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Critical Notice

Ethics Revised: Flourishing as Vulnerable and Dependent

Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, Duckworth, 1999. Pp. xiii + 172. ISBN 0–7156–2902–6. £14.95.

I

With the publication twenty years ago of *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre staked out a powerfully distinctive position in contemporary moral and political philosophy. There has, of course, been a significant revival of 'virtue ethics' over the past few decades and a related renewal of interest in Aristotle's *Ethics*. But though MacIntyre has signally contributed to this wider retrieval, the force and ambition of his work have far outreached it as an identifiable focus of scholarly and philosophical concern. His reclamation of Aristotle has at the same time been an assault on master pretensions of modernity, in particular on the idea and ideal of individuality canonized by political liberalism. In this assault, historical reinterpretation and philosophical argument have combined to offer a radically alternative reading of contemporary predicaments. And the offensive has been conducted on a double front, not only contesting central tenets of liberal modernity but also rebutting a philosophical tendency that has powered a 'post-modern' attack on the same target: having Hume and Kant with their later successors (e.g. Moore and Stephenson, Hare and Rawls) squarely in his sights has not deflected MacIntyre from a no less robust engagement with Nietzsche and his heirs (e.g. Foucault and Deleuze).

Those who have followed the trajectory of MacIntryre's work from *After Virtue* (*AV*) through *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (*WJWR*) to *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (*TRVME*) will be curious about his most recent book, *Dependent Rational Animals* (*DRA*). But before turning to this book, I want to consider that trajectory. *AV* was – and was quickly and widely recognized, by friend and foe as well as by intrigued by-standers (by no means all of them professional philosophers), as – a bravura piece of philosophical writing. A corruscating indictment of the mores of 'advanced' societies and of the assortment of theorists who might lend them a patina

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of rational acceptability, it moved with agility and aplomb between sociological analysis (and social commentary), historical reconstruction (and deconstruction), anthropological insight, literary readings, and an interpretation of the project of social science to produce a sweeping philosophical argument. The negative conclusion of this argument was that, three centuries of conceptual exertion notwithstanding, we still 'lack any coherent rationally defensible statement of a liberal individualist point of view', while its positive upshot was that 'the Aristotelian tradition can be restated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments' (p. 241). Perhaps it was unclear how the refurbished Aristotelianism that MacIntyre provided could lend intelligibility to *our* attitudes and commitments – rather than call them into question and require their radical reconstitution. But however that may be, MacIntyre had at once offered a trenchant diagnosis of 'the *ethos* of the distinctively modern and modernising world' (p. viii) *and* developed a profile of ethical/political virtue that was recognizably Aristotelian (even as it traced back to Homer and forward through various medieval figures at least up to Jane Austen) – and had done so in such a way that the diagnosis and the profile illuminated and reinforced each other.

The transition from *AV* to *WJWR* can be variously characterized. Focusing on the self-ascriptions through which MacIntyre identifies the provenances of his deep-lying philosophical commitments, one might notice the Aristotelian of the first book transmuting into the 'Augustinian Christian' (p. 10) of the second. Or, to forestall any assumption that this transmutation must entail major contradiction, one might advert to the large profile of Aquinas in *WJWR*: for it was Aquinas's great achievement to integrate the rival and apparently incompatible claims of the Aristotelian and Augustinian traditions (in *AV* Augustine had merited only a single aside, while even in the chapter on 'Medieval Aspects and Occasions' Aquinas had been 'an unexpectedly marginal figure' (p. 166)). Or again one might notice the greater density of the historical treatment in *WJWR*, at least a quarter of which is devoted to a very detailed interpretation of the Scottish Enlightenment. To be sure, *AV* was itself a deeply historical book – or, rather, a philosophical book which (inspired by 'writers such as Hegel and Collingwood' rather than by 'analytical or phenomenological philosophy') conceived of philosophy as inseparable from history, and the history of ideas as inseparable from the history of practices and institutions. Still, the historical sketches move along briskly, very evidently furthering rather than deflecting the impetus of MacIntyre's fiercely critical engagement with the present. It is true, too, that this engagement remains as a constant undercurrent in *WRWJ* – and often bubbles to the surface (as in the casually iconclastic and very MacIntyrean characterization of the *New York Times* as 'the parish magazine of affluent and self-congratulatory liberal enlightenment' (p. 5)). But the two books make very different kinds of

impact on a reader. And the main reason for this is a change of focus signalled quite clearly in the closing chapter of *AV*.

From the beginning of that book MacIntyre was acutely aware of the extent to which his argument would commit him to nothing less than a scorched-earth strategy, leaving him 'step by step deprived ... of very nearly all possible argumentative allies' (p. 4). Undeterred by this awareness, however, he went on to prosecute his case with considerable élan; indeed, a notable feature of *AV* is how it moves with such evident brio to its 'drastic conclusion'. When the moves have been made, however, MacIntyre is aware that a formidable group of antagonists still remains to speak up for the positions that he takes himself to have undermined. And it is here that the change of focus is announced. 'Arguments in philosophy', he writes, 'rarely take the form of proofs', and so 'those who wish to resist some particular conclusion are rarely without any resort'. It does not follow from this, however, that

> no central issue is philosophy is settlable. ... But when an issue is settled, it is often because the contending parties – or someone from among them – have stood back from their dispute and asked in a systematic way what the *appropriate rational procedures* are for settling this particular kind of dispute. It is my own view that the time has come once more when it is imperative to perform this task for moral philosophy; but I do not pretend to have embarked upon it in this present book.
>
> (pp. 241–2; my italics)

The difference of approach in MacIntyre's next two books derived from his standing back and undertaking this imperative task. In doing so he was led to articulate a full-blown account of rationality and thus to enlarge the focus of his concern from moral and political issues to explicitly epistemological ones. The deepening of his historical approach is of a piece with this change of focus. For rationality, as it turns out in his account, is always the rationality of this or that particular historical tradition. And there is no tradition-independent means either of vindicating any one tradition or of adjudicating between it and other rival traditions. This fact does not imply any concession to relativism or irrationalism, however. For in the course of its development (and notwithstanding the contingency and positivity of its origins in a set of socially embedded and more or less well cohering beliefs) the robustness of any tradition is tested by strains or inconsistencies that can cumulate to the point of full-blown epistemological crisis. It is in its capacity retrospectively to narrate the series of internal adjustments through which it has successfully surmounted such crises *and* to offer an account of why another rival tradition fails to surmount *its* besetting crises – in terms meaningful both on its own

terms and in terms of the rival tradition – that its claim to rationality is vindicated.

By the end of *WJWR* MacIntyre takes himself to have provided a narrative of the Thomist tradition in which the internal coherence and resourcefulness of Thomism in dealing with external critics have been persuasively exhibited. And yet, heroic as MacIntyre's endeavour may appear to a reader (and does appear to this reader), his conclusions are avowedly modest, falling short of the kind of 'settlement' envisaged at the end of *AV*, if only one of the contending parties 'stood back' and asked about 'the appropriate rational procedures'. In the later book it has become clear that such settlement could be achieved by nothing less than the enactment of a dauntingly world-historical dialectic. For there are, he there acknowledges, other narratives best told by partisans of other traditions (he mentions Jewish, Islamic, Indian and Chinese and, more locally – a counterpart to the Scottish tradition in which he situates Hume – the Prussian tradition that produced Kant); and it is only in the working through of the conflicts between these different, in some respects incommensurable, and perhaps in some cases still largely unwritten, argumentative narratives that rational resolution could be achieved.

