After Virtue

After Virtue by Alasdair MacIntyre. Wikipedia has a very [useful synopsis](#) ([permalink](#) as accessed Dec 9 2008). Citations refer to the 1984 second edition, ISBN 0268006113.

Chapter Summary

A note and disclaimer about the chapter summary: This summary is intended only to supplement an actual reading of the text. It is *not* sufficient in and of itself to understand MacIntyre's theory without having read the book, and even having read it, this guide is not sufficient to understand it in its entirety. A necessary amount of detail and nuance was eliminated in order to create the guide. Its intended purpose is to aid in comprehension of this complex but profoundly significant work during and after the process of reading it. I would suggest reading the synopsis of each chapter after reading the chapter. The goal is to present the outline of MacIntyre's claims and arguments with only a minimal gloss on the justifying evidence at each point. Thus, hopefully, the guide should prove reasonably sufficient to help a reader retain the crucial parts of MacIntyre's argument, and the text can be returned to for a full justification. It is easy to get bogged down in this book, but just take your time. No portion of his argument can be fully understood without understanding the whole— nevertheless, certain chapters deserve particular attention: Chapters 1-5, 9, 14, and 15. Enjoy.

—Ari Schulman (aschulman@thenewatlantis.com), Dec 9 2008

Chapter 1. A Disquieting Suggestion

MacIntyre imagines a world in which the natural sciences "suffer the effects of a catastrophe": the public turns against science and destroys scientific knowledge, but later recants and revives science (1). However, only fragments of the terminology and knowledge remain, and people practice science without truly understanding it. "Nobody, or almost nobody, realizes that what they are doing is not natural science in any proper sense at all. For everything that they do and say conforms to certain canons of consistency and coherence and [but] those contexts which would be needed to make sense of what they are doing have been lost, perhaps irretrievably" (1). He then hypothesizes that "in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I described" (2).

MacIntyre states that the difficulty in accepting this hypothesis is either strong evidence that it is false, or strong evidence that it is correct, for if so, "it will necessarily appear implausible, since one way of stating part of the hypothesis is precisely to assert that we are in a condition which almost nobody recognizes and which perhaps nobody at all can recognize fully" (4). He also asserts that most of the modern practices which could be useful to recognize this state in fact are not useful, because they are born from it or have no reason or capacity to look beyond it. "We may notice that if in this imaginary world [of scientific malaise] analytical philosophy were to flourish, it would never reveal the fact of this disorder. For the techniques of analytical philosophy are essentially descriptive and descriptive of the language of the present at that. The analytical philosopher would be able to elucidate the conceptual structures of what was taken to be scientific thinking and discourse in the imaginary world in precisely the way that he elucidates the conceptual structures of natural science as it is" (2). He argues that history is thus vital to understanding philosophy, but that academic history has only been around for perhaps two centuries, and thus is a product of the condition he hypothesizes, and so it is not currently sufficient to recognize this state.

Chapter 2. The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism

MacIntyre notes that the nature of most moral discourse today is interminable disagreement. He lists several examples of common moral arguments on the subjects of just war, abortion, and medical licensing and regulation (6-7), and notes three salient characteristics of these debates: First, though each argument presented is logically valid, the respective concepts they use are incommensurable, so that there is no apparent rational way to decide in favor of one argument over another, and thus such a decision has the appearance of being personal and non-rational; Second, that despite the necessity of some personal and non-rational choice, the arguments all purport to be impersonal and rational, in that they "presuppose ... the existence, independently of the preferences or attitude of speaker and hearer, of standards [of morality]" (9); And third, that the concepts employed for each argument have been divorced from larger theories and contexts of which they were originally a part, and in some cases the concepts (such as *virtue*, *justice*, and *ought*) have changed meaning over time so that the evaluative expressions themselves have also changed their meanings. If these characteristics are symptoms of moral disorder, he argues, then it should be possible to construct a history of moral discourse in which, at an earlier stage, moral utterance is not regarded "simultaneously and inconsistently ... as [both] an exercise of our rational powers and as mere expressive assertion" (11). He notes that a major obstacle to this goal is today's unhistorical treatment of moral philosophy as a single debate among contemporaries examining the same exact subject matter, rather than as a progressing series of traditions among philosophers working in distinct historical contexts.

Forestalling the discussion of such a history, MacIntyre first explores the question of whether moral discussion is in fact rationally interminable not as a contingent feature of our culture, but because that is the inherent nature of moral questions. He specifically addresses emotivism, which "is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling" (11-12, his emphasis throughout). He notes that emotivism purports to be a theory about the meaning of sentences used in moral utterance. Prominent emotivists have asserted that the sentence "This is good" means the same as "I approve of this, do so as well" or "Hurrah for this!", but MacIntyre argues that these examples make clear that "the expression of feeling or attitude is characteristically a function not of the meaning of sentences, but of their use on particular occasions" (13). Emotivism is thus not a theory of the *meaning* of moral utterances, as it purports to be, but rather of their *use*. MacIntyre then traces the history of emotivism, arguing that it in fact arose in its modern form as a theory of the usage of moral utterances in a specific period: at Cambridge in the early 20th century. He then argues that emotivism has existed in other historical periods, and that it arises as a response to the breakdown of the project of providing rational justification for objective and impersonal moral claims. He argues finally that emotivism rests upon a claim that all historical attempts to provide such a justification have failed.

Chapter 3. Emotivism: Social Content and Social Context

MacIntyre notes that every moral philosophy implies a sociology—a "conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions" (23). He argues that because emotivism obliterates claims to objective standards, the "do so as well" of moral utterances "entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations". In such a society, "no type of authority can appeal to rational criteria to vindicate itself except that type of bureaucratic authority which appeals precisely to its own *effectiveness*. And what this appeal reveals is that bureaucratic authority is nothing other than successful power" (26). He then describes at length the importance of the idea of characters, which in emotivist societies are "those social roles which provide a culture with its moral definitions", especially by being archetypes which are a focus of moral discussion and disagreement (he names, for instance, "The Public School Headmaster in England and the Professor in Germany") (31,30).

The modern self does not, however, find its identity from the social roles that it adopts, but rather is able to adopt any role and any standpoint as it chooses, "because it *is* in and for itself nothing" (32). Because the emotivist self has no ultimate criteria, it "can have no rational history in its transitions from one state of moral commitment to another", and thus its inner conflicts are characterized by the same "confrontation of one contingent arbitrariness against another" that characterizes public moral debate (33). MacIntyre notes that in many pre-modern societies, personal identity derives from membership in particular social roles, and that in such a conception, "to move through life is to make progress—or fail to make progress—toward a given end" (34). Modernism is characterized to some degree by the loss of this conception, which is today regarded as a gain, "as the emergence of the individual freed on the one hand from the social bonds of those constraining hierarchies which the modern world rejected at its birth and on the other hand from what modernity has taken to be the superstitions of teleology". From this conception of the self arises the core of the political debates in so many modern societies between the "the goods which are available through bureaucratic organizations" that derive their effectivess from limiting personal liberty, and the sovereignty of "the free and arbitrary choices of individuals" (35).

Chapter 4. The Predecessor Culture and the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality

MacIntyre posits that the historical episodes analogized in Chapter 1 in which moral discourse became fragmented were in fact episodes in the history of philosophy. These occurred in a time in which (unlike today) the practice of philosophy had a central role in and influence upon society. He traces that history to the Enlightenment, in which moral questions were first considered distinct from theological, legal, and aesthetic questions, and thus a project of conceiving an independent rational justification for morality became a central concern of Northern European culture. MacIntyre notes that "a central thesis of this book is that the breakdown of this project provided the historical background against which the predicaments of our own culture can become intelligible"—and thus that the Enlightenment was the "predecessor culture" to which emotivism is a response (39).

