Chapter 1

Alasdair MacIntyre: Virtue and Reason in Practice

MacIntyre argues that human beings "need the virtues."[1] What is a virtue? And what do we need them *for*? Can the virtuous person be irrational? And can virtuous traits be put in service to vicious ends? This chapter aims to address these questions and more by analyzing Alasdair MacIntyre's theory of virtue and practical rationality.[2] MacIntyre (born 1929) has exercised wide influence.[3] Jack Weinstein observes that Macintyre did for ethics what John Rawls did for political philosophy. Rawls re-invigorated political philosophy, "inaugurating the dominance of late twentieth-century liberalism."[4] MacIntyre helped to re-invigorate analytic ethical philosophy (especially the ascendancy of late twentieth-century virtue ethics) by freshly examining ethical concepts in light of history.[5]

Two of MacIntyre's recurring themes are history and tradition. For example, he argues that

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

2. MacIntyre's ethical theory is best presented in the "*After Virtue* Project", which consists of four books: *After Virtue* (1984), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988); *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990); and *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999).

3. Though he is classified as a "virtue ethicist", MacIntyre rejects the label insofar as it does not necessitate a real restoration of the Aristotelian tradition of virtue. Nevertheless, he has contributed to virtue ethics, as well as a surprising number of other fields: the history of philosophy, political science, epistemology, the philosophy of education, sociology, and more.

4. Jack Russell Weinstein, *On MacIntyre* (Wadsworth, 2003), 38.

5. Ibid., chap. 4.

we can only responsibly use and evaluate practical concepts such as self, practice, *telos*, or virtue when we know our own history. Furthermore, *we ourselves* have a history and inhabit a tradition. These two themes have guided the construction of MacIntyre's virtue theory. Though MacIntyre is justly reputed as a critic,[6] his most surprising and most lasting contributions have been his constructive theoretical solutions. This chapter aims to summarize – and critically discuss – some of MacIntyre's ethical theory.

Chapter outline

This task is divided into four sections.

Section 1: Virtue. First, I shall present MacIntyre's theory of virtue and practical rationality, drawing on his four primary virtue books. I shall present his definition of virtue and the six supporting concepts by which he defends his definition. Those concepts are: practice, self, *telos*, human nature, tradition-constituted rationality, and *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Together, these form a powerful theory that is useful and explains a wide range of ethical phenomena.

Section 2: Objections. Then, I shall present a battery of powerful objections to various aspects of MacIntyre's theory. He has received more excellent replies than can be mentioned in a short space; some must be left out. For instance, valid criticisms from postmodern and his fellow Thomistic philosophers I must sadly leave to one side. I shall focus on three clusters of objections from modern philosophers that seem to me the most potentially devastating. The first pertains to moral relativism and perspectivism. Is MacIntyre successful in defending the Aristotelian tradition of moral realism or just producing an anthropology of virtue? The second family of objections pertains to his concept of rationality as "tradition-constituted." Is his theory of rationality coherent and clear enough to be useful as a theory of virtues? Or is it also subject to the charge of relativism? The third family of objections pertains to teleology. In attempting to shoehorn teleology back into ethics, is MacIntyre accepting tenets from a discredited Aristotelian metaphysics of nature? If not,

6. Peter McMylor, *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity* (Routledge, 2005).

aren't some modern moralities teleological after all? If not, can't modern morality get along well enough without *telos*?

Section 3: Discussion. Then, I shall present and discuss answers to the three families of objections above. While I cannot promise to calm the legitimate worries of his critics, I argue that each of these three families of objections can be answered satisfactorily. Many of the worries about relativism are misunderstandings. MacIntyre can avoid a legitimate worry about conclusion that no theory of virtue is rationally superior to any other. Secondly, his notion of tradition-constituted rationality may cause frustration since it is open to interpretation (by philosophers from varying traditions) but this is not a mark against it; rather, the paradoxical notion tracks the paradoxical phenomena, especially the fact of both widespread moral disagreement *and* widespread moral agreement. Thirdly, MacIntyre's early notion of teleology is credible within our modern scientific context; it only requires is a recognition of "social teleology" which can be easily adduced by reflection on our actions and our lives. If some modern theories (such as Kantian deontology) are teleological, then they are in fundamental harmony with MacIntyre's theory. That said, consequentialisms are not properly teleological if they treat all relations between actions and consequences as contingent.

Section 4: Conclusion. Finally, I shall review the terrain covered. First, I shall close this chapter with a reflection on why some critics don't just disagree but are perplexed or frustrated by MacIntyre's philosophical ethics.

I. Rational Virtue in Practice

Section Introduction

MacIntyre's concept of virtue is derived from (but not limited to) a careful study of the history of the concept within the broader western tradition.[7] So we'll begin there. Then we shall see how he

7. MacIntyre's philosophical methodology is exemplified in how he defines 'virtue'. He begins with Homeric virtues (roughly, the performance of one's social role) and works through the implicit or explicit definitions of virtue in Plato, Aristotle, the Greek tragic poets, the New Testa-

expands this definition in light of six supporting concepts: practice, self, telos, practical rationality, and *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Briefly, *practices* are social activities in which virtues are acquired and used; The *self* is what acquires virtues and vices; *telos* is necessary to define the contrast with the way we are now and the way we ought to be if we were fully "realized" or fulfilled as persons; *practical rationality* is the defining feature of humans as dependent animals; similiarly, *phronesis* or practical wisdom bears a special relationship to all the other virtues. In sum, this account of virtue and practical rationality powerfully captures the phenomena of human life, and so lends support to MacIntyre's conviction that humans need the virtues.

Virtue – an initial definition

MacIntyre's initial definition of virtue is that virtues are "acquired human qualities that enable their possessor to achieve those goods which are internal to practices."[8] This is perhaps a puzzling definition. What are "*practices*"? Practice is a key term of art; to misunderstand it would be to misunderstand MacIntyre. Also, he defines virtues with reference to goods *"internal to"* practices. What is the internal/external relation doing? The next section shall explain these term more fully. For now, a few further observations are in order to elucidate each piece of this initial definition.

First, he says virtues are acquired *human* qualities. Presumably, human qualities are opposed to analogous qualities of non-human animals. The flexible flagellum of a bacterium, the swiftness of a deer – formal or functional biological features that enable an animal to survive and thrive – are excluded from the class of virtues by definition. MacIntyre's later *Dependent Rational Animals* retracts the assumed divide between human and non-human animals. But here, virtues do not arise from nor depend on biology. In this, MacIntyre's initial formulation disagrees with Foot but agrees with

ment, Aquinas, Jane Austen, and Benjamin Franklin. While respecting the different definitions and examples, he creatively abstracts an account that unifies them all. His definition is historical but not restricted to history; it aims to be universal but does not pretend to be purely abstract. His concept of virtue is, rather, *traditional*. Furthermore, as we shall see, MacIntyre's view of 'tradition' is not conservative but progressive, not oriented toward the past but the future.

8. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 191.

McDowell, as we shall see. The next section will also address the question: What constitues an individual human self?

Secondly, virtues are *acquired* human qualities. This is an important point and relates to the first, for natural biological features are inborn. Virtues, rather, are acquired. This is no small matter. In the first line of Plato's *Meno*, Meno asks Socrates a question that moral philosophers have continued to try to answer for the last 2,400 years. He asks "whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way?"[9] MacIntyre's answer is not that virtue is a gift of the gods, but that it is *acquired.* A recent volume edited by Mark Alfano[10] discusses the range of which positive traits count as virtues. MacIntyre, it would seem, sides with those who limit the range to exclude inborn or genetically determined qualities like a good memory or excellent eyesight from being considered virtues. That is not to say that virtues are *not natural*. In one sense of the word 'natural', virtues are proper to human beings without being, so to speak, "automatic." In this, he agrees with Aristotle that virtue is *in accordance with* nature but not *by nature*. Rather, virtuous traits are a "normal" psychological outgrowth of cultivating excellence within particular human practices.

Thirdly, virtues enable their possessor to achieve particular *goods.* This clause assumes that virtues are beneficial. A virtuous trait *cannot* be directed at achieving ills. This assumption will bring some trouble for MacIntyre's initial definition in *After Virtue*. Can't overall wicked people have particular virtues? Can't the thief be courageous, the dictator magnanimous, the glutton affable? It certainly seems that the answer is yes. Even indexing virtues to practices does not solve the problem; can practices be wicked? I shall discuss this problem in next sub-sections.

Fourthly, since virtues "enable their possessor to acheive … goods", it may seem that virtue are mere instruments to goods, not goods themselves. A grave misunderstanding lurks in the vicinity. Virtues *are* instrumental for MacIntyre, but they are not *merely* instrumental. They are both

9. John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997), *Meno* 70a.
10. Mark Alfano, ed., *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory* (Routledge, 2015).

instrumental (to the achievement of certain goods) and also *partly constitutive of those goods.* Virtues are both means to an end and also ends in themselves.[11] Now, this conflation of means and ends is liable to worry some critics. The worry is not trivial; however, for the sake of completing my presentation of virtue, I must set it aside until the discussion of teleology below.

With these comments in hand, we can more deeply explore MacIntyre's unfolding account of virtue in the following sub-sections. The first concept we must explain is that of a 'practice.'

Practice

What is a practice? A practice is a social activity aimed at defined ends. (We commonly speak of "practicing" medicine in this sense.) MacIntyre mentions farming, chess, and political activity, among other examples. A practice is not merely a reflexive action (like scratching an itch) nor merely a single, discrete, intelligible action (like pulling a weed); it is an intelligible set of actions. The farmer is engaged in a series of activities, from tilling, sowing, watering, protecting, harvesting, storing, etc., all of which are embedded within a social context and organized around a particular goal. Each practice has a history, a set of practitioners, a common set of standards, and a common goal. And virtues are those qualities that enable their possessor to excel in practices.

For example, secondary school education is a social activity that teachers undertake in order to give children the basic knowledge and skills they need to transition to functional adults in society, whether by getting a job, starting a business, or advancing to higher stages of education.[12] Secondary education in the U.S. is a practice with a history (or a set of histories) from the present time back to when Americans completing high school (rather than beginning work on a farm or in town by the

11. *Phronesis* or practical wisdom, for example, enables agents to make good decisions that result in human flourishing but having *phronesis just is part of what it means* to flourish qua human.

12. Secondary education has other (perhaps de facto) purposes, like to socialize young people in a community of peers and authorities, and to afford them opportunities for recreation, art, clubs, to give parents a break, and so on. For the sake of simplicity, I shall focus on what seems to me the primary goal of education, which is education (in knowledge) and training (in skills) needed for becoming a legal adult.

age of 16) was the exeption rather than the rule. It has standards, both legal standards and "best practices" passed from mentor to student teacher. It pretty obviously has standards of excellence according to which most educators are average, some poor, and some excellent. An educator who wants to join that profession will be enculturated with that history, taught those standards, and given a chance (usually by trial and error) to become a good teacher.

Leading MacIntyre scholar, Christopher Lutz, highlights four aspects of MacIntyre's famous definition of practice. A practice is:

> [1] a complex social activity that [2] enables participants to gain goods internal to the practice. [3] Participants achieve excellence in practices by gaining the internal goods. When participants achieve excellence, [4] the social understandings of excellence in the practice, of the goods of the practice, and of the possibility of achieving excellence in the practice are systematically extended.[13]

I believe my example of high school education illustrates Lutz' explication of MacIntyre's definition of 'practice.' [1] Practices are inherently complex *social* activities in that teachers cannot be teachers without students, and (usually) do not teach in isolation but in community with colleagues and administrators and parents. [2] Secondary education qua practice enables teachers to gain the goods "internal to the practice", namely students who are educated enough to be ready for legal adulthood – for a job or college. [3] Good teachers are those that demonstrate the ability reliably to produce, against all odds, educated students. And [4] good schools and good teachers usually have a *history* and social context that is being "extended" across generations. Good schools recruit and train good teachers, good teachers train the next generation of good teachers, and so on.

