TOWARDS VIRTUE:

A STUDY OF ALASDAIR MACINTYRE'S RECOVERY OF THE VIRTUES

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

PROVIDENCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF DIVINITY

2008

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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-37191-6
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-37191-6

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter M. Miller describes a world in which the devastation of war has robbed humanity of its learning. There is a new dark age in which only misunderstood scraps of the vast scientific knowledge of the past remains. These scraps - schematics, stories, and broken machines - without context have no meaning.

The world Alasdair MacIntyre describes in the opening pages of *After Virtue*[1] is eerily similar.[2] The disaster MacIntyre is describing is the loss of tradition, and with it the coherence and justification of our entire ethical system. We have scraps, vestiges of the past, but without the traditions and modes of thought necessary to understand and correctly interpret them, we not only lack the ability to do ethics, but even the ability to fully comprehend the nature of the problem and address it.

MacIntyre identifies the Enlightenment as the point at which we lost our way. He carefully accounts how the Enlightenment developed, and how it failed to achieve some of its central aims, most importantly a universally comprehensible rationality for moral action. But although this was never

[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1977).
[2] I am not the only one to notice this striking similarity. Edward T. Oakes in his article "The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre" printed in *First Things* August/September (1996) also makes note of it.

achieved, the damage had already been done, and the modes of rationality, which had previously guided western culture, had been lost.

What MacIntyre believes was lost is a teleological understanding of the human condition and the commitment to a tradition of enquiry. This involves a detailed examination of the changes in modern western culture that have led to the loss of a coherent tradition. Once MacIntyre demonstrates the Enlightenment as the offending development, the Aristotelian ethic of virtue is identified as the lost tradition that we must begin to recover.

The purpose of this study is to describe MacIntyre's project and evaluate it from an Evangelical perspective. It will provide an account of what MacIntyre sees as the problem and what he suggests is necessary to begin correcting it. It will be useful to those looking for an introduction to MacIntyre's work, those who hope to understand MacIntyre in order to better understand the philosophers and theologians who have been influenced by him, and by those who are looking to understand the current state of fragmentation and moral confusion our culture finds itself in. MacIntyre will be of interest to thoughtful observers of this phenomenon because of his careful analysis of the situation, and because he engages, rather than evades the challenges it presents.

We will begin with an examination of Aristotle, to better understand what MacIntyre is looking to recover. We then look briefly at some key changes that Aquinas introduced to Aristotle's thought. This is important because while MacIntyre early on identifies Aristotle as providing the best account of a rational justification for right action, he later becomes a Thomist.

In Chapter 3 we will briefly survey the history of moral philosophy that led to the Enlightenment's abandonment of the Aristotelian tradition, outlining the development of the Enlightenment, and the moral systems which came out of it.

Chapter 4 examines MacIntyre's response to this, what he identifies as the problem and how his project seeks to address it. It will describe MacIntyre's arguments starting in *After Virtue* and then trace the development of that argument through the three following books (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*[3], *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*[4], *and Dependant Rational Animals*[5]) which contribute to the overall project. The chapter also notes key changes in MacIntyre's thought as the project continues, most importantly his shift to Thomism.

Chapter 5 describes how MacIntyre's project has been criticized for relativism, and how MacIntyre has responded to this charge. MacIntyre's Thomism helps him to counter this, but comes with criticisms of its own; we will also discuss these.

Chapter 6 discusses how this project is useful to the church. MacIntyre's assessment of modernity and the positive contributions of his project have important implications for the church, we will introduce some examples of how theologians have made use of MacIntyre and suggest how he can further instruct us.

Finally, we will summarize the content of the thesis in the final chapter. The hope is the thesis will provide a useful introduction to MacIntyre's work and

[3] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1988).
[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990).
[5] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependant Rational Animals* (Peru: Carrus, 1999).

demonstrate that it has important contributions to make to the life of the church and the work of its theologians.

Chapter 2

MacIntyre's Roots in the Aristotelian Tradition

Abstract: An analysis of the sources MacIntyre identifies as being influential in his thought: primarily Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).

The Greek Tradition

It has become a cliché that ancient Greece (and Athens in particular) was the "crucible of civilization," yet in this endeavor as in so many others, it is precisely where we begin. While MacIntyre primarily draws on Aristotle, in keeping with his focus on tradition and context he presents Aristotle's predecessors to us as a means to better understand Aristotle and also to make his own position more clear.

It is impossible to understand Aristotle and his contemporaries without having some familiarity with the Homeric tradition that was so pervasive in their culture. MacIntyre notes that heroic stories "provided a moral backdrop to contemporary debate in classical societies, an account of a now transcended or partly-transcended moral order whose beliefs and concepts were still partially influential, but also provided an illuminating contrast to the present."[1]

[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 121.

One aspect of Homeric society which is common to various heroic societies and which is particularly important to MacIntyre's thought is this: that roles, rules, and structures in heroic societies were well ordered and well understood by the members of the society. Indeed, it was within these roles and structures that individuals came to understand their rights and obligations, what comprised virtuous action and what comprised right and wrong action. "A man in heroic society is what he does."[2] Because roles were well defined in heroic societies, moral responsibilities were unambiguous.

In Homeric society the characteristics of virtue relate closely to excellence in these roles. "The virtues are just those qualities which sustain a free man in his role and which manifest themselves in those actions which his role requires."[3] The virtues which are extolled in Homeric literature are tied inexorably to the Homeric social structure, and MacIntyre anticipates the issue which creeps into our minds, that if these virtues are a part of a now lost society, and are irrational outside of that context, of what relevance are they to us? MacIntyre suggests the following: "first that all morality is always to some degree tied to the socially local and particular and that the aspirations of the morality of modernity to a universality freed from all particularity is an illusion; and secondly that there is no way to possess the virtues except as part of a tradition in which we inherit them and our understanding of them from a series of predecessors."[4] Thus, MacIntyre suggests that while the virtues of Homeric society, like the society itself, are lost,

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[2] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 122.
[3] Ibid.
[4] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 126.

they nonetheless provide us with a useful paradigm for how virtues function within a society and how they are perpetuated within that society.

In the Athens where this Homeric society thrived as an oral history, the conception of the virtues had already progressed. In a real sense, the Homeric society did not exist by Aristotle's time, if it indeed ever existed as depicted in Homer's literature, but this in no way minimizes its importance in Athenian culture.

Classical Athenian culture inherited much of this conception of the virtues, but at the same time, through the centuries and dramatic social changes, the form and practice of the virtues evolved. Basic virtue vocabulary and concepts including "friendship, courage, self-restraint, wisdom, justice – and not only these,"[5] carried on, as well as related concepts such as honor and kinship. An important change did take place, however: the key measure by which one's virtue was measured went from how one performed one's specific role to an evaluation based on one's relationship to the *polis*. For most Greeks, but Athenians in particular, "to be a good man will on every Greek view be at least closely allied to being a good citizen."[6] Yet this reliance on the *polis* as the unit from which people derived their primary identity led to a situation where the virtue concepts were tied to conceptions common to a specific *polis*. In MacIntyre's words, "there is no justice-as-such, but only justice-as-understood-in-Athens and justice-as-understood-at-Thebes and justice-as-understood-at-Sparta."[7]

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[5] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 134.
[6] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 135.
[7] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 139.

And even within Athens, we find evidence of differing and conflicting accounts of the virtues, including attempts to better account for and systematize the virtues. MacIntyre identifies four significant contributors: the sophists, Plato, Aristotle and the tragedians (especially Sophocles).[8] Ultimately, it is Aristotle's account of the virtues that MacIntyre finds most compelling, and it is Aristotle's account which has had the most enduring impact on how ethicists approach the virtues.

Aristotle

The influence of Aristotle on western thought in ethics, as in many academic disciplines, has been enormous. Though he did not originate virtue ethics, he did articulate it in a persuasive and systematic way. To MacIntyre, "it is Aristotle whose account of the virtues decisively constitutes the classical tradition as a tradition of moral thought, firmly establishing a good deal that his poetic predecessors had only been able to assert or suggest and making the classical tradition a rational tradition."[9]

Aristotle is important to us because he has been important to so many other thinkers in ancient, medieval and modern times. For the purposes of his work, MacIntyre has chosen "to regard him not just as an individual theorist, but as the representative of a long tradition."[10] His writings on ethics have proved immensely influential, and virtue ethics as he conceived it became the standard for generations.

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[8] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 135.
[9] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 147.
[10] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 146.

Aristotle's definitive work in ethics was the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He opens this work by positing that all human activities serve some end, to achieve some sort of good. "Good is defined at the outset in terms of the goal, purpose or aim to which something or somebody moves. To call something good is to say that it is under certain conditions sought or aimed at."[11] The greatest of all goods is happiness. Human disciplines serve a purpose and, done well, they achieve a good of some variety: the teacher imparts knowledge, the doctor heals, the artist brings beauty, but ultimately all these goods lead to one overarching good, and therefore all human disciplines serve one end. Indeed, all human actions serve this one end. Aristotle identifies this chief end as happiness.

Of course, the word 'happiness' is a somewhat inadequate substitution for the Greek word *eudaimonia* which has also been translated as prosperity and blessedness. MacIntyre defines it as "the state of being well and doing well in being well, of a man's being well favored himself and in relation to the divine."[12] The happiness Aristotle describes is a type of completeness that involves all parts of our lives and in no way leaves us lacking. It is not to be confused with the type of short-term joy that is gained from pleasures such as wealth and power. Furthermore, happiness is an end above all others because it is an end in and of itself, not a means to some other end, as is the case with wealth. Finally, in achieving this end humans must employ rational and creative talents, since this is what Aristotle believes is our unique and special function, setting us apart from the animal and plant kingdoms.

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[11] Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics,* (New York: MacMillan, 1966), 58.
[12] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 148.

This is a *teleological* view of humanity, and of ethics. Human beings have a purpose and a function: a *telos*. MacIntyre terms Aristotle's teleology his biological metaphysic, meaning that humans are biologically inclined toward a specific end. This position strongly implies the divine and, in the context of virtue ethics, that human nature truly and perfectly expressed is virtuous. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre rejects Aristotle's teleological perspective, and attempts his own alternative, although more recently he has moved closer to Aristotle's position.

Aristotle outlines the path to achieving *eudaimonia* in his discussion of the virtues. "The virtues are precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement toward that *telos* [end]."[13] Human good "is activity of the soul in accordance with virtue."[14] Aristotle defines virtue as "a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean [between two negative extremes] . . . this being determined by principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it."[15] Virtue is an aspect of character revealed through acts, though not determined by them. Thus a person is not made virtuous through actions, but rather actions are the product of virtuous character.

MacIntyre states, "Virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways. To act virtuously is not, as Kant was later to think, to act against inclination; it is to act from inclination formed by the cultivation of the virtues."[16] The truly virtuous person is also educated and aware

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[13] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 148.
[14] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. David Rose (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1980), 1.13.
[15] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* ix.
[16] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 149.

of the virtue of his or her actions. The intentionality of the virtuous act is also crucial to its virtuous merit. There are many reasons for an individual to make the virtuous choice and many of them have nothing to do with virtue, for example fear of punishment or embarrassment may lead one to act in a virtuous manner without virtuous intent.

Aristotle provides us with a detailed discussion of the virtues. He begins with a division: virtues are of two types, moral and intellectual. This is "in accordance with his division of the soul."[17] Aristotle's conception of the soul is not as metaphysical as what ours may be, MacIntyre notes that we could often replace the term with the word personality and be not far wrong.[18] His division of the soul distinguishes between the rational (thinking, reasoning) and non-rational (feelings, impulses).

The intellectual virtues pertaining to the rational come about through teaching, while the moral virtues pertaining to the non-rational come about through habit.[19] Aristotle also posits that these moral virtues are *entirely* learned from habit, indeed "none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature."[20] Some people may have a predisposition to "do on occasion what a particular virtue requires...[but because] it is not informed by systematic training and by principle even such fortunate individuals will be the prey of their own emotions and desires."[21] Furthermore, Aristotle goes on to explain that though nature does not imbue us with moral virtues, their development is restricted by our nature. Virtue

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[17] MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 64.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.1.
[20] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.1.
[21] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 149.

is then a disposition to right action, formed through habitual behavior; this behavior being restricted by and yet not driven by our human nature.

Through proper training (in the case of intellectual virtues) and proper action and experience (in the case of moral virtues), we will learn and acquire the virtue. In time, our actions reflect the right actions that we have internalized and virtuous actions will become natural and pleasant to us; this is a sign that we have become truly virtuous.[22]

A virtue is found in the balance between negative excesses: for example, courage lies somewhere between cowardliness and rash foolishness. The proper balance, the virtuous choice, is called the mean. MacIntyre notes several difficulties which emerge from this position. Firstly, "that there are too many emotions and actions for which there cannot be a 'too much' or a 'too little.'"[23] Aristotle anticipates this, but doesn't provide for us a guideline for which emotions and actions can be done in excess, which ones do not have this character, and which, such as malice, are evil and have no positive correspondent.

Aristotle confesses that finding the mean is difficult, and few are able to find it. He gives us three pieces of advice for erring least from the mean. Firstly, he tells us to steer away from the extreme which is least desirable: on the courage spectrum, Aristotle would suggest that we err on the side of rashness, rather than cowardice. Secondly, he suggests that we evaluate ourselves and

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[22] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 2.3

[23] MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics,* 65.

pay careful attention to our personal weaknesses. Finally, he cautions us against things that bring pleasure since they can easily lead to excess.[24]

MacIntyre defines two distinct ways one can fail. One is to fall short of what is expected or required of the individual given his or her role. The other is to actively commit a positive wrong, an offense which is not merely a failure to act as one ought, but to deliberately commit an offence. It is these types of offences that are likely to be formally prohibited within the community, though they are influenced and closely connected to the virtues, they are acts which also stand somewhat on their own. "An account of the virtues while an essential part of an account of the moral life of such a community could never be complete in itself. And Aristotle, as we have seen, recognizes that his account of the virtues has to be supplemented by some account, even if a brief one, of those types of action which are absolutely prohibited."[25]

To Aristotle there is, among the virtues, one virtue that stands apart from all others. Justice, according to Aristotle, is the quality that characterizes the law abiding and the fair. Justice is a special virtue. People who are just seek justice in all aspects of life for all people, and therefore the just demonstrate a multitude of virtues. Aristotle quotes a proverb from his time: All virtue is summed up in dealing justly.[26] This central virtue is described by the Greek word *phronesis.* It describes someone who "knows how to exercise judgment in particular cases."[27]

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[24] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 2.9.
[25] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 152.
[26] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5.1.
[27] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 154.

This includes judging what action in a given situation conforms to various virtues, so we can see how Aristotle deems this to be the fundamental virtue.

This is the most important example of how Aristotle sees the virtues as interdependent and interrelated. Indeed, he argues that it is not possible to have *any* of the virtues in a developed form without having at least some characteristics of *all* the virtues.[28] "This interrelationship of the virtues explains why they do not provide us with a number of distinct criteria by which to judge the goodness of a particular individual, but rather with one complex measure."[29] The interaction and unity of the virtues are among the main features of Aristotle's account of the virtues with which MacIntyre struggles, and his perspective on it evolves throughout his project, as we shall see.

Aristotle's account of practical reasoning is particularly compelling to MacIntyre, and MacIntyre describes Aristotle's practical syllogism as consisting of a few key elements. Firstly, the existence of wants and goals in the nature of the agent; secondly, that a given type of action is conducive to a good, thirdly that the individual judges that a specific action in question qualifies as a said type of action. Fourthly, the individual takes the action. Most important to MacIntyre is that "Aristotle takes the conclusion to a practical syllogism to be a particular type of action,"[30] rather than a verbal assertion. Thus, action and utterance must be in accord with one another for an individual's actions to be comprehensible.

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[28] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 155.
[29] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 155.
[30] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 161.

Aquinas

Aquinas is an important figure to MacIntyre. He belongs to both the tradition on Aristotle and Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Aquinas's integration of Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology provides a model to MacIntyre of how two traditions can be integrated and how a tradition can be successfully adapted to new cultural circumstances and new intellectual challenges.

Aquinas is famous as the man who reintroduced Aristotelian thought to the western world. He was the foremost proponent of Aristotle in the medieval period and was instrumental in his reintroduction and broad acceptance in the medieval world.[31] To Aristotle, Aquinas brought his own medieval Christian flavor, and (often unintentionally) offered his own interpretation of Aristotle's thought. Aquinas's Christianity, and the vast historical and cultural gulfs between Aristotle and Aquinas mean that while Aquinas made use of Aristotle, his vocabulary, and many of his logical forms, there are significant differences between the two.