He traces the Enlightenment project first through Kierkegaard, whose work *Enten-Eller* posited two competing ways of life, the ethical and the aesthetic, one of which a moral agent much choose to live by. MacIntyre argues that there is "a deep incoherence" in this idea, since "the ethical is [supposed] to have authority over us. But how can that which we adopt for one reason [described by K. as a 'radical choice'] have any authority over us?" (43,42). Kierkegaard's conception of morality descends from that of Kant, who argues that morality is based not in choice but in rationality, in that it is the set of rules that "are *binding* on all rational beings" (44). Kant thus conceives of a test to discriminate valid moral maxims: "can we or can we not consistently will that everyone should always act on it?", which MacIntyre argues fails as a rational basis for morality (45). This failure provided the context in which Kierkegaard felt that the basis would have to be found in choice. Kant's appeal to reason was in turn "the historical heir and successor of Diderot's and Hume's appeals to desire and to the passions", which MacIntyre demonstrates to have also been failed attempts at the Enlightenment project (47).

The "effective criticism of each position by the others turned out to be the failure of all", and thus the project as a whole failed, so that "the morality of our predecessor culture—and subsequently of our own—lacked any public, shared rationale or justification. In a world of secular rationality religion could no longer provide such a shared background and foundation", and the subsequent failure of philosophy to provide such a foundation largely led to its cultural marginalization (50).

Chapter 5. Why the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality Had to Fail

MacIntyres argues that each of the writers attempting to provide a justification for morality were bound to fail. They attempted to form valid arguments which "move[d] from premises concerning human nature ... to conclusions about the

authority of moral rules", but could not succeed because of inherent discrepancies between their undertanding of moral rules and their conception of human nature (52). The historical ancestor of these conceptions, as outlined by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is a "teleological scheme [in which] there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature. Ethics is the science which is to enable men to undertand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter." Thus "reason instructs us both as to what our true end is and as to how to reach it" (53). But Protestantism rejected this notion; in its conception, "reason can supply ... *no* genuine comprehension of man's true end; that power of reason was destroyed by the fall of man". Pascal, a Jansenist, recognized that this conception of reason was highly compatible with the principles of the Scientific Enlightenment. He was instrumental in incorporating into scientific reason the idea that reason can speak only of means, not ends, "and hence a central achievement of reason ... is to recognize that our beliefs are ultimately founded on nature, custom, and habit" (54). The arguments of Hume, Diderot, Kierkegaard, and their contemporaries descended from Pascal, and "all reject ... any view of man as having an essence which defines his true end". Without such a view, the practice of ethics as a study of how humans can achieve their end became quite unclear.

MacIntyre uses this rejection of teleology to explain why many modern moral philosophers have argued the 'no "ought" from "is" principle' that "from a set of factual premises no moral conclusion validly follows as 'a truth of logic'" (56). Such a principle must, however, exclude functional concepts from its scope, as otherwise "from such factual premises as 'This watch is grossly inaccurate and irregular in time-keeping' and 'This watch is too heavy to carry about comfortably', the evaluative conclusion validly follows that 'This is a bad watch'" (57-8). Thus "within the Aristotelian tradition to call *x* good ... is to say that it is the kind of *x* which someone would choose who wanted an *x* for the purpose for which *x's* are characteristically wanted" (59). Thus "it is only when man is thought of as an individual prior to and apart from all roles that 'man' ceases to be a functional concept" and "it begins to appear implausible to treat moral judgments as factual statements". Such a change was not purely theoretical, but also decisively political and social: it was the invention of the modern self, the concept of the individual.

Chapter 6. Some Consequences of the Failure of the Enlightenment Project

The failure of the Enlightenment project led to a disarray in modern moral theory, and utilitarianism was one attempt to restore order. Jeremy Bentham conceived of a new *telos*, in which the purpose of human life is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, each of which are, essentially, quantifiable sensations. John Stuart Mill attempted to rectify problems in Bentham's theory by distinguishing between 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures. However, MacIntyre argues that "human happiness is *not* a unitary, simple notion and cannot provide us with a criterion for making our key choices", as happiness is not simply a state of mind with alternative means of achieving it (63). Thus "different pleasures and different happinesses are to a large degree incommensurable: there are no scales of quality or quantity on which to weigh them" (64). Hence the philosopher Sidgwick recognized that psychology could not form a foundation for teleology from which utilitarian rules could be derived, and concluded that moral thinking must simply rest on a series of irreducible and unarguable beliefs. It was in direct continuation of this idea that the previously described emotivist theories of use of early 20th-century Cambridge arose.

MacIntyre then traces the analytic philosophical project of demonstrating Kant's requirement "that the authority and objectivity of moral rules is precisely that authority and objectivity which belongs to the exercise of reason" and hence that "any rational agent is logically committed to the rules of morality in virtue of his or her rationality" (66). That project typically takes the form of attempting to demonstrate that *rights* exist, but, he argues, all such attempts devolve into appeals to 'intuitions' and ultimately fail. "Natural or human rights then are fictions—just as is utility— ... they purport to

provide us with an objective and impersonal criterion, but they do not. And for this reason alone there would have to be a gap between their purported meaning and the uses to which they are actually put" (70). Thus modern moral debate often takes the form of a conflict between the *rights* of an individual and the *utility* of a bureaucracy, two terms which "are a matching pair of incommensurable fictions", and so "the mock rationality of the debate conceals the arbitrariness of the will and power at work in its resolution" (71). So "*protest* becomes a distinctive moral feature of the modern age and ... *indignation* is a predominant modern emotion"; protests are shrill because the incommensurability of such debates means arguments can never be won, and by the same token, self-righteous indignation arises from the fact that arguments can also never be lost. Protest can, of course, be effective, but it cannot be so by an appeal to rationality. Hence also "*unmasking* the unacknowledged motives of arbitrary will and desire which sustain the moral masks of modernity is itself one of the most characteristically modern of activities" (72).

The central *characters* of modern society thus embody emotivist modes of manipulative behavior: the aesthete "specialize[s] in seeing through illusory and fictitious claims"; the therapist is most likely to be deceived into believing his own claims to power, despite the fact that "devastating hostile critiques of the standard therapeutic theories of our culture are easily available"; and the manager is the figure interested in effectiveness, "the contrivance of means ... [to] the manipulation of human beings into compliant patterns of behavior" (73,74). MacIntyre argues that all claims to managerial expertise are false, and thus that "what we are oppressed by is not power, but impotence" (75).

Chapter 7. 'Fact', Explanation and Expertise

MacIntyre notes that there is no such thing as an observation or description conducted prior to or without the interposition of some sort of theoretical interpretation. He notes that the empiricist conception of experience "makes every experiencing subject a closed realm", and thus denies any distinction between *seems to me* and *is in fact* (80). Paradoxically, "the natural scientific concepts of observation and experiment were intended to enlarge the distance between *seems* and *is*" due to a distrust of the bias of personal experience. However, MacIntyre notes that observations cannot be basic elements of knowledge, as they themselves are subject to questioning and must be vindicated by theories. It was the false belief in the opposite—that science had stripped away theory to deal with unadulterated fact—that led philosophers to proclaim their era the Enlightenment.

For Aristotelian philosophers, "mechanisms were efficient causes in a world to be comprehended ultimately in terms of final causes", and so to explain a mechanism was to explain how a member of a species moved towards or away from its ends. When the Aristotelian understanding of nature was rejected, the corresponding teleological understanding of action was as well; and so beginning with Kant, notions of "intention, purpose, [and] reason for action" were detached from conceptions of mechanical explanation (82). MacIntyre notes the work of Quine, who argues that any natural science of humanity, that is, a science for explaining human nature, must like all natural sciences take the form of law-like generalizations—but in order to do so must omit all references to "intentions, purposes, and reasons for action". He then argues that if human action is to be explained teleologically, it "not only can, but must be, characterized with reference to the hierarchy of goods which provide the ends of human action", while a natural scientific explanation of law-like generalizations "not only can, but must be, characterized without any reference to such goods" (84). Thus "*if* it proved impossible to eliminate references to such items as beliefs and enjoyments and fears from our understanding of human behavior, that understanding could not take the form ... [of] embodiment in law-like generalizations". MacIntyre finally lays out his task of demonstrating that the entire project of bureaucratic competence, which is precisely the task of producing law-like generalizations about human behavior in order to control it, has been a failure, "a social performance which disguises itself as [real] achievement" (85).