The enactment of this dialectic being a manifestly impossible project for any single author, MacIntyre's strategy in *TRVME* is to further develop his account of Thomism, less as one tradition among many competitors than as a philosophical viewpoint in which the reality of moral enquiry as constituted by and constitutive of tradition is very adequately acknowledged, and to counterpose to it two positions which attempt to deny tradition altogether: *encyclopaedia*, the claim to a unified reason whose impersonal standards and methods, universally established – in 'morality' as in everything else – underwrite a narrative of straightforward epistemic progress; and *genealogy*, a subversive posture which unmasks every universalist claim as the construct of a particular perspective that can have no entitlement to epistemic primacy over *other* perspectives since, like them, it is a more or less distorted expression not of the search for truth but of the will to power. 'Encyclopaedia' here represents the self-misunderstanding of Enlightenment in its nineteenth-century heyday; it is the epistemological conceit of that liberalism which had been MacIntyre's primary target in *AV* and which (its protestations of neutrality notwithstanding) he had shown in *WJWR* to be itself a tradition – albeit one now in terminal decline. Genealogy too had been anticipated in *AV*; for it of course derives from Nietzsche, who had been recognized in a cardinal chapter both as the most unflinching witness to the hollowness of Enlightenment ambitions and as the ultimate antagonist of Aristotle. In *TRVME*, MacIntyre renews his argument against genealogy, extending it to heirs of Nietzsche such as Foucault and Deleuze; this complex argument turns on issues of personal identity and continuity that, as he suggests, genealogists must covertly

presuppose despite their expressly denying them. But he still takes very seriously the genealogical challenge, whose deconstruction of encyclopaedia he takes the latter to be incapable of rebutting. While it is now 'long after . . . due time to recognise the defeat of the encyclopaedists', in the case of genealogy, he concedes, it is 'not yet due time' (p. 215) to conclude that it will be unable, on its own terms, to vindicate its project. And so debate between genealogist and Thomist remains open – albeit that, in MacIntyre's view, it is a debate that is always likely to be distorted when conducted within the liberal university which still acts *as if* encyclopaedic claims remain unimpugned.

II

Insofar as *Dependent Rational Animals* argues in its final two chapters against, respectively, Rorty's insouciant ironist and Nietzsche's unbound hero, it may be seen as a further instalment in this continuing debate. This new book is, however, a very interesting development of MacIntyre's position that – happily, I believe – does not continue the meta-concern with rational presuppositions of *WJWR* and *TRVME*. Much more than either of these books, it returns him to the substantive analysis of virtue and human flourishing that he had taken up so brilliantly in *AV*. Epistemological preoccupations in *WJWR* had led him to inveigh against those who would begin in moral enquiry not 'from any theory . . . but rather . . . from *the facts themselves*' (p. 332) and later to write that 'facts, like telescopes and wigs for gentlemen, were a seventeenth century invention' (p. 357). In nice contrast to this, however, in the preface to *DRA* he invites rival philosophers to show how, 'from each of their standpoints, due place can be given to the facts' (p. xii) and later he writes: '[w]hen philosophers have said: "it must be so" and those with the relevant kind of experience say "it is not so", the philosophers have not always been in the right' (p. 18). The facts here which the book is designed to draw attention to are those of human animality, fragility and dependency; and those with the 'relevant kind of experience' include ethologists, animal trainers, child psychologists – and women. MacIntyre remains, of course, a dialectical thinker, and his argument proceeds via adroit engagements with contemporary philosophers in the analytic and continental traditions, with Hume and Adam Smith, and of course with Aristotle and Aquinas. It is striking, however, that he begins with a page of generous acknowledgement of certain strands of feminist thought.[1] And though this is indeed a *philosophical* kind of thought, it is one that, running athwart debates in and between the philosophical traditions with which he has contended in earlier writings, draws attention to a kind of experience with which women have had peculiar intimacy. (Clearly MacIntyre does not regard it as *exclusive* to women. Echoing a remark in the preface to *AV*, he refers to

prephilosophical sources – too belatedly captured in his philosophy – for his own recognition of these experiences; and near the end he sees it as one of the book's main lessons to have made clear the respect in which 'men need to become more like women' (p. 164).)[2]

MacIntyre's friendly attitude to feminism reflects a more eirenic attitude throughout the book. To be sure, he is still arguing against 'mainstream moral philosophy in the advanced societies of the West' (p. 4). But the polemical tone is more muted and one sees more easily how, his anti-Enlightenment animus notwithstanding, he is himself a modern thinker. He has no difficulty, for example, in acknowledging that 'from Darwin we should by now have learned that human history . . . is the history of one more animal species' (when he goes on: 'we all of us, or almost all of us, know this' (p. 11), one may reflect wryly on how effectively in other writings he has deconstructed others' use of the little word 'we'!).[3] It is clear too, from the attention given to the work of Donald Winnicott, how much he is prepared to learn from the Freudian legacy. Or again there is the relaxed concession – hard to imagine in the earlier books – that 'modern moral philosophy has understandably and rightly placed great stress upon individual autonomy' (p. 8).

None of this, however, should suggest that the leopard has changed his spots. MacIntyre's basic question here is still the Aristotelian one: what is human flourishing? And he still gives the Aristotelian answer: a virtuous life. What is new is the enlarged understanding he now offers of the human being about whom the question is asked (and who also, of course, asks it), leading to a different inflection in the account of virtuous living that provides the answer. True to his oft-repeated dictum that a tradition lives only by self-correction and renewal, he is engaged here in a self-conscious revision of Aristotle and of his own earlier work. The first of the book's two main themes – the fact of human *animality* – involves a correction of his own earlier attempt to correct Aristotle in *AV*. There he had tried to provide a core conception of the virtues that, while still recognizably Aristotelian, would dispense with Aristotle's 'metaphysical biology'. Here, however, he writes: 'I now judge that I was in error in supposing an ethics independent of biology to be possible' (p. x). The book's other main theme entails a repudiation of a characteristic element in Aristotle's catalogue of virtues, 'greatness of soul' (*megalopsychia*). The great-souled man, masterful and strong, is comfortable in giving but not in receiving – and thus conceals the facts of human *vulnerability* and *dependency*. It is to these basic anthropological facts (neglected or suppressed not only by Aristotle but by 'Western moral philosophy . . . [f]rom Plato to Moore and since') and the other basic fact of our animality (well recognized by Aristotle, as much biologist as moral and political philosopher) that MacIntyre tries to do justice in this book, reconfiguring as he does so his account of the virtues.

The most substantial and consequential part of the book is contained, I believe, in the central chapters dealing with vulnerability and dependency. These bring into profile 'virtues of acknowledged dependency' and also provide a richly illuminating analysis of moral education – thus making good a lack, as it seems to me, not only in Aristotle's ethics but in more recent accounts of 'virtue ethics',[4] including MacIntryre's own account in his earlier work. These chapters are followed by an examination of socio-political issues, especially with respect to the family and the nation-state, that I shall discuss later, and by a concluding riposte to Richard Rorty and Nietzsche, both understood as (in their different ways) foes of an ethics reconciled to dependency. And they are preceded, after a brief introduction, by an analysis of animals. Illuminating as this analysis is, the question arises as to how necessary or integral it is to the ethical account that follows.