The fundamental difference between the ethics of Aquinas and that of Aristotle is that Aquinas presumes a creating, sustaining, benevolent God who has promised his faithful a life after death. This well-defined, monotheistic image of God leads Aquinas to look beyond the temporal, toward the supernatural. God is our creator and we are accountable to him. Also, because Aquinas believes in an afterlife which is promised as a reward and hope to the faithful on earth, Aquinas can hardly assert that happiness in our lives here on earth is the highest

[31] Prior to Aquinas, Aristotle was known only through contact with Islamic scholars, and much was lost in the many levels of translation. Aquinas sought, acquired and had translated Greek copies of Aristotle.

good, since it is only passing and incomplete. Therefore, the final good must be the happiness promised in the afterlife.[32]

MacIntyre notes three major features which distinguish the ethics of Aquinas and Aristotle. Firstly, it is the vision of God which becomes "the goal and satisfaction of human desire." Secondly, "the list of virtues is modified and extended." And thirdly, "both the concept of the *telos* and that of the virtues are interpreted in a framework of law which has both Stoic and Hebraic origins."[33]

Aquinas supplies a goal for human existence which is more satisfactory to Christian sensibilities than that which Aristotle proposed. In our lives and in our exercise of the virtues we seek sanctification and communion with God, and ultimately our goal and purpose is not in this world, but the next.

Aquinas views the virtues in much the same way that Aristotle did but with an important difference. Like Aristotle, Aquinas asserts that a virtue "is that which makes the one having it good and renders the activity good,"[34] but while Aristotle divides the virtues into the intellectual and the moral, Aquinas sees another division: between virtues attainable by humans and those attainable only through the grace of God.[35] It is only with the help of God that we can live virtuously and find the "supernatural happiness" that is our true happiness. Therefore, according to Aquinas "all things are directed to the highest good, namely God, as their end."[36]

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[32] Michael Haren, *Medieval Thought* (Toronto: U of T Press, 1992), 190.
[33] MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics,* 117.
[34] Ralph McInerty, "Ethics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas,* ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 203.
[35] Aquinas, *Summa Theologia,* trans. Timothy McDermott (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), IIa IIae 62.1.
[36] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* trans. Anton C. Pegis (Garden City: Hanover House, 1955), 3.18.

This view of the virtues also leads Aquinas to consider new virtues. The theological virtues (charity, hope and faith), are considered separately from the moral and intellectual virtues. While Aquinas maintains the theory that virtue lies in a mean for the latter virtues, he rejects the theory of the mean for theological virtues. Theological means have no negative extremes: either you possess them or you do not.

It is interesting to note how irreconcilable these theological virtues are with some of the virtues put forward by Aristotle. Humility and passiveness (the virtue that encourages us to turn the other cheek) are completely unaccounted for and unheard of in Aristotle's account. In fact, the prideful and self-righteous magnanimous man Aristotle describes possesses none of these! This is exemplary of the great differences between Classical Greece and Christianized Europe of the late High Middle Ages.

Aquinas adapts and integrates Aristotle into a framework which, as MacIntyre notes, has both "Stoic and Hebraic" origins; a defining feature of this framework is the law code. Aquinas approaches Aristotle with a philosophy informed both by the Stoic minds of the Classical tradition and by the Hebrew tradition as recorded in scripture and understood by the church. These traditions embrace a legal governance of morality, in a way foreign to Aristotle.

For Aquinas, reason takes an even higher position than it does for Aristotle. Reason is not just the central human trait, it is also a central Godly trait, and it is by, through and with reason that we determine and act upon virtue. Reason is the foundation of moral law, and moral law is the "'eternal' law, which

is the divine will for the ordering of the created universe in accordance with divine reason."[37] For Aquinas then, it is reason that motivates and enables the virtues as opposed to 'practical wisdom,' as purported by Aristotle.

While Aquinas and Aristotle agree that the search for happiness and the work of the virtues are directed by human functionality (the function humans perform in creation – reason), their view of that function differs. They agree that it is human reason that sets us apart from the rest of the created order, and that our culpability for our actions requires that we understand the actions and make the choice freely, meaning that our reason makes us accountable. Further, they agree that this function, reason, follows a form. Where Aquinas and Aristotle differ is in the relationship between a being and its essence.

Aquinas distinguishes between form and being, and he posits that the ultimate being is God who is much more developed and active than Aristotle's conception of the divine. God has being as his nature, a quality in which he is unique. The rest of creation received its being in creation; God imbues his creation with its being. Aquinas differs from Aristotle in that a thing's being is not determined by its nature. Since Aquinas noted this metaphysical gulf between creator and creation, Aquinas differentiated between a thing's existence and a thing's nature, or essence.[38]

MacIntyre considers Aquinas's integration of Aristotle's thought into an Augustinian Christian framework an extremely important development, and one that provides a template for his work. Aquinas was positioned in a time when two

[37] Haren, 192.

[38] Joseph Owens "Aristotle and Aquinas," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas,* ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 46-48.

rival systems of thought were in conflict. Aristotle had been introduced to the medieval world and philosophers had found his accounts compelling, but the conclusions these accounts produced were incompatible with Christian doctrine. "Philosophy of one kind encountered philosophy of quite another, each with its own standards for evaluating the truth and rationality of philosophical claims and those two sets of standards apparently incommensurable as well as incompatible."[39] The areas of rivalry included Aristotle's ethics for a specific class of gentleman in the *polis* versus the Christian doctrine of a law for all mankind, the Christian account of the virtues as discussed above, the importance of an Augustinian conception of the will, which was foreign to Aristotle, and finally the "keystone of the Augustinian conception of justice and of everything else is Augustine's biblical understanding of the relationship of the soul to God, as created by God, required by God to obey his just law and destined for eternal society with him."[40]

MacIntyre describes the manner in which Aquinas accounts for the will in that "our own inability to eradicate this tendency for disobedience out of our own natural and rational resources points toward the collusion of the will in moral evil...the only remedy [to which] is divine grace."[41] The Aristotelian version is incomplete and requires the elements supplied by Augustine to build a more complete and compelling account.

The same can be said of Aristotle's understanding of the virtues and *telos.* "The virtues understood only in Aristotelian terms are incapable of perfecting

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[39] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions* (London: Duckworth, 1990), 107.
[40] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), 163.
[41] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 181.

human beings in such a way that they can attain their *telos*, partly because of Aristotle's inadequate understanding of what the *telos* is and partly because the natural virtues themselves can only perfect when informed by that *caritas* which is a gift of grace."[42]

Aquinas demonstrates that "it is from God as truth, *veritas,* that all other 'truths' and 'trues' flow."[43] In understanding the Augustinian God in Aristotelian terms of causality and teleology "Aquinas integrated both rival schemes of concepts and beliefs in such a way as both to correct in each that which he took by its own standards could be shown to be defective or unsound and to remove from each, in a way justified by that correction, that which barred them from reconciliation."[44] Thus MacIntyre is arguing not only that Aquinas was able to integrate Augustine and Aristotle, but that he was able to use the resources of the two frameworks to solve issues internal to each. "The Augustinian understanding of fallen human nature is used to explain the limitations of Aristotle's arguments, just as the detail of Aristotle often corrects Augustine's generalizations."[45]

Aquinas was educated in and amongst two separate and rival traditions, but by virtue of his familiarity with each he was able to understand each on its own terms, and to discover ways they complemented and completed each other. MacIntyre sees this as the model that we need to use in understanding and improving rival traditions today.

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[42] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 182.
[43] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 122.
[44] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions,* 123.
[45] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 205.

Conclusion

What we have in Aquinas is an adaptation and extension of the theories Aristotle put forth, revised to fit Aquinas's cultural and religious background. While there are some significant differences between the two, in many cases these theoretical differences lead to similar stances. In Aquinas we have an Aristotelian who has a creation theology, a salvation theology and a Christian perspective on the virtues, with unique nuances to many of Aristotle's key philosophical ideas. Most pertinent to this study is his theory of being.

To MacIntyre, as we shall see, Aristotle holds the banner for a moral vision that we have lost sight of, and Aquinas gives us a clue for how it might be recovered and understood in our own time and within our tradition. In the following chapters we will explore how Aristotle's tradition was lost, what replaced it, and how MacIntyre proposes to reintegrate Aristotelian concepts into modern moral thought.

Chapter 3

The Modern Developments MacIntyre Rejects

Abstract: An overview of the development of the modernity which MacIntyre rejects and examples of the moral systems that have arisen from this changing social and moral framework.

The Development of Western Modernity

In *After Virtue* and in the subsequent books written to contribute to its aim, MacIntyre does not simply reject the ethical theories he encountered, he charges that their very framework was ill founded. This section will explore MacIntyre's account of the major trends in the history of ethics, and the social shifts to which they responded, and the effects these changes had on the frameworks from which ethical systems are developed. In so doing we will begin to see what it is that MacIntyre has rejected and why.

Christianity

To understand the development of the modern ethical approach, MacIntyre explores the Christian framework, as it is the broad framework within which most moral inquiry has taken place in western culture. MacIntyre identifies several key issues presented by Christianity, including the need for obedience to God out of a sense of duty and the need for reconciliation to God. These key

theological concepts form the basic impetus for Christians to seek right action,[1] and they tie in to the debate of the interplay between faith and works.

MacIntyre sees two problems related to the moral teachings of the New Testament and their relevance for us today. He considers the teachings of Christ in the Gospels not to comprise "a self-sufficient code,"[2] but rather to be highly contextualized critiques and criticisms of the Pharisees. He characterizes the church's attempts to build a universal ethic from the New Testament and early church tradition as a "paradox…it has always tried to devise a code for society as a whole from pronouncements which were addressed to individuals or small communities to separate themselves off from the rest of society. This is true both of the ethics of Jesus and the ethics of St. Paul…[they] preached an ethics devised for a short interim period before God finally inaugurated the Messianic kingdom and history was brought to a conclusion."[3] MacIntyre says that the teachings of the New Testament do not provide a complete ethical system, and questions the usefulness of the New Testament ethic for application in a broad, lasting social system.

MacIntyre describes two further problems that Christianity presents as a framework for moral theory: "First, the sheer extent of its metaphysical commitments; and second, the fact that it has to assert that the point and purpose of this life and this world is in the end to be found in another world."[4] MacIntyre sees these as problematic because there is danger of Christians

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[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Collier, 1966), 112.
[2] MacIntyre, *History of Ethics*, 115.
[3] MacIntyre, *History of Ethics*, 115.
[4] MacIntyre, *History of Ethics*, 150.

minding 'otherworldly' concerns, rather than immediate moral ones. And, more fundamentally, MacIntyre fears Christians losing interest in their faith during times of comfort and ease, when thinking about the world to come seems less relevant and commitment to the faith and its moral authority falters.

Within Christianity there are many varied approaches to ethics and these are rooted in differing theological presumptions. Some of the most important theological distinctions regard original sin, justification by faith, and predestination, all of which are great determinants for Christians forming a moral philosophy.

The Reformers emphasized the utter corruption of mankind (especially regarding our inability to act righteously without God's motivation), justification by faith alone, and staunch determinism and predestination; hence they were naturally led away from Aristotle. It is hardly tenable to maintain an Aristotelian ethic while believing that all human action is motivated by sin.

William of Occam (1288-1348) conceived of an ethic whereby we are beholden solely to God's revelation to form our ethics. MacIntyre characterizes this as making "God's commandment the basis of forgiveness, rather than God's goodness a reason for obeying him."[5] The Reformers then, echoing and expanding on this, proposed an ethic in which the individual is accountable to God and his commandments, which MacIntyre describes as being interpreted as "absolutely unquestionable...[and] as far as human reason and desires are concerned, arbitrary and contextless."[6] We are duty bound to obey God and can

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[5] MacIntyre, *History of Ethics,* 119.
[6] MacIntyre, *History of Ethics,* 124.

do so only through his empowerment. In this MacIntyre sees a striking departure: our ethical behavior is bound to God alone, and all ethical behavior is thus abstracted from its communal and societal contexts.

The Reformation and its associated political revolutions changed the social order and brought about a new moral approach. The philosophical shift toward individualism and social shift toward modernism meant that the old feudal system and the associated moral paradigm would falter. MacIntyre sees this shift as problematic and central to the return he proposes to a Thomist approach.

The shift to an individualistic ethic takes ethics away from the communal enterprise that MacIntyre believes it must be. It culminated in the ethics of modernists, and the Enlightenment, the main object of MacIntyre's dissatisfaction.

The Modern Ethicists

An important development in ethics coincided with a growing skepticism about truth and organized religion. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) worked from a framework that no longer held the presumptions of the medieval or reformed Christian traditions. He proposed an ethical system in which the criteria for what constituted a moral action depended not on how it coincided with God's commandments, or with the commandments of his representatives, but rather how beneficial the outcomes of that act appeared to be. Inevitably though, "any regard for the welfare of others is secondary to a regard for, and indeed is only a

means to, my own welfare."[7] This also differs from the Aristotelian (choosing the good life) model. It was born of a time when the credibility of the church was low and the old, established social patterns no longer made sense. Thus, it was a response to the changing social patterns of Hobbes's age.

This pragmatic approach to ethics was not new, but Hobbes was important because his views were extremely contrary to the status quo, in particular, his "view that human beings are motivated wholly by self-love,"[8] yet became a standard from that time onward.

Another response to many of these same pressures came from David Hume (1711-1776). Hume's skepticism lacks the focus on logic that exists in Hobbes's thought and later in Kant's. Hume believed that "moral approval or disapproval are sentiments, not deliverances of reason."[9] In this way he anticipates the emotivism MacIntyre refutes, but in another way Hume anticipates Kant and the ontological argument.

Hume is famous for his Is /Ought construction, which posits that based on what we know *is* we can not determine what *ought to be.* This concept of 'ought' is foundational to the modern morality and has a genesis in this era, and although it cannot be said to take a central or pivotal role in Hume, the concept is nonetheless developing. MacIntyre asserts that in Hume we may for the first time

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[7] MacIntyre, *History of Ethics,* 136.
[8] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), 255.
[9] J. Kemp, *Ethical Naturalism: Hobbes and Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 31.

be finding a reference to an 'ought' without context or imperative.[10] This will be discussed at the end of this section.

MacIntyre outlines Hume's thought: how he saw our actions as being motivated by passions rather than reason and how Hume and Denis Diderot (1713-1784) fail to address the problem of conflicting passions.[11] If morality is determined by emotional responses how can we address the problem of conflicting passions? MacIntyre also criticizes Hume for advocating the status quo when it came to specific moral judgments. He advocated a much-changed rationalization for moral choice, but defends a conventional set of eighteenth century English values.

Finally, the approach to moral philosophy that has dominated modern ethics, and Protestant ethics in particular, finds its origin in Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Growing out of Hume's thought and responding to its weaknesses, Kant advocated a rational ground for morality, as opposed to Hume's assertion that morality is a product of the passions.[12] Kant's theories begin with some existing presuppositions. John Locke, for example, had already made clear that he believed that moral truths were discernible by reason. Still, Kant stands at a tremendous crossroads, in which he has changed indelibly our perception of morality. Kant believed that humanity is called to obedience: obedience to a universally binding moral code. We have the capacity to discern this code because we have moral intuition, from which we can make moral deductions

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[10] MacIntyre, *History of Ethics,* 174.
[11] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1977), 48.
[12] Robert Wokler, "Projecting the Enlightenment," in *After MacIntyre* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1994), 112.

through rational evaluation. In searching for what are guiding principles for all rational beings, Kant deduces that reason itself holds the key. Any study of human behavior itself would be merely descriptive, and a study of human nature incomplete, because it is not our humanity that makes us moral beings, it is our capacity for reason. Therefore, we must examine reason itself in order to discover what the root principles of this universal moral code must be.[13]

Kant concluded that the 'supreme principle for morality' was universal on the grounds that the universality of a principle was a condition of its being truly rational. For something to be rational it needs to be something you would desire to be acted upon by all rational beings, at all times, under appropriate circumstance. These are the criteria for the 'supreme principle,' or categorical imperative.

This rational deduction is our responsibility. Since we have the capacity for rational thought, and reason is the criterion for moral rightness, we are responsible for choosing the right, rational choice. We are obedient to God only in so far as he is better at deciphering right action. For all intents and purposes we are obedient to ourselves.

Implicit in this argument is the assertion that the outcomes of our actions ought to be ignored when we weigh the moral rightness or wrongness of that action. Moral choices should be based solely on the guiding moral principles, and not on what we think will provide the best outcome. Because we are finite and imperfect beings we do not have the capacity to foresee with any accuracy the

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[13] Oliver Johnson, *Ethics* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978), 227.

outcomes of our actions, we must therefore act on the basis of principles, namely principles that have been determined rationally to be categorically imperative.

We have now an even stronger individualistic framework than before. The individual is the sole source of authority and our moral accountability is to reason alone, and specifically to what we discern using our faculties. The individual's moral accountability is no longer defined in terms of the community or specific social roles.