What does this phrase "goods internal to the practice" mean? MacIntyre later refashions the contrast between 'internal' and 'external' goods into one between 'goods of excellence' and 'goods of effectiveness.' I prefer the latter terminology. But the point is, I think, clear. The goods of excellence just are those that necessarily contribute to succes within a given practice as such. In secondary education, success is defined by graduate rates, student retention of information, high test

13. Stephen Lutz, "Alasdair MacIntyre" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015).

scores, high acceptance rates to top colleges, low drug use, low teenage pregnancy, and so on. The profession-specific virtues needed include understanding (to stay patient with struggling students), affability (to keep repoire), articulateness (to present material effectively), and so on. More general virtues needed include honesty, integrity, courage, faithfulness, and so on. Without these, *teaching* may be possible but *teaching well* is impossible.

By contrast, goods of effectivness are those that might fit with the practice but are not *necessary* for achieving the end of that practice: high pay, an excellent teacher lounge, a short commute to work, and so on. Mere efficiency in attaining such external goods does not entail the presence of a virtue. In fact, the desire to pursue such goods *instead of* the goods of excellence is not a neutral desire — it is a *temptation.* Virtues are needed to overcome those temptations and to succeed according to the standards of the practice itself.[14]

MacIntyre's initial definition, culled from a careful study of history, is that virtues are "acquired human qualities that enable their possessor to achieve those goods which are internal to practices."[15] However, this definition is incomplete. It is only the first of three layers or dimensions of his final account in *After Virtue*. The second layer depends on the notions of self and *telos*.

Self

MacIntyre initially defines virtues as properties that enable success in practices. More specifically, virtues sustain practices while vices enervate them; virtues eventually improve practices while vices eventually ruin them. But humans are the practicioners. So MacIntyre expands his account by defining virtues as those qualities that benefit human beings in the quest of human life.[16]

Two contrasting understandings of the self and of human life compete. We might term

14. To illustrate the temptation goods of effectiveness might pose, we need only think about political activity. Some (I suppose) become politicians *in order to bring about* the survival, security, and prosperity of the *polis*; others engage in order merely to satisfy their own ambition or achieve fame. Often we see American politicians running for office only one apparent aim: book sales.

15. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

16. Ibid., chap. 15.

them 'the natural self' and the 'empty self.' The natural self is the traditional understanding. In the seminal text of the "Aristotelian tradition", the *Nicomachean Ethics*, MacIntyre finds the view that humans "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*. The good is defined in terms of their specific characteristics."[17] For Aristotle 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*."[18]

The empty self is radically different. The Enlightenment thinkers (such as Kant) and their heirs (such as Rawls) conceive the self as unencumbered. As an individual, I am a moral subject free to pursue my own ends. I am a self among other selves, each of whom is equal to me qua individual. I have rational capacities to know facts, and emotional or practically rational faculties with which to desire and value. I have my own good separate and apart from the good of other individuals, such as those of my friends, family, and society. I am morally responsible to negotiate the pursuit of my goals and my own self-interest with the rights of others. The empty is not naturally constrained by inherent teleology or inherent sociality. The self is not social *by nature*; it is atomic by nature and only social by choice, or contract, or artifice. As Michael Sandel says, "what separates us is in … prior to what connects us— epistemologically prior as well as morally prior."[19] The empty self does not have a history; the body arises from a biological history but the self emerges as it were from nowhere, suddenly possessed of detached freedom. Without strictures of ready-made history and destiny, the empty self is, of course, celebrated as more free. It is self-determining, self-legislating, and ultimately self-creating.

The natural self is also a moral subject, a self among other selves. But as an individual I owe my being and personhood to the past, biologically, psychologically, and culturally. Furthermore, the

17. Ibid., 148.
18. Ibid., 148.
19. Michael J Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 133.

end of life is somewhat already defined and waiting for me to achieve it. I may have to create and determine much about my life, but my end is a task already given.

On this issue, MacIntyre argues the standard communitarian line.[20] While this section is not the place to adjudicate the entrenched dispute between communitarian and liberal view of the self, a two comments are worth making to clarify and help to justify MacIntyre's location on the conceptual map. The first is the sociological and anthropological point that each of us belongs by nature to a family (via genetics) and a culture (via upbringing): There are no Tarzans or Mowglis raised outside of a particular culture. In social institutions (clubs, churches, schools, guilds, towns) that practices are learned, taught, preserved, extended. In social conditions we develop what virtues we may enjoy and what vices we may suffer. We are trained in courage by ennobling traditions and trained in cowardice and vice by "corrupt traditions."[21]

The second is the observation that we bear responsibility for the actions of our ancestors. For example, a present day black American's identity is in part defined by relation to 18th century blacks and their relation to 18th century whites. It will not do for a modern individual to assert that he or she is not responsible for American slavery. Though it is literally true that he or she never owned a slave, never bought or sold another human being as property, it is not true that our present identities are completely divorced from our past.

Much more could, of course, be said. These two dimensions of identity – across the community at the present and across the community over time – do not definitively settle anything. But they point to a robust notion of individuality. It will come as no surprise that MacIntyre's view of the self, the narrative of life, the end of humanity, ethics, and rationality itself come to be built on the notion of restored *telos*.

20. Cf. Charles Taylor, "Atomism," *Philosophical Papers* 2 (1985): 187–210.
21. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223.

Telos

The contrast between these two understandings of the self is great. John Horton and Susan Mendus summarize the contrast well enough to quote them in full:

> Where Aristotle understood man as a creature with a definite function which he might fulfill or deny, modern morality sees man simply as a rational agent who has no true or definable purpose independent of his own will… By appealing to a *telos*, Aristotle was able to distinguish between the way we actually are and the way we should be. His conception of human beings as having a specific *telos* brought with it the possibility that we might fall short of the ideal… But with the rejection of Aristotelianism gain the rejection of any such distinction between what we are and what we should be. Post-Enlightenment man is seen as governed, not by a *telos* external to him, but simply by the dictates of his own inner reason… Thus the abandonment of an Aristotelian conception of the good has not only left us without standards by which to evaluate our moral arguments, it is also cast us adrift in the moral world. For Aristotle, a conception of the good for man has an essentially societal dimension.[22]

For MacIntyre, the loss of *telos* is one of the chief if not the chief error of Enlightenment moralities. He explains why in his discussion of the three elements of morality.[23] The first element is "untutored human nature" (as it is). The second element is human nature (as it could be, should be). The third element is the set of properties needed to move from the first to the second points. Moral rules or admirable character traits are the content of morality; but the *telos* of humanity is the context of morality. It quite literally makes the content of morality make sense. Understanding "human-nature-as-it-is"[24] is a task for philosophers, as well as psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc. Understanding human nature "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos*"[25] was "the whole point of ethics." It is difficult to understate the importance of this point about the self and its relation to not only virtue theory but ethical theory itself. Edward Oakes describes the removal of *telos* from our worldview as "perhaps the greatest category mistake ever made in the history of philosophy."

22. John Horton and Susan Mendus, "Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue and After," in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. Mark Alfano (Routledge, 2015), 6.

23. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 54ff.

24. Ibid., 55.

25. Ibid., 55.

> That word "teleological" is the key to MacIntyre's solution, the loss of which is the cause of the catastrophe described in his science-fiction parable. Teleology is the study of final causes, goals, purposes, and aims: a style of explanation that saturates Aristotle's philosophy. After the combined impact of Newton and Darwin, however, this type of explanation seems mostly 'quaint' and once Aristotle's science seemed quaint, his ethics soon followed: when Newton demonstrated how motion can be better explained as resulting from the outcome of mechanical laws, and when Darwin posited natural selection as the "mechanism" for explaining an organ's functionality, the use of teleology in ethics was doomed…Emptying moral discourse of teleological concepts because of the perceived impact of Newton and Darwin has been for MacIntyre the catastrophe of our times.[26]

Now, MacIntyre's account of virtue is "neo-Aristotelian" in that it borrows from but also contrast with Aristotle's. For instance, MacIntyre denies that Aristotle's virtues are so timeless, abstract, and generically human as Aristotle would make them appear; they are partly indexed to fourth century, upper-class, educated Athenian culture. He also rejects Aristotele's metaphysics of nature. Nevertheless, he argues, the loss of a concept of *telos* is dramatic. MacIntyre's provisional conception of our human *telos* is this: "The good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is."[27] Our *telos* is to be free to pursue our *telos*. MacIntyre is not a straightforward eudaemonist; this conception of the human *telos* is more vague than Aristotle's. Whatever the human *telos* turns out to be, it minimally includes the freedom to explore "what else" the *telos* might be.

I defer a full discussion of teleology until the next section. For now, it is not vacuous to conclude that the virtues needed to achieve this (extremely indeterminate) goal themselves indirectly make room for and might directly illumine "what else" our *telos* consists in. The virtues needed to preserve the quest for the good, he suggests, may illumine "what else" our *telos* consists in. It may turn out (and his later writings are more explicit about it) that the determinate *telos* of a given tradition is a more determinate conception of eudaimonia.

26. Edward Oakes, "The Achievement of Alasdair Macintyre," *First Things*, 1996.
27. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 210.

An initial worry

Thus far, we have seen the first two layers or dimensions of MacIntyre's theory of virtue. He presents virtues as those qualities acquired by individual selves in the performance of practices that serve the intrinsic or ends of those practices. We have also seen that virtues enable the self qua member of a community to achieve its end, which is minimally the freedom to further explore what that end is.

One worry that many readers have shared is that MacIntyre's account of virtue, thus far, is simply too relativistic: Is torture – or grand theft auto – a practice in which one can achieve excellence? MacIntyre admits in *After Virtue* that there *might* be evil practices. Yet he tries to deny relativism. To avoid it, he must justify the assumption that virtues are not neutral with respect to ends, but are actually *good* for their possessor. Thus far, however, MacIntyre's theory cannot overcome this worry. Lutz argues:

> Unfortunately, the relativism of *After Virtue* cannot be overcome unless its definitions of the virtues are extended to embrace the Aristotelian and Thomistic doctrine of the unity of virtue. MacIntyre's rejection of the unity of virtue in *After Virtue* has grave implications for the rest of his virtue theory because the rejection of the unity of virtue divorces the intellectual moral virtue of prudence from the passional moral virtues of courage, temperence, and justice… Prudence becomes cleverness…The strength of MacIntyre's account of practices is that the pursuit of excellence in a practice entails the pursuit of virtue, but if practices can be evil, and virtues can 'enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to' such an evil practice, and virtues can be anything at all.[28]

A fuller discussion of relativism I return to below, clarifying the charge and explaining how MacIntyre rebuts it.[29] For now, the charge of relativism effectively motivates MacIntyre's third layer in the *After Virtue* account: "tradition-constituted" rationality, and human nature.

28. Christopher Stephen Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Lexington Books, 2004), 98–101.

29. There have been ethical philosophers who endorse this kind of reductive virtue: Lutz mentions Edmund Pincoff., Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552–71. But the commonsense definition of "virtue" includes *goodness*. A virtue is, within our tradition, a quality *admirable for its own sake* or else a quality that enables its bearer to *achieve admirable goals*. MacIntyre has not yet said enough capture this definition.

Tradition-constituted rationality

One of MacIntyre's enduring themes is that we all inhabit a "tradition." The concept is liable to fatal misunderstanding. I should be cutting off the Hydra's immortal head if I were to explain it here. What does it mean to assert that "we all inhabit a tradition"? Most trivially, it means each of us are embodied, live in a time, place, and social setting, and speak a given language.

More interestingly, it means that each of us (intellectuals at least) owe our conceptual resources to a tradition. What is a tradition? "A living tradition . . . is an historically extended, socially embodied argument…"[30]. The content of a tradition is partly self-reflexive: it is "… an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition." Traditions derive from a source text and continue across generations via normal sociological channels (schools, friendships, political institutions, etc.). So, by MacIntyre's lights, history-writing is a tradition. It is rooted in source texts such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Gibbon and extending through Europe and the western world, consisting of a series of historical and historiographical arguments over not just "what happened" but how to conduct historical enquiry.

As MacIntyre says, "We, whoever we are, can only begin enquiry from the vantage point afforded by our relationship to some specific social and intellectual past through which we have affiliated ourselves to some particular tradition of enquiry, extending the history of that enquiry into the present …"[31] The tradition of enquiry we inhabit gives us not only abstract standards of reasoning but also facts, connections, concepts, and the very language we speak. Rationality, for MacIntyre, is inclusive of all the resources by which we judge true and false. Rationality itself as tradition-constituted and tradition-constituting. The resources I receive from my tradition are resources I may prune, discard, modify, or add to. What tradition we are a part of makes a great deal of difference to how we conduct moral inquiry.

30. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

31. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 401.

Tradition and rationality are bound up together. He discovered this partially through his study of ethics. As a young philosopher, he was troubled about emotivism in particular and modern metaethics in general. Emotivists, intuitionists, naturalists, and error theorists all seemed to assume that moral terms are *referential*. If moral terms within moral judgments are supposed to pick out a property in the world, then either we must identify that property or (if we cannot) conclude that moral terms are literally meaningless. He argued that this assumption is a mistake. Instead, he concluded that the significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action."[32] Instead of referring (or failing to refer) to a special 'moral property', all evaluative reasoning is practical reasoning. We employ moral judgments when we must evaluate something or when we must reason about what to do. Moral reasoning is not a special, mystical discipline divorced from prudential, instrumental, and other kinds of practical reasoning. Hence, there can be no adequate theory of ethics apart from a theory of (practical) rationality.

Rival traditions, rival rationalities

By presenting rationality and tradition as almost the same concept, MacIntyre both elevates the concept of tradition and threatens the concept of rationality. Since traditions vary, is there any way to avoid the conclusion that rationalities vary – and do so without hope of reconciliation?

MacIntyre's answer is that we can rationally adjudicate between traditions (from within a tradition). We can justify or "switch" from our primary tradition. The means we have of "switching" traditions are these: first, one undergoes an epistemological crisis in which one identifies the inadequacies of a primary tradition; and secondly, to "exercise… a capacity for philosophical imagination"[33] and identify the resources of a rival tradition. We must empathetically engage with our rivals as if we are learning a "second first language." He says:

32. Mark C. Murphy, in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 118, quoting MacIntyre's master's thesis *The Significance of Moral Judgments* p. 73.

33. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* .

> For each of us, therefore, the question now is: To what issues does that particular history bring us in contemporary debate? What resources does our particular tradition afford in this situation? Can we by means of those resources understand the achievements and successes, and the failures and sterilities, of rival traditions more adequately than their own adherents can? More adequately by our own standards? More adequately also by theirs? It is insofar as the histories narrated in this book lead on to answers to these questions that they also hold promise of answering the questions: Whose justice? Which rationality?"[34]

Three rival versions

MacIntyre picks up the theme of tradition-constituted rationality. His most thorough treatment of the theme of rival traditions is the (1990) Gifford Lectures.[35] There he presents 'genealogy,' 'encyclopedia', and a third version he simply calls 'tradition' but I will call 'Thomism.' These three rivals are defined by their respective attitudes toward the past. Genealogists (such as Nietzsche and Foucault) use the past to subvert and "debunk" the present. Stephen Lutz summarizes the three uses the "Nietzschean research program" has for history:

> (1) to reduce academic history to a projection of the concerns of modern historians, (2) to dissipate the identity of the historian into a collection of inherited cultural influences, and (3) to undermine the notion of "progress towards truth and reason" (3RV, pp. 49-50). In short, genealogy denies the teleology of human enquiry by denying (1) that historical enquiry has been fruitful, (2) that the enquiring person has a real identity, and (3) that enquiry has a real goal. MacIntyre finds this mode of enquiry incoherent.[36]

By contrast, encyclopedists use the present to denigrate and "debunk" the past. The encyclopedist par excellence is the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, about which one reviewer said:

34. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 402.

35. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

36. Lutz, "Alasdair MacIntyre."

> The *Britannica* represents the idea of an impersonal, universal, tradition-free conception of rational enquiry into morals, telling a story of the progress of reason in philosophy and the sciences through an appeal to timeless, universal principles of rationality. The encyclopedic tradition holds moral enquiry to be about an autonomous, distinct realm of human life, which can and must be understood solely in its own terms.

Genealogists think, in advance, that no one in the future will use the present as a foundation.Encyclopedists think, in advance, that no one in the future will ever be able to transcend the present; they think we have *arrived*. Now, modernity is an encyclopedic tradition. It was the tradition MacIntyre was raised in. It is the tradition I was raised in, as (I presume) were my readers. So, by MacIntyre's lights, we are "encyclopedists." Our source texts are Hume, Kant, Newton, Locke, and others. Ours is an argument extended through time and socially embedded in the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and parts of western Europe.[37]

MacIntyre followed his own advice. As a member of the modern tradition, he reflected on it. He gradually discovered its inadequacies and searched for resources from his rivals. His attempt to trace the root of the mistake about moral judgments lead him to a mistake at the heart of Enlightenment modernity. As a social, political, and moral project, the Enlightenment has been, MacIntyre argues, a failure by its own standards. Not only is moral discourse largely devoted to moral disagreement, but it is largely soaked in despair of ever reaching agreement. Moral discourse with its interminable moral disagreement retains the rhetorical *trappings* of rationality and objectivity while denying rationality and objectivity. Neither side wants to give up the *appearance* of having a dialectical case for its value theory. One of his most memorable and oft-cited images compares modern moral discourse to the hypothetical state of scientific discourse in a post-apocalyptic catastrophe.

37. Modernity has political, scientific, religious, and philosophical aspects; it is indeed *encyclopedic*. The intellectual tradition of modernity arises alongside the rise of the modern state. We do well to remember that almost all the luminaries of Enlightenment philosophy also wrote on politics: Mill's ethical writings are almost always written with an eye to reforming civil law; Kant wrote the three *Critiques* but also the *Perpetual Peace*; John Locke wrote about perception and understanding but also treatises on government.

Only decaying fragments of intelligible moral discourse survive.[38] The picture here captures the state of moral discourse. But an obvious symptom of the decay of moral discourse and social unity is interminable ethical disagreement.[39] An explanation of this disagreement is that we are trying to get by using the scraps of a previous and whole moral tradition. MacIntyre thinks this version of rational enquiry, like genealogy, incoherent by its own standards. Nevertheless "it still exercises an extraordinary influence on contemporary thought and on university curricula."[40] The problem with modernity is not merely academic. The social and political fabric is woven from the thread of morality, so many of the ills of modern life can be traced to our inability to share a substantive conception of the good and the good life.

There are many modern philosophers who have gone into similar crises and become distrustful thought, language, and rationality itself; they join the "masters of suspicion."[41] MacIntyre took a surprising course. Moved by Thomas Kuhn's influential work on the structure of revolution between various paradigms in the natural sciences[42] he speculated that a similar structure might

38. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1: "Imagine that the natural sciences were to suffer the effects of a catastrophe…Widespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed. Finally a Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all that they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance… all these fragments are reembodied in a set of practices which go under the revived names of physics, chemistry and biology. Adults argue with each other about the respective merits of relativity theory, evolutionary theory and phlogiston theory, although they possess only a very partial knowledge of each. Children learn by heart the surviving portions of the periodic table and recite as incantations some of the theorems of Euclid. Nobody, or almost nobody, realizes that what they are doing is not natural science in any proper sense at all."

39. Ibid., 6.

40. Terry Pinkard, "Review of Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry, by Alasdair MacIntyre," *Ethics* 102, no. 1 (1991): 162–64.

41. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. D (Savage (Yale University Press, 1970). "Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzche, and Freud."

42. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1975).

obtain in moral revolutions?[43] This in turn lead MacIntyre to recover the tradition of virtues. But virtues are not free-floating moral concepts; they are embedded in a specific, living, moral tradition – the Aristotelian tradition. And the Aristotelian tradition includes a particular notion of practical rationality.

Human nature as practical reasonors

The primary theme of MacIntyre's work has been not only virtue but practical rationality.[44] For MacIntyre – as for Bernard Williams[45] – morality should not be seen as a special domain of practical life but the whole practical domain.[46] But 'rationality' is something we are raised in, and is constituted by our tradition.Tradition-constituted rationality was supposed to explain why practices can vary between people and traditions that both claim to be rational and believe the rival to be irrational; the process of switching between traditions explains, from within a tradition, one can rationally adjudicate these disagreements. This is why *practical rationality* is so important for MacIntyre's theory of *virtue.*

Nevertheless, worries about relativism may linger. For MacIntyre, virtues are relative to practices; practices are relative to traditions; traditions are relative to conceptions of rationality. His answer to this worry is, I believe, the crux of his whole theory of ethics. It appeals to two concepts that are, for him, intimately bound up with each other. The two concepts are practical reason and human nature. *Dependent Rational Animals* is the capstone to address lingering worries about relativism.

43. His 1977 essay on epistemological crises was his own version of Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – we might call this essay MacIntyre's "Structure of Ethical Revolutions"., Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist*, 1977, 453–72

44. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 60.

45. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Taylor & Francis, 2011) Chater 1.

46. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* treat rationality as the ground of ethical reasoning, while *After Virtue* and *Dependent Rational Animals* treat ethical reasoning as practical reasoning.

The project of *Dependent Rational Animals* is to insist that human beings are animals even if we are animals of a particular and unusual sort; and that our dependence and vulnerability are as morally significant as our independence, autonomy, or self-sufficiency. In other words, there are virtues of both autonomy *and* dependence. The book also contends that certain social arrangements are conducive to the transmission and sustenance of both kinds of virtue.

Let's consider a key quotation on each of these themes. Regarding the notion that we are unusual animals, MacIntyre argues at length that the human differentia (be it language, reason, practical reason, self-consciousness, or what have you) does not eradicate the commonalities between us and other animals. He says:

> I shall contend that although our differences from all other species are certainly of crucial importance, it is also important that both initially in our earliest childhood activities and to some extent thereafter we comport ourselves towards the world in much the same way as other intelligent animals. Indeed our ability to transcend those limitations depends in part upon certain of those animal characteristics among them the nature of our identity.[47]

The point, I take it, is that rational animals is *what we are*. If we cannot escape our identity as animals who are (potentially) practically rational, then we cannot escape our need for certain virtues. Furthermore, some activities will militate against our growing up to become fully practical rationality; these are vices. What kind of animal are we? We are by nature practical reasoners. Imagine any scenario of humans gathering and doing what comes naturally, and it will involve group deliberation about what to do: High school students debating about where to sit at lunch; couples arguing over the budget; political leaders proposing new laws; philosophy department meetings making hiring and admissions decisions. It is impossible (for fully functioning adults) to live life even for a full day without engaging in such reasoning. The pattern is the same. Groups of humans engage in practical reasoning — a community thinking what to do.

A second point is that human life is not one continuous phase of adulthood; it begins with

47. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 8.

youth and ends with old age. So MacIntyre breaks important new ground in explaining the relation between virtues of independence and "virtues of acknowledged dependence." He argues that the vulnerability, fragility, and affliction characteristic especially of early childhood and old age are highly morally significant. As he says:

> Virtues of independent rational agency need for their adequate exercise to be accompanied by what I shall call the virtues of acknowledge dependence and that a failure to understand this is apt to secure some features of rational agency. Moreover both sets of virtues are needed in order to actualize the distinctive potentialities that are specific to the human rational animal. Identifying how and why they are needed is a prerequisite for understanding their central place in the kind of human life through which human flourishing can be achieved.[48]

There is an obvious – and I think exciting – connection here with the ethics of care. Many others in the Aristotelian tradition have noticed the significance that we have the potential to be rational, and the potential to be independent reasoners. Fewer, until recently, have noticed the significance of dependence.[49] But the virtues of acknowledge dependence are not identical to the virtues (such as the empathy or patience) *of a care-giver*. Rather, they are virtues that arise in *relation* between the dependent and the care-giver. Dependence is, after all, as close to any of use as sickness, injury, or misfortune. The dependent needs certain virtues (gratitude is perhaps a good example) that the care-giver does not need, or needs differently. Independent rationality is rather the exception than the rule. So it is simply wrong-headed to magnify the virtues of indendence out of proportion of those that are needed, in individuals and in a community, at the beginning and end of life, and also any disabling portion of life.