III

This question requires us to clarify the nature of MacIntyre's departure in *AV* from Aristotle's biologically based ethics and the reason for his now finding this departure to be an error. Much of the originality of *AV* lay in its showing the coincidence of the rise to prominence of three main characters in the dramatic script of modernity (the aesthete, the therapist and the manager) with the decline of a cultural milieu hospitable to virtue, and in its then providing a conceptual elaboration of 'practices', 'the narrative unity of a life' and 'tradition' as together forming the necessary matrix for a reconstruction of 'virtue'. With this reconstruction McIntyre took himself to be replacing a 'biologically teleological' account of virtue by a 'socially teleological' account – that is to say, one that 'does not require the identification of any teleology in *nature*' (p. 183, my italics). His target was the view that '[h]uman beings, like the members of all other species, have a specific nature; and that nature is such that they have certain aims and goals, such that they move by nature towards a specific *telos*' (*AV*, p. 139). Or, since it is primarily other species of *animals* that are in question here, the same target seemed close to the view that '[t]he standard . . . is set by man *qua* animal, man prior to and without any particular culture' – a creature, as he went on, 'of whom we know nothing . . . [and do not] actively meet in history' (pp. 150–1).

The polarization here between 'biological', 'nature' and 'animal' on the one side and 'social', 'culture' and 'history' on the other is a familiar trope that had come easily to MacIntyre as a thoroughly post-Hegelian philosopher. It is just this polarization, however, that he now puts in question, adroitly unpicking arguments presented in its defence by both analytical philosophers such as Davidson, Kenny and MacDowell and hermeneuticists such as Heidegger and Gadamer. His opening gambit is to draw

attention to the very considerable cognitive capacities displayed by dolphins in activities both in their natural environments and in their interactions with humans. In virtue of these activities we can rightly ascribe to them, so MacIntyre contends, capacities to attend and investigate perceptually (and so not merely passively register sensory inputs); to make identifications and discriminatory classifications and thus to have and apply concepts; to make judgments and have beliefs involving an elementary distinction between truth and falsity; to learn from experience, revising judgments and amending beliefs in the light of salient changes tracked in the environment; to have reasons for action and to engage (sometimes indeed with humans as partners) in goal-directed and often co-operative activity designed to achieve goods that contribute to their wellbeing.

The advantage of this kind of account of dolphin capability, for MacIntyre, is that it breaches the conceptual wall erected by philosophers to divide humans from animals. Rather than a sharp contrast between humans and animals, what McIntyre gives us is a *comparison* between humans and *some other intelligent* animals. He does not deny the achievements of philosophers from both traditions in illuminating the nature and significance of language, and attempts neither to dilute what linguistic competence actually entails nor to support any ambitious claims for the possession of such competence by some non-human animals. He argues, rather, that philosophers have erred in taking language as a *sine qua non* for thought and concluding that animals must therefore be incapable of the kind of intelligence that, on his more *a posteriori* account, they do in fact exhibit. Moreover, the kind of intelligence thus obscured by an exaggerated preoccupation with language is just the kind that not only some other animals but humans too – and not only in their infancy – deploy in all that unreflective interpretative activity, replete with acts of perceptual attention, recognition and response, through which they interact successfully, gain orientation, and comport themselves bodily in the world. MacIntyre denies that language is a precondition of this kind of intelligent activity, while insisting that, conversely, the latter is a precondition of language. For we do not put it behind us when we make the transition from infant (etym.: 'non-speaker') to speaker; rather, we continue to rely on it for the content of what we express (thereby, to be sure, opening it to semantic differentiation and enrichment) in articulate speech. Indeed, without it as 'starting point' or 'crucial subject matter', this transition is in danger of becoming unintelligible. For although the acquisition of language enables the child reflectively to evaluate its reasons for action, did the child not *already have some* reasons for action it is difficult to see how its emerging rationality would have any material on which to get purchase.

One upshot of all this, clearly, is to rescue non-human animals from the condition to which they had been reduced by more than a few prominent philosophers: of being inattentive, thoughtless and 'poor-in-world' (*weltarm*, Heidegger).[5] The main upshot, for MacIntyre, however, is to

> undermine the cultural influence of a picture of human nature according to which we are animals and in addition something else. We have, on this view, a first animal nature and *in addition* a second distinctively human nature. The force of the 'and' is to suggest that this second nature can, at least in the most important respects, only be accounted for on its own terms. Its relation to our given biological nature is thought of as external and contingent in a way and to a degree that permits a single sharp line to be drawn between human beings and members of all non-human species.
>
> (pp. 49–50)

The anthropology to which MacIntyre is led by his rejection of this view emphasizes the extent to which the essential in human beings is constituted by the not-specifically-human, i.e. the animal.[6] It also emphasizes the bodily dimension of personal identity and continuity – the body that I am rather than the body that I have.

On all of this, which concerns one of the two main themes of his book, it seems to me that MacIntyre is right. What I do not see so clearly, however, is how the position he takes here is consequential for, or carries weight in, the following part of the book where he moves on to normative analysis, from biology to ethics. In this second part, to be sure, 'flourishing' is the master-concept (giving us the 'focal use' and the 'underlying unity' in all our multifarious ascriptions of 'good'); and since for MacIntyre this concept applies in the same sense, and not merely analogously, to humans and to other animals (and indeed plants), whether as species or as individuals-of-a-species, he takes it to commit him to 'in some sense a naturalistic account of good' (p. 78). Just *what* sense might be involved here he clearly intends to leave undetermined. Still, it is puzzling that when he speaks of the maturation beyond infancy of dolphins and humans and refers to changes in the patterning of desire that accompanies this process in both cases, he sees the changes in dolphins as 'part of their natural development' (p. 68) – in a context where 'natural' is clearly intended to *contrast* with changes in humans that entail a *separation from* their immediate desires. Moreover, even if 'flourishing' means the same in all cases, still what is to count as flourishing in any particular case is always species-specific: 'what it needs to flourish is to develop the *distinctive* powers that it possesses *qua* member of that species' (p. 64, my italics). And from MacIntyre's analysis it seems clear that what is distinctive of humans, creating the very possibility of their ethical life, is precisely their ability to *move beyond the merely animal state* (in ways, moreover, that depend – as MacIntyre himself acknowledges with qualifications – on language). The account of this ethical life that he goes on to provide is greatly enriched, I believe, by the developmental dimension that he builds into it. This dimension keeps us aware of just how fraught the ethical life remains, given that its *terminus a quo* in

infancy is an animal condition. But my point is just this: that, as *terminus a quo*, animality is in MacIntyre's account precisely what we have to depart from, in the sense of transcending or transforming it, in making the 'transition' from infant to mature moral agent – though, to be sure, even when the transition is made we are still transformed *animals*. And this seems both to tell against his claim to be renaturalizing ethics and even to allow one to imagine his book, as a book on the virtues, beginning at chapter 7 – without the material (interesting though it be in itself) on the phenomenology of animal life in the preceding chapters. This is all the more the case when his steady focus on development grounds his account of virtue in an insightful consideration of infancy and childhood. I do not see how the psychological richness of this consideration is much helped by or dependent on the biological considerations that have preceded it;[7] and indeed there are dangers, that he may not always avoid, in too easy an assimilation of 'infant' to 'animal'.[8]

IV

The most compelling part of *DRA* is its depiction and working through of the ethical implications (in chs 7 to 11) of the other two primary anthropological facts, in addition (though to be sure, not unrelated) to animality: our *vulnerability* or proneness to many different kinds of disability and affliction and our consequent *dependency* on others for our flourishing. For MacIntyre, this flourishing resides most fully in the exercise of independent practical reasoning; but part of his intention is to show just how deeply beholden to others we are for this very exercise – for its character both as independent and as rational. Our dependency is most apparent in infancy and childhood, and a great merit of this book is the way it foregrounds the care and education we receive at these early stages as intrinsic to the quality of our moral lives – whereas in most moral philosophy they are made to disappear behind the façade of an apparent moral competency, already unproblematically established. It is here that MacIntyre draws on Winnicott, illuminating the crucial role of the 'ordinary good' (or 'good enough') mother in providing the kind of responsive, trustworthy and non-retaliatory recognition required for relaxed, exploratory and sometimes aggressive play – and with it the formation of a secure sense of selfhood and the beginnings of properly rational activity. MacIntyre is alive to the full intimacy and particularity of the parental bond: the fact that care must be for *this* unique child, must give resolutely without expectation of proportional receiving, and must actively convey a sense of unconditionality – even if in most cases, happily, this is never fully tested by the actual occurrence of, e.g., severe disability or disfiguring injury.