Chapter 8. The Character of Generalizations in Social Science and their Lack of Predictive Power

The validity of managerial expertise rests on our confidence that social science provides "a stock of law-like generalizations with strong predictive power" (88). MacIntyre discusses four examples of law-like generalizations in social science which have been well-researched and are confirmed by many instances, but which share several characteristics: each is refuted by a number of counterexamples; each lacks universal quantifiers and scope modifiers so that "we cannot say of them in any precise way under what conditions they hold" (91); and each lacks conterfactual conditions, so that we do not know how to apply them beyond the instances from which they were derived. Because social sciences, unlike natural sciences, have no standards of predictive power and do not see those powers increasing with time, they are of an entirely different character than natural sciences.

MacIntyre argues that "there are four sources of systematic unpredictability in human affairs" which preclude social science from being like natural science (93). The first is radical conceptual innovation, which can be explained in retrospect, but inherently can only be predicted when the innovation has already occurred. MacIntyre notes that this also means that the future of scientific innovation cannot be predicted, invoking the Church-Turing thesis as further proof. The second source is the fact that "the unpredictability of certain of his own future actions by each agent individually" implies the unpredictability of that agent by any other agent, and hence an aggregate unpredictability to the social world (95). The third source "arises from the game-theoretic character of social life" (97). Social life in fact embodies multiple games, players, and transactions and thus cannot be studied as a single instance, reducing the predictive power of game theory. The fourth source is "pure contingency", the way in which "trivial contingencies can powerfully influence the outcome of great events", such as the length of Cleopatra's nose, or Napoleon's cold at Waterloo (99-0).

MacIntyre notes that "not only does unpredictability not entail inexplicability, but ... its presence is compatible with the truth of determinism in a strong version", meaning that, for example, a computer with a definite program which causes it to behave like a human would be subject to all four types of unpredictability (100). He also argues that the unpredictable elements of social life are related to predictable elements: "the necessity of scheduling and coordinating our social actions", statistical regularities such as the rise in suicide rates around Christmas, knowledge of the causal regularities of nature, and knowledge of causal regularities in social life (102). He notes that there are indeed social generalizations with clear predictive power, but that statistical regularities do not necessarily imply explicable causal knowledge, and that "the status of the generalizations which express such knowledge is in fact the object of my enquiry" (103).

MacIntyre argues that both predictability and unpredictability are crucial aspects of human life, for a degree of social structure and regularity is necessary to engage in the long-term projects and planning which make life meaningful, while a degree of unpredictability is required "for us to be in possession of ourselves and not merely to be the creations of other people's projects" (104). He concludes that generalizations about social life will have to be of the form "'Characteristically and for the most part...'", a logical form which is "rooted in the form—or lack of it—of human life" (104,5). Thus Machiavelli's *Fortuna*, unpredictability, cannot be eliminated, and so error in social predictions should not be treated as random, but should be studied systematically. Finally, a person who wished to eliminate unpredictability would have to create an organization to do so, but all evidence suggests this task is impossible, "doomed by the facts about social life", and thus that totalitarianism as imagined by Huxley and Orwell is impossible (106). The only reasonable prediction that can be made about social life is its permanent unpredictability, and hence the claims of managerial competence are false, and are masks to "will and preference" (107).

Chapter 9. Nietzsche or Aristotle?

MacIntyre discusses the ramifications of the illusion of managerial competence, noting that in modern society moral discourse has become a mask for will and power, but that a discussion of *whose* will and power it masks is beyond the task of the book. This critique, he notes, is very similar to what informed Nietzsche's moral philosophy, which, if MacIntyre's argument is correct, "makes it one of the two genuine theoretical alternatives confronting anyone trying to analyze the moral condition of our culture" (110). MacIntyre describes the voyage of Captain Cook, who discovered the Polynesian concept of *taboo*, a series of prohibitions and rules whose original purpose and context had long been forgotten, and which were soon abolished by King Kamehameha II without any social consequences. He compares the Enlightenment project of justifying morality to an attempt by hypothetical philosophers to describe and justify taboos in that modern setting in which their original purpose was lost, and proposes that these situations are in fact entirely the same, and that Nietzsche is "the Kamehameha II of the European tradition" (113). Thus Nietzsche provides the basis for Weberian thought, and is "*the* moral philosopher of the present age" (114).

Nietzsche's moral philosophy is directly in contradiction to that of Aristotle, because it arose in response to an intellectual era, the Enlightenment, which had repudiated the Aristotelian tradition as its intellectual core. "Hence the defensibility of the Nietzschean position turns *in the end* on the answer to the question: was it right in the first place to reject Aristotle?" (117). Thus either Aristotle can be revived, and the intellectual malaise of the Enlightenment to which Nietzsche responded becomes moot along with his moral philosophy, or else Nietzsche is correct. MacIntyre notes that modernism is founded upon the idea that "questions about the *good life for man* or the ends of human life are to be regarded from the public standpoint as systematically unsettlable" (119). Since "rules of morality ... are not to be derived from ... some more fundamental conception of the good for man", rules themselves "become the primary concept of the moral life", and virtues become important only in their capacity to lead a person to follow such rules. But, MacIntyre argues, it may be the case that "we need to attend to *virtues* in the first place in order to understand the function and authority of rules", and thus we ought to begin moral enquiry by examining the virtues of a heroic society in the same tradition as Aristotle, such as those portrayed in the *Iliad*.

Chapter 10. The Virtues in Heroic Socities

MacIntyre notes that in classical societies, "the chief means of moral education is the telling of stories" (121). Thus he intends to analyze classical societies as portrayed in their heroic stories, because a society's understanding of itself is of chief interest. In heroic societies, "morality and social structure are in fact one and the same ... morality as something distinct does not yet exist. Evaluative questions *are* questions of social fact" (123). MacIntyre outlines the central virtues of courage, friendship, and fidelity, and the central functions of household, fate and death, as well as the inextricability of these concepts. For example, "courage is important, not simply as a quality of individuals, but as the quality necessary to sustain a household and a community" (122). "Life is the standard of value" but "the man ... who does what he ought moves steadily towards his fate and his death", which is the fate of all men; understanding this fact is a crucial part of courage (124). What is understood when all of these connections are grasped is "that life has a determinate form, the form of a certain kind of story. It is not just that poems and sagas narrate what happens to men and women, but that in their narrative form poems and sagas capture a form that was already present in the lives which they relate."

There is, however, a crucial distinction to be made about epic poetry, which is that the poet views the society from the outside, while any character in the story cannot have such a detachment. MacIntyre compares the rules which govern action in the *Iliad* to the rules which govern a player of chess: the only right moves to make are those which lead a person

to win the game, and thus it is a factual question as to whether a person is a good chess player. In the cases of people in both situations, "it is only within their framework of rules and precepts that they are able to frame purposes at all" (126). But people play chess for a variety of reasons, while in the *Iliad*, "All questions of choice arise within the framework; the framework itself therefore cannot be chosen". Thus the self of the heroic age lacks that fundamental ability of the modern self to step backwards and consider any framework from the outside. So morality "is always to some degree tied to the socially local". The virtues must be considered as part of a tradition which begins with heroic societies, and any attempt to describe the history of that tradition must begin with heroic societies, which "stand[s] to civilized modernity as the child to the adult" (130).

Chapter 11. The Virtues at Athens

The concept of the virtues at Athens shifted from that of the classical conception. "For Homeric man there could be no standard external to those embodied in the structures of his own community to which appeal could be made", whereas an Athenian man's understanding of the virtues "provide[s] him with standards by which he can question the life of his own community"; thus "the question of the relationship between *being a good citizen* and *being a good man* becomes central" and knowledge of other societies provides the basis for asking that question (133). Athenian citizens were strongly conscious of heroic society, and considered themselves its descendants. Thus they inherited the virtue terms of heroic society, but with a shifted framework, leading to inconsistencies when its members attempted to discuss why each virtue was considered a virtue. MacIntyre describes these shifts and competing frameworks at length, noting that each however shares the concepts of the city-state and contest as "contexts in which the virtues are to be exercised" (138). Thus virtues only have meaning within the context of a particular city-state. Sophism arose as a means of resolving this competition: it took the relativistic position of adopting the virtues of the present city for the purposes of argumentation. This relativism entailed its own inconsistency, both by adopting multiple conflicting accounts of the virtues, and by adopting accounts which purported to be non-relativistic.