MacIntyre criticizes Kant's position as well; Kant, "while making compliance with duty a morally binding principle, had provided no logical grounds for doing so, leaving the performance of duty for duty's sake indefensible to anyone who elected to act in accordance with self-interest rather than disinterested reason."[14] MacIntyre charges that when building arguments for categorical imperatives Kant is reduced to using "notoriously bad arguments"[15] to substantiate his position. Furthermore MacIntyre charges that amoral and trivial axioms can be universalized by Kant's method, and ought by that reasoning to become absolutely binding moral precepts. For example, MacIntyre suggests that the injunction "always eat mussels on Mondays in March" passes all Kant's tests and, by his reasoning, can be universalized.[16]

MacIntyre believes that Kant's rational moral project is fundamentally flawed and fails in its attempt to justify morality rationally.[17] MacIntyre argues that "Kant's thesis that the nature of human reason is such that there are principles

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[14] Wokler, 111-112.
[15] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 45.
[16] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 46.
[17] Brad J. Kallenberg, "MacIntyre's Master Argument," in *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition,* ed Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg & Mark Thiessen Nation (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997), 10.

and concepts necessarily ascended to by any rational being"[18] faces two important challenges. First, that the "universal and necessary principles of the human mind turned out in fact to be principles specific to particular times, places and stages of human activity and enquiry."[19] Secondly, that "the conceptions of necessity, of the *a priori,* and of the relationship of concepts and categories to experience that the Kantian transcendental project required could not be sustained."[20] Most crucial though, is that, to use Wokler's summary, Kant "while making compliance with duty a morally binding principle, had provided no logical grounds for doing so, leaving the performance of duty for duty's sake indefensible to anyone who elected to act in accordance with self-interested prudence rather than disinterested reason."[21] MacIntyre contends that reason alone cannot deliver ultimate moral truth because it is possible to logically defend radically different ethical responses to various problems based upon differing presumptions.

The modern concept of duty has developed from where it was in Hume's mind and is now a central and preeminent concept, and a necessary one, in Kant's moral framework. As mentioned earlier, what concerns MacIntyre is that the 'ought' that is implied in the work of this era is unsubstantiated. While at one time, prior to the Enlightenment, to give the injunction "you ought" implied a because - because it is befitting your social role as an elder, as a craftsman etc, because you want to live up to an ideal (the virtues) - in the enlightenment

[18] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 266.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Wokler, 112.

and post-enlightenment the "you ought" injunction carries none of these. So when someone responds to another telling them they ought to do something, the response to the question "why ought I" is "you just ought" rather than "you ought to because."[22]

MacIntyre gives two root causes for this situation. One is that the individual has been abstracted from the moral equation and is accountable only to his or herself. The second reason is that our communities have lost their "shared ideals and accepted functions,"[23] so moral dialogue is nearly impossible. These, broadly, have been the shifts that MacIntyre has identified as having moved us away from the culture of virtue and into the framework of current moral dialogue. In the following section I will discuss the ethical systems MacIntyre interacts with within the modern ethical framework.

MacIntyre argues that just as Hume had failed in his rationalization, focusing on passion and desire, Kant had failed in his, focusing on reason. Kierkegaard (1813-1855) noted the problems faced by Kant and proposed a resolution. His starting point was the act of choice.

Kierkegaard offered us a choice between aesthetics and ethics. This is not a choice between good and evil, it is a choice between conceptions of good and evil. Kierkegaard extols the strengths of the ethical choice, but asserts that the choice which is to be made is non-rational and without criterion: to evaluate the decision according to reason is to enter the ethical plane; to make it according to

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[22] MacIntyre, *History of Ethics,* 173.
[23] Ibid.

passion is to have already entered the aesthetic plane.[24] MacIntyre derides "the apparent incommensurability of two distinct value systems, and the arbitrariness and irrationality of any moral choice between them."[25] Kierkegaard assumes that the internal struggles, weaknesses and unsatisfying nature of the aesthetic life will lead people to choose the ethical, but this is a decision made without reference to either mode of thought, it is a "criterionless leap."[26]

MacIntyre contends that Kierkegaard's proposal is flawed because it provides no direction, he cannot actually endorse the ethical, because there is no *reason* to do so in his theory. Secondly, MacIntyre contends that Kierkegaard is incoherent because Kierkegaard has established that people make the choice to act ethically for no reason, yet the only reason we have to follow the precepts of the ethical realm is because we made the choice. Since the reason we chose to follow the ethical path was no reason whatsoever, ethical pronouncements have no authority over us.[27] The authority is the vacuum in which we chose to follow the ethical path, and that is without foundation.

Now that the Enlightenment has succeeded in having each of us guided morally "by the dictates of [our] own reason...our moral language has degenerated into an incoherent set of rules or principles deprived of the teleological background which originally gave them meaning."[28] Thus, we see the conundrum. MacIntyre has explained how in his view, the Enlightenment has led

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[24] Kallenberg, "Master Argument," 10.
[25] Wokler, 111.
[26] Kallenburg, "Master Argument," 10.
[27] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 42.
[28] Horton and Mendus, 7.

us, through successive failures, to a situation in which no moral justification can be found, no moral authority appealed to, and no moral stance defended.

MacIntyre admits that Hume "makes as strong a case for his position as could conceivably be made."[29] Indeed, MacIntyre denies that the Enlightenment project could be repaired if a "more powerful mind applied itself to the problems,"[30] because it is not the logic or thoroughness of the arguments which is lacking, it is the premises upon which the arguments are made. MacIntyre contends that the Enlightenment project had to fail.

MacIntyre's Modernist Rivals

Having described the crucial historical shifts that moved western culture away from Aristotle and Aquinas, we will now describe the systems of thought MacIntyre has described as his primary opposition. In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* MacIntyre describes three views, The Encyclopedic, the Nietzschean (Genealogy) and the Traditional view, as espoused by Pope Leo XIII. His thesis is that the Aristotelian/Thomist approach, as demonstrated in the Traditional View, provides the most complete and coherent model for moral practice. He furthermore contends that the theories he rejects can be proven to have imperfections on their own terms and the weaknesses of the Encyclopedic and Nietzschean views can thereby be made manifest.

MacIntyre describes the Encyclopedic view as found in the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*; it is the view that human reason can decipher moral

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[29] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 48.
[30] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 51.

truth. This is the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and goes even beyond what Kant said. It is a belief that knowledge and reason are the keys to all truth, including moral truth.

Kant denied that reason can reveal truth about reality, but accepted that it could be used to deduce truth from our moral inclinations. The Encyclopedic view maintains that all rational beings are capable of using knowledge gained in scientific pursuits and reason to find ultimate truth. We ought to be able to find consensus on truth, once all blurring distinctions such as prejudice, superstition, and etcetera, are removed. When we are working with unencumbered reason, we will have the ability to perceive the ultimate truths about reality and morality.

The Encyclopedic position, then, is "of a single framework from within which knowledge is discriminated from mere belief, progress towards knowledge is mapped, and truth is understood as the relationship of *our* knowledge to *the* world."[31] While the views described earlier belonging to Hume and especially Kant are diversions from this pure Enlightenment position, they nevertheless fall within the broad picture that MacIntyre is painting.

Nietzsche, as represented in his *Zur Genealogie der Moral,* provides MacIntyre with the example of the Genealogical position. It is interesting to note that MacIntyre, though he refutes Nietzsche, views him as an important and useful figure in his own work. Nietzsche used a historical survey of the development of ethics to gain a perspective on truth, and this is a method MacIntyre himself employed. Unlike MacIntyre, however, Nietzsche had contempt for most of what he encountered.

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[31] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990), 42.

Nietzsche was intensely critical of Christianity and Judaism and the moral guides they provided. He famously proclaimed that God was dead, and he rejected the Christian ideals of submission, obedience and humility. He also criticized democracy for advocating equality. Nietzsche preferred that a race of supermen rise up and enslave lesser peoples. It was the morality fit for this superior caste in which Nietzsche is interested. In light of his rejection of the tenets of the cultural forms current in his day, Nietzsche naturally had to supply some alternative.

What he proposed was that human beings, as an evolving species, ought to seek the survival and procreation of the strongest. A moral position arising from this perspective, unsurprisingly, differs significantly from those that advocate mercy and equality.[32] And yet, Nietzsche's thought is more subtle and complex than it first appears.

In fact, MacIntyre characterizes it as the natural logical development of Nietzsche's premises. Nietzsche utterly denies the power of reason to discover truth; it does not and cannot produce consensus because our reason is impeded by our human frailties. MacIntyre follows Nietzsche in discrediting claims to objectivity. The Encyclopedic formula relies upon reason providing a culture-free and prejudice-free tool with which to seek truth. Nietzsche and MacIntyre contend that this is impossible. There is, however, a significant difference between the two: Nietzsche assumes that this means that no moral viewpoint can be proven to be more rational than another; MacIntyre does not.[33]

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[32] Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), 291.
[33] Michael Fuller, *Understanding MacIntyre* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998), 21.

Nietzsche is supplied as an example here because of the consistency and thoroughness of his thought. If Nietzsche's premises are correct, that God is dead and that we lack the faculties to discover moral truth, then the amoral moral framework he presents is perfectly appropriate. Nietzsche saw the inconsistency in the thought of his skeptical forbears (e.g. Hume): though they rejected many of the presumptions that Nietzsche did, they tried to maintain the ethical standards those traditions had produced.

Though MacIntyre acknowledges Nietzsche's consistency and significance and finds him useful in his critiques of the Enlightenment, and in his use of historical analysis, he rejects Nietzsche's disregard for the moral pursuits of the past. Nietzsche's dismissal of the history of moral inquiry on the grounds that it masks the innate human desire for power is antithetical to MacIntyre's thesis.

This is an expansion and explanation of the critiques leveled at modern ethics in the earlier books *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* But for our purposes the above dialogue is a logical starting point from which to examine MacIntyre's characterization of the modern moral dilemma, and discuss what is at the core of MacIntyre's criticism and rejection of modernity.

MacIntyre's Rejection of Modernity

MacIntyre sees the Enlightenment as the event that pushed us into confusion. The modernists and liberals that now carry on the Enlightenment traditions he criticizes as having lost their real relationship with right and wrong.

Kant proposed that we can use reason to make ethical deductions when we use our reason to refine our moral inclinations. Enlightenment Rationalists move beyond this and posit that through reason we can determine ultimate truth.

Two questions have arisen that have spawned so much of Western Modernity. Can reason determine truth, and does truth as it's commonly conceived even exist? While many believe that reason is useful for determining some truths, often they reject that moral truths are a product of reason.

This has led to a separation between moral injunctions and real moral referents. In Kant, moral statements went from being injunctions to goodness, to simply injunctions to duty. In modern liberal thought, this too is lost, and moral injunctions become statements of opinion. Many philosophical movements now make this specific claim, most notably Emotivism.

Emotivism is the belief that a moral inclination is nothing more than that: a sensation. Each of us has independent emotional responses to various moral issues, we are naturally conditioned by a number of factors to react in one way or another, yet the content of these emotional responses is not of consequence, since, as merely emotional responses, no one emotional response can be said to be superior to another. Emotivism claims that "every attempt, whether past or present, to provide a rational justification for an objective morality has in fact failed."[34] Indeed, this is the very premise of Emotivism.

The Emotivist position has developed, in MacIntyre's view, because there are so many competing perspectives on morality; all seem to make logical sense, and yet they find no consensus. The common response to this is to make

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[34] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 19.

morality personal, further widening the gulf between individual morality and the community. It is possible to see how this is a natural development following the significant revolutions in moral thought outlined in this chapter. In some ways, we are not unlike the people of the Enlightenment, loosely forcing echoes of a moral past on to a framework that questions the very meaning of "moral."

The most recent and prevalent ethic to emerge in this tattered shadow of the moral past is relativism. Similar to Emotivism, though lacking its nuances, relativism makes truth a matter of personal choice and opinion. This exemplifies the severing of morals from truth, and even the concept of moral truth.

Furthermore, with the loss of the teleological ethic, so also was lost a sense of purpose and meaning, as well as a context and social structure from which to form and define moral truth deductions. Morals and meaning have been rendered all but empty by the loss of the *telos*. MacIntyre contends that meaningful moral dialogue is impossible in this state, and that we must begin to reflect on our history and traditions to begin to uncover what has been lost.

MacIntyre argues that the modern ethical discourse which has evolved out of the failure of the Enlightenment is functionally Emotivist. "This does not mean that the Emotivist theory of the meaning of moral utterance is true, nor even that it is widely believed to be true. It means that great numbers of people, whether they realize it or not, whether they admit it or not, speak and act as though Emotivism is true."[35] The development of modern culture and thought has brought us to the current state of moral discourse.

[35] Arthur Madigan, "Plato, Aristotle and Professor MacIntyre," *Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1983), 171.

MacIntyre's description of the Emotivist stance is a scathing and insightful critique of modernity. He contends that essential moral debates seem to be at a constant stalemate. This stalemate and the modern attitude toward it, MacIntyre characterizes as Emotivism. MacIntyre says of Emotivism that it considers moral questions as essentially meaningless, that whatever positions you assume are emotive responses and have validity on that account, but cannot be judged or validated as truth statements. These moral pronouncements are not about truth or untruth. As personal opinions, our moral responses have no bearing on others, beyond whatever empathy they may share, or which emotions a moral opinion might evoke in another. Since these moral pronouncements are emotive and have no truth referent, moral disputes cannot be rationally debated, because, as Kallenberg puts it "as the emotivist contends, all value judgments are nonrational...moral discussion is at best rhetorical persuasion."[36]

MacIntyre believes in truth, but questions people's ability to objectively deduce it using reason. What we do have is the ability to work within the concepts and precepts of our own traditions and dialogue and compare with rival traditions. Using this framework, MacIntyre seeks to demonstrate to us the weakness of liberal Modernity and instruct us as to how to go about beginning to rectify the crisis he sees us in.

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[36] Kallenburg, "Master Argument," 8.

Chapter 4

Virtue: MacIntyre's Alternative

Abstract: A description of MacIntyre's response to Ethical Modernism, and how this response develops over time as MacIntyre embraces first Aristotle and later Aquinas.

MacIntyre's Virtue Project

MacIntyre presents a cutting critique of modernity, and demonstrates that debates between Modern ethicists can offer no meaningful conclusions, but he does not leave us stranded. He says that we have lost a great deal in our non-teleological ethics and he proposes a return. Early in his work, he focuses on Aristotle, who provides us with the most compelling account of the virtues of any of the ancients.

Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* is his most important work, and it begins the project he continues with *Whose Justice? Which Rationality* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry.* This project seeks to discover the source of the moral confusion in which we now find ourselves and to suggest a solution.

MacIntyre asserts that the source of this confusion is Modernism, born of the Enlightenment as we have outlined in the preceding chapter. The

developments leading up to the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment itself, and the developments that came about after and as a result of the Enlightenment have broken down the traditions that once provided us with a framework from which to approach ethics in a meaningful and effective way. In place of this tradition, we now have a fragmented and confused state in which moral enquiry is nearly impossible, and the enquiry that does go on takes place between advocates of incompatible theories: which seem perfectly logical on their own. This means that there is no consensus among moral philosophers even on basic and fundamental ethical questions.

As a response to this crisis, MacIntyre went about an historian's task. He searched the history of ethics in order to discover what was there, and to identify what has been lost. He found what has been described here, the slow disintegration of the tradition upon which the core ethical paradigms of western culture have been built. As a part of this process he tried to determine which tradition provided the most coherent and rational system from which to approach ethics.

This search led him to the topic of our first chapter, Aristotle. Later, as his thought developed, MacIntyre became more and more inclined to Aquinas' adaptation of Aristotle, and his integration of Aristotelian concepts into a Christian (largely Augustinian) framework.

We will examine MacIntyre's thought in the way in which it developed, by examining his initial Aristotelian response in *After Virtue* and then explaining how he expands and adapts his thought to Thomism in *Whose Justice? Which*

Rationality?, Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry, and *Dependant Rational Animals.*

MacIntyre's Aristotelianism

In *After Virtue*, the first installment of MacIntyre's Virtue project, he describes the great problem that earns the focus of his study for this and three more books. As we have noted, MacIntyre is critical of the way philosophy no longer considers social and historical context when considering morality, and he intends for his project to work from these contexts. In fact, he believes that in order for moral discussion to have meaning we must employ historical and theological discussion.