To achieve the communal goal of producing independent reasoners requires a systemic web of virtues across the entire communal association. MacIntyre argues that "neither the modern state nor the modern family can supply that kind of political and social association that is needed."[50]

48. Ibid., 8.

49. Cf Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford University Press, 2005). There is an obvious overlap with some feminist ethics, and MacIntyre acknowledges his debt.

50. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 9.

Not only individual human beings, but entire communities, institutions, and nations need virtues to keep their integrity and to produce the next generation of independent, virtuous, rational animals. While *Dependent Rational Animals* is an exciting and fruitful book that deserves more attention, I must transition to explaining how it further helps protect against the charge of relativism.

Practical wisdom

Our human nature as dependent practical reasoners demonstrates why prudence or *phronesis* is the master virtue. For *Phronesis* complements every other moral virtue. MacIntyre defends Aristotle's conception of the practical syllogism. For example, *I ought to do (the courageous thing of) resisting a student's attempt to bribe me for a higher grade. This student is attempting to bribe me for a higher grade. Therefore, in this case, I ought to do (the courageous thing of) resisting this student's attempt to bribe me.** The major premise here is an evaluative judgment about a virtue or action-type; the minor premise is a factuaion judgment about a situation or action-token; the conclusion is a *maxim*. It is a judgment but not merely a judgment; it is *an action*. Each piece of the practical syllogism is needed for the whole to function in practice. For without moral virtues, prudence may be knowledge of what one ought to do but it does not entail that one is in the habit of actually doing it. And, more crucially, without prudence, the moral virtues are simply skills – skills that might be serviceable to bad ends. Without prudence, one might be skilled in achieving *what is not to be done*.

The mastery of prudence over other virtues also unifies the other virtues. *Dependent Rational Animals* supplies a necessary unifying base for MacIntyre's virtue theory in three ways: it unifies intellectual and moral virtues, unifies various moral virtues, and unifies the various stages of the narrative of *human* life.

Section conclusion

Although these responses to the initial worry about relativism may bring up more questions than they answer, they at least present a coherent picture of human life and the qualities needed to live

it well.

Human beings need oxygen and food by nature. These are biological necessities. Biologically, we are animals evolved from simpler animals.[51] But we are also social and practical-reasoning animals by nature. Our advanced practical reasoning sets us apart. We have the burden and responsibility to set the course for our own lives, and to care for the dependent among us who are not yet practical reasoners, who are temporarily disabled, or who are permanently infirm. Any tradition that does not do justice to these realities will be defective. Any practices that militate against our distinctively human life are bad practices. Whatever virtues are included on the list had better not exclude virtues that make human life possible; it had better not exclude (as Aristotle did) women and manual workers from the very possibility of developing virtues. Tradition and rationality are not ultimately at the mercy of perspective but can be rationally adjudicated.

MacIntyre thinks that "human beings need the virtues" because they are intrinsically good and useful for transforming communities and persons.[52] He began by defining virtue in reference to practice. But moral enquiry itself is a practice that takes place within a tradition. At the practical level of daily life, a small community (such as a family or town or university) does well to organize themselves around a common vision of what is good and a common conception of what qualities will help everyone to attain that good. It can and should be undertaken by regular folk, not just specialists in philosophy. And the goal of such enquiry is discovering what is really admirable and pursuing it, becoming more admirable moral agents through the acquisition of virtues. Virtues are acquired traits that enable the achievement of goods internal to the practices, those traits that sustain traditions, and those traits by which we overcome perennial temptations to lead lives that are divided, deviant, or contrary to our true nature. Furthermore, at the theoretical level of philosophical ethics, the concepts of virtue, practical wisdom, and happiness supply for moral theory what many modern moralities have not: a clear, coherent, useful, and justifiable theory that grounds a rational pursuit

51. Ibid. x.
52. Ibid.

of the good life and resolvable moral disagreements.

While there is much more that could be said, it is time to consider some of the critical responses to MacIntyre's work.

II. Objections and Clarifications

MacIntyre's work has been influential. Yet he has opponents on all sides. He has come in for criticism from fellow Thomists[53] and from postmodernists who think he is too rationalistic.[54] The critics that shall concern us here are modern philosophers who think he is not nearly rationalistic enough. These mostly analytic modern philosophers are MacIntyre's "encyclopedists."" Such readers find MacIntyre's diagnosis misguided and so find his solutions needless.[55]

In the following sub-sections, I shall articulate three families of objections about relativism, tradition-constituted rationality, and teleology that seem to me to make the most trouble for MacIntyre's account of virtue and rationality.

Relativism objections

The most recurring objection, as we have seen, is that MacIntyre's virtue theory is viciously relativistic. Now, it is undeniable that in MacIntyre's account virtue is relative to rival traditions of moral inquiry with their conflicting communities and practices. So has he only provided a cultural

53. Such as Robert P. George and John Haldane.

54. R Kevin Hill, "MacIntyre's Nietzsche," *International Studies in Philosophy* 24, no. 2 (1992): 3–12; Buket Korkut, "MacIntyre's Nietzsche or Nietzschean MacIntyre?" *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 38, no. 2 (2012): 199–214. It would seem a bit cheap to stipulate that Nietzscheanism is false and move on. Perhaps Nietzscheanism is true. Perhaps all moral discourse that appeals to rationality, divine law, human nature, tradition or any other such nonsense is simply a mask for the Will to Power. Philippa Foot, at least, has argued that analytic philosophers do not take Nietzsche's immoralist challenge seriously enough (*Natural Goodness*, chapter 7). This chapter is simply not the place to host a debate between the Nietszchean school and the Aristotelian school. Suffice it to say that I have not yet been persuaded by the "masters of suspicion."

55. They deny that our choice is between *either* "Nietzsche *or* Aristotle." They rather defend some one or other modern moral philosophy, such as deontology, consequentialism, contractarianism, egoism, sentimentalism, or something else.

anthropology of virtue and not a theory of virtue? Is there any way to rationally adjudicate moral conflict?

This weighty objection almost certainly deserves a whole chapter in its own right. How do we characterize this worry? Defining 'relativism' – or relativisms – is no small task. Instead of attempting to sift through the enormous literature on this topic, I shall follow Stephen Lutz's stipulation: " 'Relativism' is a thesis about the conclusion of enquiries; every would-be knower wants truth, but is limited by its contingent, historical conditions and/or the perspective of the enquirer. Hence no conclusion is *true* in the sense the enquirer wanted."[56] The key point is not that disagreement is insoluable and so each person must allow that the other person is correct from their own perspective. Rather, the key point is the conflation between *truth* and *rationality.* Richard Rorty gives a representative expression when he defines relativism as the claim that "there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society—ours—uses in one or another area of inquiry."[57] For Rorty, as Lutz highlights, the "familiar procedures of justification" of a given society are the beginning and end of not only rationality but truth.

This characterization of the relativism objection is the one I shall address most thoroughly. There are a variety of other ways to specify this objection that are simply misunderstandings. For example, Stephen Lutz summarizes nine possible 'relativism' objections.[58] In order to clear out some of the misunderstandings, and further detail MacIntyre's theory, I shall move through four of these. The remaining relativism objections that put real pressure on the limits of MacIntyre's theory.

56. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 66.

57. Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

58. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 74ff. He addresses no less than nine such objections. I have reiterated here the four or five most salient.

Four misguided criticisms

The first objection based on a misunderstanding is from Susan Feldmen.[59] Feldman treats MacIntyre's project as a failed and incoherent attempt to resolve factious, subjective ethical disputes by judging them from an abstract, objective, ideal observer. But MacIntyre never explicitly presents his theory as an ideal observer theory; rather, he explicitly denies it. The ideal observer would have to *begin* the enquiry from the view from nowhere, which is impossible for us. MacIntyre just is not building – not even *attempting* to build – a procedural meta-ethics with which to adjudicate otherwise intractable normative disagreements. He is rather trying to show both why normative disagreements are so intractable (they bottom out in disagreeing traditions, disagreements over rationality itself) and how normative disagreements can be tractable (by evaluating the conceptual failings of one's own tradition *and* evaluating the conceptual resources of a rival tradition).

The second is from Robet Wachbroit. MacIntyre himself responded to Wachbroit in the second edition of *After Virtue*.[60] Wachbroit's worry is about the fundamental plurality of rationalities. He thinks MacIntyre faces a dilemma. Either MacIntyre himself writes from the view from nowhere, the Enlightenment objectivity, the "Archimedean point", or he writes from within the Aristotelian tradition. MacIntyre seems to get caught in this dilemma in sentences like these: "It scarcely needs repeating that it is the central thesis of *After Virtue* that the Aristotelian moral tradition is the best example we possess of a tradition whose adherents are entitled to a high measure of confidence in its epistemological and moral resources."[61] To whom does that innocuous little word, 'we', refer? Either 'we' are the Enlightened modern liberals or 'we' are the dyed-in-the-wool Aristotelians. If we are supposed to be seeing matters from the view-from-nowhere, then MacIntyre is simply a modern meta-ethicist writing modern meta-ethics while decrying meta-ethics. He is criticizing liberalism from within the liberal tradition; he is borrowing the resources of the liberal definition of rationality

59. Susan Feldman, "Objectivity, Pluralism and Relativism: A Critique of Macintyre's Theory of Virtue," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (1986): 307–19.

60. Robert Wachbroit, "Relativism and Virtue," *Yale Law Journal* 94 (1984): 1559.

61. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 277.

to posit a theory in which no one definition of rationality has the resources to write books like *After Virtue*. But if we are supposed to be card-carrying Aristotelians, it is trivial and almost tautologous to assert that 'we' take a high measure of confidence in Aristotelianism's epistemological and moral resources. Of course 'we' do – accordance with the Aristotelian tradition is just what makes 'us' what we are. That kind of heady confidence that 'we' are up to standards arises within *each* tradition according to *that* tradition's own standards.

Wachbroit misunderstands MacIntyre's theory ever so slightly here. MacIntyre can run through the horns of the dilemma. The 'we' need not be an ideal observer from a God's-eye point of view nor an Aristotelian already subsumed in the Aristotelian tradition. The 'we' can be those of us within broader western culture who have faced or might face the same kind of epistemological crisis that lead MacIntyre (and others) to critically evaluate the present state of western culture. The adherent of liberalism and the adherent of Aristotelianism share a common social, historical, and traditional root. Without too much difficulty, they can learn each other's conceptual vocabulary as a 'second language'. By self-reflecting upon the Enlightenment "branch" of the broader western tradition, and by facing up to its inadequacies and epistemological inconsistencies, the liberal adherent can test for him or herself whether the Aristotelian tradition has more resources for solving problems that are problems *by liberalism's own lights*. If, as MacIntyre did, such a person discovers that the Aristotelian has more resources for solving those problems, he or she might make rejoin with that thriving tradition.

The third criticism is this: Mark Colby misunderstands MacIntyre's project as an attempt to develop a new, objective criterion of truth that will solve the problem of epistemological crisis, regardless of one's tradition. On Colby's reading, MacIntyre is a kind of pragmatist, where the truth is just the conclusion of a certain sort of rational enquiry. But MacIntyre denies this. The test of a traditon's rationality is its adequation to reality. Lutz illustrates the point with an example of progress in astronomical science.

> Ptolemaic astronomy lasted 1000 years because it solves a set of astronomical problems better than any of its opponents, including the heliocentric models of Aristarchus and Copernicus. Nevertheless, it did not adequately characterize the true nature of planetary motion and so under close evaluation it was plagued by inefficiencies that lead its adherents into a epistemological crisis. The theory that overcame Ptolemaic astronomy did so because it solved the astronomical problems or adequately than the Ptolemaic model, and it was confirmed by its predictive capacity. The fact that Kepler's astronomical model once subsumed into Newtonian physics, could predict novel facts provided confirmation that it was not only a clever description of a puzzling phenomenon, but a more adequate characterization of its object: the true nature of planetary motion. What counts as progressiveness in the epistemological crisis resolution is improved adequacy to truths, but it pissed him logical crises only rise *within* traditions. Ptolemaic astronomers overcame *their* epistemological crisis when they abandoned *their own* geocentric beliefs Intertraditional considerations arise only when the adherents of one tradition are able to recongize in the resources of another tradition a more adequate solution to their own epistemological crisis. So progressiveness in epistemological crisis resolution cannot function as an intertraditional norm of rationality. This is no challenge to MacIntyre, however, because MacIntyre does not envision epistemological crisis as a tool for comparative ethics or meta-ethics.[62]

As I understand Lutz' point here, Colby is conflating the attempt of an enquirer *within* a tradition to resolve his or her epistemological crisis through examining the resources of a rival tradition with the attempt of an inquirier *outside* both traditions to resolve "epistemological crisis" per se by developing an intertraditional or trans-traditional criterion of adequacy. MacIntyre thinks the former is possible (and happens often) but that the latter is impossible. This is a terse reply; I will pick it up in the next section.