Plato's account of the virtues attempted to respond to the problems posed by this relativism. Central to this account is the idea that virtue and conflict are "mutually incompatible and exclusive", and thus that "there cannot be rival goods at war with each other" (141,2). Tragic drama, MacIntyre contends, deals with the conflicts that arise between competing virtues in a post-Homeric society. There are two competing answers to the question of whether virtues can be in conflict, the first being Plato's view that virtues are harmonious, and that each requires all of the others. The modern answer contrastingly holds that virtues are heterogeneous and cannot be reconciled in a single moral order. The basis of tragic drama, however, is that we have to recognize the authority of all claims that are in conflict, that we recognize that "there *is* an objective moral order ... [but] we cannot bring rival moral truths into complete harmony with each other", and neither can we choose one claim over another (as suggested by Weber), for such a choice does not exempt us from the authority of the competing claim. Hence the resolution to Sophoclean plays is typically an act of a god, a *deus ex machina*.

Finally, MacIntyre claims that Sophocles, like Shakespeare, "portrayed human life in dramatic narratives because he took it that human life already had the form of dramatic narrative and indeed the form of one specific type of dramatic narrative" (143-4). Thus he hypothesizes that "to adopt a stance on the virtues will be to adopt a stance on the narrative character of human life" (144). On the view of Weberian individualism, life has no form, "save that which we choose to project on to it in our aesthetic imaginings". The Sophoclean self, like the emotivist self, is able to question and transcend social roles, but "it remains accountable to the point of death" for the manner in which it handles the conflicts of post-heroic society, and thus presupposes some order which specifies the ends of human life and renders our judgments true or false (145). It is to the question of whether such an order exists that MacIntyre proposes to turn next.

Chapter 12. Aristotle's Account of the Virtues

MacIntyres notes that though Aristotle was opposed to treating philosophy as part of a tradition, he intends to do just that to Aristotle, because he believes that "the present is intelligible only as a commentary upon and response to the past," which "leaves the present open to being in turn corrected and transcended" (146). According to Aristotle, "human beings ... have a specific nature ... such that they have certain aims and goals, such that they move by nature towards a specific *telos*" (148). In discussing the good for man, he appeals to *eudaimonia*: the state of "blessedness, happiness, prosperity ... of being well and doing well in being well, of a man's being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine". The virtues are those qualities which enable a person to achieve *eudamonia*, and without which a person is frustrated in their movement towards the human*telos*. So "what constitutes the good for man is a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to secure such a life" (149). Such virtues "are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways", and thus to act virtuously is to act from inclination rather than, as Kant argued, to act against it.

Aristotle also believed that the virtues were defined not just in terms of the individual, but also of the city, and thus that one way to "elucidate the relationship between virtues on the one hand and a morality of laws on the other" is to consider what individual characteristics would aid or hinder some communal project, such as "the founding and carrying forward of a school, a hospital, or an art gallery" (150-1). Knowledge of how to apply moral laws is possible "only for someone who possesses the virtues of justice", which means being able "to give each person what each deserves", which in turn is dependent on there being in the community "rational criteria of desert and ... socially established agreement as to what those criteria are" (152). There is no "rule-specified concept of justice" which can tell us what justice demands in any situation, so Aristotle defines each virtue as a balance between two extreme vices: "courage lies between rashness and timidity, justice between doing injustice and suffering injustice, liberality between prodigality and meanness" (153,4). These balances mean that "judgment has an indispensable role in the life of the virtuous man"—a crucial virtue called *phronêsis*—so that "excellence of character and intelligence cannot be separated" (154). Similarly, Aristotle believed that "the *central* virtues are intimately related to each other" (155).

In Aristotle's view, the best form of friendship is based less on affection than on "a common allegiance to and a common pursuit of goods" (156). MacIntyre notes that Aristotle's insistence on the unity and inseparability of the virtues, largely due to his denial of the diversity of Athenian society, is "an unnecessarily strong conclusion" based on his hostility to "conflict either within the life of the individual good man or in that of the good city", which he believes to result either from individual character flaws or "unintelligent political arrangements" (157). He then describes the place of liberty in Aristotle's conception, which is to be free from subjection in political relationships "between those members of a community who both rule and are ruled over" (159).

MacIntyre then outlines some of the problems with Aristotle's conception of the virtues. One is his exclusion of "the peculiar excellences of the exercise of craft skill and manual labor" because of his belief that certain key virtues are available only to those of affluence and high status. This derives from his belief that barbarians and slaves by nature cannot be virtuous, which MacIntyres attributes to "the ahistorical character of his understanding of human nature"—that is, his lack of understanding of "the transience of the *polis*". This particular oversight, on MacIntyre's account, does not pose a significant problem for the overall structure of Aristotle's ethics. He notes a particularly important insight of Aristotle's, previously discussed in relation to Bentham: that enjoyment "characteristically accompanies the achievement of excellence in activity" so that it "is the *telos* of our activity", but because of its heterogenous nature, it "provides no good reason for embarking upon one type of activity rather than another", and thus that "the virtues cannot be defined ... in

terms of the pleasant" (160). He notes that an appeal to man prior to culture cannot object to this insight, because "man without culture is a myth" (161). He then outlines the nature of practical reasoning, which for any agent must presuppose but not express his wants and goals, and, contrary to Hume, can terminate or be embodied in actions in addition to just statements. The relationship between practical reasoning and the virtues then gives us the basis for ethics, which is about "the education of the passions into conformity with pursuit of what theoretical reasoning identifies as the *telos* and practical reasoning as the right action to do in each particular time and place" (162).

There are three final points at which Aristotelian ethics can be put into question. The first is that his teleology presupposes his refuted metaphysical biology, so that "any adequate generally Aristotelian account must supply a teleological account which can replace Aristotle's metaphysical biology" (163). The second is the question of Aristotle's particular account of the virtues in relationship to the *polis*, and whether Aristotle's account can be put into a historical perspective as just one of many social and political areans in which the self can exemplify the virtues. And the third is Aristotle's denial of the importance of conflict, which MacIntyre belives to be possibly one of the most important ways that "we learn what our ends and purposes are" (164).

Chapter 13. Medieval Aspects and Occasions

MacIntyre thus undertakes to put these questions to later writers in the tradition of thinking about the virtues—specifically, medieval writers. He notes that Aristotle was introduced relatively late and only in translation to the medieval world, and thus was able to provide only a partial solution to the medieval problem of how to "educate and civilize human nature" in a culture torn apart by conflicting ideals and conceptions of human life (165). But the memory of heroic society still had a strong influence upon medieval culture. He also notes a conflict in medieval society between an acceptance of the classical tradition in fragmentary form and a complete rejection of it as paganism, using the Bible as "an all-sufficient guide" (167). In this latter Christian tradition, virtue is only important insofar as it directs the will, which is the true and sole arena of morality—a view which traces back to Stoicism. A rightly acting will is one which conforms to cosmic law and order, which applies universally to all rational beings regardless of their historical circumstances or local particularities. The Stoic abandonment of the *telos* leads to a sort of paradox: virtue finds purpose externally, in leading a person to serve the cosmic order rather than their private purposes—yet for an individual to do what is right means to do what is right for its own sake, "without any eye ... to further purpose at all" (169). He notes that this contradiction results from the rejection of the Aristotelian idea of a community as directed toward a shared good, with its morality embodied in virtues and laws directed toward that good—a state which "strikingly anticipates some aspects of modernity", for "whenever the virtues begin to lose their central place, Stoic patterns of thought and action at once reappear" (170).