Understanding the Enlightenment Problem

MacIntyre suggests that modern moral philosophy not only lacks the coherence for addressing moral issues, but that it even lacks the resources to address the crisis. As we shall see, MacIntyre describes the current state of moral discourse as attempts to articulate "goods, virtues and rules that [are], in the broadest sense, Aristotelian and Christian, while discarding the contexts and from the evidence that made them plausible."[1] That is: we are still formed by and largely promoting the values of the Christian and Aristotelian traditions, even though we have rejected the foundations that made those values rational. This

[1] Arthur Madigan, "Plato, Aristotle and Professor MacIntyre," *Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1983), 171.

leads to a "conception of rationality independent of historical and social context, and independent of any specific understanding of man's nature and purpose."[2]

MacIntyre describes how this crisis developed. The most important and destructive development in modern moral philosophy was, according to MacIntyre, the Enlightenment. He describes what he terms as the 'Enlightenment project', and then explains why it failed and why it had to fail. In keeping with his contextual and historical approach, he explains the basic problems Enlightenment thinkers faced. As was outlined in Chapter Three, MacIntyre discusses the development of the Enlightenment and how it fell victim to Nietzsche's critique and eventually led to the Emotivism that now pervades our culture.

What was Lost

MacIntyre mourns the loss of the *telos,* the Greek conception of an end or goal of human life. When people have a clearly defined purpose, there is a reason and justification for moral principles; without a conception of human purpose and good, this direction is lost.[3] The "Aristotelian conception of morality has been supplanted by a rejection of teleology and a denial that we have any specific or identifiable purpose beyond that which we choose."[4] While people had been understood as having a clear purpose, which we fulfilled or failed to fulfill in a tangible and recognizable way, we are now the arbiters of our own ends. Thus,

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[2] John Horton and Susan Mendus, "Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue and After," in *After MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 3.
[3] Brad J. Kallenberg, "MacIntyre's Master Argument," in *Virtue & Practices in the Christian Tradition,* ed Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg & Mark Thiessen Nation (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997), 11.
[4] Horton and Mendus, 6.

we are not able to tell when we have fallen short of the mark, because that mark is not clearly defined.

In the teleological framework Ethics is the science of bettering people, taking people from what they are to what they ought to be. People in an uninstructed state can be made better through moral instruction in practical reason. From here people can be moved toward what we ought to be, what we were intended to be. [5]

It is in the loss of this concept that MacIntyre finds the central and fundamental flaw in the Enlightenment project. In the various attempts to fashion reason into a justification for moral judgments, whether through the injunctions of passion, reason itself, or radical choice, MacIntyre finds serious and crucial flaws.

When we have an idea of how a thing *ought* to be, we are in a position to critique it and to make provisions for its changing. When we allow the thing itself to determine how it ought to be, or deny that change of any sort can bring about improvement, we can no longer make evaluative judgments or direct right behavior.

In this moral muddle MacIntyre only sees two possible alternatives: Nietzsche or Aristotle. Nietzsche saw the hypocrisy of the Enlightenment's claims to impartial rationality.[6] He saw these claims as justifications for personal will, "what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective

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[5] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1977), 52-53.
[6] Kallenberg, "Master Argument," 14.

will."[7] MacIntyre agrees with this insight, even though, as previously noted, MacIntyre disagrees with Nietzsche's abandonment of morality as a whole, and with his pure personal, selfish pragmatism, with its eventual "absurd and dangerous" doctrines.[8]

Nevertheless, MacIntyre acknowledges that Nietzsche alone has addressed the critical flaws of the Enlightenment formula. MacIntyre then presents us with a choice: do we accept Nietzsche's amoral response, or do we seek to undo what has been done and recover what has been lost in our western heritage? He chooses the latter option.[9]

The Aristotelian Ideal

MacIntyre follows the history of the *telos* conception of Ethics from its earliest traces in the Homeric tradition, up to its developed Aristotelian form. Brad Kallenberg writes: "In order for MacIntyre to make the case that Aristotelian morality ought never to have been discarded, he must first demonstrate the strength of this moral tradition from its origin."[10] As noted earlier MacIntyre believes putting a philosophical system within its historical concept is crucial to understanding it, and therefore, also crucial for understanding its strengths and weaknesses. As we shall see this also serves to record the narrative tradition MacIntyre is supporting, which is crucial for him as he is suggesting that in order

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[7] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 113.
[8] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 113.
[9] Madigan, 171.
[10] Kallenberg, "Master Argument," 14.

for us to understand our own *telos* we must understand the narratives of which we are a part.[11]

The Homeric tradition and later literary sources preserve, in literary form, the ideals and structures of ancient Greek society. We are able to discern what qualities were admired, and how people were expected to live. MacIntyre discovers in the Homeric tradition a society in which a person's social role is clearly defined. This is a contrast to the present social structure. In ancient Greece, one was born into a position with clearly defined roles and expectations; according to MacIntyre, in Homeric society (and other ancient heroic cultures) "a man...is what he does."[12] Furthermore, the values extolled by these people were intrinsically bound to the social structure. Qualities important to sustaining the society were prized, particularly values which were necessary for an individual's specific role, for example, courage for warriors, or fidelity for wives.[13] MacIntyre wants us to understand that morality and abiding by social roles were one and the same. In the terminology I've used in earlier chapters, the individual and the individual's morality were not abstracted from the social framework. On the contrary, the social framework was the foundation for moral rules, rules that were well known, and which were not subject to evaluation or scrutiny.

MacIntyre goes on to describe the relationship between the literary heroic societies and the much more historically well-documented later ancient cultures, in particular, Classical Athens. Unsurprisingly, standard Athenian morality

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[11] Paul J. Mehl, "In the Twilight of Modernity: MacIntyre and Mitchell on Moral Traditions and their Assessment," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 19.01 (1991), 25

[12] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 122.

[13] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 123.

differed from the depictions we get in Homer. The *polis* of Athens had a much different social structure than the Homeric stories they studied, and the social and moral discrepancies between the two were not lost on the Greeks. Now rather than merely contributing to fulfilling a social role, virtues aided in general human life.[14] The *telos* which was once a purely practical, functional idea now became a philosophical ideal.

Several differing and rival perspectives on the virtues arose to meet this moral dilemma, most notably the Sophists, Plato, and Aristotle. Because the virtues now apply to people generally, there is room for critique and analysis. The Athenian's "understanding of the virtues does provide him with standards by which he can question the life of his community and enquire whether this or that policy or practice is just."[15] The Sophists are willing to acknowledge differing moral requirements for the various city-states.[16] Plato rejects this relativism and proposes a moral and social ideal that can never be fully realized in physical reality but nonetheless provides a goal for which to aim, and a guide by which to evaluate right and wrong. Plato's depiction of the virtues sees them divided as to their relationship to the soul. The soul has various aspects, each with a function. There are four virtues, each corresponding to an aspect of the soul; they are wisdom, prudence, courage and justice.[17] These are the virtues and each works with the others to ensure a balanced harmony, reaching for the Ideal.

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[14] Kallenberg, 15.
[15] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 133.
[16] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 139.
[17] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 140.

Aristotle contributes to this tradition as well; in fact MacIntyre points out that Aristotle saw himself as having perfected the model outlined by Plato and others.[18] MacIntyre focuses on a few aspects of Aristotle's ethics. Since Aristotle has already been described briefly in chapter two, an identification of MacIntyre's main focal points will suffice. He makes note of the way Aristotle views human beings as intrinsically *teleological* or, aimed at a purpose: having within us an end. That end is *eudaimonia,* happiness or well-being. It is intrinsically wrapped up in the virtues; virtues enable us to achieve the *telos* of *eudaimonia*, and yet are in themselves the expression of its content. It is also important to note that this happiness is found in fulfilling the unique distinguishing characteristic of the human species, reason. Kallenberg states that in Aristotle's scheme "the end of human life therefore, is rationality."[19] MacIntyre discusses Aristotle's account of the virtues, as well as the important concept of practical reasoning and its governing role between the moral and intellectual virtues. MacIntyre also discusses the Aristotelian concept of friendship and the social implications of Aristotle's ethics in the Athenian *polis.*

Virtues and the Aristotelian Tradition

In the lengthy period from the time Aristotle lived and wrote, to the relatively recent rejection of his thought, there were important developments in the Aristotelian tradition. MacIntyre describes the complex tensions in Medieval Europe, where various cultural and religious traditions were alternately opposed

[18] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 147.
[19] Kallenberg, "Master Argument," 17.

or integrated into the Christian tradition, a tradition that went through important changes, along with, significantly for our study, the rediscovery of and dialogue with ancient texts, including Aristotle. Christians were faced with the question "of how to relate to the daily forms of life that the Christian has to learn… [and]…how is the practice of the four cardinal virtues of justice, prudence, temperance and courage to be related to that of the theological virtues – faith, hope and charity?"[20] There was great debate over what these virtues were, what should be included, and which virtues were contained within the four cardinal and three theological virtues. Aquinas wondered if patience and humility should not be added to the virtues, since none of the theological virtues seemed to address them, and these concepts (as virtues) were utterly alien to Aristotle. In addition to this, MacIntyre notes that Jews and Muslims also had a dialogue in medieval society, and that they too were exposed to and contributed to the virtue tradition.

Macintyre notes several important medieval Christian contributions to the virtue tradition. The Christian tradition offers equal standing to people of 'low birth,' or who endure misfortune that is not their own. Aristotle did not even consider slaves and 'savages' capable of virtue. As well, the medievalists had the advantage of a recorded history by which to measure the benefit of various virtues and examine and study them by this means. Medievalists were largely influenced by Augustine and "his synthesis of Scripture and neo-Platonism

[20] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 167-168.

[which]...dominated both the intellectual and institutional structures up until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."[21]

And yet this history can be a confusing and troubling one. The lists of virtues admired by different societies seem to differ greatly from culture to culture, many of the accounts being incompatible. But this is not the most fundamental way in which various accounts differ from one another, they disagree even on the concept of virtue itself and how it functions. MacIntyre uses the example of Benjamin Franklin and his account of the virtues. Franklin asserts that virtues are an *external* means to an end. The virtues have an outward, utilitarian quality. The virtues are to be useful and are intended to help others and yourself.[22] This gives us, according to MacIntyre, three visions of virtue: the social role fulfillment of the heroic/Homeric view, the human *telos* of Aristotle, and the outward utilitarian (act virtuously so it benefits you or someone else) view professed by Franklin.

MacIntyre's Account of the Virtues

MacIntyre responds to these issues in a number of ways in his account of the virtues. MacIntyre claims that there is still a unity among the different accounts, and that through analysis and study we will be able to "disentangle from these rival and various claims a unitary core concept of the virtues of which we can give a more compelling account than any of the other accounts so far."[23]

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[21] Jean Porter, "Tradition in the Recent Works of Alasdair MacIntyre," *Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), 58.
[22] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 185.
[23] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 186.

MacIntyre does this through a three stage conceptual structure. The three stages are practice, narrative, and moral tradition. These, along with virtue, form the concepts central to his project and are foundational to his whole moral scheme.[24]

A practice is a social human activity of some complexity and import. "Arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life all fall under the concept."[25] These activities must be challenging and serve a useful purpose. Components of a practice are not practices themselves, nor are activities which do not serve a greater goal practices in MacIntyre's sense. Practices are inwardly rewarding, and they reward excellence. A person is satisfied with having performed a practice well. The ability for a practice to be performed well increases as one does it, and over the history of its being performed within a tradition.[26] This component of MacIntyre's understanding of virtue informs his definition in this way: the virtues that enable one to do well and achieve the inward good associated with a given practice depend upon the nature of the practice. Certain practices require different virtues than others. This accounts to a large extent for the different virtue lists found in various accounts. Furthermore, "we should construe morality in general, and virtues in particular as practice based: acting morally well, like playing chess well, is not a matter of individual performance or decision."[27] That is to say, good behavior must conform to the accepted standards of good behavior.

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[24] Kallenberg, "Master Argument," 20.
[25] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 188.
[26] Kallenberg, "Master Argument," 21-22.
[27] Horton and Mendus, 10.

Narrative is the story of a person's life. A person's actions only make sense in the context of the story of his or her life. The past events that have had an impact upon a given individual inform us as to the motivations that person has for the actions being taken now. This is a major departure from Aristotle; for Aristotle the "metaphysical biology" is central to the direction and motivation of the virtuous life, but MacIntyre rejects this: the narrative of a person's life, along with the tradition described below, provides this.[28] Narrative is not merely the story of your life, however: it is informed by the social fabric of which you are a part and by which you define yourself. MacIntyre sees this concept of narrative informed contextualization as flexible enough that we can adapt the model Aristotle supplies, with the singular context of the affluent, aristocratic Athenian in mind, to much broader contexts.

For MacIntyre, human beings are essentially story telling and story living beasts. "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question: 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"[29] We learn about and interpret our world through stories. We recognize ourselves as part of a narrative structure, and in searching and defining that narrative is the core of our moral quest.[30] And likewise, we make moral decisions by formulating a story around a moral problem and finding parallels in our lived or vicarious experience. The stories of our lives are not simply a record of the past; they are a determining factor in our future action, and a crucial aspect of understanding our present.

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[28] Kallenberg, "Master Argument," 23.
[29] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 216.
[30] Horton and Mendus, 9, 10.

Narrative is to MacIntyre what unites our moral life. Moral decisions are not independent choices, but part of a broader narrative, asking 'What is good and right for me?' There is unity among the narratives of individuals, in as much as we can answer 'What is good for mankind?' or 'What is good for all people?' With MacIntyre's rejection of Aristotle's metaphysical biology, however, he does not recognize a single unified *telos* for all people, so the *telos* must be informed by this narrative and the tradition in which it is formed.[31]

MacIntyre's definition of tradition is an extension of his concept of narrative. Just as every person has a narrative, so too do communities, nations, and cultures. These are the complex continuities that develop, historical threads which we identify with and define ourselves by. I am a Christian; this puts me in an historical narrative. I am a Protestant, which further defines that narrative. I am Western Canadian which provides a history and a heritage of its own. Tradition is also "constituted by a set of practices and is a mode of understanding their importance and worth; it is the medium by which such practices are shaped and transmitted across generations."[32] These traditions have key values and are in a constant dialogue seeking to adapt to changing situations and achieve the greater good. The concept of the historical narrative is very important to MacIntyre because he sees, in the Aristotelian narrative, a narrative that he thinks has overcome great obstacles in the past and which, with the adjustments he has made, is adaptable enough to provide a moral framework for modern people.

[31] Horton and Mendus, 10.
[32] Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1992), 90.

Horton and Mendus describe MacIntyre's account of the virtues and moral theory as follows:

> The narrative of an individual's life is to be understood against the background of the wider social context within which that individual finds himself or herself. This wider social context consists of sets of practices which serve to define the virtues, and those practices, in turn sustain and are situated within a tradition which provides the resources with which the individual may pursue his or her quest for the good.[33]

In light of this practice, narrative, tradition scheme MacIntyre has developed, he defines virtues as those qualities which enable us to perform well and benefit from practices, seek out the good life and resolve our personal narrative and help to maintain and improve the social and historical traditions that define us.[34] These concepts and their definition and application constitute a significant part of MacIntyre's project.

Conclusion

MacIntyre believes that the whole modern approach to ethics is wrong headed and his proposal challenges the most basic presumptions we have about morality. His appropriation of Aristotle and restatement of an ethic based on his tradition forces us to consider our own positions and address his critique. But it is an incomplete project. There is much that has yet to be done, and many criticisms that need to be addressed. MacIntyre further explains his position and

[33] Horton and Mendus, 11.
[34] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 223.

adapts his position in the later works, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, Three Rival Views of Moral Enquiry,* and *Dependant Rational Animals.* Most notably, he shifts his position closer and closer to St. Thomas Aquinas, and it is to this development that we will now turn.

MacIntyre's Thomism

As MacIntyre's project moves forward he explains and expands some key themes introduced in *After Virtue*, as well as making some significant diversions. In *Whose Justice, Which Rationality* the two most significant of these are: his move toward Thomism and his embrace of the unity of the virtues.

The move to Thomism was made for several reasons, not the least of which was Thomas's success in adapting the Aristotelian ethical scheme to an Augustinian Christian paradigm. It is crucial to MacIntyre's theory that such adaptations are possible, and Thomas provides for him an example of how to integrate the core of Aristotelianism with new concepts and presuppositions. In a general sense, however, MacIntyre now sees Thomas as corrective to Aristotle and as providing a more coherent and comprehensive account of the virtues.

MacIntyre finds Aquinas's account more definitive and useful for several reasons. For one, Aquinas provides a better model for the *telos*, namely "that state of perfect happiness which is the contemplation of God in the beatific vision."[35] Aquinas's developed theology provided for his ethical scheme a clearer and more useful goal for which humanity aspires. As well, Aquinas in his (tempered) Augustinian understanding of sin offers an explanation for human

[35] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1988), 192.

weakness and wickedness. Finally, Aquinas's integration of Biblical and Aristotelian ideals leads to a more satisfying and complete account of the virtues, an understanding which includes grace and forgiveness, as well as a conviction that the poorest and least fortunate are more likely to reach the human *telos,* rather than be barred from it, as in Aristotle's account.