Alicia Juarrero Roque surfaces a fourth possible misinterpretation. MacIntyre claims that "comparison" between traditions is possible for an enquirer. But it is not possible by the attainment of an objective, context-free stance. Rather, each inquirier acquires a conceptual framework from his own tradition – this is like a "first language." But each enquirer has the capacity to learn a "second first language". We can learn another conceptual framework philosophical imagination, through taking it *as if true* even before affirming it *as true*. Why do this? Usually because the enquirer's

62. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 91.

own tradition has failed him; he sees its inadequacies, he sees its problems and contradictions, he sees that it fails to live up to its own standards. MacIntyre describes what "rare gift of empathy"[63] that this "philosophical imagination" makes possible: "…understand the theses, arguments, and concepts of their rival in such a way that they are able to view themselves from such an alien standpoint and to re-characterize their own beliefs in an appropriate manner from the alien perspective."[64] Roque's worry is that the capacity for learning a second first language is an innate, rational capacity that *all people share.* If so, then belief in such a capacity contradicts the definition of tradition-constituted rationality. If not, then the absence of such a capacity renders tradition comparison impossible. MacIntyre's response is flatly to deny this interpretation of his work. The "capacity" to learn another tradition as a "second first language" is a "rare gift of empathy" and in no way part of a supposed bundle of innate capacities. This rebuttal does not make such a capacity unproblematic; we still might wonder whether, for an given enquirer, that enquirer's estimation that he possesses the gift of empathy and philosophical imagination isn't just a re-statement of the trivial thought, "I think I am right."

These four criticisms arise from a worry that is ultimately unjustified. Below, I shall respond more fully to a few more versions of this worry. Some worries about relativism can be answered by an appeal to practical rationality. But for MacIntyre, practical rationality is tradition-consituted. So at least some worries about relativism reappear at this second order.[65]

Tradition-constituted rationality objections

The second family of objections pertain to the way MacIntyre's ethical theory appeals to tradition-constituted rationality. MacIntyre argues that we should return to the Aristotelian tradition of virtue and practical reason. We must beware one misunderstanding. Any talk of "returning" is liable

63. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 167.

64. Ibid., 167.

65. For this reason, Stephen Lutz's last "relativism" objection I treat as a "tradition-constituted rationality" objection.

to sound nostalgic. At the risk of sounding paradoxical, we might put it this way: MacIntyre's positive ethical positions are *traditional* but not *nostalgic*. In fact, his definition of tradition is *progressive*. Tradition is an ongoing, socially-embedded argument over time, which necessarily entails that moral enquiry is dynamic – even *modern*. To be traditional is not to be past-oriented; to be traditional is to be staunchly future-oriented, since the business of life is not only the pursuit of our *telos* but the transmission of everything valuable and precious to the next generation.

One critic who misunderstands MacIntyre along these lines is Martha Nussbaum.[66] She begins her review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* with an age-old dilemma between the social stability afforded by tradition (with its danger of hidebound error) and the social volatility endemic to critical reflection (with its opportunity of progress toward truth). She alludes to this dilemma as articulated by Aristotle:

> In the second book of the Politics, Aristotle asks whether it is a good thing to encourage changes in society. Should people be offered rewards for inventing some change in the traditional laws? No, he writes, because this would lead to instability and unnecessary tampering with what is working well. Should we, on the other hand, listen to those who wish to keep ancestral traditions fixed and immune from criticism? No again—for if we reason well we can make progress in lawmaking, just as we do in other arts and sciences.[67]

Aristotle's solution is that it should be hard but not impossible to change societal structures. Of course, we don't have to pick just one or the other. But, putting it starkly, of the two it is better to gamble for progress toward truth at the risk of instability than to gamble for stability at the risk hidebound error. Strangely, Nussbaum takes MacIntyre to be reversing Aristotle's balance. She thinks MacIntyre is urging for betting on social stability even if it means sticking closer to existing tradition (and hence surpassing or intentionally avoiding critical reflection) than is compatible with unfettered progress.

66. Martha Nussbaum, "Recoiling from Reason," *The New York Review of Books* 36, no. 19 (1989): 36–41.

67. Ibid.

This is not an objection to MacIntyre — it is a misreading. He rejects fideism and this kind of conservative traditionalism. MacIntyre sides with Aristotle, in my view, that the risk of complacent error is greater than the risk of instability. For hidebound error is likely to perpetuate itself across generations, while the instability arising from a cacaphony of disagreement is likely to be short-lived. Nussbaum does not see that MacIntyre's proposed solution is not a sort of *anti-progressive* longing for the past. It is radically progressive. His solution is not to reverse progress but to replace the Enlightenment's standard of progress with a more tenable alternative. Ironically, it appears to me that Nussbaum is too conservative in her defense of the Enlightenment's standard of progress; MacIntyre is the progressive here. Rather than accusing MacIntyre of being too conservative, Nussbaum should focus on his critique of the Enlightenment. MacIntyre's critique may be wrong, but it is with that critique that she should take issue. She should not accuse him of failing to "make progress… [in] arts and sciences" but of "tampering with what is working well."

MacIntyre's theory of rationality may be wrong, but it is not wrong along the lines that Nussbaum attacks. The other objections we must consider are that his concept of tradition-constituted rationality is incompatible with the very act of writing a book like *After Virtue*, or unhelpfully vague.

First, is MacIntyre's concept of tradition-constituted rationality even coherent? Suppose some traditions are truly incommensurable to each other, and that MacIntyre himself is truly situated within a tradition. It follows it is not possible to write a book (like *After Virtue*?) from a universal, objective, view-from-nowhere. But MacIntyre wrote such books and defending such theories. This amounts to a performative contradiction.

Even if his concept is coherent, is it *clear* enough to be an indispensable feature of an ethical theory? What constitutes a tradition? MacIntyre's examples sometimes lead us to believe that a tradition can be anything from a religion (Judaism) to a discipline (moral inquiry) to a philosophical school (Thomism).

Once the concept of tradition is clarified, how can MacIntyre avoid the charge of relativism at this level? According to MacIntyre's account, members of traditions can leave their primary

tradition after undergoing an epistemological crisis. Remember that varying traditions can disagree about a proposition P. Perhaps tradition A finds P true and B finds it false, on best evidence and sufficient reflection. But incommensurable traditions disagree about the standards (say, S1 and S2) by which to judge the truth and even the rationality of other traditions. So A finds P true and rational (by S1) while B finds P false and irrational (by S2). They genuinely disagree. And A judges B to be irrational (since they deny that P) while B returns the favor (since A affirms that P).

Let's put these abstractions into an example. Consider Annabelle. Annabelle is a member of tradition A. Suppose that by A's standards of rationality, S1 contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense. And suppose that A teaches that P. Finally, suppose that P entails both (Q and ~Q). Annabelle discovers a problem with her tradition. She cannot deny P nor can she affirm the contradiction. After some searching about, she concludes she cannot solve the problem and cannot even discover the rational resources with which to solve them. Being passingly familiar with tradition B, she becomes curious why her friends who belong to that tradition deny P and exercises her philosophical imagination to begin to see B "from within." Tradition B is compelling, since it denies that P. She "converts" traditions. However, there is a problem with tradition B, and that is that the standard of rationality of B (S2) allows its adherents to affirm a contradiction. So now, even though Annabelle left A to avoid having to affirm a contradiction (by her standard of rationality S1) now that she has joined B she no longer sees it as irrational to affirm the contradiction (by her new standard of rationality S2). This is surely an odd conclusion.

A second variation on the same problem is this: how would a born-and-raised member of tradition B, affirming S2, ever come to epistemological crisis? Discontentment with contradictions is not available to B members *ex hypothesi*. They do not see affirming a contradiction as irrational. Their tradition can bear a hundred instances of (Q and ~Q).

The odd conclusion of this thought experiment is a dilemma: either such nonsense is possible, or embracing the law of non-contradiction is a universal standard of rationality in every tradition. The latter option seems to indicate that traditions A and B are *not* actually incommensurable,

since they share one rather substantial presupposition. The flow of members from one to the other is intelligible. The former option allows A and B to be incommensurable, but seems to freeze members in their own tradition. Members of A would have no (rational) justification for joining B, while members of B would have no (rational) justification for leaving B. So either all traditions are the same (in which case MacIntyre's definition is unclear) or some people are in principle locked in their own tradition (in which case one kind of relativism is final).

While "tradition" and "tradition-constituted rationality" were supposed to solve the conundrums MacIntyre faced in his life and philosophical career, the cure may have been worse than the disease.

Telos objections

The third and final family of objections pertain to teleology. If MacIntyre's suggestion that we need to recover the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues is to be taken as a serious plan, then we must recover *telos*, for virtue without *telos* becomes an unintelligible set of rules or traditions. Virtue without *telos* literally has no point.[68] This constellation of objections is, I think, most potentially disastrous for MacIntyre's theory, and the objections are powerful.[69]

Telos is, of course, Greek for "end". The word is bursting with dizzying array of possible meanings, including "definite point", "goal", "purpose," "cessation," "order," "prize," "highest point", "realization", "decision", and "services."[70] There are at least two kinds of teleology we can

68. A society that enforces chaste behavior and honors chastity as a virtue but does so without any understanding of how such chastity fits into the fulfilled life of a fully virtuous human being and a fully virtuous community will be open to the criticism that such behaviors and virtues are prohibiting a whole range of pleasurable activities.

69. Yet in addition to the real philosophical difficulty of the matter, the prejudices and misconceptions surrounding teleology are so thick one would need several chapters to dig through the muck and mire. I think an adequate response can, ultimately, be made.

70. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Harper & Brothers, 1896) compare with Strong's 5056: "telos tel'-os from a primary tello (to set out for a definite point or goal); properly, the point aimed at as a limit, i.e. (by implication) the conclusion of an act or state (termination (literally,

distinguish between: natural and social.[71] Natural teleology is not *intentional*. Social teleology is. The type of teleology the Aristotelian tradition takes for granted is natural teleology, of which social teleology is a human instantiation.

In this section I shall present three objections from teleology that are especially problematic for MacIntyre's narrative. The first objection regarding teleology is to deny MacIntyre's historical narrative. Oakes above eloquently summarized MacIntyre's criticism of the loss of *telos* in modern moral philosophy, natural science, psychology, and ethics. But perhaps modern moral philosophy is not so anti-teleological as all that. Kant's categorical imperative, much vaunted for its austere duty for the sake of duty, is actually aimed at perfection.[72] Keith Ward argued with some impatience almost 40 years ago (10 years before *After Virtue*'s first edition) that Kant should not be interpreted as commending duty as some abstract, context-free obligation. He says:

> Kant's position is not merely that one must conceive oneself as setting up a purposive order of Nature, according to universal laws, as though one could arbitrarily choose anything whatsoever as one's purpose. One can see this if one takes Kant's list of examples of moral duties in the *Metaphysic of Morals* [sic]. Masturbation is against the *purposes of Nature*, in forming the sexual organs; suicide contravenes *Nature's purpose* in establishing self-love in order to preserve life… Finally, "holiness of will" must be pursued, as this expresses the absolute worth of the human person, in its freedom from sensuous impulses and its transcendence of Nature.[73]

These quotes from the allegedly dour-faced deontologist certainly sound awfully similar to Aristotle (not to mention St. Paul). Along similar lines, Kantian ethicist David Cummiskey has argued that Kant can be understood as a consequentialist of sorts.[74] The proposal is that Kant's *justification* for moral normative principles was a brute, formal, categorical imperative, but the *content* of such normative principles included agents and the goods they aim to attain. Happiness can be valued as

figuratively or indefinitely), result (immediate, ultimate or prophetic), purpose); specially, an impost or levy (as paid); continual, custom, end(-ing), finally, uttermost."