For medieval writers of the former non-Stoic strand, the classical tradition "provid[ed] resources for answering political questions" (171). Specifically, they took the virtues of "loyalty and justice, the military and chivalric virtues and the virtues of purity and patience" as generating just the right kinds of creative cultural conflicts and tensions to invent basic institutions. Thus both the medieval kingdom and the Aristotelian *polis* are "conceived as communities in which men in company pursue *the* human good and not merely as—what the modern liberal state takes itself to be—providing the arena in which each individual seeks his or her own private good" (172). Thus in much of the medieval world, like the ancient world, an individual is identified and constituted in his or her social roles within an ordered community. He notes that Christians also reconciled the notion of an eternal soul—which for Platonists and Cartesians became an identity prior to all social roles, but for Catholics made the individual also a member of a heavenly community with its own roles, represented on earth by the church.

Medieval Aristotelians also had as their project the reconciliation of theological with Aristotelian virtues. The narrative form which embodied the medieval conception of human life was that of the quest or journey, "in which the subject—which may be one or more individual persons ...—is set a task in the completion of which lies their peculiar appropriation of the human good; the way towards the completion of that task is barred by a variety of inward and outward evils. The virtues are those qualities which enable the evil to be overcome, the task to be accomplished, the journey to be completed" (175). Thus, unlike Aristotle, the medieval account distinguishes *positive evil* from *failure to be good*, but also supposes that no external misfortune (including afflictions such as ugliness) can exclude one from the human good, nor can any evil that happens, so long as one does not become its accomplice. The medieval vision also "situates our aiming at the good ... in specific contexts", but, unlike the Aristotelian vision, supposes that those contexts themselves have a history. MacIntyre also notes the problems with the strong Aristotelian thesis of the unity of the virtues—which was supported by Thomas Aquinas, making him an uncharacteristic medieval thinker. He argues finally that the medieval account enlarged and improved upon the Aristotelian, forming a connection between "the distinctively narrative element in human life and the character of the vices", and reconciling it with "a biblical historical perspective" (178,180).

Chapter 14. The Nature of the Virtues

MacIntyre sets out to respond to the potential criticism that there is no core conception of the virtues to be found among the many rival conceptions he has described, as well as the many more he has not. To that end, he outlines rival accounts of the virtues as outlined by Homer, Aristotle, the New Testament, Benjamin Franklin, and Jane Austen. Each of these accounts, MacIntyre notes, offers not only different lists and priorities of the virtues, but differing theories of what a virtue is. In the Homeric account, virtues are the qualities which enable a person to fulfill a particular social role. For Aristotle they are available only to certain types of people, but nonetheless "attach not to men as inhabiting social roles, but to man as such" as a result of his *telos* (184). The New Testament's definition is similar to Aristotle's, with the addition that "*the* good for man is of course a supernatural and not only a natural good". For both Homer and the New Testament, virtues are secondary, a means to the end of achieving the good life; but for Aristotle, while virtues are a means to the end of achieving the good life, "the ends cannot be adequately characterized independently of a characterization of the means", so that "the exercise of the virtues is itself a crucial component of the good life for man". Franklin's account is also teleological, but is utilitarian, so that "the means-end relationship [is] external rather than internal": virtues are merely means to the end of "happiness understood as success, prosperity in Philadelphia and ultimately in heaven" (185).

The nature of the rival and incompatible claims suggests that there is no core conception which "might make a claim for universal allegiance" (186). But MacIntyre argues that it is just such a common claim among each account that offers the beginning of a core conception. Each account "claims not only theoretical, but also an institutional hegemony", in that the virtues are embodied in specific institutions: the *polis* for Aristotle, Philadelphia for Franklin, marriage to an English naval officer for Austen. Thus one feature of the concept of the virtue is the presumption of some prior account of social and moral life. The logical development of the concept then requires three stages: the background account of a practice, an account of the narrative structure of a single human life, and an account of what constitutes a moral tradition. He defines a "practice" as any complex social activity, with internal goods and standards of excellence realized in order to achieve it, which extends our understanding of and our ability to achieve human goods and ends; but he notes that virtues are not *only* exercised in the course of practices. In order to explain the difference between external and internal goods of a practice, he describes a situation in which an intelligent child is taught to play chess with the promise of receiving candy if she wins; the candy is an external good, which could be achieved many ways other than playing chess, and to which chess is an incidental means. Focused solely on such external goods, the child has motivation to cheat; but as she learns to play, she attains particular skills, and gains reasons to excel at the game of the chess, not merely at the goal of

winning. Thus if the child cheats, she will deprive herself of these internal goods, and defeat only herself. These internal goods "cannot be had in any way but by playing chess" or a similar game (188). He then uses the example of portrait painting to show that "a practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods" (190). Entering into a practice involves accepting those standards, whose authority "rule[s] out all subjectivist and emotivist analyses of judgment". He notes that external goods, when achieved, become an individual's property, and are thus a subject of competition, while the achievement of internal goods characteristically benefits the whole of the community who participates in a practice.

MacIntyre thus formulates "a first, even if partial and tentative definition of a virtue: *A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods*" (191). He then argues why, because the goods of a practice can only be achieved in concert with its pursuit by others practitioners, we must accept the necessity of the virtues of justice, courage and honesty. It is still the case that vices may flourish where virtues are required, but the vicious rely on the virtues of others and deny themselves the internal goods of a practice. Practices also require the exercise of technical skills, but a practice is much more than just a set of such skills: it is an entire conception of ends and goods which those skills serve and enrich. Practices must also be contrasted with institutions, which "are characteristically and necessarily concerned with ... external goods" (194). Yet the making and sustaining of institutions which benefit communities without becoming corrupt is itself a practice. That practice is particularly important to the exercise of the virtues, which are always practiced within the context of a particular community. The contrast outlined in previous chapters between the ancient and modern liberal conceptions of the relationship between morality and politics indicates that "we shall be unable to write a true history of practices and institutions unless that history is also one of the virtues and vices" (195). The virtues can be helped or hindered by certain types of social institutions. And a society with no virtues would recognize only external goods and be characterized primarily by competitiveness.

MacIntyre notes that his account of the virtues differs from Aristotle's in that it does not require his metaphysical biology, and in that because of the multiplicity of human practices and the consequent multiplicity of goods, conflict may arise from competing goods rather than solely from flaws in individual character. But his account is still Aristotelian in at least three ways: its requirement of the same distinctions and concepts required for Aristotle's account, such as that between intellectual virtues and virtues of character; its agreement with the Aristotelian account of pleasure as heterogenous, in contrast to the utilitarian view; and the link it creates between evaluation and explanation, so that an account of the actions of a person or persons must make some appeal to their virtues and vices. He notes that his account does not preclude that there may be practices which are evil, and thus virtues which sustain evil; rather, his account supposes only that virtues be initially defined in terms of practices. But because of this objection, his account is clearly incomplete in several ways. The first is that a life informed only by the conception as defined thus far would "be pervaded ... by *too many* conflicts and *too much* arbitrariness" as a result of the multiplicity of goods (201). Something akin to the modernist emotive self must reemerge to resolve these conflicts. The second is that many virtues remain incomplete without a conception of the *telos* of a whole human life, which is necessary to provide a rational ordering between virtues. These two considerations lead to the third, which is that the crucial virtue of constancy cannot be defined except in reference to a whole human life. Thus MacIntyre argues that the account he has offered so far is incomplete, and that to give a more fully adequate account it is necessary to answer the question of whether it is "rationally justifiable to conceive of each human life as a unity" (203).

Chapter 15. The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition

MacIntyre notes that any contemporary attempt to conceive of human life as a whole meets with the obstacle that "modernity partitions each human life into a variety of segments, each with its own norms and modes of behavior": work from leisure, private from public, corporate from personal, individual from social role (204). Similarly, actions are conceived of as distinct, rather than as part of a larger whole. The result of these modes of thought is that "life comes to appear as nothing but a series of unconnected episodes", and the self is "liquidated" into "a set of demarcated areas of role-playing" (204,5). So virtues are typically conceived of as synonymous with professional skills—but genuine virtues manifest in situations beyond their original practice, and can only be evaluated in a person's life when that life is conceived of as a whole. Thus the change into the modern view of moral judgment corresponds to a change into the modern view of selfhood. That modern view rejects the narrative mode of selfhood—yet that predecessor view is so influential in our culture that it is still "natural ... to think of the self in a narrative mode" (206).