For MacIntyre the purpose of this care, and hence its essential ethical import, is to open the child to 'the good and the best'. And this entails

enabling it to make the transition from having immediate reasons-for-action (which it already has, in common with many kinds of non-human animals) to (a) *evaluating* its reasons and – as a condition both for engaging in this evaluation and for being disposed to redirect its actions accordingly – (b) *separating* itself from and transforming its desires, and (c) *expanding* the range of alternative future action-scenarios it can imaginatively but realistically entertain. To make this transition successfully (and success here is always a matter of more or less) one must release oneself both from the tyranny of 'clamorous felt need' *and* from the distortions of one's attachments to, and inevitable ambivalences and antagonisms towards, those primary figures on whom one's need-fulfilment first concentrates. In doing this one makes oneself educable into a range of practices, with the goods and excellences internal to them; at the same time one begins to become an independent practical reasoner *and*, as MacIntyre well shows, to acquire the ethical virtues. His larger concern, however, is to show that this acquisition on my part is dependent on the prior possession by others of those same virtues and of some other virtues specific to the offices of caring and teaching. Nor is it only that I depend on others if I am first to acquire and then to be sustained in reasonableness and virtue. Rather, exercise of the virtues of an independent practical reasoner is in itself shot through with otherness. I cannot, for example, claim to be the sole authority on my good as I can on my wants or desires; to evaluate my reasons for actions is at the same time to make myself accountable to others; my self-knowledge is importantly mediated and confirmed by others' knowledge of me; and against my unavoidable proneness to intellectual error and moral failing there is no better antidote than friends and colleagues – not least, as MacIntyre shows, those who may themselves be severely disabled.

Dependency as an inescapable fact translates morally as *indebtedness*. Indebtedness resides in the fact that one has received. And one's corresponding obligation is to give. It is in specifying the norms proper to this pattern of giving and receiving that MacIntyre gives substance to his revised understanding of flourishing and the virtues that as constitutive of it must be at the centre of moral and political life. This specification strongly excludes any calculus of reciprocity, any attempt to measure what a person has received so that a proportionate degree of giving can be exacted in return. What carries enormous weight in MacIntyre's sense of things here is not only the profoundly asymetrical nature of the relationship out of which we all first emerge, if we have had 'ordinary good' parenting, but also the depth of affliction and disability to which we remain exposed as an ever-present possibility. The weight of this actual past and always possible future shatters the basis on which we may suppose, in 'the illusion of self-sufficiency', that bargaining in the present on costs and benefits with other robust preference-maximizers is a well-supported endeavour. What

this weight enforces, rather, as a realistic obligation, is attentive care to the needs of 'those whom contingency and chance put into our care', so that '[w]e can set no limit to those possible needs' but must exercise an 'unconditional care for the human being as such, whatever the outcome' (p. 100). When MacIntyre writes these words he may seem to place himself far outside an Aristotelian orbit (though he himself does not believe so: he later suggests that how to understand ourselves and others within the kind of patterns of giving and receiving he has in mind 'is perhaps best captured' in Aristotle's discussion of friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics* IX (p. 160)). The very different philosophical discourse that, as it seems to me, he approaches here is that of Emmanuel Levinas. It is not in MacIntyre's style, of course, to write of another person as 'the [capitalized] Other' – when he does so once in this book, unsurprisingly it is with deflationary intent (p. 119) – and his stock-in-trade terms (e.g. 'independent practical reasoner') have nothing of Levinas's more unrestrained rhetoric (e.g. 'traumatic command'). But the magnitude of what can be recognized as a properly ethical demand, and its incommensurability with what the normalized ego takes as rational expectations, seems to be much the same for both MacIntyre and Levinas.[9]

MacIntyre, however, does not take himself to be canvassing an ethic of extreme supererogation or heroic perfection. To the contrary, it is an ethic implicit in 'networks of giving and receiving' that he sees as the substance of ordinary political community. Ethics and politics meet in the coincidence he posits between my individual good and the common good. What is undercut in this coincidence is the dichotomy between egoistic and altruistic motives and actions – between, on the one hand, pursuit of self-interest regulated by rules that restrain me no more than they restrain those who might otherwise take unfair advantage of me and, on the other hand, solicitude for others as simply a given of sentiment or a matter of individual discretion *outside* the ambit of reason. The common good is common in that it is neither 'mine rather than others'' nor 'others' rather than mine'; and it is underwritten by reason insofar as it is based on a recognition of our human lot as one in which any heavy misfortune that befalls another should incline me truthfully to say, 'this could have been me'.[10] Just as the other cannot calculate when or how such misfortune may occur, so I must not calculate when or how I may be called on to respond. What disposes towards uncalculated giving is 'just generosity', a key virtue that is not found in MacIntyre's earlier work and that he finds precedent for, among elaborated catalogues of the virtues, only in Aquinas's treatment of *misericordia*. Giving is *just* insofar as it honours a debt I have already incurred by the attentive and affectionate regard I have already enjoyed from others (though not necessarily from *this* person – here is part of the uncalculated non-reciprocity MacIntyre insists on) and may at any time greatly need again. And it is *generous* insofar as it partakes of charity and compassion

– it responds to the real need of another human being and is moved by her distress as if it were my own (for MacIntyre, one's sympathies and affections are always subject to norms of appropriateness and one has acquired a virtue only when they have been made harmonious with these norms). If just generosity is the virtue most strongly profiled in this book, its counterpart and perhaps necessary condition, as another one of what MacIntyre calls the 'virtues of acknowledged dependence', is that abiding sense of one's own indebtedness that constitutes the virtue of *gratitude*.