MacIntyre seems to prefer Thomism "because as a tradition it possesses the intellectual and cognitive resources necessary for the rational resolution of tensions within and between earlier traditions."[36] A thorough discussion of the successful integration of the Aristotelian and Augustinian traditions by the Thomist provides a blueprint for MacIntyre's own integration and adaptation of Aquinas.

MacIntyre's shift from secular philosophy to Thomism exposes him to "a new kind of scrutiny in terms of its faithfulness to the work of St. Thomas Aquinas."[37] We will examine some examples of this scrutiny in the next Chapter.

Whose Justice? Which Rationality?

Whose Justice? Which Rationality? is focused primarily on further explaining the terms by which we understand justice, and how these are rationalized. MacIntyre presents four historical philosophical models, each with its own view of tradition and practical reason. Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas and Hume are explored in terms of their respective traditions and a contrast is made

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[36] Horton and Mendus, 3.
[37] Christopher Stephen Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Toronto: Lexington, 2004),113.

between the claims of each on practical rationality.[38] MacIntyre seeks to achieve inter-tradition dialogue and to prove the inadequacy of the Enlightenment's claims by contrasting it with the Aristotelian/Thomist tradition. In order to adequately achieve dialogue between traditions, he founds each criterion for analysis within a traditional and historical context. This is necessary for him to remain consistent with his earlier claims that rational enquiry can only take place within a cultural context. The dialogue he sets up is also historical. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* is in fact a probing history of practical reason and justice within these four traditions.

MacIntyre studies these traditions within their historical contexts. What have the dialogues in the past been, and how has the current position come to dominance? MacIntyre also contextualizes the arguments. He describes in as much detail as possible the conditions under which each view developed. This is consistent with his insistence that our personal and traditional narratives are instrumental in forming our thought. It is, then, imperative that we understand the contexts in which these rationalities developed as well as possible. Furthermore, the dialogue between the traditions must take place with reference to the history of the various traditions.

MacIntyre provides a detailed description of how each of the traditions is a response to sociological and political pressures. Aristotle is noted as having provided the most satisfactory response to the pressures presented by the Athenian *polis.* Aristotle's conception of the *telos* and the manner with which he clearly links it to the practice of virtues provides a justification for virtuous

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[38] Brian Barry, "The Light that Failed" *Ethics* Vol. 100 No. 1 (1989), 160.

behavior lacking in earlier accounts. This well developed rationality and clear concept of justice allowed it to prevail over rival accounts of the virtues and alternative rational justifications. MacIntyre says of the impact of Aristotle's account of the virtues that "one not only values each of the virtues for its own sake, but understands the exercise of the virtues as also being for the sake of being *eudaimon*."[39] Thus, there is a clear cognitive link between doing a thing and its connection to your life. MacIntyre also notes that to Aristotle "the knowledge which enables one to understand why this kind of life is in fact the best is only to be had as a result of having become a virtuous person."[40] Thus, one must be instructed in the virtues before they can make rational choices about right and wrong.

MacIntyre continues this thread through to Aquinas, and the above-mentioned Thomist characteristics are explored, as well as the process and development of Aquinas's thought, with especial attention to Aquinas's dialogue with the core of the Aristotelian tradition and his integration of it into his own. Julia Annas notes, "The three chapters on Augustinian Christianity and Aquinas focus entirely on the adaptation, in one Christian tradition, of Aristotle's ideas on justice and practical reasoning."[41] Finally, MacIntyre describes how this tradition was a background for the Scottish Enlightenment and for Hume's thought in general.

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[39] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* 109.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Julia Annas, "Review of *Whose Justice, Which Rationality*" *Philosophy and Public Affairs,* Vol.18 No. 4 (1989), 391.

MacIntyre notes that the study of Aristotle continued on into the Enlightenment, but he contends that in the conflicted period emerging from the Reformation onward it became increasingly difficult to conceive of a broadly acceptable concept of the good and therefore impossible to define a *telos.*[42] The fragmentation of traditions led to the demise of the virtue tradition and the birth of modern moral philosophy.

MacIntyre carefully traces the development of the Scottish Enlightenment, discussing the ethics of a few key thinkers. MacIntyre sees a distinctive Scottish tradition being maintained after the unification with England in several institutions, namely "the Church, the law and the education system."[43] There is a particular focus on the thought of Frances Hutcheson, culminating in a discussion of Hume in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters. MacIntyre chooses Hume to exemplify the Enlightenment. He explores how Hume, in a self-conscious effort to ally himself with English thought perceived to be more erudite, rejects his Scottish heritage and the Reformed theological perspective prevalent at the time, which was much more aligned with Aristotelian thought than that of the more secular English thinkers. MacIntyre argues that in so doing Hume accepts a value system which values class, wealth and prestige rather than the success of individuals in their given roles and in pursuit of their *telos.*[44]

This reminds us of an important element in MacIntyre's thought alluded to earlier. He is not merely suggesting a way to conduct our personal lives, but a large-scale social change. The Aristotelian concepts of role and community

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[42] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* 209.
[43] Annas, 397.
[44] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* 298.

require a particular social setting, and in order for us to function properly we as a society need to conform and accept a set of common ideals and roles. This is a monumental challenge, particularly in a pluralistic, multicultural culture.

A fifth tradition also finds its way into MacIntyre's discussion: that of liberalism, which MacIntyre contends (as part of his thesis that the Enlightenment was a break from the previous tradition) now constitutes a distinct tradition. MacIntyre maintains that liberalism is the inheritor of the Enlightenment project, which MacIntyre has already deemed to have failed, and he maintains that Liberalism too has failed. He contends that, despite its pretensions, liberalism is a tradition and that it judges and guides behavior from the liberal perspective. Despite claims of openness, MacIntyre asserts that Liberalism is actually quite restrictive in what opinions and behaviors it condones. What is crucial to MacIntyre and to his entire project is that the Enlightenment and Liberalism have never produced a sustainable rationality for justice. Therefore, there is ultimately no compelling impetus for right action. Since MacIntyre has concluded that the Enlightenment failed and that liberalism and its claims therefore are false as well, he now presents his alternative.

In the last chapters of the book MacIntyre puts forth his understanding of the rationality of traditions, which he reveals to be an expanded Thomist approach, but one which appears at once flawed by "simultaneously rejecting relativism and insisting on rationality's traditional dependence."[45] MacIntyre overcomes this by employing rational forms within the traditions themselves,

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[45] Jennifer A. Herdt, "Alasdair MacIntyre's 'Rationality of Traditions' and Tradition-Transcendental Standards of justification," *Journal of Religion* (1998), 524.

starting from a base in which the truth of specific claims and texts is assumed, but the inadequacies and insufficiencies of the overall system are also recognized. At this point MacIntyre details his process for evaluating truth. Truth evaluation takes place between rival traditions, but also within the traditions themselves. The historical method that MacIntyre has employed throughout his project must be used to evaluate truth within a tradition. When a crisis develops within a tradition and it is unable to solve it, the tradition must dialogue with history and with rival traditions and discover a rational response to the crisis, and (more importantly) discover why their tradition was unable to manage the problem with its own resources. It is then rational for the adherents of the weaker tradition to adapt and reconstruct their tradition, or adopt that of the corrective tradition. This is MacIntyre's rationality of traditions.[46]

According to Annas, MacIntyre "does not attempt to produce confrontation between the different notions of justice and practical rationality that he considers, much less a resolution of such conflicts: the book is entirely devoted to the task of description."[47] He has, however, now developed a formula by which to evaluate the truthfulness of a given tradition's claims and come as close as is possible for us to undertake such evaluation rationally. The stage is now set for MacIntyre to further explicate this theory in a larger demonstration: to bring about the comparison and evaluations which were missing in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and this is the project of his next book.

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[46] This system is exemplified in *Three Rival Versions,* described below, in which MacIntyre describes the problems internal to the Encyclopaedia and Genealogical traditions and demonstrates how Thomism can respond to these weaknesses and provide a more adequate rationality.
[47] Annas, 389.

Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry

In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* MacIntyre takes up the task he started in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Where in that book he explained and accounted for the rationalities of key traditions, he must now establish that dialogue between different traditions can be fruitful, and that a definitive, rational decision can be made as to which of the rival traditions provides a more satisfactory impetus for right action. He seeks; in short, to demonstrate the model he set out for resolving inter-traditional dialogue in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* He uses the models I presented in Chapter 3 to implement his method, the Encyclopedic, the Genealogical, and he defends his own position, the Traditional.

The Traditional approach he advocates is a much deepened and more explicitly Roman Catholic Thomism. A position such as this is necessary for MacIntyre, since he is arguing that only from within a tradition can we attempt rational judgments.

MacIntyre begins by describing the nature of the modern problem and describing the Encyclopedic and Genealogical positions. He addresses the problem of justifying rationality and the current debate that is taking place between the Genealogical and Encyclopedic, and how it has "obscured apprehension of the Thomistic alternative."[48] The claims are that reason is either utterly universal and impartial, or that it is simply a mask for self interest. This

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[48] Thomas S. Hibbs, "Reflections on *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*" *The Thomist* April (1993), 277.

excludes "the possibility that reason can only move towards being genuinely universal and impersonal insofar as it is neither neutral or disinterested that membership in a particular type of moral community one from which fundamental dissent has to be excluded, is a condition for genuinely rational inquiry."[49] This quote succinctly summarizes MacIntyre's contentions that rational inquiry is only possible within a tradition and that it must be understood as taking place within the fundamental assumptions of this tradition.

MacIntyre presents an account of Aquinas's development and synthesis of Aristotelian and Augustinian Christian thought. He does so in order to meet the following criteria for his scheme's justification: "that narrative prevails over its rivals which is able to include its rivals within it, not only to retell their stories as episodes within its story, but to tell the story of the telling of their stories as such episodes."[50]

Aquinas is explained and placed in his historical and social context. Where Aristotle was the star in *After Virtue,* Aquinas now takes center stage. It is Aquinas and his success at bringing rival traditions together and recording and systematizing the process so thoroughly that it provided a blueprint for MacIntyre's project that now enjoys MacIntyre's attention.

Augustine and Aquinas now provide a corrective to Aristotle, and a coherent alternative to the rival positions MacIntyre describes. A good example of how MacIntyre perceives the weakness in Enlightenment thought is found in his description of Augustine's model for moral enquiry, in which he contrasts that

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[49] Hibbs, 278.
[50] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990), 81.

view with the rationalist Enlightenment standard (using Adam Gifford as an example):

> Where Adam Gifford held that the methods of moral and theological enquiry required a starting point in universally available rationally warranted first principles, the Augustinian denies that there can be any such principles. Where Adam Gifford held that moral and theological enquiry require no initial or initiating commitment to any particular form of religious belief, the Augustinian claims that it is only through initial commitment to one specific type of Christian belief that rational enquiry can be developed. And where Adam Gifford held that tradition presents itself to us to be sifted and evaluated by our standards, the Augustinian holds that we have to learn from authoritative tradition how to sift and evaluate ourselves.[51]

This passage is very telling. It vividly describes MacIntyre's gripe with the Enlightenment ideals, and his appreciation of and admiration for tradition, and for cultures that hold and maintain their traditions. It also identifies the key philosophical problem MacIntyre has been working to correct throughout this project, the notion that there is no need of tradition for rational enquiry.

MacIntyre now further describes the relationship between Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas and the challenge the latter faced in grappling with the earlier work. The ways Augustine and Aquinas approach Aristotle are compared, and the way Aquinas approached and integrated the two is explored. MacIntyre describes three critical areas of incompatibility between Aristotelian and Augustinian presuppositions. Firstly, Augustine assumes the mind is weak and corrupted by sin, requiring God's illumination to allow us to reason with clarity.[52]

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[51] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions,* 101-102.
[52] Hibbs, 287.

Aristotle sees the mind as having the capacity for clear rational thought and the ability to attain that capacity through the practice of intellectual virtues. Secondly, Aristotle speaks of truth in terms of the relationship between a mind and the object with which that mind is concerned. Truth is determined by the character and state of the mind in relation to this object. For Augustine truth is that which is real and substantive, and its quality is determined by its relationship to God. Thirdly, Augustine's thought is permeated with the theology of a corrupted and sinful will, whereas the concept of the will does not appear in Aristotle at all. People do as they have been instructed and as their reason guides them. These are core presuppositions that bar dialogue between the two frameworks.

Aquinas is able to overcome these difficulties and present a coherent account that integrates the two approaches.[53] "In the three major areas in which the Augustinian tradition had confronted its central problems Aquinas developed new positions by both interpretation and argumentative means."[54] That is to say that Aquinas was able to use common presuppositions within the traditions to build a case for one or the other being inwardly incoherent. He then offers a corrective by integrating the two. The "Aristotelian account of nature, both theoretical and practical, was not merely harmonized with an Augustinian supernatural theology but shown to require it for its completion."[55]

Having described the process and circumstances under which Aquinas's model was produced, MacIntyre goes into greater detail about how it came to pass that this model was abandoned. He then begins contrasting the traditional

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[53] Hibbs, 287.
[54] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions,* 123-124.
[55] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions,* 123.

model, as exemplified by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris* with the Encyclopedic and Genealogical versions of enquiry as found in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* Ninth Edition and Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral,* respectively.

As we have already explored these in some detail in the last chapter, it will suffice to simply relate the basic arguments MacIntyre presents against each of the two positions. MacIntyre continues to maintain that the Enlightenment, this time characterized by the Encyclopedic position, has a scrapbook of moral concepts delivered from long dead traditions, but lacks the rational framework to substantiate its claims. This has led to a plurality of poorly understood and poorly argued moral theories competing in a fruitless and ultimately pointless rivalry. One of the outcomes of this is the growth of relativism. People either justify their value statements on their own, or claim that no justification is possible. While natural science has provided a tool for us to evaluate facts, we have no resource for evaluating values.[56] Finally, as has been his argument throughout, the Encyclopedic position attempts to derive value statements supra-culturally, and this is, as has been stated, simply impossible in MacIntyre's assessment.[57] In these ways MacIntyre believes the Encyclopedic position is inconsistent, and in need of correction. Given the fundamental nature of the flaws, MacIntyre offers his own, adapted tradition as an alternative.

MacIntyre now turns his attention to the Genealogical model. He recognizes that Nietzsche identifies and avoids some of the critical errors in the Enlightenment project, but nevertheless has logical weaknesses of his own. The

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[56] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions,* 192-193.
[57] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions,* 190.

Genealogist too sees traditions as rather trite, and although it is recognized that rational enquiry was impossible, they nevertheless see themselves as functioning as individuals outside of tradition. Secondly, MacIntyre notes that in order to argue for the nonexistence of logic and reason the Genealogist is compelled to employ these very faculties to make the claim.[58] Finally, MacIntyre asserts that the denial of truth is in itself a fallacious assertion, and that for that reason Nietzscheism is in perpetual imperilment.[59]

MacIntyre's position develops in a number of ways pertaining to his Thomism. Not least among these is a softening of MacIntyre's attempt "to rehabilitate Aristotle's ethics by substituting social for natural teleology,"[60] with gradual shift in his thought from a speculative philosophical approach to one which seeks to reconstruct Thomas' writings and which "locates particular issues within broader pedagogical structures."[61] Further, MacIntyre now explores philosophical psychology. Quite contrary to his earlier assertions, MacIntyre now contends that we have some innate ability to recognize natural law, although not to formulate it.[62] This shift is a precursor to the next work in MacIntyre's project.

Dependant Rational Animals

In *Dependant Rational Animals* MacIntyre has decided that his initial attempt to reformulate Aristotle's ethics without reference to our biological nature was in error, and that it was necessary to discuss our animal nature for a more

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[58] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions,* 54.
[59] Michael Fuller, *Making Sense of MacIntyre* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998), 32.
[60] Hibbs, 279
[61] Hibbs, 279.
[62] Hibbs, 281.

complete picture of our position as ethical beings.[63] In *After Virtue* MacIntyre had argued that modern science had disproved the notion that we were biologically predisposed to a particular *telos,* rather we ought to determine this based upon our "personal narrative." This departure from Aristotle and his tradition led to some criticism of MacIntyre. For one, his arguments seem dubious if we are the arbiters of our own *telos.* It should be noted that in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* MacIntyre avoids discussing metaphysical biology, inferring that even at that time he doubted his position. With his embrace of Thomism, MacIntyre has been offered a more appealing rationalization of the *telos,* and has adopted it.

