of "norm" as meaning "law not including God," which would entail the elimination of the notion of "duty." Anscombe should not use the term "duty" in an emphatic style or in a special "moral" sense; on the contrary, her proposal is to discard the term "wrong" and use notions such as "unjust" (Cf. the perspective of Anscombe, text by Foot (1978).

However, "if the term "unfair" is simply determined by facts, it is not the term "unfair" that determines whether the term "wrong" can be applied, but the decision that the injustice is wrong, together with the diagnosis of the "factual" description as implying an injustice" (Anscombe 1958, p. 40); it remains to be explained, therefore,

that the man who makes the absolute decision that the injustice is "wrong" does not in fact then have the basis for stating that anyone who does not make a similar decision is making a false judgment. Anscombe finds herself in a sort of relativistic *impasse*, which, however, brings out the problem at its root when one assumes an ethical conception.

The problem must therefore be moved from the moral duty to what is considered just/unfair – and in this regard, Anscombe does not fail to recall that (common) sense for which the extermination of the Jews by Hitler must be universally recognized as an abomination. In fact, it is necessary in Anscombe's perspective to get rid of notions such as "moral obligation" or "moral duty" which, if used with audacious carelessness, can lead to the greatest disasters. It is interesting to reflect on conscientious objection. It is an example that summarizes the steps taken so far: legitimacy – epistemological realism – the problem of language used in morals. In fact, conscientious objection presupposes something that is believed to be right/wrong and that this can be recognized by another person; if not, universally, then it presupposes an objective point of view as much as a subjective one, and it concerns the principle of legitimacy precisely because if forbidden it would no longer be considered as a legitimate objection that must therefore be respected. Interesting as Brugues observes, he writes: "Conscientious objection is always a personal decision. Very dramatic cases can arise. The importance of denied moral values, the serious and repeated nature of offenses can lead to the conviction that legal authority is threatening the good of a community. The moral duty of personal resistance then becomes a duty of rebellion (cf. *Popolorum Progressio*, 31). The person must warn her/his fellow citizens and, together with them, demand the repeal of a law that clearly offends good and truth. In the most serious cases – and history gives us many examples – the right to rebellion is transformed into the right to tyranny, that is, to the elimination, even by force, of a legal authority that has lost all moral legitimacy. The upheavals that occurred in Eastern Europe in 1989–1990 highlight the moral and political strength of those who, at the cost of serious personal suffering, had become the "dissidents" of totalitarianism" (Bruguès 1991, pp. 203–204). The subject, in fact, by virtue of what she/he considers to be just, acts, in which case she/he starts from a personal consideration, from a judgment proper to her/his conscience, to reach an action such as the objection. We will now see how action is directed toward an ever-greater flourishing of the subject, so let us now analyze the decisive proposal of Anscombe for a virtue ethics.

A New Language: Metaphysics of Action and Virtue Ethics

Let us begin by recalling Anscombe's filial relationship to Ludwig Wittgenstein. For him, in fact, linguistic expression reflects thought; there are no mysterious properties of thought that language cannot express. Wittgenstein writes: "When I think in language, there aren't "meanings" going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought" (Wittgenstein 1958, p. 329). Thinking is not something that can take place without language, no more than it is possible to perform a piece of music without music (Vd. Carli 2003). And it is precisely because of this loyalty

that Anscombe arrives at the necessity of the elaboration of a philosophy of psychology, intent, as already mentioned, not yet fully satisfied in the philosophical disciplines, and of the abandonment of a now empty language in moral philosophy, in order to propose a new language that focuses on the importance of virtues. It is no coincidence that she is one of the initiators of the contemporary trend of virtue ethics, which certainly has its origins in classical culture (see precisely Aristotle).

Anscombe underlines the importance of the virtues, and it is no coincidence that the devotees of MacIntyre have to go back to her to understand her thought. As Mario Ricciardi observes in a targeted review on the theme of virtue ethics: "Anscombe claimed that making moral philosophy presupposes adequate moral psychology (i.e., the kind of things that Aristotle or David Hume dealt with and that many contemporary moral philosophers neglect). That this does not happen is surprising, since this is not a refined theoretical thesis, but the banal caution that should push us, before pressing the buttons of a strange device, to be certain that we have understood what it is. The work to which Anscombe alludes is a type of conceptual reconstruction, a description. The theory of virtues deals with this. Only once we have understood how the device works can we evaluate whether or not we should use it and advise our loved ones to do the same. This is the object of virtue ethics: after having understood what virtues are, to choose whether one should be virtuous" (Ricciardi 2001, p. 64). Now, as already mentioned, what exactly Anscombe meant by the philosophy of psychology is not entirely clear since she herself highlights the lack of it, and even Ricciardi's observation does not reveal the secret. However, he does indicate the method followed by Anscombe, which is to arrive at an understanding of the origin of an action from the description of the action itself. Far from a utilitarian type of ethics, the Anscombian proposal is that of the flourishing of the subject, that is, of the exercise of virtues in order to achieve full realization. In this perspective, virtue and legitimacy are intrinsically connected. The principle of legitimacy, in fact, finds its foundation in the human flourishing, in other words, in something that unites the whole human species. Let us take here, however, the starting point from the perspective of MacIntyre (1999) for which, as Ricciardi notes, "the ethics of virtues can also be placed adequately within a vision of the world that assumes no transcendent guarantee of ethics, and considers human beings as an animal species among others, obviously endowed with its own distinctive characteristics" (Ricciardi 2001, p. 73). Anscombe in speaking of flourishing has in mind the concept of "eudaimonia," the Aristotelian *telos* toward which the action of man desires are directed, whose essence is reason and virtue. As Ricciardi notes, it is the action of man, whose essence is the reason and virtue. In this light, it is possible to indicate a metaphysical opening in the proposed theoretic of Anscombe.

Conclusion

Language, morals, and legitimacy are therefore intrinsically linked. Acting according to virtue encapsulates a true and proper metaphysics of action. Starting from what the subject considers to be good, she/he moves to action in respect to what

is legitimate. The very principle of legitimacy therefore identifies the potential of a government that places at the center a good that can be shared, put precisely in common. With regard to the nature of this good, one cannot fail to refer to the essence of man who acts according to an end, with a directionality, by virtue of a flourishing. Recalling a study (Geach 1967) by Elizabeth Anscombe's husband, the well-known philosopher and logician Peter Geach, "what is good" is not a prescriptive term but has an attributive function, that is, it always goes hand in hand with the object to which it is attached; for this reason, an analysis of the general concept of what is good would be abstract: it is formed in virtuous action, in the action that yearns for the flourishing of the subject, for her/his full happiness.

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