71. James Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology" (PhD thesis, PhD dissertation, 2011).

72. Keith Ward, "Kant's Teleological Ethics," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 21, no. 85 (1971): 337–51.

73. Ibid., 341.

74. David Cummiskey, *Kantian Consequentialism* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

an imperfect duty, though rational agency must be valued as a perfect duty. Without entering into all the interesting details at this juncture, the thought is that perhaps a (thoroughly modern) moral philosophy like deontology can be synthesized with natural teleology.

The other putatively modern moral philosophy that comes in for criticism for MacIntyre, Anscombe, et. al., is Mill's utilitarianism. But isn't consequentialism teleological in the proper sense of *telos*. Clearly, consequences are *ends* of actions – I go to work *in order to* earn a paycheck at the end of the month; the consequence (my paycheck) is the goal or purpose or point of the action (going to work). For consequentialism, the great intrinsic value is happiness, or pleasure. On the surface, this sounds like a kind of Aristotelian eudaimonism. But Aristotle's eudaimonia is the necessary end of all action and all practical reasoning. The proof that we pursue eudaimonia (something vague) is as robust as the proof that we pursue *anything at all*.[75] Similarly, all that Mill can say to the enquirer who wants to hear about *why* happiness is desirable is that people desire it.[76] So perhaps virtue ethics can be synthesized with consequentialism.

A second objection regarding teleology grants MacIntyre's pessimistic narrative. Ethics can get along well enough without intrinsic *teloi*. We cannot accept natural teleology since this notion has been exorcised from natural science (and from all rational philosophy) by Darwin and Newton. Bernard Williams summarizes this feeling well:

> It seems to me that a correct understanding of evolution is relevant to projects of this kind, but that the effect of that understanding is largely discouraging to them… the idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best expression, in many ways, is to be found in Aristotle's philosophy, a philosophy

75. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 2014) Book I.1.

76. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 1861, chap. 4. *Of what sort of Proof the Principle of Utility is Susceptible*. He says, "The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible, is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible, is that people hear it: and so of the other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it. If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and in practice, acknowledged to be an end, nothing could ever convince any person that it was so. No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness."

> according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave… The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way fully into ethical thought.[77]

Williams' objection is a general objection from metaphysical naturalism to *any* form of naturalistic ethics. Rosalind Hursthouse says that, "From early on, Williams has expressed pessimism about the project of Aristotelian naturalism on the grounds that Aristotle's conception of nature, and thereby human nature, was normative, and that, in a scientific age, this is not a conception that we can take on board."[78] His objection is ostensibly against the notion of natural teleology but also against a realist notion of human nature as well. If humanity as it is today is a more or less jumbled "bricolage" of adaptive parts, it is hardly a secure enough entity to ground ethical obligations.

Thankfully, morality can function without it. The moral law *by itself* guides or forms our actions without a natural *telos* performing that function. For example, Christine Korsgaard's "Authority of Reflection"[79] builds a case that human autonomy – the ability to be a law to oneself – is the source of normative authority. How does this work? My own identity as a human being obligates me to behave morally. She argues that "autonomy is the source of obligation" and that "we have *moral* obligations… to humanity as such."[80] Because I am self-reflective, I am accountable for what I do. Also because I am self-reflective, I have a self-conception. She says the "thinking self" regulates the "acting self." Korsgaard's notion of practical identity is that we assume identities such as human being, child, parent, teacher, etc. Each identity is functional; it grounds obligations. If I am really to be a teacher, I must show up for class. If I really am to be a parent, I must feed and educate my child. Practical identities may be more or less contingent. All of us are children; not all

77. Bernard Williams, in *Making Sense of Humanity: And Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

78. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 256.

79. Christine M Korsgaard, "The Authority of Reflection," *The Sources of Normativity* 90 (1996): 97–98.

80. Ibid., 93.

of us educators. At least one practical identity is necessary. That is our practical identity *as humans*. Humans "need to have practical conceptions of our identity in order to act and live."[81] The fact is, we do act and live. Therefore we do have a moral identity. Put another way, she says: "Rational action is possible only if human beings find their own humanity to be valuable."[82] The moral identity is one in which I take up a viewpoint as a member of the "Kingdom of Ends", the community of those who also have a moral identity. So the moral law delivers content-full moral duties derived from my own autonomously legislated rules prescribed by my valuing humanity; these rules are not teleological in that they require any future fulfillment of an end to validate them.

The point of these objections is to push back on MacIntyre's narrative in which our modern liberal tradition excised *telos*. Either we did not do so, or (even if we did) we could get along without it.

These three objections – about relativism, tradition-constituted rationality, and teleology – are some of the most telling against MacIntyre's theory. In the discussion section I shall attempt to answer each one.

III. Discussion

MacIntyre's denial of relativism boils down to two claims: the first is that even enquirers situated within a tradition can achieve *truth*, because truth is distinct from *rationality*; the second claim, which is related, is that enquirers can overcome the rational limitations of their tradition.

Relative enquiry, absolute truth

MacIntyre accepts – indeed, argues for – a certain truth within relativism. That truth is that every enquirer seeks the conclusion of the enquiry at a particular time and place, within a particular social setting, within a language, and within a tradition. Following Lutz, we can say that MacIntyre

81. Ibid., 106.
82. Ibid., 106.

accepts "relativity". Relativity (a term borrowed from Michael Krausz[83]) is a thesis about *the condition of enquiry*. It is not a thesis about the *conclusion of enquiry*. Lutz approves of Mark Colby's statement that "argumentative situatedness is inescapable."[84] However such relative situatedness is compatible with objective or absolute or mind-independent or tradition-independent *truth*.

Returning to Rorty's claim, we can say that MacIntyre agrees that "nothing can be said about… rationality" except what is taken as rational in a given society and tradition; where he disagrees is in equating rationality with *truth*. From the historically- and socially-situated position of enquiry, a philosopher (he argues) may indeed find truth. It is impossible to achieve objective or absolute or tradition-independent *rationality* but it is possible – indeed, it is the hope and *telos* of enquiry – to achieve objective *truth*. This may seem a paradox.

The primary kind of truth we seek in enquiry is "the adequation of the mind to reality."[85] This is the understanding of truth inherent in the Aristotelian tradition.[86] Aristotle says, "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."[87] Aquinas calls this the adequation of the intellect to the object.

However, 'truth' is ambiguous across at least two senses: a metaphysical, substantive sense and an epistemological, logical sense. The metaphysical sense of truth is simply reality. "Truth" is

83. Michael Krausz, "Relativism and Foundationalism: Some Distinctions and Strategies," *The Monist*, 1984, 395–404.

84. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 89.

85. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, n.d. Q.16 and *De Veritate* Q.1, A.1-3. "Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus."

86. On the correspondance theory of truth, Marian David says: "The main positive argument given by advocates of the correspondence theory of truth is its obviousness. Descartes: 'I have never had any doubts about truth, because it seems a notion so transcendentally clear that nobody can be ignorant of it…the word "truth", in the strict sense, denotes the conformity of thought with its object' (1639, AT II 597). Even philosophers whose overall views may well lead one to expect otherwise tend to agree. Kant: 'The nominal definition of truth, that it is the agreement of [a cognition] with its object, is assumed as granted' (1787, B82). William James: 'Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their "agreement", as falsity means their disagreement, with "reality" ' (1907, p. 96). Indeed, The Oxford English Dictionary tells us:"Truth, n. Conformity with fact; agreement with reality"'.

87. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Metaphysics* 1011b25.

being itself. The logical sense of truth (which MacIntyre alludes to here) is the adequation of the intellect to those beings. Logical "truth" is knowing the (metaphysical) truth.[88]

If we understand MacIntyre to be arguing or assuming that (logical) truth is adequation of mind to reality, we can make sense of his endorsement of "relativity". Rationality is something more pragmatic than truth, something more like "warranted assertability."[89] That is, the theories we rationally construct are, for us, the "best theory so far."[90] It is no contradiction or paradox to assert that our rationality is the best thus far but that others in the future (or the past, or in rival traditions) might be *closer* to the truth.

The second point is that enquirers from within various traditions can (and often do) come to realize that their tradition is incoherent by its own standards and from this epistemological crisis come to find the resources of a rival tradition superior to their own; Aristotelian (and specifically Thomist) moral enquiry is, he argues, more rationally justified than encyclopedic or genealogical enquiry *by their standards* and *by its own standards*.

In this way, MacIntyre escapes (one iteration) of the charge of relativism. The truth can be known from within the confines of our tradition and perspective. This answer, of course, puts pressure on his definition of "tradition." We shall return to this concern below.

Another worry about relativism was this: Are there evil practices? If so, it seemed that MacIntyre's theory would allow "virtues" to serve wicked ends. The rebuttal to this charge depends on the unity of virtue.

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre explicitly retracts his earlier belief that virtues exist without a unity under prudence.[91] The consequences of this retraction, Lutz argues, are crucial

88. The third semantic sense of 'truth' would, naturally, be the accurate relation between the content of one's assertions and the beings about which one is making assertions. Semantic "truth" would be veridical statements about the metaphysical truth.

89. John Dewey, "Propositions, Warranted Assertibility, and Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1941, 169.

90. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

91. Ibid. preface, p. x.

to refuting the charge of relativism. If virtues are unified, then even though virtues exist only in the context of practices, "no genuine practice can be inherently evil."[92] Rather, practical reason can judge *apparent goods* as genuine goods. The qualities needed for achieving the spurious goods internal to that "practice" would not be virtues but only *apparent virtues*.

Now, such a definition certainly seems ad hoc. But Lutz provides a persuasive illustration: eugenics. Eugenics certainly seems to bear the markings of a genuine practice. Its apparent good is the purification of the gene pool for future generations. However, genuine virtues militate *against* the achievement of that goal. For example, Lutz cites a story of a doctor who had the virtue of compassion found himself unable to pursue the program of euthanizing mentally-disabled children.[93] We might also recall Huck Finn's internal struggle with his "conscience" in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck decides to turn Jim in to the slave owners. He writes a letter outing Jim, and says: "I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now." Yet for all that, after vividly confronting Jim's humanity and goodness, he feels the loyalty of their friendship and wavers:

> It was a difficult situation. I picked up the letter, and held it in my hand. I was trembling, because I knew had to make a choice between two things, and the outcome of my decision would last forever. I thought about it a minute while I held my breath. And then I said to myself: "All right, then, I'll GO to hell"—and tore it up.[94]

The humor of this passage arises, in large part, because of the tension between the *apparent good* of treating Jim as legal property and the *actual good* of treating Jim as an end in himself, as a free man just like any other. Huck's virtue (in this case, loyalty or friendship) *cannot* be put to use in the service of a corrupting practice like slave-trading. Just as vice subverts institutions and their worthy practices, virtue "subverts" vicious institutions and unworthy practices. Virtue marks the difference between the coward who disobeys his commanding officer's orders because the obedience would

92. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 102.

93. Léon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate: The Nazi Program for the Destruction of the Jews of Europe* (Schocken Books, 1979), 186–7.

94. Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Lathifa, 2014),Chapter 31.

put him at risk of painful death and the courageous person who disobeys his commanding officer's order because obedience would require wrongdoing. Without prudence to discriminate between the two cases, we lack any resources by which to discriminate courage and cowardice, between a virtuous resistance and vicious resistance.

Some might worry that the distinction between apparent goods and actual goods brings with it more problems than it solves. It is certainly a distinction that leaves many questions unanswered. My first reply is that such a distinction is inevitable and necessary in our practical reasoning. Assume for a reductio that "there is no real distinction between apparent and real goods." Then either *nothing* is "actually good" (everything that appears good is just an apparent good) or that *nothing* is "actually bad though it appears good" (everything that appears good is a real good). But I take it as axiomatic and irrefutable that some things are actually good (life, pleasure, happiness, friendship). And some things that appear good are not good: obeying unjust laws, enjoying the misfortune of an enemy, etc. Therefore there is a real distinction between apparent and real goods.