This book is a bit of a diversion from MacIntyre's overall project. While he is certainly working from the position he developed in the *After Virtue* project, the emphasis is on other aspects of moral enquiry. He posits that we are, as the title explains dependant, rational animals. We are dependant because we are social beings and thrive in social structures, "animals" because, simply put, that is what we are. An important postulation in MacIntyre's formulation is that we are all dependant to some degree, that we all fall somewhere on the spectrum of dependence.[64]

MacIntyre laments that we have been led to believe that we have little need of others and little responsibility for others. He sees us as dependant on other people and also recognizes the inverse that others depend on us. There is therefore a mutual responsibility to provide for this dependence, which obviously

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[63] Gilbert Meilaender, "Dependant Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues and The MacIntyre Reader," *First Things* 96 (1999), 47.
[64] Meilaender, 48.

requires sweeping social change. "The picture of human life that emerges is, thus, one of reciprocal indebtedness."[65] We flourish as others take responsibility for our well-being, and we acquire the virtues that lead us to aid in other's well being.

Aristotle defined the decisive feature of our separation from the animal kingdom as being human reason. Except, it wasn't a full separation from the animal kingdom; indeed, Aristotle was explaining our role within it. MacIntyre picks up on this and explains that we have neglected the fact that we are animals and fit within this category, he notes that this is particularly surprising in a post-Darwinian society. MacIntyre is particularly interested in how we are an interdependent species and how other animals rely on each other for survival and flourishing, and what corollaries exist with human relationships.[66] He also gives us some clues as to what types of communities he believes humans can flourish within. These communities cannot be comprised by something as broad or shallow as the modern nation-state. Smaller communities comprised of people who share core principles "are the only public spaces in which a genuine common good can be debated and nourished."[67]

This book focuses less on the historical narrative and more on the psychological and sociological implications of his understanding of practical rationality. He concludes that we ought to have a much more community oriented, generous society in which those in need are provided for as much as possible. He also includes a virtue to describe the act of giving to those in need.

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[65] Meilaender, 49.
[66] Meilaender, 47.
[67] Meilaender, 48.

Conclusion

MacIntyre's Development

MacIntyre grew up in a culture in transition. The Gaelic Scottish society with an oral narrative tradition was slowly being eclipsed by the English post-Enlightenment culture and MacIntyre was exposed to both of these.[68] He later became exposed to another tradition Marxism, and he began his academic career as a Christian Marxist dissatisfied with the moral dialogue he witnessed around him. By the time he wrote *A Short History of Ethics* he had disassociated himself from both of these traditions, but retained his skepticism about the usefulness of modern moral philosophy and its methods. His response to this skepticism was hinted at in journal articles ("Notes from the Modern Moral Wilderness"), but *After Virtue* marked a major breakthrough and a dramatic step for MacIntyre. He was then applying the wisdom he found in Marxism, and using an historical approach to understanding the present, providing an alternative to the moral dysfunction he describes.

After Virtue is, as can be deduced from the above description, largely a book of explanation and critique. He is intensely critical of the Enlightenment and all of its heirs, as diverse and as different as they are. At the core his criticism is the notion that individuals can be abstracted from their social and historical roots. Reason, MacIntyre insists, takes place within a tradition, not outside of it.

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* this note is given a much more thorough exploration, and MacIntyre continues the development of his historical

[68] Lutz, 12.

account of his tradition and traditions he opposes in order to better argue the strengths of his own position.

MacIntyre's shift toward Thomism is an important development. How is it that MacIntyre, who was critical of Christianity's usefulness as an ethical framework (clearly evidenced in his account of Christianity's contribution to ethics in *A Short History of Ethics*), now extols Aquinas as the pinnacle of historical moral enquiry? MacIntyre reflects on what led to his rejection of the Christian faith:

> For a time I tried to fence off the area of religious belief and practice from the rest of my life, by treating it as a *sui generis* form of life, with its own standards internal to it, and by blending a particular interpretation of Wittgenstein's notion of a 'form of life' with Karl Barth's theology. But I soon realized that the claims embodied in the uses of religious language and practice are in crucial ways inseparable from a variety of nonreligious metaphysical, scientific and moral claims, a conclusion I reached when reading Hans Urs von Balthasar's criticism of Barth. When I came to reject this strange philosophical mixture of a misunderstood Wittgenstein and an all-too-well understood Barth, I mistakenly rejected the Christian religion along with it.[69]

In his acceptance of the Catholic faith, we ought to acknowledge that MacIntyre's was a highly rationalized conversion, born of a realization that Thomistic metaphysics provided in Lutz's words "the best theory so far for explaining the phenomena of the world."[70] In fact, it is in part because Thomism has shown itself to be flexible and open to enhancement that MacIntyre finds it compelling.[71] As well, he openly admits that his understandings of Augustine and Aquinas

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[69] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Reflecting on the Project: An Interview with Giovanna Borradori" *The MacIntyre Reader* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1998), 257.
[70] Lutz, 131.
[71] Ibid.

were incomplete earlier on and that he has now come to understand how they are corrective to Aristotle and the Greek tradition. Finally, he seems to have become convinced that the Augustinian-Thomist conception of a creator God was necessary for a coherent understanding of humanity's purpose and goal.[72]

In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* MacIntyre supplies the example of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical and defends it as his own position. This coincides with MacIntyre's formal acceptance of the Catholic faith. His growing interest in that tradition is explored in this book, which devotes significant time to Augustine and Aquinas.

Three Versions also continues the development of his discourse on the rationality of traditions and the development of his historical account of his tradition and its rivals. It also presents his strongest and best-developed polemic against the Enlightenment, as well as a sophisticated critique of what he sees as the most coherent alternative to it (second, of course, to his own), Nietzsche's Genealogy.

Dependant Rational Animals is a shift in focus, but its inclusion in this study was important because in it MacIntyre distances himself from his earlier criticisms of Aristotle's metaphysical biology. What he believes about this is not entirely clear at this point, but it seems tied to a theistic Evolutionism. It will be interesting in the future to see how MacIntyre confronts the implications this change must have on his practice - narrative - tradition virtue scheme.

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[72] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Moral Philosophy: What Next?" *Revisions* Ed. Stanley Hauerwas (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press), 14.

Throughout the *After Virtue* project MacIntyre has employed many branches of social science, and in *Dependant Rational Animals* natural science. He has had much to say about education, linguistics, politics, sociology, history, literature and many other disciplines that simply did not relate to the thrust of this project, but were nevertheless important to his. It is a multifaceted and multidisciplinary undertaking that has challenged not just the way we do ethics but the social and cultural forms and structures related to this.

Indeed, the arguments MacIntyre presents are broad in their scope, yet probing and intricate in their analysis. I have in this project only highlighted the core aspects of his arguments, but the depth and complexity of his arguments, as well as the detailed historical and sociological background he provides for each position he discusses, make for a highly involved and dense academic corpus. There are, in addition to the books studied here, various articles and interviews which further nuance and explain his positions on various aspects of his thought, but the scope and aim of this project has led me to focus my discussion on the key texts in his body of work, and the key themes within those works.

MacIntyre's thought has been amended over the course of his project, so the shape of his response has grown more coherent and applicable, but his core critique of modernity has remained consistent throughout the *After Virtue* project and his career as a whole. However, these shifts in MacIntyre's thought, especially his acceptance of Thomism, have led to scrutiny from his peers. In the next chapter we will examine some of these critiques.

Chapter 5

Critiques of MacIntyre's Virtue Project

Abstract: An overview of some of the key criticisms that have been leveled against MacIntyre, especially relativism, but also with attention to the impact of his shift to Thomism.

Introduction

Given the breadth and depth of MacIntyre's criticisms, it is not surprising that his own project has received critiques of its own from the proponents of the ethical systems that it derides. MacIntyre's theory of rationality and his conception of the *telos* are commonly attacked because they seem to open him up to the same relativism that he so strongly criticizes. As MacIntyre's project develops and he shifts focus from Aristotle to Thomas, it addresses some of these criticisms, but reveals a new set of challenges which will be the focus of this chapter.

Relativism

MacIntyre's evolving project has endured a number of critiques over its various stages. The most common and most important is the accusation of relativism. Although this chapter aims to interact also with MacIntyre's adoption of

Thomism and its criticisms, we will first introduce the charge of relativism. It is the most common attack made on MacIntyre's project and his response to this accusation ties in closely with the changes he makes to his thought, including his turn to Thomism.

It may be helpful at this point to make some distinctions between the various terms and concepts being employed. MacIntyre sees most modern moral dialogue as functionally emotivist, which reduces moral judgments to matters of personal preference. Lutz describes the relativism that follows this: "Relativism arises when theorists despair of finding any tradition-independent measure by which to assess [moral] claims."[1] Perspectivism, which is the denial of any moral truth, together with relativism are "embodied in the moral subjectivism of contemporary emotivist culture."[2]

For his part, MacIntyre concedes that certain of the claims that are made in support of the emotivist case are valid. He himself holds that human reason is impaired and tied to cultural and linguistic forms, but he nevertheless believes that there is truth, including moral truth, and it is the aim of moral philosophy to seek that truth. While the emotivist will posit the question "Which truth?" assuming many exist, MacIntyre seeks to rephrase the question into a reasonable form and ask "Which rationality?"[3] (Hence the title of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) MacIntyre asks us instead to ask whose formulation for discovering truth is best,

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[1] Stephen Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Toronto: Lexington, 2004), 71.
[2] Ibid.

and analyze that, rather than to assume truth is a matter opinion, and somehow realized solely internally.

So it is true that MacIntyre accepts some of the terms used to support relativism, but he does so in this manner:

> Philosophical doctrines that are not susceptible to genuine refutation fall into at least two classes. There are some to which, in the light of rational justification that can be provided for them, we owe simple assent. But there are others to which our assent is or ought to be accorded only with recognition that what they present is a moment in the development of thought which has to be, if possible, transcended...Scepticism is one such doctrine; and relativism is another."[4]

MacIntyre feels compelled to concede some ground to the relativists, but does so reluctantly. It is interesting to note that the publication date of the above quoted work is 1985, in between *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* but within a year of the second edition of *After Virtue* in which he responds to critics who accuse him of relativism.

This charge of relativism is leveled against MacIntyre in several ways. Lutz believes the strongest attacks are those which deconstruct MacIntyre's concept of practices and those which note MacIntyre's belief that we currently lack the resources to recognize absolute truth, meaning that the best we can do is to find the best tradition from which to rationalize the truth and work with it the best we are able in order to ascertain the closest approximation we can to the absolute

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[3]Lutz, 73.

truth. Thus, it is impossible to entirely escape relativism holding this view of our ability to ascertain truth.[5] Nevertheless, MacIntyre does not fall victim to the forms of strong relativism he has been accused of.

As discussed earlier, MacIntyre's concept of the practices (those activities which through their practice and development foster and employ the virtues) are defined in *After Virtue* as:

> Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.[6]

MacIntyre goes on to give some examples of activities which, by his definition, qualify as practices: chess, architecture, and farming. Some examples he supplies of activities that do not qualify as practices include tic-tac-toe, bricklaying, planting turnips.[7] Activities are grouped into these classes based on what goods, if any are developed in their employment. He also further defines the 'goods' yielded by these practices as external and internal. External goods are those goods outside of one's self, the quantifiable benefits of a given practice, while internal goods are those which develop in the character of the participants.

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[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Relativism, Power and Philosophy," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* Vol. 59, No. 1 Sept. (1985), 5.
[5] Lutz, 74.
[6] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 187.

Note that MacIntyre has dichotomized human activity into activities that have the capacity to promote excellence, and those that do not. Practices, such as chess promote true excellence, tic tac toe, does not. But by what criterion do we decipher what is a practice from that which is not? The choice seems arbitrary, particularly given that practices exist within specific traditions, and according to MacIntyre's own account, we must work within the rationality of tradition. Is something a practice in one tradition but not in another? If so then MacIntyre seems to run into a type of relativism.

In response to Stanley Hauerwas and Paul Wadell's[8] question of what qualifies as a practice and why, MacIntyre simply states that practices are "modes of activity within which ends have to be discovered and rediscovered and means devised to pursue them."[9] This answer is not especially satisfying and Lutz explores MacIntyre's later work to reply more deeply to this early criticism.

Lutz notes that MacIntyre acknowledges the issues pertaining to evil practices and goods result from his early rejection of the unity of the virtues. He admits, for example, that "courage sometimes sustains injustice, that loyalty has been known to strengthen a murderous aggressor and that generosity has sometimes weakened the capacity to do good."[10] MacIntyre argued that it is

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Stanley Hauerwas and Paul Wadell, "Review of *After Virtue*" in *The Thomist* 46 No. 2 (1982), 313-323.
[9] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 273.
[10] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 200.

possible to have one virtue, but not another, making it possible to be courageous, but not kind or fair. In so doing, he rejected the unity of the virtues.

The unity of the virtues is the notion that in order to have one of the virtues, you must have them all in some measure. Thus those who conduct themselves in an evil manner are not employing real virtues, they merely appear virtuous. In order to be truly courageous, one must have at least something of kindness and fairness. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre rejected this unity of the virtues, in his later writing he concedes that he erred in this respect and accepts Aquinas's version of the unity of the virtues.[11] This also allows him to rebut many of the problems he faced with relativism.

MacIntyre uses practices as a starting point for his ethic, he defends this approach saying that "the importance for beginning from practices in any consideration of the virtues is not only worthwhile for its own sake...but has further point and purpose, and indeed that it is in grasping that point and purpose that we characteristically initially come to value the virtues.[12] Since they are such a crucial concept, the charge that they introduce relativism to MacIntyre's project in *After Virtue* is a serious one. In his original formulation practices that may promote one virtue but clearly defy others are still genuine practices. This limits moral assessments and, given the centrality of practices in MacIntyre's project, and its stated aims, presents a serious problem. Once he accepts the unity of the

[11] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, x.
[12] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 273.

virtues, practices that defy the virtues can be critiqued on those grounds, closing the gap that had led to this apparent relativism.[13]

Given that the virtues themselves are defined differently in different cultures, then it clearly follows that practices would vary as well. MacIntyre's acceptance of the unity of the virtues helps to address potential relativism here as well, since practices in other cultures can now be evaluated according to their conformity to the virtues.

Yet, this is not the only way in which MacIntyre's project has been accused of relativism. Gordon Graham notes that MacIntyre's scheme seems to fall into a trap that forces people to make a judgment about rationality without the resources to rationally do it. He contends that in our emotivist culture, we do not have a rational tradition, yet we need to make some judgment about the superiority or inferiority of different traditions to approach the truth in MacIntyre's scheme.[14] We seem to be left with a choice similar to Kierkegaard's radical choice.

MacIntyre, needless to say, forcefully rejects this notion. In his postscript to the second edition of *After Virtue* MacIntyre illustrates his formula for making rational deductions regarding the rational superiority of a rival tradition. We should note that this is the theory, explicated in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* where MacIntyre proposes that within a tradition and according to the terms of rationalization of that tradition it is possible to account for and present the claims

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[13] Lutz, 102.

of a rival tradition in an intelligible manner. This can, particularly in periods of epistemological crisis lead to one tradition drawing on the other to resolve this crisis, or even being absorbed by it. Note that MacIntyre is not appealing to standards independent of tradition, or principles that could be appealed to by any rational mind – he rejects these concepts. MacIntyre believes that we are able to make reasonable assessments of the rational claims of a tradition according to the terms of rationality of that or another tradition. It is precisely because the modern emotivist culture has a flawed rationality that it is possible for its adherents to be able to recognize its flaws and note the strength of a rival tradition.[15]

However, though this may be possible, it is not easy. J. L. A. Garcia notes that since MacIntyre sees us in a "kind of prolonged, epistemological crisis in the moral realm, MacIntyre is not eager to claim that we are in a position to resolve (or even to recognize) our crisis."[16] So while such interaction between traditions may be possible, the rational trap placed by emotivism and the limited scope and high degree of specialization sought by our academics make this increasingly difficult.

R. Scott Smith observes that it can be argued that attaining such an intimate knowledge of another tradition may not be possible because he questions

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[14] Gordon Graham, "MacIntyre on History and Philosphy," in *Alasdair MacIntyre* ed. Mark Murphy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 33.
[15] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 267-268.
[16] J.L.A Garcia, "Modern(ist) Moral Philosophy and MacIntyrean Critique," in *Alasdair MacIntyre* ed. Mark C. Murphy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105.

our ability to fully appropriate the moral language of a rival tradition in order to fully understand and evaluate it.[17] Without fully understanding the language of a tradition we cannot have complete comprehension of the tradition itself, preventing the type of dialogue that MacIntyre envisions. Garcia notes that MacIntyre's formula deflects this type of strong relativism, because he forces the relativist to make the claim that attaining such an understanding of another tradition is impossible, which requires the kind of certainty that relativism denies.[18] Smith also notes that MacIntyre can argue that anyone disputing him on these grounds "presupposes the ability to gain an epistemic vantage point outside of language. But since that is not possible, [the] claim is nothing but a claim made from within another tradition, in this case a liberal one, which, on his view, mistakenly denies that rationality is found only within traditions."[19]

Nevertheless, Smith denies that MacIntyre is able to fully free himself from the charge of relativism. The rebuttal described above depends on the accuser appealing to an extra-linguistic plane, which will prove unpersuasive to MacIntyre and his sympathizers. But, not making this assumption, Smith claims that MacIntyre's argument that we can judge the rational superiority of one tradition above another is unclear, arguing that "comparing one way of life to another is tantamount to just comparing one set of behaviors with another."[20] Smith doesn't

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[17] R. Scott Smith, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Knowledge* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 197.
[18] Garcia, 104.
[19] Smith, 197.
[20] Smith, 205.

think that, given MacIntyre's assumptions, there are any criteria by which to gauge the superiority of one tradition over another taking into account the nature of virtuous acts (which can appear irrational and unintelligible out of context). This leads Smith to conclude that MacIntyre and his supporters leave us without a "way to decide between ways of life...and that anything, even atrocities or other morally outrageous acts...could possibly be justified by any given linguistic group."[21]

The answer to Smith's primary objection is found in his second. The justification of atrocities within a linguistic group is not simply a possibility, it is a reality, and a reality stemming from flawed rationalities. MacIntyre believes that these flaws are determinable and that it is through these flaws we are able to judge one tradition against another.