To that end, MacIntyre explains why it is impossible to give an intelligible account of human actions outside of a narrative mode. First, "we cannot ... characterize behavior independently of intentions", which we cannot characterize without reference to settings that make those intentions intelligible. Next, to characterize the behavior of an agent, we need to know "both what certain of his beliefs are and which of them are causally effective", that is, which intentions directly caused his actions (207). We also need reference to long-term intentions in order to make short-term intentions intelligible. Thus intentions "need to be ordered both causally and temporally and both orderings will make reference to settings" (208). MacIntyre notes that there can thus be no independent studies of a person's subjective attitudes and their objective actions (as in the account of B.F. Skinner and other functionalists), for the two groups are in fact "only one set of items". Based on these arguments, he concludes that "narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions". MacIntyre then explains why the concept of an *intelligible* action is much more fundamental and important than an action as such. The basic distinction between "human beings and other beings" is that humans "can be held to account for that of which they are the authors", and such an account must always be one of intelligible actions and not just actions (209).

MacIntyre notes that the status of narratives as essential for characterizing human action is especially true for that most fundamental of human actions, conversation. Conversations have participants who are both actors and authors, belong to genres, have beginnings, middles, and ends, have digressions and sublots, and move towards and away from climaxes. Thus "conversation, understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general" (211). The narrative form, MacIntyre argues, is intrinsic to human action, not merely an imposed method of understanding it. "Narrative is neither disguise nor decoration ... It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of a narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told—except in the case of fiction" (211,2). We characterize life in narratives just as we do art, and a person may be a part of many different narratives—but unlike art, "we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives" (213). And each person's individual drama interacts with and exerts pressure on that of every other person. Further, the notion of a history is fundamental to understanding actions, for each action is intelligible only within a particular history or multiple such histories. MacIntyre argues that modernity agrees with this point, but denies that the concepts of history and action require each other—a position most clearly articulated by the existentialist Sartre, who believes that "the story-teller imposes on human events retrospectively an order which they did not have while they were lived", so that "to present human life in the form of a narrative is always to falsify it" (214). But actions prior to imposed narratives, MacIntyre counters, are merely disjointed elements of potential narratives. Sartre, MacIntyre notes, never gives an account of the nature of human actions "deprived of any falsifying narrative order", and "it is striking that in order to show that there are no true narratives, he himself writes one, albeit a fictional one [the novel *La Nausée*]." The difference between fictional and real characters is not the form of their narrative, but their degree of authorship of it.

One key aspect of a dramatic narrative is that at any point during it, we do not know what will happen next—thus the unpredictability outlined in Chapter 8 is required by the narrative form of human life. Narratives also have a teleological nature, in that they are guided by some vision of the future—some variety of ends and goals. The unpredictable and teleological natures of narratives coexist, so that we never know what will happen next in our lives, but nonetheless our lives have a shape which guides us towards our future. Thus it emerges that "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (216). We make sense of our lives only through the stories of which we find ourselves a part, and so we can only understand a society through the stock of stories that it tells. Thus also the continuity of the self is a prerequisite rather than a source of identity. And just as an action is not intelligible when divorced from a history, "the concept of a person is that of a character abstracted from a history" (217). We are each the subject of our own personal history—and thus when a suicidal person says that their life is meaningless, he or she is "complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any point, any movement towards a climax or a *telos*". The unity of a personal narrative requires a unity of character, an understanding of how a person could at various points be a character in different narratives. Thus "the narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives" (218). And the unity of an individual life is the unity of a narrative embodied in that life. It is the notion of a quest towards particular goals, in which obstructions are encountered and dealt with, and in so dealing, the goals of the quest come to be fully understood. Thus the virtues are to be understood as those dispositions which enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices and to engage in the overall quest for the good. The good life for man, then, 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" (219).

The good, however, is tied to particular circumstances and is particular to social roles, which "constitute the given of my life" and are "in part what gives my life its own moral particularity" (220). Any social identity is also tied to a particular historical identity. These particularities impose initial moral limitations, "but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists" (221). The notion of escaping from the particular "into a realm of entirely universal maxims which belong to man as such ... is an illusion and an illusion with painful consequences". Thus "what I am ... is in key part what I inherit", and so each individual is the bearer of a tradition. MacIntyre takes pains to contrast his notion of a tradition with that of contemporary conservatives in the vein of Edmund Burke, who "contrast tradition with reason and the stability of tradition with conflict". This contrast is false, however, for "all reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought", be it that of medieval logic or modern physics (222). But modern individualism has no use for such a tradition, and in this sense, MacIntyre argues, modern conservatives are just as individualist as liberals, and thus are mostly engaged only in preserving "older rather than later versions of liberal individualism". What strengthens or weakens such traditions is "the exercise or lack of exercise of the relevant virtues", and thus "the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one" is crucial (223). A key question then becomes how to resolve conflicts between competing goods and traditions. MacIntyre disputes the notion that we must either believe that goods are inherently incompatible or that there must be "some determinate conception of *the* good life for man", but not both. For this tragic confrontation itself presents better or worse ways for individuals to live through it. "What is better or worse for X depends upon the character of that intelligible narrative which provides X's life with its unity", and "it is the lack of any such unifying conception of a human life which underlies modern denials of the factual character of moral judgments" (225). This lack transforms the notion of a virtue; it is to the history of that transformation that MacIntyre proposes to turn next, "for we shall only understand the tradition of the virtues fully if we understand to what kind of degeneration it has proved liable".

Chapter 16. From the Virtues to Virtue and after Virtue

MacIntyre reiterates the interminable nature of moral debates in modern society, and argues that the seemingly arbitrary nature of pluralism is the result of a history from the late middle ages to the present during which both the dominant lists of the virtues and the conception of virtue itself have changed. That change was inevitable, for during the same period, two concepts which are necessary for the traditional account of the virtues were displaced: those of narrative unity and of a practice. Hence "the cultural place of narrative has been diminished", and art has been relegated "to the status of an essentially minority activity", which "protects us from any narrative understanding of ourselves" (226,7). Since narratives are essential to understanding life, they persist in such forms as realist novels, movies, and newspaper stories, but "nonetheless to think of a human life as a narrative unity is ... alien to the dominant individualist and bureaucratic modes of modern culture". The concept of a practice with internal goods has been similarly marginalized—most notably with the move of production outside the household, which ended the sustaining of the family as a practice. Work now—most apparently in production lines—is predominantly governed by the pursuit of external goods (chiefly wealth) by both the employer and the worker, rather than a combination of goods both external and internal to practices. Work is now solely a means to the end of productivity, and thus practices are marginal to social life, while aesthetic consumption is central. The aesthete and the bureaucratic manager thus become central characters of modern society, as outlined in Chapter 3.

When the notion of narrative unity was removed from the virtues, they became understood as dispositions related in one of two ways to the "newly invented social institution, the individual": either as expressions of natural passions, or as dispositions necessary to curb natural passions (228). The 17th and 18th centuries took a view of humans as naturally egoistic, and thus subscribed to the latter view of the virtues. MacIntyre analyzes Hume's account, which purports that the virtues can be derived from universal human sensibility, yet also claims that accounts based on the sensibilities of Diogenes and Pascal are mistaken. He thus reveals Hume's appeal to universal human nature to in fact be a mask for "the prejudices of the Hanoverian ruling elite", so that "Hume's moral philosophy presupposes allegiance to a particular kind of social structure as much as Aristotle's does, but allegience of a highly ideological kind" (231). MacIntyre then points out three features of Hume's account which recur in other contemporary accounts of the virtues that fail in a similar manner: First, in a society with no conception of a communal good, there can be no conception of contribution to that good, and so "notions of desert and honor become detached" from their original contexts (232); Second, virtues are no longer conceived of as posessing a function distinct from that of rules, but rather are "just those dispositions necessary to produce obedience to the rules of morality"; And third, the virtues become described as singular rather than plural. Thus, as in the Stoic account of Chapter 13, virtues are practiced not for the sake of some other good—rather, it becomes the belief that "virtue is its own reward". MacIntyre outlines the accounts of the virtues offered by Dr. Johnson and Adam Smith, which are influenced by the Stoic account.