A second reply, however, requires conceding that MacIntyre's theory leaves us unsatisfied. That is, it might be that the unsatisfying aspects of his theory track those aspects of morality that are unsatisfying. The admitted indeterminacy of MacIntyre's account reflects the real indeterminacy of our moral lives. Consider two phenomena: some individuals and cultures persist in behaviors (that I believe) are wicked and unjustifiable – slavery, child prostitution, ritual human sacrifice, or what have you. It needs to be explained, from within my tradition, how it could be that otherwise decent and normal human beings could persist in such vileness. The other phenomena is this: some individuals and cultures repent and change (what I believe are) their wicked ways. Some make moral progress. The paradox is that while we cannot expect magical linear moral progression from wicked to good everywhere, neither can we despair of any person or culture making moral progress. It just seems a brute datum of observation that some are stubbornly stuck in their wicked ways, and some are admirably firm in their benevolent resolve. How do we explain this paradoxical phenomenon?

MacIntyre's account offers an explanation of why vices sometimes persist within pseudo-

practices, institutions, and traditions from generation to generation; on the other hand, it explains why practice-enabling virtues sometimes emerge to disrupt a pseudo-practice, a wicked institution, and a corrupt or at least incomplete tradition. The fact is that "many kinds of activities can be, and in fact are considered to be, practices. Some of these may conflict radically, owing to errors and insufficiencies in rationality."[95] Errors in rationality explain errors in traditions and hence false ascriptions of the title 'virtue.' Rationality answers to truth, to the world as it is, not merely to the pragmatic truth to "dialectical success."[96] Hence, virtues answer to *what is really good*. They do not merely answer to "what-counts-as-good-for-us", which property is relative to each tradition.

In this way, MacIntyre escapes this iteration of the charge of relativism, while still explaining why rival traditions differ – and sometimes radically differ – in their evaluations and opinions. Incomplete traditions can, and do, undergo crisis. Particular persons within that tradition discover and asseverate on inadequacies within the tradition, leading to an epistemological crisis. In response, others within the same tradition may become willing to examine the resources of rival traditions and either quit their primary tradition or re-fashion it, re-make it, update it, and make real moral and intellectual progress.

Closing remarks on relativism

MacIntyre has responded to (and he thinks refuted) the charge of relativism multiple times, in his primary works and in "responses to critics." Yet for many, relativism stains the image of MacIntyre. J. L. A. Garcia says this that "MacIntyre's rebuttal is as radical as it is ingenious. It is, in effect, to outrelativize the relativist."[97] In other words, MacIntyre uses the genealogist's starting points to

95. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 103.

96. Ibid., 104.

97. J.L.A. Garcia, in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 94–113. He continues: "Rather than recoiling from relativism, as I understand his strategy, MacIntyre plunges so deeply into it, as we might say, to fall out the other side… Contrary to what he sees as the relativist's hasty and facile assumption, MacIntyre insists that it is not necessarily (nor always) the case that everyone is so situated that there is no position whose adoption *by her* at *any* time would be rationally superiors to some particular *set* of alternatives…Now the tables are turned,

undercut the encyclopedist. By itself, this undercutting seems to endorse moral relativism. But he doesn't stop there; he uses all the resources of intellectual history, contemporary natural sciences, and social sciences to defend some (but not all) of the beliefs and values of modernity, such as the value of democracy, of university education, of history, and of progress. Taken by itself, this move seems to endorse the encyclopedic tradition against the genealogists. But together, he challenges both to use the best resources of the past and the best rational resources of the present to defend a particular set of conclusions *as the best thus far*, as the *closest* to the truth. To both, his challenge is to defend a conception of morality and rationality *neither* claiming that any such conceptions are impossible *nor* claiming to have *concluded* the enquiry once and for all.

The consistency of tradition-constituted rationality

MacIntyre would have us believe that 'rationality' is not a disembodied set of timeless and universal procedures of thinking. My rationality includes whatever standards of reasoning I accept, and all the other resources (facts, authorities, memories) I use to judge true and false. I already responded to worries presented above about whether rationalities are ultimately incommensurable. The fact that people can, and do, identify inconsistencies with their own tradition, identify the resources of rival traditions, and switch traditions.

Even after clarifying MacIntyre's optimism about the possibility of ethical truth, his answer to relativism is sufficient but still somehow indeterminate. This indeterminacy is partly due, as I have suggested, to his appeal to practical rationality. While this appeal seems to me to solve some problems, there is one lingering problem it does not solve. From my perspective (or my tradition), *every legitimate tradition* affirms the law of non-contradiction. But that is just to say that if Walt Whitman or Nagarjuna denies the law of non contradiction, then I will necessarily judge them to be irrational.[98] But I wish to go further and say that this strand of Buddhism *really is irrational*. That is,

and it is the relativist who appears the dogmatist, claiming to know in advance and *a priori* that no one can be so situated."

98. Laurence R. Horn, "Contradiction," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward

I wish to affirm that they are irrational – full stop. I am not sure MacIntyre's theory allows me to affirm that. Unless I am missing something crucial here, this seems to me a limitation of the theory.

Perhaps a qualified acceptance of MacIntyre's claim about tradition-constituted rationality is that when a tradition does not *seem* share this standard of rationality (the value of logical consistency) I should not be too quick to judge that I have really understood their meaning. Perhaps when I ask them if they affirm (S is P and S is not P) they have a slightly different concept in mind for "not" or for "and." Or perhaps they are speaking of an entity instantiating a property and not instantiating that same property at the same time but in ever so slightly different respects. Walt Whitman may be saying he contradicts himself in ever so slightly different respects in order to grasp apparently paradoxical truths that can be predicated of a transcendental modern man. Or perhaps they are denying both P and not P in favor of some other, different articulation of the predicates a given subject instantiates. In the case of any of these alternatives, the principle of charity recommends I extend my interlocutor the benefit of the doubt before concluding that the appearance of irrationality reflects real irrationality.

The clarity of tradition-constituted rationality

What exactly is a tradition? MacIntyre's account is not clear. John Haldane (among others) questions MacIntyre's ability coherently to identify what a tradition is. What is tradition A? How do we differentiate it from B? Are two traditions separate and hence identifiable only if they are *incommensurable*? How much difference constitutes separation? How much overlap is compatible with difference? Jewish and Christian traditions share a common origin and bear considerable overlap in authorities, scriptures, and doctrines.

MacIntyre's definition makes answering these questions difficult. He characterizes a tradi-

N. Zalta, Spring 2014, 2014. "Do I contradict myself? / Very well, then, I contradict myself. / (I am large, I contain multitudes.) (Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself');"Everything is real and not real. / Both real and not real. / Neither real nor not real. / That is Lord Buddha's teaching." (Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā 18:8), quoted in Garfield (1995: 102).

tion as "separate and unified when its members or texts have a core set of shared commitments to beliefs, when the tradition is situated in a particular context in a particular set of institutions and when the tradition has an identifiable linguistic difference when compared to other traditions."[99] But is there any universal procedure for identifying such linguistic and institutional differences?

The right response to this call for clarification, I think, comes from Weinstein. We should not expect, by MacIntyre's lights, that there is an automatically objective, view-from-nowhere by which we can define tradition itself. Rather, MacIntyre concludes that "the concept of a tradition, together with the criteria for its use and application, is itself one developed from within one particular tradition-based standpoint. This does not preclude its application to the very tradition within which it was developed."[100] MacIntyre grants that his self-definition of his own tradition arises, in part, from his criteria of that tradition. Traditions change over time. They progress (according to their own unchanging standards) toward unchanging goals or else they abandon old standards. This is liable to frustrate some readers. But the alternative is worse. The alternative is a denial of pluralism that liberalism holds dear. For it is intellectual imperialism to assume that I have the *real* scoop on every other tradition. It assumes I have the right to define and critique all other traditions *in my own terms.* Even though MacIntyre thinks his own tradition correct, and others incorrect, this is not imperialistic. For he is willing to reflect on his own tradition, examine its resources and inadequacies, and engage through philosophical imagination with rivals.

In short, by MacIntyre's lights he does not need a definition of tradition that is any more cut and dry than it is. Forcefully to disagree with this conclusion requires his interlocutor to produce an alternative theory of practical rationality. But that alternative will either aim to be *not* tradition-constituted but universal (which is the encyclopedic tradition) or it will admit is tradition-constituted but the "best so far" (which is MacIntyre's own view).

We can think of this worry about MacIntyre's theory more generally as a problem of thinking

99. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 83.

100. John Horton and Susan Mendus, *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 295.

about thinking. MacIntyre is a theorist of virtue and practical rationality. Hence rationally to assess his theory requires thinking through our own theory of rationality. The errors we make in *thinking things through* are not likely to be solved by *thinking them through*. The Greek proverb is: "If water chokes us, what shall we drink?" The Latin proverb (from a very different context) is "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" — who will guard the guards themselves? I believe the answer to the rhetorical question is *no one at all* can guard the guards; if water chokes us, there is *nothing at all we can drink to wash it down*. Likewise, if something is deeply wrong with the way we think, how can theorizing about rationality right the wrong?

Some of the errors MacIntyre diagnoses in thinkers who belong to encyclopedic tradition will be invisible to those thinkers unless they themselves earnestly examine the problems of the tradition. Even if MacIntyre's diagnosis is *correct* – especially if it is correct – the readers who especially need to hear it will find the diagnosis unintelligible, even irrational. Insofar as the "patient" finds any parts of his theory intelligible, they will seem radical, disastrous in their social implications, and destructive of the very nature and purpose of education. The reason these appearances will be insuperable to MacIntyre's patient is because the patient is, by his lights, self-deceived. He or she simply denies being part of a tradition, and hence denies having a particular (rather than universal) tradition-bound conception of rationality, and hence denies having a particular, tradition-bound conception of the good (perhaps the good is unbounded freedom to follow the moral law, or to pursue happiness,, and justice unfettered equality). Modernity is the "tradition-less tradition" and hence *must* deny tradition to be consistent with itself.

The solution to this paradox is not to browbeat people into admitting that they inhabit a tradition. Rather, he directs the arguments (of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) and others at interlocutors who are already undergoing epistemological crisis. This "patient" comes to MacIntyre with manifesting symptoms. MacIntyre offers one possible diagnosis, and the patient's job is to investigate further. The patient needs philosophical imagination to even *consider* the possibility of another truth. The patient needs patience, intellectual courage, and self-reflection. The patient

needs to sit in front of the proverbial mirror and mouth the words, (a) "I am part of a tradition" and (b) "my tradition might be inadequate," and (c) "that other tradition might have the resources more adequately to address the intellectual and practical problems that I now see are insuperable to my tradition." The critic who would escape the battery is more likely to flee rather than engage; but the critic who would escape by engaging and overcoming is liable to meet her match.

The justification of morality by tradition-constituted rationality

A third reply is in order here. D'andrea[101] points out a critique Philippa Foot has leveled against MacIntyre: after all the informative and wide-ranging historical analysis, MacIntyre's account does not solve the "problem posed by Plato, and never solved … that of showing the rationality, for any man, of a thorough-going acceptance of the restraints of justice."[102] The challenge of a Nietzsche or Callicles or Thrasymachus lies in their acceptance that the good life for humans *requires* some virtues or requires virtue in some sense but their rejection of the "robust concept of justice with its corresponding constraints on action."[103]

One response is this: the question "why be moral?" is never asked in the abstract. For example, in describing the "self of the heroic age" MacIntyre says, "In heroic society there is no 'outside' except that of the stranger. A man who tried to withdraw himself from his given position in heroic society would be engaged in the enterprise of trying to make himself disappear."[104] Even though virtues in twenty-first century North America are not what the same as Homer's day, there is a parallel to be drawn.

Philosophers often ask "why be moral?" hypothetically. They ask it *as if* speaking on the skeptic's behalf, or as if *they* were skeptics. But hypothetical moral skeptics will not do. We must

101. Thomas D D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006).

102. Philippa Foot, "Review of After Virtue," *Times Literary Supplement*, 1981, 1 097. This is the "problem of immoralism" she tries to address in the final chapter of her *Natural Goodness*.