There is a final way in which MacIntyre's project has been accused of relativism. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre makes clear his hesitations to accept a metaphysical biology as a root for the human *telos*. Instead MacIntyre began the process of describing how the *telos* is defined by one's own personal narrative, informed by the tradition and stories of which one is a part, thus it is a culturally determined variable, rather than a specific end common to all people. Our lives possess a narrative unity, and the narratives of which we are a part define our *telos*. Clearly, if the *telos* is variable from one tradition to another, and even within that tradition, there are clear grounds to charge relativism. William Frankena says

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[21] Smith, 207.

dismissively in a critique of *After Virtue* that according to MacIntyre "human life is a kind of indefinite pursuit of a (holy?) Grail not definable in advance."[22] That is, the very teleology of MacIntyre's account is in question, because the *telos* to which life it is to be aimed is not clear until these narratives are formed. J.B. Scheewind makes clear the peril in which this relativism places MacIntyre by noting that "the narrative unity of my life might assign me a vicious sort of role; yet we would not wish to regard the traits making me apt for it as virtues."[23] However, as MacIntyre's thought has developed he has distanced himself from the concept of a culturally defined *telos* as espoused in *After Virtue*, and conformed his thought within the Thomist tradition. This shift also answers J.B. Schneewind's charge. Further discussion on MacIntyre's thought on the goal and purpose of human life will be illuminated in the following section, but suffice to say that the acceptance of a Thomistic concept of the *telos* allows MacIntyre to overcome the most serious charges of relativism he has encountered.

Further to this, by the time *Dependant Rational Animals* was written, MacIntyre had accepted that biology has some bearing on our nature as ethical creatures and was promoting a more universal notion of human flourishing which recognizes our mutual dependence on one another and the state of varying degrees of disability into which we all fall.

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[22] William K. Frankena "MacIntyre and Modern Morality" *Ethics* Vol. 93 No. 3 (1983), 585.
[23] J.B. Schneewind "Virtue, Practice and Community: MacIntyre and Morality," *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 79 No. 11 (1982), 658.

The most common and serious criticism of MacIntyre's work is that it is relativistic, and as we have seen, it has come in a number of forms. As MacIntyre's project has evolved it has answered these criticisms, but these shifts have generated controversy of their own. MacIntyre's acceptance of the Thomistic tradition particularly, has generated serious criticism.

MacIntyre's Thomism

MacIntyre has expanded on his work in *After Virtue*, but he has also made some important adjustments to his thought, perhaps most significantly his conversion to the Catholic Church and his assumption of the Thomist tradition. We have already seen how this shift has helped him to overcome the relativist charge against his project. But with this change came new questions and challenges. We will examine the two most fundamental of these, the first that MacIntyre's theory is not authentically Thomist, and the second that his Thomism is driven by an ideology and is not true, impartial philosophy.

With MacIntyre's move to Thomism he has identified himself with a specific tradition and can be scrutinized on how consistent his own work is with that of his newly adopted tradition. In contributions to *After MacIntyre* Janet Coleman and John Haldane both question MacIntyre's use of Aquinas and the consistency of his Thomism. Coleman believes that MacIntyre has built an ethic in which practices are bound to traditions and which therefore betrays Aquinas' basic suppositions about truth and teleology. John Haldane suggests that MacIntyre's

work is incomplete and that he needs to more comprehensively demonstrate the truthfulness of Thomism, rather than using it to build critiques of rival traditions.

In "MacIntyre and Aquinas" Coleman provides an outline of Aquinas' thought and draws comparisons between her representation of Aquinas and her understanding of MacIntyre.[24] Coleman takes issue with MacIntyre's conception of:

> Human practices that are determined by the standards achieved 'so far' by historically situated practitioners, an understanding of human excellence that is open to change but that is determined by authorities at a particular time, rather than human excellence being determined by a timeless definition of what constitutes the essence of human nature in its existence.[25]

She argues this is contradictory to and incompatible with the teleological assumptions of both Aristotle and Aquinas. While Aristotle and Aquinas hold us to universal standards, MacIntyre appears to assume changing standards that are built without regard to a metaphysical *telos* upon which to found the unitary good for human life. Thus, in MacIntyre's own summation of Coleman's critique he "[has] fatally misunderstood both Aristotle and Aquinas"[26] in his attempt to adapt and reform Aristotelian Thomism without the metaphysical foundations of their original work.

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[24] Janet Coleman, "MacIntyre and Aquinas," in *After MacIntyre* (Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, 1994), 65-90.
[25] Coleman, 66.
[26] Alasdair MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to my Critics," in *After MacIntyre* (Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, 1994), 299.

MacIntyre goes on to defend his position, saying that "both Aristotle and Aquinas recognize a distinction between those timeless truths about natural kinds, essential properties and the teleological ordering of things and persons in terms of which all true and justified explanation and understanding has to be framed and the varyingly adequate attempts to formulate those truths which marked the history of enquiry."[27] MacIntyre reminds us to recognize the distinction he makes between truth and the varying ability of traditions throughout the history of enquiry to build systems of rationalization to perceive the truth.

Christopher Lutz goes into further detail, refuting Coleman's assertion that MacIntyre must accept a metaphysical biological *telos* to remain consistent with Aquinas. Lutz argues that MacIntyre's rejection of Aristotle's metaphysical biology does not assume an overall rejection of his metaphysics. He notes that Aristotle's metaphysical biology and conception of forms is untenable to the modern reader, if for no other reason than modern science has shown that make-up of the human material changes in succeeding generations through sexual reproduction, which defies Aristotle's contention that forms are immutable and that the *telos* is tied to the form.[28] Therefore MacIntyre is right to reject it. Lutz argues, however, that because Aristotle's *telos* is intellectual in nature, a metaphysical biology is not essential to embracing Aristotelian or Thomist teleology because both understood intellect to be a function of the soul, and soul is understood to have been imbued

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[27] MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to my Critics," 300.
[28] Lutz, 133-134.

from a divine source rather than from natural procreation.[29] Thus it is our created nature that imbues us with a *telos* and which forms the central unifying character of both Aquinas's and MacIntyre's teleology. It also demonstrates another way in which MacIntyre's Thomism and Catholicism have allowed him to maintain coherence as his project has developed.

Interestingly, in *Dependant Rational Animals* MacIntyre begins to explore the features of the human animal and to offer notions of what that nature means which may answer Coleman's call that we "need to agree that there is a level of conceptualization, thinking of universals, which is the species-specific language of thought, and here culture holds no sway."[30] Although *Dependant Rational Animals* was written before Lutz's book (which MacIntyre has endorsed), he does not employ it in his defense against Coleman. If *Dependant Rational Animals* did not present relevant aids to Lutz, neither did it fulfill Haldane's suggestion that MacIntyre's next book be a more thorough and rigorous defense of Thomism in broader terms.

In "MacIntyre's Thomist Revival: What Next?" Haldane presents his reservations about MacIntyre's theory of tradition bound rationality.[31] These reservations include 'suspicions of relativism', like those previously discussed, and related questions over the compatibility of MacIntyre's concepts of tradition

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[29] Lutz, 137.
[30] Coleman, 87.
[31] John Haldane, "MacIntyre's Thomist Revival: What Next?" in *After MacIntyre*

defined rationality with Aquinas's teaching on truth.[32] Haldane contends that these problems arise because MacIntyre fails to fully explicate his defense of Thomism, explaining it in terms of conflicts with rival traditions, and that he fails to define his Thomism on its own terms.

Lutz, in a form similar to the one he uses in dealing with Coleman, draws on a broad and careful reading of MacIntyre to demonstrate that he has maintained the key elements of Aquinas's metaphysics and indeed "does have a tradition-transcendent notion of truth."[33] He further explains that Aquinas himself recognized a difference between our apprehension of truth and the ultimate divine truth.[34] Without the divine truth our own apprehension of the truth would be merely an illusion and no real truth would exist. This depiction of Aquinas shows a compatibility with MacIntyre's own conception of truth and demonstrates another example of how his project presupposes the divine.

While Coleman and Haldane questioned MacIntyre's Thomism, we find a sympathetic Thomistic reading of MacIntyre in the Thomas Hibbs article in *The Thomist*, "MacIntyre's Postmodern Thomism: Reflections on *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry.*" In this article Hibbs describes MacIntyre's work as "a constructive post-modern Thomism, one which is not susceptible to the genealogical critique of encyclopedia and which circumvents the self destructive

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[32] Haldane, 96, 104.
[33] Lutz, 132.
[34] Lutz, 122-123.

tendencies of genealogy."[35] He characterizes MacIntyre's work as authentic Thomism, although he suggests that Aquinas's success in integrating rival traditions may stem primarily from the truth of his Christian convictions rather than his method of rationality.

In Hibbs' reflections on *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* he makes note of Martha Nussbaum's article "Recoiling from Reason" which accuses MacIntyre of foregoing impartial philosophical reason for ideological theology. One might anticipate this type of attack, given the vigor with which MacIntyre began to proclaim the necessity of a Christian basis for rational moral enquiry. In his commentary on *Veritatis Splendor* MacIntyre writes:

> Unless, unlike the rich young man, we respond to God's offer of grace by accepting it, we too shall be unable fully to understand and to obey the law in such a way as to achieve that ultimate good which gives to such understanding and obedience its point and purpose...without understanding of and obedience to God's law we become self-frustrating people...that is to say, both our moral lives and our philosophical enquiries are bound to be ultimately frustrated, unless we learn what the gospel has to teach.[36]

It is impossible then, in MacIntyre's opinion, to approach ethics with any hope of success outside of a Christian perspective which recognizes the centrality of God's grace and our decision to accept or reject that grace: "There is in the end,

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[35] Thomas S. Hibbs, "MacIntyre's Postmodern Thomism: Reflections on *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*" *The Thomist* 57 (1993), 277.
[36] Alasdair MacIntyre, "How Can We Learn What *Veritatis Splendor* Has to Teach?" *The Thomist* 58 (1994): 190.

on the Christian view, one and only one [truth] to be told about every moral agent, a story of how one loses one's life or gains it."[37]

In Nussbaum's article she argues that MacIntyre's embrace of Christianity has led him to answer the issues posed by *After Virtue* in a contradictory and irrational manner. She argues that MacIntyre has exchanged the impartial search for truth with an ideologically driven search for order and control in Catholicism.[38] Nussbaum finds MacIntyre further irrational because he has chosen the Catholic tradition while arguing that local languages and traditions are crucial to our ability to order ourselves and make sense of moral issues. Nussbaum states that "no moral system has exterminated local traditions more relentlessly and more successfully than Christianity, especially in its Roman Catholic form."[39] She presents the Augustinian ethic that Aquinas adapted to Aristotle's challenges as one focusing on sexual disobedience as central to the human moral condition, further arguing that Augustinian's sexual ethic is incompatible with the Aristotelian account.[40] Hibbs notes the inadequacy of this representation of Augustine, saying that it "is given to sweeping generalizations and unsubstantiated theories" and is

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[37] Alasdair MacIntyre, "What has Christianity to Say to the Moral Philosopher," in *The Doctrine of God and Theological Ethics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 28.
[38] Martha Nussbaum, "Recoiling from Reason: A Review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*" in *The New York Review of Books* Vol. 36 No. 19 (1989), 41.
[39] Nussbaum, 38.
[40] Nussbaum, 40.

led astray by her reliance on a single source on Augustine[41] and that this source is "at best a superficial and selective reading of Augustine."[42]

Lutz also notes the inadequacy of Nussbaum's argument on this and the previous points. Lutz delineates several issues with Nussbaum's arguments. On the issue of local traditions and their relationship with Christianity and the Catholic Church, Lutz notes that MacIntyre is not arguing for the legitimacy of each and every local tradition, he simply notes that it is within these traditions our rationalization and comprehension of the goods is and must be developed. When these local traditions encounter a rationally superior tradition it is MacIntyre's contention that these ought to incorporate characteristics or be incorporated into the rival tradition. Thus, that the Catholic Church informs and directs the rationality of various local traditions is consistent with MacIntyre's thought.[43]

Nussbaum's accusations regarding MacIntyre's motives seem incredible partially because they seem to ignore the process, the narrative if you will, that brought MacIntyre to accepting the Catholic faith. He came to it because he felt compelled to do so while on the honest philosophical journey started in *After Virtue.* When this is considered, we can put aside one aspect of her argument, but we are still left with the general question of religion in philosophy and whether one presupposes an ideology when approaching philosophy from a religious standpoint.

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[41] That source being Elaine Pagel's *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988)
[42] Hibbs, 295.

Nussbaum's attack is tantamount to a rejection of the idea that it is possible to do philosophy from a religious perspective. Lutz notes that "philosophy is rendered futile whenever we trade the work of discovering how the world is for the task of advancing some agenda or ideology."[44] In the quote from the beginning of this discussion from MacIntyre's commentary on *Veritatis Splendor,* we see that MacIntyre believes the success of any attempt to conceive of philosophical matters requires faith in the Christian gospel. Nussbaum is essentially saying the opposite, that this faith prevents such success. All this begs the question: is Nussbaum any less ideologically driven than MacIntyre? I would contend that she is at least as ideological, but lacking MacIntyre's recognition that he is working from within a tradition with specific assumptions.

Lutz notes that "from a Thomistic point of view, the acceptance of theological presuppositions is a precondition for the development of any adequate account of human life and conduct."[45] We are ironically enough, confronted with exactly the kind of moral incommensurability that started MacIntyre's project in the first place. To Nussbaum with her presumptions and assumptions MacIntyre's work, and all religious philosophy, will seem ideologically driven and unphilosophical. To the Thomist and to other Christian philosophers recognition

[43] Lutz, 169.
[44] Lutz, 179.
[45] Lutz, 189.

and acceptance of basic theological presumptions is necessary for philosophical enquiry.[46]

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined several of the most serious challenges posed to MacIntyre's project. We have seen how he and his supporters have responded to these challenges, with particular attention paid to how MacIntyre's turn to Thomism has enabled him to overcome a great number of these accusations and build a coherent and consistent theory. In the following chapter we will take a closer look at how the Evangelical community can draw on and benefit from what MacIntyre has accomplished.

[46] Lutz, 189.

Chapter 6

What MacIntyre Means to the Church

Abstract: An examination of how MacIntyre's work is useful to the church.

Introduction

MacIntyre's project has been highly influential in the years since *After Virtue's* publication. His critique of modernity, his efforts to revive an ethics of virtue, to restore the concept of the *telos,* and to build the foundations upon which a revived moral tradition might be erected have been the topic of many books, articles and – doubtless – theses. He has drawn on an extraordinary range of material in proving and building his case. In addition to theology and philosophy MacIntyre employs art and literature as well as many branches of the social sciences: history, psychology, sociology, linguistics and from the natural sciences physics and biology. This ambitious project has attracted a great deal of attention, including some from the church. After having examined MacIntyre's work, what can we learn from it, and how can it be applied to the life of the church?

Emotivism and Deontology

There are several aspects of MacIntyre's work that are very clearly useful to the church. MacIntyre gives a compelling account of how our culture has come to the point of moral incommensurability it now finds itself in. This is a powerful and useful description of the moral discourse in our culture. During my time in seminary, talk of the challenge relativism poses to the message of the church and the frustration it was causing evangelicals was a common refrain, and I'm sure still is. MacIntyre's explanation and critique of this phenomenon should prove instructive to an evangelical community attempting to cope with it.

Of course MacIntyre also makes challenges that confront evangelicals directly. Evangelicalism favours the deontological method and MacIntyre's critique of the Encyclopedia has a strong bearing on evangelicals as inheritors of the deontological method, although I think we are able to deflect several key features of this argument.[1]

Nevertheless, we must take seriously MacIntyre's reservations about our ability to reason objectively and the degree to which our perceptions are determined by our own presumptions and understandings. We must also appreciate that unless we acknowledge and comprehend our own system of rationality our moral assertions can fall into the same emotivist trap MacIntyre identifies in the society at large.