Since one can hope to flourish only by finding one's part within a network of giving and receiving in which one's own good is aligned, though not identical, with a common good, it is perhaps unsurprising that MacIntyre spells out the political implications of his position here by reference to 'local community'. Already in *AV* he had written: 'I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. . . . As such I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations.' He had gone on, however, to acknowledge that the particularity of one's historical identity does not imply that 'the self has to accept the moral limitations' of this identity and to insist that 'it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, the universal, consists' (*AV*, pp. 204–5). Taken together, both of the things MacIntyre says here make it understandable perhaps why he has been tagged as a communitarian *and* why he has wanted to resist this tag. And albeit that he still speaks up for 'local community' in *DRA*, there is, I think, an important change of emphasis in this book that makes the grounds of his resistance to the tag much clearer. For ethics here is more deeply inscribed in a philosophical anthropology that traces a fundamental structure of *human being as such*. And this leads to more explicit and much fuller qualifications about community. These take the form partly of unpacking the 'moral limitations' already mentioned in *AV*: local communities, he now tells us, 'are always open to corruption, by narrowness, by complacency, by prejudice against outsiders and by a whole range of other deformities, including those that arise from a cult of local community' (p. 142). But his qualifications now also bring an acknowledgement (partly perhaps a concession, not granted in *AV*, to specifically modern conditions of life) that I may simultaneously belong to several communities and move consecutively in and out of different communities. Moreover, they are deepened through reference to the 'stranger', a figure whose appearance makes her a kind of shadow member of the community by evoking from it the virtue of hospitality which, if it is to prove itself a decent community, it must show itself capable of offering. And in the end they go so far as to explode the boundaries of community altogether, by making clear that ultimately one's community is one that can exclude no human being

– irrespective of previous affiliation – since just generosity must extend to *anyone* in 'urgent and extreme need'.

V

The depth and extent of these qualifications (which some trusty 'liberals' might be happy to have formulated) may make one wonder why, notwithstanding them, MacIntyre still gives such priority to 'local community', canvassing its merits over those of both the family and the nation-state in his chapter on 'the political and social structures of the common good'. Although deeply sympathetic to MacIntyre's general position, I confess to finding this the least convincing chapter of the book.[11] His hostility to the nation-state is well known and his charges against it (e.g. its being in thrall to large moneyed interests, its inability to engage the great bulk of its citizens in meaningful political participation, its incapacity to be a genuine moral community – and the even direr consequences should it attempt nonetheless to masquerade as one) are indeed hard to rebut. Still, just what he means by 'local community' is unclear and its contours remain indistinct. Sometimes, as when he mentions schools, workplaces, clinics, clubs or churches, admits that one may belong to more than one community, and sees the nation-state as 'an ineliminable feature of the contemporary landscape' (p. 133) to which people should relate strategically, one takes 'local community' to refer to those multifarious clusterings of people bound by some common purpose that exist throughout 'civil society' (a term he does not use). But at other times, as when he speaks of 'the whole political society', or refers to decisions about the priority to be accorded through the allocation of resources to the place of dramatic art in 'the life of our community', or when he speaks of a quite systematic subordination of economic to social and moral considerations – so that disparities in income are kept small, there are 'self-imposed limits to labour mobility' and 'some significant degree of insulation from and protection from the forces generated by outside markets' (p. 145) – he seems to envisage a much more formally organized political unit, perhaps at county or regional level (and in any case on a smaller scale than the nation-state – though not, as he seems to concede, altogether supplanting it). If by 'local community' MacIntyre means only the former, then it is hard to see how it could have the cohesiveness needed to constitute, and bind people into, a pattern of giving and receiving of the kind he intends. But if, on the other hand, 'local community' does indeed mean something like the latter, then I do not see how it can escape the difficulty that he himself raises against the family: its 'lack of self-sufficiency' (p. 134) and consequent inability to flourish unless its wider social environment also flourishes.

As one who has always been to the fore among philosophers in deploring the abstraction of a great deal of philosophical argumentation from

relevant contexts, MacIntyre characteristically regards a consideration of local community as 'one point at which the discussions of moral and political philosophers benefit from becoming historical and sociological' (pp. 142–3). It is striking, however, that the historical examples that he then invites us to consider are of 'fishing communities in New England over the past hundred and fifty years ... Welsh mining communities ... farming cooperatives in Donegal, Mayan towns in Guatamala and Mexico, some city-states from a more distant past' (p. 143). He has sometimes been accused of nostalgia for his attachment to examples such as these. This charge, of course (to echo his own remarks about utopianism towards the end of *TRVME*), may often say less about an unrealistic hankering by those against whom it is levelled than about an inadequate appreciation of values realized in earlier periods and places on the part of those levelling it. Still, one would like MacIntyre not only to direct us to exemplary cases in the past but to show us – as he does not attempt – how the genuine goods they embodied might be carried over the threshold of hyper-modernity so as to be exemplary *for us*. He might, of course, retort that crossing this threshold is precisely what we must *not* do – or rather, since we have already done so, what renders us incapable of realizing the kind of flourishing he so generously evokes. It is not clear that he would in fact make this retort. But even if the kind of networks of giving and receiving that he envisages can indeed be sustained only through a quite radical redirection, or even reversal, of the thrust of industrial and post-industrial societies, how is this to be achieved? I do not believe that the kind of local protectionism he suggests can supply an answer. It is disappointing that his commitment to sociological analysis leaves issues concerning technological transformations and globalization so unaddressed. To be sure, the nation-state is increasingly exposed as a political entity incapable of regulating economic forces, let alone of promoting cultural or moral wellbeing. And one appropriate response to this is indeed a devolutionary one, encouraging the reanimation of local communities. But the subsidiarist insight that supports this move calls for a move *also* in the opposite direction: for the creation of political structures well beyond the limits of any nation-state. MacIntyre is surely right to see unrestrained market-forces as inimical to the kind of politics he espouses. But these forces are no respecter of borders, national *or* local, and it is hard to see how they can ever be properly checked without political institutions whose scope is coterminous with themselves.

The difficulties I have just raised, concerning as they do the nature of a world dominated by advanced capitalism, are ones that confront all contemporary moral and political thought and for which perhaps no theorist now has a satisfactory response. I want then to press a different question with more particular bearing on MacIntyre's project in this book. There are very good reasons for persisting, as he does, with the classical insight that human flourishing is possible neither for myself nor for others outside

reliable patterns of giving and receiving that, while irreducible to rules of contract or of the market, are nonetheless political. Still the relationship between the ethical and the political is perhaps more problematic than he allows. Or, rather, the depth of human solidarity for which he argues not only severely strains the normal recourses of politics but tests to the limit – and perhaps, as I shall try to show, beyond the limit – what we can draw on in 'ethics'.

On the one hand MacIntyre lessens the burden on an individual by placing as much weight as he does on the 'institutional forms' of the political. This weight is evident in what I have already said about the entanglement of an individual's good with a common good, and the consequent need for a 'common mind' – to be achieved through shared deliberative procedures – 'as to how responsibilities for and to dependent others are allocated and what standards of success or failure in discharging these responsibilities are appropriate' (p. 133). And it comes out too in his seeing these 'dependent others', however deep or permanent their disability, as no mere recipients of the beneficence of others but as 'in one way or another' contributing to 'our shared education in becoming rational givers and receivers' – so that we must 'accord them political recognition . . . [and] treat them as someone whom it would be wrong to ignore or to exclude from political deliberation' (p. 141). Politics, thus understood, benefits not only those who are dependent but also those on whom they must depend, by ensuring that the caring that falls to them is a shared and not merely an individual burden. Within the economy of this sharing, however, the burden on some can be relieved only by increasing the burden on others. It is MacIntyre's thesis, of course, that this kind of calculus of benefits and costs is undercut precisely by individuals' reconciling their own good with the common good. But a politics founded on the reliable expectation of such reconciliation, as he readily grants, is committed to 'Utopian standards, not often realized outside Utopia, and only then . . . in flawed ways' (p. 145).