The central question of moral philosophy then becomes "'How do we know *which* rules to follow?'", indicating the marginality of virtue concepts (236). That marginality owes also to the fact that writers of the period "already treat of society as nothing more than an arena in which individuals seek to secure what is useful or agreeable to them". Thus they exclude any notion of a societal good prior to individual interest, from which virtues are made intelligible—but he argues that republicanism, which is based on just such a notion, "represents an attempt at a partial restoration of what I have called the classical tradition" (237). He notes the concerns of writers who "see in this republican commitment to public virtue the genesis of totalitarianism and even of terror". But he argues that totalitarianism was bred by the desperation of republicans who recognized that public morality cannot be reinvented on the scale of a whole nation when the notion is already alien to the public and the intellectual elite. Understanding this fact makes clear "the predicament of all those adherents of the older tradition of the virtues ... who seek to re-establish the virtues" (238).

MacIntyre explores two such writers, the first of whom is William Cobbett, who saw market and individualistic forces as antithetical to the public good, believing "that the small working farmer is the social type of the virtuous man"—and who

thus became influential to Marx (239). The second writer, Jane Austen, "by contrast, identifies that social sphere within which the practice of virtues is able to continue"—namely, marriage. That sphere was particularly important because when production moved out of the household, women no longer engaged in the same kind of work-relationship as men, and thus their good and *telos* became defined through marriage; "The restricted households of Highbury and Mansfield Park have to serve as surrogates for the Greek city-state and the medieval kingdom" (240). Thus, MacIntyre argues, Austen continues the Aristotelian tradition—and also extends it. First, she is "preoccupied in a quite new way with counterfeits of the virtues"—those who believe virtue is in appearing virtuous rather than being virtuous (241). She is similarly concerned with the importance of self-knowledge. Most importantly, she recognizes the necessity of a narrative unity to give structure to life and the virtues—but by the time she is writing, "that unity can no longer be treated as a mere presupposition", but rather must "be continually reaffirmed ... in deed rather than word", a virtue she calls constancy (242). Constancy is most clearly exhibited in the character of Fanny Price through her corresponding lack of charm, which is "the characteristically modern quality" used by those who lack the virtues to get by in modern life; thus Austen rejects the utilitarian catalogues of the virtues offered by Hume and Franklin. MacIntyre argues finally that the narrative form of Austen's novels—ironic comedy—coincides with her moral view because "she sees the *telos* of human life implicit in its everyday form" (243). That form exhibits the harms and evils which virtue alone can overcome and the structure of a life in which this is accomplished and the *telos* is achieved. Thus "once again it turns out that any specific account of the virtues presupposes an equally specific account of the narrative structure and unity of a human life and *vice versa*". MacIntyre thus considers Austen to be "the last great representative of the classical tradition of the virtues", and so we ought to observe the crucial aspect of her writing that "the life of the virtues is necessarily afforded a very restricted cultural and social space". He proposes to turn next to the question of what happened to our conception of justice, which relies so crucially on a shared rather than a restricted notion of a public good.

Chapter 17. Justice as a Virtue: Changing Conceptions

MacIntyre notes that as virtue has become understood as dispositions leading a person to obey certain rules, it has become crucial to agree on some set of rules. But such agreement, as emphasized earlier in the book, cannot be secured in modern individualist culture—a fact with profound consequences for justice. In order to illustrate those consequences, MacIntyres describes a hypothetical debate between two characters: 'A', who finds his pursuit of his own projects threatened by high taxes, which he regards as unjust; and 'B', who notes the arbitrariness of inequalities of wealth, which he finds unjust, and thus supports redistributive taxes. "Our pluralist culture possesses ... no rational criterion for deciding" between the incommensurable claims of entitlement made by A on the one hand and those of need made by B on the other (246). MacIntyre notes two modern analytical moral philosophers whose work closely parallels the competing arguments: Robert Nozick gives a rational articulation of A's position, and John Rawls of B's. Rawls argues that distributive equality is the position which would be chosen by a rational agent who possessed no prior knowledge of what his or her abilities, place in society, or conception of the good will be, and Nozick makes a similar argument for the inalienable rights of entitlement. MacIntyre does not argue with each writer's derivation of principles of justice from their respective premises—rather, he argues that "it is *only* a rational agent in such a situation who would choose such principles", while in fact "*we* are *never* behind such a veil of ignorance", and an appeal to such a premise simply begs the question of why we ought to accept one premise of justice (that is, entitlement or need) over the other (247,9).

He notes that while the debate between Nozick and Rawls mirrors up to a point that of A and B, the latter pair make reference to *desert* in their arguments while the former do not, and it is that reference which makes A and B each feel that they are suffering injustice rather than some other sort of wrong. The accounts of both Nozick and Rawls, however, rule out any notion of desert. For both presuppose an account of society as something akin to strangers shipwrecked together

on an island: a collection of individuals with interests "prior to, and independent of, the construction of any moral or social bonds between them" (250). But we have already seen that the notion of desert can only be found within a community with a shared good, "whose individuals identify their primary interests with reference to those goods". Desert is also ruled out in that Rawls's account excludes reference to the past, while Nozick's makes reference to the past only in its requirement that "all legitimate entitlements can be traced back to legitimate acts of original acquisition"—but MacIntyre notes that "there are in fact very few, and in some large areas of the world *no*, legitimate entitlements", because ownership of most property today can be traced back to acts of theft and violence from natives (251). Thus A and B's appeals to desert are a tribute to the enduring power of the classical tradition of justice to which they trace. That power traces to the fact that fragments of such conceptions still exist alongside conceptions such as rights and utility in the modern "conceptual *mélange* of moral thought and practice", and to the fact that there are still "communities whose historical ties with their past remain strong" in which the conceptions exist in a less fragmentary form (252). Such communities, however, still have to participate in that *mélange* and thus must employ concepts that risk eroding their traditions.

Moral philosophy, then, reflects the same debates and disagreements of culture and thus is "unsettlable in just the way that the political and moral debates themselves are" (252). For the multiple and fragmented concepts by which we live are in fact "used at one and the same time to express rival and incompatible social ideals and policies *and* to furnish us with a pluralist political rhetoric whose function is to conceal the depth of our conflicts" (253). There are significant implications for this conclusion: the Supreme Court, for instance, can no longer be seen as a neutral body arbitrating from "shared moral first principles", but rather must be seen as a body attempting to fairly keep the peace "between rival social groups adhering to rival and incompatible principles of justice". More generally, this reveals that "modern politics cannot be a matter of genuine moral consensus", for no such consensus can be achieved. It is, rather, "civil war carried on by other means". Further, the virtue of patriotism cannot find any true expression, for we have no conception of a shared public good, and thus no understanding of our government as allied to that good. Thus just as much as the tradition of the virtues is at odds with modern economics and individualism, it must also involve "a rejection of the modern political order ... for modern politics itself expresses in its institutional forms a systematic rejection of that tradition" (255).

Chapter 18. After Virtue: Nietzsche *or* Aristotle, Trotsky *and* St. Benedict

MacIntyre returns to the question posed in Chapter 9 of, in light of the disorder of moral practice today, which of the two logical alternatives we ought to accept: Nietzsche's or Aristotle's. He argues first that the cogency of Nietzsche's rejection of contemporary moral rules "did not necessarily extend to the earlier Aristotelian tradition" which differed crucially in its placement of rules within a larger scheme of virtues (257). On the contrary, "against that tradition the Nietzschean polemic is completely unsuccessful" because of the success of the rational case for a moral tradition outlined in Chapters 14 and 15. Nietzsche's claim rests on the figure of the *Übermensch*, or "great man", who recognizes that moral language is a mask for the will to power and in fact has no objective authority, and thus decides to eschew human relationships and transcend the social world in order to dictate his own moral law. But MacIntyre argues that in light of his account of the virtues, "it is the isolation and self-absorption of 'the great man' which thrust upon him the burden of being his own self-sufficient moral authority" (258). Not only does Nietzsche's argument fail against the Aristotelian tradition, but it is in fact from that perspective that we can best understand the mistakes of the Nietzschean position. Thus the concept of "the great man" "represents individualism's final attempt to escape from its own consequences" (259). Nietzsche's stance turns out to be "only one more facet of that very moral culture of which Nietzsche took himself to be an implacable critic".