103. D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*, 430.

104. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 126.

consider a concrete character, real or fictional. Once we look for a real or fictional skeptic, a problem arises. By MacIntyre's lights, sincere "why be moral?" skeptics are political or social outcasts. For millions of people who are full-fledged members of their tradition, the "why be moral?" question will not usually arise. Parents, teachers, religious leaders, politicians, businesses, and non-profit organizations all have a hand in giving each member of the community the tradition out of which the community arises and within which abstract philosophical or pseudo-philosophical worries such as "What does it all mean?" do not arise because they are satisfactorily answered.

By contrast, the emergence of the doubt as to whether one should be moral, and the crystallization of the doubt into an articulate challenge, is *a political failure*. The *polis* to which the moral skeptic belongs has failed him. The moral skeptic, likewise, has failed the *polis* which belongs to him or her. So MacIntyre's theory makes room for people who are not actually skeptical (to whom an answer to Foot's challenge is not required) and people who are actually skeptical but do not belong to their society (to whom an answer to Foot's challenge would be meaningless).

MacIntyre's theory makes room for one more group: moral skeptics *are* members of their own tradition but are seeing the problems within their own tradition and who are troubled by a "border tradition". This type of skeptic sees the resources of a rival tradition and compares such favorably with the resources of his own tradition. The skeptic is, in a word, entering epistemological crisis.

Specifically, it might be that the moral skeptic has been raised outside of the Aristotelian tradition and is noticing the inadequacies of his or her own tradition, and is entering epistemological crisis. MacIntyre's response is to invite him or her to do the hard work of resolving that crisis by examining, from within the context of a primary tradition *and* a "second first" tradition, the problems at hand and the available solutions, working toward an ever greater understanding of the truth.

In short, MacIntyre's theory gives an account of two contradictory phenomena. It explains how a moral skeptic might arise within a community and how that skeptic might be moved to a

more adequate grasp of the truth; and it explains why, in healthy, unified, moral societies, *so few people become moral skeptics*.

Telos is not natural but social

One objection above stated that teleology (understood as *natural* teleology) is outmoded by Darwinian modern science. While the later MacIntyre (in *Dependent Rational Animals* especially) might want to ground morality in the biological or otherwise natural features of human animals, the early MacIntyre can sidestep this conversation. Since we will discuss natural teleology in other chapters, I think it wise here to argue the more modest point.

All MacIntyre needs to build his virtue theory on human nature is social teleology. We know that *human society is teleological.* We act to achieve goals. Whether we arise from bed *in order to* give a talk, or drive to work *in order to* do a good job, or pursue a career *for* satisfaction and a profitable retirement, we are directing ourselves toward ends. In groups, too, we deliberate about what to do, about *what is to be done*. We pursue group goals. We are directed at group ends. Congress aims to pass just and beneficial laws. The school board aims to increase enrollment and balance the budget. Our social practices *just are* intelligibly teleological. They cannot be understood without teleology.

We can put the point more strongly: all of human life is a practice. It can be brought under the concept of either one, unified, whole practice or pluralistic set of practices. Human life is, at least viewed under this concept, therefore teleological and indispensably so. Iris Murdoch argued as much in her famous "The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts."[105] Even if human life has "no external point or τελος", it has one *from within.** We pursue projects. It is impossible, in other words, to bring our own human life under the concept of an *event.* This insight has important implications for ethics, as well as other fields: action theory, sociology, anthropology, philosophy of mind, and so on.[106] If the objector accepts social teleology, then MacIntyre can rest his case.

105. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Mouette Press, 1998).

106. Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Harvard University Press, 2008). One example is Michael Thompson's philosophy of action or what he calls "practical philosophy". His assumption-

Telos is needed

One objection above stated that *telos* is indeed a necessary part of morality, but that it can be found in modern morality, for instance, in Kantian or consequentialist morality. If the sense of teleology we are using here is merely social and not natural, then MacIntyre would respond, "so much the better for Kant." Moral rules are unintelligible without an understanding of the *internal* or *necessary* relation between some actions and some outcomes. Kant himself, perhaps, understood this better than many of his contemporary readers give him credit.

Telos is not needed

Consequentialism, however, cannot be made to be "teleological" in the Aristotelian or the MacInterean sense. The first reason is that, For Mill, happiness is something too specific: pleasure, or freedom from pain. He offers precious little justification for this. Mill's definition of happiness cannot be that thing we all necessarily pursue whenever we act, because then moral rules (guiding us toward the happiness of the greatest number) would be unnecessary. We would all, already, pursue happiness.

The second reason is more important: The reason is that Mill and others define "consequences" so as to be always contingent. Mill, like Moore, sees the relation between the end (happiness) and the means (actions that bring about happiness) as statistical, contingent, and probable. There is no internal relation between some actions (such as virtues) and the proper end of human life.

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trouncing work contains remarkable depth of insight and simple yet dramatic conclusions. Thompson argues that the concepts of practice, action, and life are successively larger conceptual spheres, where the latter includes the former, but where the former is constitutive of the latter. And upon reflection, each concept exhibits an undeniable Aristotelian structure. Modern theoretical and practical philosophies that obscure these concepts or miss the mark obstruct progress in practical philosophy. While I cannot do justice to Thompson's admirable work here, I mention it to point out that MacIntyre's thesis about "social teleology" — the irreducibly teleological or end-directed nature of individual and group human activities — seems correct.

Take as a few examples this statement from G.E. Moore:

> What ought we to do? The answering of this question constitutes the third great division of ethical enquiry; and its nature was briefly explained in Chap. I (§§ 15—17). It introduces into Ethics, as was there pointed out, an entirely new question—the question what things are related as *causes* to that which is good in itself; and this question can only be answered by an entirely new method—the method of empirical investigation; by means of which causes are discovered in the other sciences. *To ask what kind of actions we ought to perform, or what kind of conduct is right, is to ask what kind of effects such action and conduct will produce.* Not a single question in practical Ethics can be answered except by a causal generalization. All such questions do, indeed, also involve an ethical judgment proper—the judgment that certain effects are better, in themselves, than others. But they do assert that these better things are effects—are causally connected with the actions in question. Every judgment in practical Ethics may be reduced to the form: This is a cause of that good thing.[107]

Moore is explicit here that there are no acts that have intrinsic value (qua duty or qua virtuous deed); acts only have value insofar as they cause good effects. This good effects are, for Moore, aesthetic enjoyments, knowledge, and friendships.[108]

I said above that the refusal to treat the means/end distinction as clean and absolute is liable to cause his critics to misunderstand his position. Charles Taylor endorses the notion that "the place accorded the virtues [is] a kind of litmus test for discriminating Aristotelian from modern ethical theory."[109] He explains this feature of modern moral theories:

> …They cannot abide this kind of relation, in which one element is both cause and constituent of another. It is a central demand of one influential construal of modern reason that one clearly sort out means from ends. For utilitarians, the good is happiness, and virtues can only be good instrumentally… If the basic point of morality is to do the right actions, then the virtues must be seen as purely executive. They cannot also be seen as part of the end, because the end is not defined that way.[110]

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107. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1903) Chapter 5, Section 89, my emphasis.

108. Ibid. Chapter 6.

109. Charles Taylor, "Justice After Virtue," in *After MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 25.

110. Ibid., 25.

What could this mean? Behind the means/end distinction is a peculiarly modern assumption that formal and final causes are either not related or not *necessarily* related. But the assumption is unreasonable. Exercise *causes* (efficient causes) health; but it is partly constitutive of health. In other words, exercise *causes* (formal causes) health. The relation between a formal cause and a final cause is an internal, natural, and necessary relation. In biology, the distinction between form and function is a real one but the two are related.[111] The relation between the species *gorilla gorilla* as instantiated in an infant gorilla and a fully grown, mature one is an internal and natural and (given the proper circumstances) a necessary relation. To deny that there are formal causes, or to deny that there are final causes, is simply to beg the question against teleological ethics.

For these reasons, consequentialism of the typical sort that *reduces* the question of what actions, rules, or character traits are good to a question that cannot "be answered except by a causal generalization" is not teleological in the required sense. The character traits that tend to bring about happiness must also be, in a sense, pre-payments on that happiness.

Section conclusion

In sum, the rebuttal of the "no teleology objection" is that the sort of teleology we need is defensible: social teleology. Social teleology does not *necessarily* offend against Darwinian biology, evolutionary psychology, or metaphysical naturalism, but can (and must) be accomodated by them. Furthermore, Kantian philosophy may be able to accommodate social teleology, and so would escape the brunt of MacIntyre's criticism laid out in his narrative. On the other hand, the rebuttal of consequentialism, is that it has not often been taken to allow for a necessary relation between some means and their

111. Philippe Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose: From Comparative Anatomy to the 'Adventure of Reason'," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 37, no. 4 (2006): 649–74. Huneman summarises the "two poles" in the history of biology: "the concept of form and the concept of function." For Huneman, anatomy studies form and physiology studies function. He explains how Kant understood both poles and tried to give due weight to the mechanistic understanding of organisms *and* to the distinctive features of organic life. Humean, Kant, and evolutionary biologists are obliged to explain both form and function as real without reducing one to the other.

ends. Virtuous action both *causes* and *partly constitutes* virtuous character. Virtuous character traits both *cause* and *partly constitute* the kind of achievement of our human *telos* that makes life worth living.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to present MacIntyre's theory of virtue and practical reason. Each component part contributes to an organic whole. I explained his definition of virtue with reference to practices, and expanded this account by explaining his concept of the self and its *telos*, human nature, practical rationality, and practical wisdom.

If my summaries have captured the core of MacIntyre's contribution to virtue ethics, we can offer a few conclusions with some confidence. Virtue is, for MacIntyre, primarily an acquired human trait that enables its bearer to achieve characteristically human goods that are necessarily related to human life; secondarily, we may call virtues those qualities that enable their bearers to achieve goods internal to social and individual practices. Practices are in part constituted by their practitioners — biologists can change what biology is from within; farmers can advance what it means to farm. But practices are also constitutive of traditions. Traditions are, again, are socially embedded arguments playing out over time and across generations. And each community *needs* the virtues.

Now, different traditions offer varying accounts of virtue and "lists" of virtues. MacIntyre's career has been one of struggling with the problem of disagreement in its moral, philosophical, religious, and scientific manifestations. So I presented three families of objections to MacIntyre's virtue theory: relativism objections, tradition-constituted rationality objections, and teleology objections.

I offered rebuttals of these objections. First, I further explained how MacIntyre's theory of rationality can accommodate "relativity" as a condition of inquiry without collapsing into "relativism" as a conclusion of inquiry. Second, I further clarified the concept of tradition-constituted rationality as necessarily recursive and thus impossible to define outside of the context of a tradition. I did concede that, from within my tradition, there appear to be no legitimate traditions who em-

brace contradictory propositions or who deny the Law of Non-Contradiction. Third, I defended MacIntyre's use of (at least) "social teleology" as a grounding for the teleological virtue ethics. And I conceded that some modern morality (such as a version of Kantianism that is not very mainstream) might plausibly be conceived as teleological in the way that MacIntyre's theory demands. But I denied that other modern moralities (such as paradigmatic versions of consequentialism) can be conceived as teleological in the proper way since they treat the relation of means to ends as a merely contingent relation.

MacIntyre's theories are built on many implicit assumptions, each of which a critic might make explicit and dispute. The conclusion we have found some reason to believe is that virtues are qualities inherently related to the teleology of practice. Human life, action, and practice are all teleological or end-directed. If MacIntyre is right here, then the project of restoring *telos* should invigorate optimism. Ethics, reinvigorated with teleology, might just be able to escape some of its modern quandaries. And not only ethics. Law, political philosophy, and applied disciplines like politics itself, rhetoric and debate, social philosophy, and others disciplines are given new promise and new hope.

That said, MacIntyre's theory of virtue and rationality exposes metaphilosophical fault lines. We should not expect even satisfying answers to these objections to solve metaphilosophical problems that come from a source other, and deeper, than ethical theories. Rather, MacIntyre's opponents and allies should exercise tolerance and patience with their interlocutors, resisting the temptation to label the other as "unphilosophical" due to a short-term failure of adjudicating these disputes. This feature may infuriate some, but magnetically attracts others, and perhaps explains part of his distinctive legacy. MacIntyre's theory can explain both why his exponents agree, and why his critics disagree. His theory is, in this sense, truly pluralistic and truly liberal.