The reference to Utopia is itself an acknowledgement of how strained politics becomes here. But on the other hand it also shifts the burden back from politics to ethics; for what such a politics requires above all is citizens endowed with virtue – most especially, perhaps, the virtue of just generosity. It is in relation to this virtue that my question arises. For there may be good reason to believe that not only does it translate awkwardly into the idiom of politics but that it is also, and relatedly, a good deal more demanding as an ethical virtue than one might gather from this book. With respect to the first of these points it has to be borne in mind that the common good, though common, is itself always plural, constituted by an ensemble of richly varied goods. And, this being the case, an individual, even when well disposed to serve it, 'as an independent practical reasoner has to answer the question of what place it is best that each of those goods should have in her or his life' (p. 109). The issue here is 'the diversity of goods',[12] and I'm

not sure that MacIntyre takes sufficient account of the potential for conflict it imports into a person's judgment about the *good for her or him* and how the goods and needs of others are to find a place within it (at one point he notes but makes no judgement on the conflict for Gauguin between his good *qua* painter and his goods *qua* father and *qua* human being). Because of this potential for conflict there is an element of indeterminacy in many of the judgments we have to make about conduct. And although this indeterminacy is not ultimate insofar as we can call upon the virtue of good judgment (*phronesis*) to deal with it in each case, still it may be greatly increased by the second point mentioned above, the peculiar demandingness of just generosity.

Consider what MacIntyre writes: 'what I am called on to give has no predetermined limits and may greatly exceed what I have received'; 'the care that I give to others has to be in an important respect unconditional, since the measure of what is required of me is determined in key part, even if not only, by their needs'; 'I must know that . . . you will not blench when some task for which you have taken responsibility turns out to be much more unpleasant – coping with vomiting or persistent bleeding or screaming, for example – or much more burdensome than expected' (pp. 126, 108, 110). It is not difficult immediately to embrace these words when they refer to parents' relationship with their children, or perhaps some other close relationship within the family or among friends. But what do they require if their denotation is extended, as it is by MacIntyre, so that we are enjoined by them in our relations not just with children, other family members or close friends but perhaps with any member of our wider community or indeed with *anyone* 'whom contingency and chance put in our care'? What do they require, and from where can we draw the moral resources to meet this requirement?

MacIntyre's answer to this question, notwithstanding his removal of *megalopsychia* from the catalogue of virtues, is deeply Aristotelian. It relies on a moral education that is able to 'transform and integrate' our divided impulses and desires 'as infants, as children, and even as adolescents', so that, when morally mature, our 'passions and inclinations are directed to what is both our good and the good of others'. Our character, then, when this education has succeeded, is such that '[s]elf-sacrifice is as much of a vice, as much of a sign of inadequate moral development, as selfishness' (p. 160). There is something very admirable about this ideal of the harmonious ethical agent and about the whole middle register of 'virtue' and 'flourishing' through which it is expressed. But the question – already intimated in my earlier reference to Levinas – is whether it can meet, or motivate a response to, the brokenness and depth of need evoked by MacIntyre's words in the previous paragraph. While not attempting an answer, I want to sharpen the point of this question by reference both to MacIntyre's own earlier work and to some other recent work (closer in philosophical idiom

to his than Levinas's) which has raised issues very similar to those of *DRA*, while understanding them as having a quite different kind of import.

VI

In *A Common Humanity* (and especially its opening essay on 'Goodness Beyond Virtue')[13] Raimond Gaita considers the work of 'love, justice and pity' (all of which are combined in MacIntyre's 'just generosity'; see *DRA*, p. 121) in responding to those suffering 'affliction so severe that they have irrecoverably lost everything that gives sense to our lives' (*ACH*, p. xix). Like MacIntyre, Gaita attends to unconditionality as a standard internal to the practice of parental love. But he suggests that this standard can come to have wider ethical salience – of the kind it has for MacIntyre – only if parental love is understood in intimate dialectic with another form of love, the impartial love of saints. This suggestion is related to Gaita's belief that 'an ethics centred on the concept of human flourishing does not have the conceptual resources to keep fully among us . . . people who are severely and ineradicably afflicted' (*ACH*, p. 19). Foreclosure on the possibility of flourishing on the part of such people tends to hide their common humanity; and so the peculiar quality of a saint's love is its 'power to reveal the full humanity of those whose affliction had made their humanity invisible' (*ACH*, p. 20). The important question then becomes: how is this love possible and where does it find its source? Gaita's own answer to this question brings parental love back into the picture. 'Children come to love their brothers and sisters', he writes, 'because they see them in the light of their parents' love. Often we learn that something is precious only when we see it in the light of someone's love.' Universalizing this sense of preciousness, so that even the direst disability (or indeed, for Gaita, great wickedness) does not place a person outside it, would depend then on the claim, embodied in the practices of a saint, that 'God loves us, his children' (p. 24).

Gaita is both impressed by the 'simple power' of this religious way of speaking, 'unashamedly anthropomorphic' though it may be, and mindful of its role in the genealogy of western moral sensibility. Hardly surprisingly, however – given the terrible excesses of 'religion' and what may seem its endemic divisiveness – he wants to affirm that the ethical reality it gestures to 'can stand independently of explicit religious commitment and independently of speculation about supernatural entities. What grew and was nourished in one place . . . might take root and flourish elsewhere' (*ACH*, p. xx). But he is diffident about what is involved in – and perhaps even doubts the very possibility of – the transposition through which this independence is secured. He believes that it is '[o]n credit from' a 'language of love' 'transformed [and] deepened' by the 'love of saints' that we have built the 'tractable structure of rights and obligations' characteristic of modern

secular morality. The sublimation of this morality to the point where it can embrace those who are most disabled, afflicted and marginalized depends then on a language that 'goes dead on us' unless it is 'nourished' by the living witness of saintly love. It is a crucial question, then, whether this love could survive 'in the prolonged absence of the kind of practices that were part of [a] religious vocation' – whether, that is to say, 'with the demise of religion, we can find objects of attention that can sustain that love, or whether they will always fail us'. Gaita admits: 'I don't know the answer' (*ACH*, p. xx).

A question very similar to Gaita's is raised by Charles Taylor in 'Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy'[14] (Gaita's own sense of the question is heavily indebted to Murdoch's exploration of a region puzzlingly intermediate between ethics and religion, where 'secular sanctity' or a 'religion without theology' is made possible by the 'sovereignty of the Good' – the capital 'G' not cancelling the double 'o'). Taylor suggests that Murdoch's work helped to release philosophical thought from the 'corral of morality', leading out 'not only to the broad fields of ethics but also beyond that again to the almost untracked forests of the unconditional'; this is a movement beyond 'the question of what we ought to do to that of what it is good to be, and then beyond that again, to what can command our fullest love' ('IMMP', p. 5). The field is the place of virtue and flourishing and much modern moral philosophy, if not blind to it (when confined to the corral of rights, rules and obligations), understands it through the lens of a prior commitment to the primacy of life. Entry to the forest, on the other hand, involves 'full-hearted love of some good beyond life', and Taylor well understands the secularist attitude (akin, he suggest to post-revolutionary vigilance) that opposes it as a threat to this hard-won primacy and to the 'flourishing' it exclusively defines. 'Forest-dwelling' involves a kind of 'renunciation' that is a 'radical decentering of the self' and seems at loggerheads with flourishing just to the extent that 'most conceptions of a flourishing life assume a stable identity, the self for whom flourishing can be defined' (p. 21). Taylor contends, however, that there are religious traditions and spiritual practices in which renunciation leads away from flourishing only to lead back to a fuller and more powerful affirmation of it; these include ways of understanding the Buddhist teaching to which Murdoch was drawn and the Christian faith in which he himself shares, as well as the 'very different paths' to which 'people of great spiritual depth and dedication and, beyond this, people of holy lives, are drawn' (p. 19).