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[1] Evangelicals have a fairly well developed tradition of interpretation (whether it's acknowledged or not), as well as an understanding of the core creeds of the faith. Furthermore, because we appeal more directly to divine command than to rationally accessible principles, some of MacIntyre's critique of the *Encyclopedia* does not apply.

In "Positioning MacIntyre within Christian Ethics" Brad Kallenberg has demonstrated ways in which MacIntyre can be employed to strengthen the deontological framework.[2] He shows three ways in which deontologists can use MacIntyre's concepts to complete their project. First, they require a narrative by which to understand and interpret a theology of God. We must understand something about the nature and character of God in order to obey him and justify our doing so. Kallenberg introduces us to Plato's question as to whether right and wrong are thus because God dictates rightness and wrongness, in which case if God willed something evil, would it become good? On the other hand, if God's goodness means that he conforms to some external criterion for goodness, it seems to diminish his sovereignty. Kallenberg believes that the answer to this problem is in understanding and appreciating the character of our loving God, an understanding and appreciation that is fostered in the type of narrative scripts of our Christian communities, traditions, and scripture that MacIntyre describes.[3] When our understanding of God is thus informed and the character of God understood Kallenberg believes divine command ethics can be validated.

It should also be noted that MacIntyre himself addresses the common misconception that he has attempted to replace a 'morality of rules' with a 'morality of virtues.' Indeed, MacIntyre argues "any adequate morality of the virtues require[s] as its counterpart a morality of rules."[4] Laws are an expression

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[2] Brad Kallenberg, "Positioning MacIntyre within Christian Ethics," in *Virtue and Practices in the Christian Tradition* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1997), 45-81.
[3] Kallenberg, "Positioning MacIntyre," 71.
[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), ix.

of the virtues, and require the virtues to be executed with fairness.[5] So in this manner an account and understanding of the virtues and a teleological perspective serves to justify and support rules and their application.

Secondly, one of MacIntyre's central theses is that we comprehend our world in terms of narrative.[6] We require a narrative tradition of past exegesis to interpret the sources for understanding God's commands. MacIntyre's concept that traditions are comprised of practises reminds us that traditions consist of shared beliefs and assumptions derived through the exercise of various practices in the past and that without the benefit of these we are again contextless and lost. "The divine command theory is feasible only if there is already in place a group of master exegetes whose answers, however provisional, stand firm for the community members."[7] So, our own exegesis of scripture and tradition works from the history of tradition that precedes us. The various traditions we belong to inform the way in which we read these sources.

Finally, the tradition bound convictions that bind us together must be consulted as a source for justification and exegesis.[8] When approaching the canonical texts of our faith, we do some from a perspective informed from our tradition as to what the goal and purpose of human life is comprised of. This allows us to justify the reading and interpretation of the text we are employing. Indeed, "the divine command theory hinges on a prior conviction about what

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[5] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 152.
[6] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 211.
[7] Kallenberg, "Positioning MacIntyre," 72.
[8] Kallenberg, "Positioning MacIntyre," 74.

human life is for."[9] The Evangelical deontological ethical tradition is thus enriched and strengthened by the introduction of MacIntyre's concepts.

Kallenberg also explores the thought of liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez and the Mennonite John Howard Yoder to exemplify how MacIntyre is informative and useful to them. Kallenberg links MacIntyre's *teleological* view of humanity to both Gutierrez's and Yoder's eschatological visions, and demonstrates that while they come from widely different views, they can be said to be engaging in the type of dialogue within the Christian tradition MacIntyre describes as the natural and essential process for development and refinement of a tradition of rationality. But, Kallenberg notes that they, along with Hauerwas, go beyond MacIntyre's vision of the *teleological* by assigning a *telos* to the tradition itself, namely the Kingdom of God.[10]

MacIntyre's Appraisal of Individualism

Another aspect of MacIntyre's work that is instructive to the church is his portrayal of the self. His characterization of the individual within post-teleological modernity will resonate with church leaders who have seen the disenfranchisement of their congregations. MacIntyre portrays the self as lost and seeking power and status from a community rather than seeking definition and meaning from within that community.

This individualism leads to the rights-oriented power struggles that typify current moral dialogue. As a church we can and ought to foster a definition of the

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[9] Kallenberg, "Positioning MacIntyre," 74.
[10] Kallenberg, "Positioning MacIntyre," 80.

self that is understood in context of the community of faith. We must understand the self as comprising a part the body of Christ, and understand the purpose and potential with which God has imbued us. MacIntyre's understanding of community, tradition and narrative can help us to achieve these things.

MacIntyre says the self presented by emotivism that it:

> Cannot be simply or unconditionally identified with any particular moral attitude or point of view...because of the fact that its judgements are in the end criterionless...[it] finds no limits set to that on which it may pass judgement for such limits could only derive from rational criteria and, as we have seen, the emotivist self lacks any such criteria...to be a moral agent is, on this view, precisely to be able to stand back from any and every situation in which one is involved...and to pass judgement on it from a purely universal and abstract point of view that is totally detached from all social particularity.[11]

This is an extremely important observation for the modern church because it accounts for the resistance of the general public to the appointment of religious to places of authority. It is counted as an important moral feature of a public servant that he or she is able to 'put aside' whatever personal convictions might pertain to a given issue and render judgement from outside his or her tradition. This implicitly reveals that to the modern mind we assign more confidence to an individual to render moral judgement than to an established moral tradition. It also explains, in part, the growing distrust of religious institutions and convictions in general, as well as the weakening of the church's moral authority and influence; the church's perspective is just one among many, with no more validity

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[11] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 31-32.

than that of any given individual. For these reasons, MacIntyre's critique of the modern emotivist self is very important to the church.

Terms and Concepts

Another manner in which MacIntyre's project is helpful to us is that it has introduced a number of concepts and terms that are helpful to the church as we endeavour to understand and describe the functions of the church. In defining virtues in terms of goods, practices, narratives and traditions MacIntyre has developed a group of terms and concepts that can be useful to the church. When one considers the various functions and activities of the church as practices and then contemplates what goods are being encouraged through the various practices we can see more clearly the nature and benefit of the functions of the church.

Nancey Murphy argues that MacIntyre's work offers a compelling meta-ethical framework from which to justify and rationalize key Christian ethical demands. In fact she goes as far as to say that his "set of concepts (virtue, practice, narrative, tradition) and his account of the relations among them offer the best available resources for making and justifying first-order Christian claims."[12] When we recognize ourselves as part of the Christian tradition, in MacIntyre's sense we can "return unselfconsciously to the claim that the Bible is authoritative for Christian ethics,"[13] since we are affirming and recognizing the basic tenets and presumptions of our tradition, and acknowledging their

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[12] Nancey Murphy, "Using MacIntyre's Method in Christian Ethics," in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997), 30.
[13] Murphy, 32.

authoritative status. The Scriptures as the core text of our collective narrative can be replaced to their rightful status.

Murphy also makes note of how conceptualizing the functions of the church in these terms can be illustrative. She gives the example of worship, considered as a practice. What goods are produced through the worship we engage in? Are the goods internal or external? Are the worship services 'serving' God, or the worshippers?

Jonathan R. Wilson argues, "We must simply learn to think of the church's activities as practices in MacIntyre's sense."[14] In so doing, we would be considering the functions of the church in terms of their purpose, and with an understanding of the goods they should produce. Also addressing worship, Wilson notes that:

> The form and style of worship is a source of conflict as anything other than an expression of personal preference. If we formulated the conflict in terms of MacIntyre's practice, then we would be better able to locate the conflict in relation to the goods of the church and the enhancement of our ability to conceive and extend those goods...excellence in worship would be defined in ways appropriate to, and partially definitive of practice of worship, not of, say, group therapy, entertainment, or a motivational rally.[15]

Contemplating worship and other church activities in MacIntyre's terms reveals the ends and goods they are aiming toward, and allows us to evaluate whether these are consistent with the role and purpose of the church.

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[14] Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997), 61.
[15] Wilson, 62.

Restoring Tradition

MacIntyre's insistence on ascribing to and obedience to a tradition must also draw careful attention from evangelical Christians. The tendency among certain evangelicals to dismiss tradition and heritage deprives them of the benefit of two thousand years of thought, prayer and contemplation. It also signifies a failure to recognize that whether it is acknowledged or not, we all belong to some form of tradition, and this affects the way we reason and interpret our faith, including how we read and understand the Bible. When this fact is acknowledged we are able to honestly reflect and evaluate our presumptions and interpretations.

MacIntyre's work has proven useful to many theologians who are addressing the challenges posed by post-modernism and those interested in readdressing narrative and tradition in the church. Various streams of theological reflection: post-liberal, narrative, radical orthodox and the emergent movement all have drawn on MacIntyre's work. Brad Kallenberg and Nancey Murphy, both of whom I have cited in this chapter, are both unabashed fans of his work. However, the best-known and most influential theologian to make significant use of MacIntyre is Stanley Hauerwas. His work has focused on the Christian community faithfully and boldly representing God's Kingdom on Earth. He has forcefully made the case for tradition, and for considering ethical matters from a distinctly Christian tradition.[16]

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[16] See Stanley Hauerwas, "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological," in *Revisions* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 16-42.

In *Christians among the Virtues* Hauerwas and Charles Pinches draw heavily upon MacIntyre in considering an ethics of virtue from a Christian perspective.[17] While they do take issue with the manner in which MacIntyre has appropriated the virtues – saying he draws too heavily on Aristotle whose conception of virtue is in some ways incompatible with the Christian's (including Aquinas) - their work would be impossible without his. Their account, nevertheless, also begins with Aristotle. The book goes on to put the Christian account of virtue front and centre, as they are addressing the topic from a theological perspective, rather than a philosophical one, which MacIntyre has maintained.[18] In Hauerwas' and Pinches' account they explore the uniquely Christian perspective on the virtues of hope, obedience, courage and patience.

MacIntyre notes that the beginning is not with theorizing alone, "we need instead to begin with practice and good theory of practice."[19] Ethics cannot function alone in the realm of theory, but must be practiced. Theory "enables practice to be reflectively thoughtful and so to remedy what have been its defects and limitations."[20] Since our culture is encumbered by a theory that blinds and discourages such evaluation, a change to the theory must be made, but proper ethical theory nevertheless is grounded in practice. Murphy notes the importance of "acquiring virtue in order to read one's formative texts aright."[21] Hauerwas has

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[17] Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1997).
[18] MacIntyre discusses how he differentiates the philosophical and theological trades in "What Has Christianity to Say to the Moral Philosopher," *The Doctrine of God and Theological Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 17-32. He notes that his trade has been the philosophical one, but also acknowledges Barth's challenge that philosophy done un-theologically can produce no answers.
[19] Alasdair Macintyre, "The Recovery of Moral Agency?" *The Best of Christian Writing* ed. John Wilson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000), 120.
[20] MacIntyre, "Recovery?" 121.
[21] Murphy, 33.

made the startling claim that Scripture ought to be read only within the confines of an interpretive community;[22] meaning that the average Christian, unschooled in the practice of interpreting Scripture, does not have the discipline, or virtue to read it.

In summarizing MacIntyre's influence on his thought, Hauerwas writes that the most important influence MacIntyre has had on his thought has been "his work on the philosophy of action...the conditions necessary for our actions to be intelligible to others as well as ourselves."[23] That is, MacIntyre's assertion that we understand ourselves in terms of narrative and community means that when these break down, we fail to understand ourselves. Hauerwas believes that MacIntyre's

> Understandings of the centrality of practical reason, the significance of the body for agency, why the teleological character of our lives must be displayed through narrative, the character of rationality, the nature of the virtues, why training in a craft is paradigmatic of learning to think as well as to live, his understanding of why the Enlightenment project had to fail, his particular way of being a historicist, and why the plain person is the necessary subject of philosophy,[24]

all stem from his contention that "the intelligibility of an action depends on the narrative continuities in an agent's life."[25] In modernity we lack the narratives to adequately comprehend our actions.

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[22] See Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Abingdon Press, 1993).
[23] Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things* October (2007), 36.
[24] Hauerwas, "Virtues of MacIntyre," 37.
[25] Hauerwas, "Virtues of MacIntyre," 37.

Hauerwas has demonstrated that MacIntyre provides good tools for theologians and that his work can and has been brought to good use in helping the church to understand itself and its purpose. In fact, he would say MacIntyre's work is essential to that aim.

At the end of *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* Wilson suggests a 'new monasticism.' Just as monasteries kept learning alive amid the ignorance and superstition of the dark ages, Wilson imagines a new monastic system that would foster and build the teleological Christian tradition.[26] MacIntyre describes us as living in a type of dark ages now, and believes we need small communities that adhere to tradition and intelligible reason to keep these things alive, and to keep the hope of moral intelligibility alive.[27] This is, I think, analogous to the role Hauerwas envisions for the Church.

Conclusion

We have observed several ways in which MacIntyre's work is useful to the church. He has persuasively accounted for and critiqued the emotivism we so frequently encounter. He has reminded us that we belong to a tradition and that it is right and necessary for us to draw on the history and presumptions of our tradition in contemplating ethical matters. He has criticized deontological ethics, but also provided useful tools for working with divine command ethics. He has developed a system of terms and concepts with which to understand our actions and activities. In his emphasis on the *telos* he has reminded us to consider in all

[26] Jonathan Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1997), 70.
[27] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 263.

things the point and purpose of our lives, and in turn the point and purpose of the church.[28] He has further reminded us of the limits of our rationality and the necessity of ascribing and recognizing our own narratives and traditions. He critiques our image of the individual standing apart from these and the impact it has had on our culture.

MacIntyre has produced an important body of work we cannot afford to ignore. His compelling account of the state and history of the fragmented modern ethical discourse is indispensable in understanding the world in which we live and why our ethical debates are intransigent. The revival of the teleological approach to ethics provides a more satisfactory and practical way for us to apply ethical teaching to our lives; one that not only helps us to identify and understand right and wrong, but one that can help us to become the kind of people who will choose rightly. His emphasis on tradition and narrative reminds us of the special and peculiar role the church has to play in bringing about the Kingdom of God.

[28] There seems here to be a note that may resonate well in the Holiness tradition: the assignment of 'entire sanctification' as an attainable earthly *telos*.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This study has sought to provide to the reader a useful introduction to MacIntyre and an assessment of his project. His work is complex and erudite, at times to the point of befuddlement. The hope is that this thesis will lend clarity to the opaque. MacIntyre has had an important influence upon the field of ethics, both Christian and non-Christian. His appraisal of modernity and its power, his creative and controversial proposals, and the terms and concepts he has created to describe them have much to yield, and much to recommend them to Evangelicals.

Summary

Having in the first Chapter described the crisis MacIntyre seeks to address and identified the intent of the thesis to introduce MacIntyre's thought and point us as to how it might be employed to the good of the church, Chapter 2 was an overview of the Aristotelian teleological tradition. We also introduced Aquinas and some important modifications introduced by Aquinas' integration of Aristotle to Augustinian Christianity. MacIntyre draws primarily on Aristotle and Aquinas to

found his own work, so we looked at them before being introduced to MacIntyre's own work.

Chapter 3 was a brief outline of the history of ethics that shows the development of the Enlightenment and liberalism which MacIntyre finds so problematic. The story of how modernity came into being is important in understanding its nature. Given the time MacIntyre spends detailing this development, if we are to understand his work we must have an outline of what it is he is trying to correct.

In Chapter 4 we discussed MacIntyre's critique of modernity and provided an outline of his work through *After Virtue, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* with attention to the changes in his thought, especially pertaining to his shift from focussing on Aristotle to focussing on Aquinas, coinciding with his return to Christianity.

The most common criticism of MacIntyre's project is that it succumbs to relativism, Chapter 5 described this criticism and how MacIntyre and his supporters have responded to it. MacIntyre's Thomism aids him in countering this charge, but introduces new critiques which are also summarized.

Chapter 6 discussed ways in which MacIntyre's work can and has proven to be fruitful for the church. Specifically, we outlined how the Christian community may benefit from his assessment of modernity and description of the emotivist nature of current ethical dialogue, his critique of Kantian ethics, his understanding of narratives, his assessment of individualism in modernity, the

terms and concepts he has developed and his insistence on the necessity of communities of tradition.

Conclusion

Through the lengthy process of producing this thesis I have become convinced that certain of MacIntyre's claims are valid and require our attention. In particular, his account and assessment of modernity and his argument for a teleological approach to ethics are persuasive arguments we cannot afford to ignore. MacIntyre has had an important impact on the current theological landscape, and his impact will continue to be felt. After MacIntyre we are better able to live well, know ourselves, and seek virtue.

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