The crucial moral opposition thus turns out to be between individualism and Aristotelianism. The differences between these stances extend to the understanding of human action itself. MacIntyres reiterates his conclusion that centuries of effort have failed to provide "any coherent rationally defensible statement of a liberal individualist point of view", while "the Aristotelian tradition can be restated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments". To this conclusion he recognizes three immediate and distinct objections likely to be raised. The first is that "arguments in philosophy rarely take the form of proofs", and so "those who wish to resist some particular conclusion are equally rarely without any resort" (259-0). Nonetheless, when issues *are* settled, it is usually because participants determine to ascertain what sort of rational procedures can settle such disputes—a task which he believes to now be imperative for moral philosophy, and to which he resolves to turn in a subsequent book. The second objections are about his interpretations of the classical tradition, but he notes that, if his account is correct, traditions are strengthened by internal arguments and conflicts—which he has done in the course of the book, and which would occur again if such criticisms turned out to be correct. The final set of objections will be from Marxists, who contend that the key moral conflict of our age is between liberal individualism and some version of Marxism. MacIntyre argues that "the claim of Marxism to a morally distinctive standpoint is undermined by Marxism's own moral history", which shows that "Marxists have always fallen back into relatively straightforward versions of Kantianism or utilitarianism" (261). Further, he argues that when Marxists gain power, they either become Weberians like Trotsky—adherents of the failed notions of social prediction and control—or Nietzscheans like Lukacs and Lenin. He thus argues "not only ... that Marxism is exhausted as a *political* tradition ... [but] that this exhaustion is shared by every other political tradition within our culture" (262).

MacIntyre concludes by noting that, despite the danger of drawing precise parallels between historical periods, there is one to be drawn between our modern period and that in which the Roman empire declined into the Dark Ages. One crucial turning point of that period was when people ceased to contribute to the good of the state and "ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance" of the state (263). They turned instead to constructing communities in which moral life could be sustained. MacIntyre asserts that we have reached this turning point, and that this construction will prove crucial if moral and intellectual life are to be "sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us". He maintains that the success of that effort through the Dark Ages teach us there is ground for hope, but that "this time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict."

Chapter 19. Postscript to the Second Edition

MacIntyre notes that he has corrected several factual errors in the second edition. He promises that much of what was lacking in the account of *After Virtue* will be remedied in the forthcoming sequel, but that there are three distinct threads of immediate dissatisfaction to the book which deserve to be addressed more urgently.

1. The Relationship of Philosophy to History

MacIntyre notes the objection of William K. Frankena that he fails to distinguish history from philosophy, and that he employs techniques of analytical philosophy more than his apparent rejection of it should allow. MacIntyre responds that arguments of analytical philosophy can only support the claims about truth and rationality which they aspire to justify when they are made "within the context of a particular genre of historical inquiry" (265). Further, he reemphasizes that there is no such thing as *morality as such*, divorced from a societal context. He notes that the project of finding *morality as such* was Kant's, and reiterates that it failed because any purported universal principles of rationality and morality always

turn out—as was the case with Kant and every other Enlightenment philosopher—to be local principles of a particular time and place. Kant also failed because his belief in *a priori* principles—and the similar belief shared by all empiricists—could not be sustained, and "the consequence is that analytic philosophy has become a discipline—or a subdiscipline?—whose competence has been restricted to the study of inferences" (267). Analytic philosophy *can*, on occasion, demonstrate sufficient incoherence in an idea (as did Gödel) that any reasonable person would have to reject it, but it cannot establish universal rational principles for arbitrating between all competing ideas.

Anaytic philosophers thus "seem to be determined to go on considering arguments as objects of investigation in abstraction from ... social and historical contexts", but in so doing they are likely to repeat Kant's mistakes. The first is that it is only in considering how an argument competed with rival contemporary claims that we can understand its justification. MacIntyre argues that the history of science is a perfect exemplar: "we cannot say wherein the rational superiority of Newtonian physics consisted except historically in terms of its relationship to those predecessors and rivals whom it challenged and displaced", and "the case is no different with morality" (268). But it is also the case that any conception of morality is based on particular understandings of action and character—so moral philosophies are always tied to particular rational philosophies, and the history of the two is one and the same.

MacIntyre notes the potential objection that in chronicling the history of the succession of theories, we must employ external standards by which to judge the superiority of one theory over another. Using again the example of science, MacIntyre counters that "what we have to aspire to is not a perfect theory ... but rather the best theory to emerge so far in the history of this class of theories. So we ought to aspire to provide the best theory so far as to what type of theory the best theory so far must be: no more, no less" (270). Thus any theory can never be brought to completion, and must always be left open to the possibility of being challenged and replaced; but if a theory has proved able to meet the challenges of its predecessors, *and* has answered successive challenges, *and* has provided the best explanation of why its competitors failed, then we should be confident that it will meet future challenges and that the principles which define its core are enduring principles. "And just this is the achievement that I ascribe to Aristotle's fundamental moral scheme in*After Virtue*."

He notes finally a converse objection to Frankena's—that his social history attributes too much causal influence to the history of philosophy. He asserts that he is unconvinced that those causal inferences are in fact incorrect, and notes that the academic separation between the disciplines "presupposes just the kind of logical distinction between questions of fact and questions of value that the account of narrative given in *After Virtue* commits me to denying" (272). Thus it is not an accident that the book is written in precisely the narrative form that it takes to be crucial to studying such questions.

2. The Virtues and the Issue of Relativism

MacIntyre notes that several writers have suggested that his account of the virtues implies an inescapable relativism. He ascribes this misunderstanding to his failure to make clear that his definition of the virtues is that they require *each* of the three stages he outlined, and not simply the first stage with the second two as elaborations. Thus practices are central because the virtues are not just means to the ends of the practices, but have "further point and purpose, and ... it is in grasping that point and purpose that we characteristically initially came to value the virtues" (273). The exercise of the virtues is essential to continually discovering and expanding upon our understanding of the good. He notes the objection of one writer to MacIntyre's claim that "a great chess player who is vicious cannot achieve any of the internal goods of chess" (274). He attributes this objection again to a misunderstanding of his position on the means-ends relationship of virtues and practices. A player could cultivate the skills of chess for the purpose of gaining its external goods (prestige,

wealth), but these goods are in no way related to chess, and thus the player cannot achieve "that kind of excellence which is specific to chess and the kind of enjoyment that supervenes upon such excellence", as even an amateur player could.

He reiterates that "no human quality is to be accounted a virtue unless it satisfies the conditions specified *at each of the three stages*": "a first which concerns virtues as qualities necessary to achieve goods internal to practices; a second which considers them as qualities contributing to the good of a whole life; and a third which relates them to the pursuit of a good for human beings the conception of which can only be elaborated and possessed within an ongoing social tradition" (275,3). He ascribes to a failure on his part to adequately describe the third stage another criticism—that his account "is compatible with acknowledging the existence of distinct, incompatible and rival traditions of the virtues" (276). To this he responds that in a situation of deciding between two such traditions, it will sometimes be the case that the traditions will be able to evaluate and understand each other on their own terms, and thus correct and expand upon themselves. It is precisely through such encounters that traditions are able both to enrich themselves and to strengthen their confidence in their own persistence—and "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 rationally entitled to a high measure of confidence in its epistemological and moral resources" (277). To the potential objection that it is still possible that a situation could arise in which two traditions could *not* discover a rational way to understand and decide between each other, MacIntyre responds that his position does not entail that such situations could not arise, and that attempting to provide universal standards for such adjudication would require reviving the failed Kantian project. He vows finally to turn in his next book to the seemingly paradoxical nature of a historicist account of the Aristotelian tradition.

3. The Relationship of Moral Philosophy to Theology

MacIntyre notes that many have criticized his insufficient account of theological influence on the Aristotelian tradition. He acknowledges the complexity that exploring such relationships would entail, and proposes again to explore these issues in his subsequent book. Finally, he notes that *After Virtue* should be regarded as a work in progress, and that that progress is indebted to the criticisms he has mentioned.