Taylor goes beyond this contention to argue (in the essay on Murdoch and in another recent piece, 'A Catholic Modernity?',[15] both of which develop a perspective already opened up in the final chapter of *Sources of the Self*) that the 'practical primacy' of life, so impressively manifested in humanitarian concern, is in fact jeopardized by the 'metaphysical primacy' of life affirmed in exclusivist articulations of the corral and of the field. Like

Gaita – and, I am suggesting, MacIntyre – Taylor calls attention to ethics at its limits, to what he sees as the 'colossal extension of a Gospel ethic to a universal solidarity', in which people are asked 'to stretch out so far . . . to the stranger outside the gates'. Like Gaita, too – though unlike MacIntyre, in my construal of him – he points to the demandingness and the cost of this concern, as well as its shadow side. It has to deal with 'the immense disappointment of actual human performance, with the myriad ways in which real, concrete human beings fall short of, ignore, parody and betray . . . [their] potential'; and in the face of 'all this stupid recalcitrance' and the 'reality of human shortcomings' what can sustain it? All too easily, and in its religiously inspired as well in its secular variants, it can be 'invested with contempt, hatred, aggression', as in 'a host of "helping" institutions . . . from orphanages to boarding schools for aboriginals' (of major concern in Gaita's book). This is the 'tragic turn, brilliantly foreseen by Dostoevsky'; but it is also, as Taylor recognizes, the 'Janus face' ruthlessly unmasked by Nietzsche in his exposure of the *ressentiment* at the rotten core of much philanthropy. For Taylor it is a standing threat in the pursuit of all our highest ethical aspirations; and it can be averted only if our concern for others is ultimately an expression of a love whose unconditionality is sustained by a divine love in us.

If I am right in suggesting that we meet with the same scale of ethical demand in these three writers, how are we to assess the quite different ethical atmospheres that carry this demand in Gaita and Taylor as distinct from MacIntyre in *DRA*? This question is itself answerable in disconcertingly different ways from several quite different moral, metaphysical or religious perspectives – as nothing would more lead us to expect than MacIntyre's two preceding books, *WJWR* and *TRVME*. But in these two books MacIntyre *also* gave substantive commitment to one such perspective – the Thomist one that integrated Aristotelian insights into an Augustinian framework – and what answer emerges from *that* perspective? An answer, I believe, that is more favourable to Gaita's and Taylor's approaches than to MacIntyre's own in *DRA* – and this *despite* MacIntyre's indication in his preface to this book that reading a prayer of Aquinas had led him 'to reflect upon how Aquinas's account of the virtues not only supplements, but also corrects Aristotle's to a significantly greater extent than I had realized' (p. xi). It seems to me that, on the contrary, Aquinas's 'correction' of Aristotle is *more* evident in MacIntyre's two earlier works than in *DRA*. In *WJWR* he had already written that 'Aquinas does not merely supplement Aristotle but shows Aristotle's account . . . to be radically defective' – though this, as he put it, is not 'so much a radical defectivness in Aristotle's account as a radical defectiveness in that natural human order of which Aristotle gave his account' (p. 205). It is Augustine, of course, mainly through his novel conception of the will as a motivating agency distinct both from intellect and from the appetites of the

non-rational part of the soul, who had brought this defectiveness to the fore both for Aquinas and for MacIntyre himself in *WJWR* and *TRVME*. And perhaps the most remarkable feature of *DRA* is precisely *Augustine's absence from it* (in contrast with his unmistakable presence in Taylor's words cited above).

I have already shown how MacIntyre construes 'just generosity' in this book as the product of a moral education that redirects the passions and desires. In *WJWR*, however, the 'direction and ordering of human desires is the work of the will' (p. 154); and the will is itself 'systematically . . . misdirected in such a way that it is not within its own power to redirect itself' (*WJWR*, p. 156). Its condition of misdirectedness, then, remains 'ineradicable by even the best moral education in accordance with reason' (p. 181); and so it 'is only divine grace which can rescue . . . [it] from that condition' (p. 156). This Augustinian position was also Aquinas's in *WJWR*. But a quite different position seems to be attributed to him in *DRA* when it is claimed that his notion of *misericordia* (to which MacIntyre appeals in developing his own account of 'just generosity') 'has its place in the catalogue of virtues, independently of its theological grounding'. MacIntyre makes this claim because *misericordia* 'is recognisably at work in the secular world and the authorities whom Aquinas cites on its nature, and whose disagreements he aspires to resolve, include Salust and Cicero as well as Augustine' (p. 124). But the fact of its being 'at work in the secular world' is hardly the issue; the question, rather, is from what source it is empowered to perform it works of charity in that world. Moreover, that Cicero and Augustine take very different views of the depth and range of such charity – and that Aquinas follows Augustine and not Cicero on this – is very clear from MacIntyre's own reading of all three of them in *WJWR*. Although the characteristically Stoic universalizing of the range of *caritas* is indeed to be found in Cicero, MacIntyre goes to some lengths in that book to show how nugatory is our debt to 'someone to whom we owe whatever we owe merely as a fellow member of the human race' (so that the 'word "*caritas*" may . . . mislead us if . . . we project into its Ciceronian use a Christian meaning' (*WJWR*, p. 148)). The kind of community presupposed by Augustine's concept of justice, then, 'is very different indeed from that presupposed by Cicero' and its 'universality requires far more than had Stoic universality, particularly in relation to the poor and oppressed, so much more indeed that its requirements have from time to time been discovered to have yet further and more radical application throughout the subsequent history of the church' (*WJWR*, p. 153).

It is, I believe, a quite 'radical application' and transposition of these 'requirements' – or, in Taylor's phrase, 'a colossal extension of a gospel ethic' – that we meet in *DRA*. But the puzzling feature to which I have been trying to draw attention, by reference to Gaita, Taylor, and MacIntyre's own two books between *AV* and *DRA* (and indeed to Levinas), is the absence

of the *sources* of that requirement, of its progressive radicalization, and of our own ability to meet it.[16] If, as MacIntyre writes, 'self-sacrifice is as much of a vice, as much of a sign of inadequate moral development, as self-ishness' (*DRA*, p. 160), this is hardly the case for someone whose will is in what Augustine took to be the default condition of misdirectedness 'to the love of self rather than of God' (*WJWR*, p. 157); perhaps it is reliably the case only for someone who, even if not in Augustine's terms, has undergone what Taylor calls 'a radical decentering of the self'. But there is no hint of this in the Aristotelian picture of harmonious moral development in *DRA*. Perhaps my final statement of the difficulty here can be put in MacIntyre's own words (with an echo of Gaita). In *WJWR* he wrote: 'The highest type of human being, according to Aristotle, is the magnanimous man [*megalopsychos*]. The highest type of human being on any Christian view, including Augustine's, is the saint.' The puzzle about *DRA* is that in raising the ethical stakes so high it gets rid of the magnanimous man but finds no need to introduce the saint.

We are faced here, of course, with large and contestable issues about the nature of secularization, as well as with complex issues about the relation between 'grace' and 'nature' within the specifically Christian tradition that Aquinas brought to such a high point of articulation (and it must always be remembered – this being the point of his Aristotelianism – that for him nature 'requires to be corrected in order to be completed but not displaced' (*TRVME*, p. 140)). We are faced, too, with issues about the boundary between the proper jurisdictions of philosophy and theology or, more particularly, about how this boundary may be understood with different degrees of strictness by different thinkers who, while open to a horizon of faith, ply their trade as philosophers. And for many readers a merit of *DRA* may be precisely the fact that it is *not* embroiled in issues such as these – not least, perhaps, because they raise no genuine or relevant questions. From my own perspective, however, there are indeed questions here – though I am not sure what the answers are. It is for this reason, and because – much as I have learned from his earlier work – *DRA* is MacIntyre's most sympathetic and inspiring book, that the puzzle of its not raising them remains piquant.

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Notes

1 The themes of vulnerability and dependency have been well worked not only in recent feminist philosophy but also, under the rubrics of finitude and intersubjectivity, by hermeneutical thinkers such as Gadamer and Ricoeur. Although MacIntyre has on other occasions shown sympathy with these thinkers, he may feel that the extreme absence of nature and animality from their discourse – preoccupied as it is with language – makes it vulnerable to

attack either from the reductive naturalism of socio-biologists and evolutionary psychologists or the unrepressed vitalism of the Nitezschean rhetoric of man as 'the clever animal'. The importance of outflanking these two adversaries – by not conceding nature and animality to them – may be a real if unstated motivation in *DRA*.

2 Annette Baier had already accorded MacIntyre 'the status of honorary wom[a]n'. See 'What do Women Want in a Moral Theory?', in Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (eds) *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; reprinted from Baier, *Moral Prejudices* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994)).

3 See, e.g., *WJWR*, pp. 169 and 176.

4 For a helpful exception, see David Carr and Jan Steutel (eds) *Virtue Theory and Moral Education* (London: Routledge, 1999).

5 MacIntyre does not mention exceptions here; but advertence might be made to, e.g., Stephen L. Clark, *The Nature of the Beast: Are Animals Moral?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Mary Midgely, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 1995); or for a critique, paralleling MacIntyre's, of Heidegger's stark separation of human and animal, Simon Glendinning, 'Heidegger and the Question of Animality', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 4(1) (1996), pp. 67–86. It is worth noting that although *DRA* is a book on ethics in which animals are given a conspicuous part, it gives no attention – unlike the works of Clark and Midgely – to ethical issues with respect to the treatment of non-human animals by humans.

6 It might be claimed that the force of MacIntyre's comparison shows not so much that humans are like some other animals as that the latter are like humans. For what he attends to are respects in which some animals are intelligent and goal-directed in their activities – and therefore already on a continuum with the practical rationality that for him is so significantly characteristic of humans. A different kind of attention, however, entirely absent from MacIntyre's treatment, might focus on the capacities of some non-human animals, when flourishing, for, e.g., relaxation, deep unhindered breathing, graceful movement or playfulness, and see these animals as in these respects exemplary for humans.

7 This would not be the case if what MacIntyre presents as his new acknowledgement of the biological basis of ethics included, as it does not, the kind of argument, for example, that Frans de Waal advances for justice as an orientation in some primates as well in humans in *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996) or the kind of considerations that lead J. Q. Wilson to posit some basic moral sentiments as natural human endowments in *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

8 For example, MacIntyre's phrase 'our initial animal condition' can too easily evoke as correlate 'our eventual human condition' – and thereby obscure the sense in which we are neither less human when callow nor less animal when mature. Just as it is part of MacIntyre's intention in this book to rehabilitate our animal nature, so he intends to undo some of the philosophical damage caused by philosophers' characteristic neglect of childhood as an integral phase of the human life-span – he refers with apparent approval to Rousseau's *Emile* and Gareth Matthews' recent *The Philosophy of Childhood* as conspicuous exceptions to this endemic neglect. But a comparable point to the one I made in n. 6 above about his non-valorization of certain aspects of animal life can be made here in relation to his treatment of childhood. Both Rousseau and

Matthews see children as peculiarly gifted precisely as children; for Rousseau the intensity of early sensori-motor experience is all too quickly forfeited in the rush to rational accomplishment, while Matthews suggests that in respect of some artistic capacities as well as of a disposition to certain kinds of philosophical speculation children surpass their elders – so that educators need to try to *minimize losses* as well as promote gains. But there is no hint of any of this in MacIntyre – or in Aristotle, who seems to have a thoroughly privative view of childhood. In Aristotle's writings children are characteristically included with other categories of beings that fall short of the standard embodied by well-formed adult males – e.g. women, the sick, the insane and animals (see Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990)). In the *Ethics* he explicitly denies that we can 'speak of an ox or a horse or any other animal as *eudaimon*' and immediately adds that 'no child is *eudaimon* either' (*E.N.* 2, ix, 1099b34–1100a2). And in the *Politics* there is this chilling sentence: 'As to the exposure and rearing of children, let there be a law that no deformed child shall live' (VII, 16, 1335b20–1). MacIntyre does not advert to or distance himself from *this* side of Aristotle – though in the overall context of *DRA* he has perhaps even more reason for doing so than for baulking at the *megalopsychos*.

9 MacIntyre has not, to my knowledge, written about Levinas. But he does briefly advert to the striking affinities between Levinas's thought and that of the Danish philosopher-theologian Knud Ejler Løgstrup in his very sympathetic introduction (co-authored with Hans Fink) to a new English translation of Løgstrup's *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). Although Løgstrup is nowhere mentioned in *DRA*, one may wonder whether his influence is not present in it.

10 Reason is stretched here in dealing with what is precisely beyond reason in that it either happens to me contingently (as in an accident at birth) or is imposed by a necessity of nature (as in the growing infirmity of old age); MacIntyre explicitly excludes from the circle of what obligates to responsive giving misfortunes that result from a person's own deliberate wrongdoing (p. 128; though for possible qualification here, see p. 124). It would be interesting to clarify, as I cannot do here, why there are deep differences, in determining an acceptable basis for justice, between a MacIntyrean saying 'this could have been me' and a Rawlsian surveying (from behind the 'veil of ignorance') all the possible positions she might occupy as a result of the 'natural lottery'. (Apparent convergence here might seem to be reinforced by the fact that whereas in his chapter on justice in *AV* MacIntyre sharply distinguishes his own 'desert'-based conception from Rawls's 'needs'-based conception of justice, in *DRA* need seems to have superseded – though not indeed replaced – desert as the decisive consideration for a just socio-political order.)

11 I pass over here the final two chapters of the book in which MacIntyre takes up the deconstructionist challenge of Rorty and Nietzsche. Though severe, his strictures on both of them seem to me warranted; but they hardly advance what he has already argued, particularly in *TRVME*, against the genealogical project. (He finds Rortian irony to be a type of 'offence against truthfulness' and a 'species of moral evasion'; and Nietzsche is still, as he was in *AV*, the ultimate antithetical figure for the whole tradition of the virtues, who presents us in this case with an 'inverted mirror-image' of what it is to live the virtues of acknowledged dependence.)

12 The phrase is Charles Taylor's; see his essay with this title in Amartya Sen and Bernard Willimas (eds) *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 129–44.

13 Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (London: Routledge, 2000).
14 In Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (eds) *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 3–28.
15 James C. Heft (ed.) *A Catholic Modernity: Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
16 This absence does not figure among the four areas of 'unfinished philosophical business in these pages' that MacIntyre acknowledges in the preface to *DRA* (p. xii).