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MORALITY AND POLITICS:

Alasdair MacIntyre on Moral Theory

by

David Cox, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts

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"MORALITY AND POLITICS:
ALASDAIR MACINTYRE ON MORAL THEORY"

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the problem of morality and politics, and focuses on the treatment of this question by the contemporary thinker, Alasdair MacIntyre. This work will be a discussion of MacIntyre's ideas on morality and politics, providing an exposition, analysis, and critique of MacIntyre's moral philosophy.

Chapters One and Two will provide a detailed discussion of MacIntyre's argument. For MacIntyre, the difference between classical and modern morality is paramount. Modern teachers of morality, neglecting the wisdom of antiquity, have led man to nihilism. For MacIntyre, the moral philosophy of Aristotle exemplifies the morality of the ancients in that it is coherent, traditional, and community oriented. The classical tradition of morality will be the subject of Chapter One, Chapter Two will be concerned with the contrast between classical and modern moral theory and practice (as explained by MacIntyre). MacIntyre understands modern moral theory to be arbitrary, individualistic, and incoherent. Whereas classical morality and politics were indistinct, modern man thinks that morality is remote from the political realm. Chapter Three will examine the consequences of MacIntyre's thesis and will provide a criticism of his ideas. It will be agreed that the morality of the modern age is distinct from that of classical antiquity. It will nonetheless be argued that MacIntyre misunderstands the essential teaching of the classical moral philosophers. This thesis will conclude with the argument that MacIntyre's teaching is contrary to the actual moral theory of Aristotle and the major thinkers of antiquity, and he shares the defects of the modern approach to morality which he criticizes. MacIntyre, while attempting to expose the nihilism inherent in modern moral theory and advocating a return to the morality of classical antiquity, is himself a nihilist and his work is distinctly modern in character.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Political philosophers have often attempted to use moral arguments to justify the actions of individuals and groups in the public realm. Two distinct styles of political thought have emerged: descriptive political science, which tells us how men behave in a political situation, and normative political science, which tells us how men ought to behave and why this is the case. Hence, a politician, when justifying his actions, can either explain them in terms of the "how", or the means employed, or in terms of the "why", or the ends considered. The former explanation is a technical one - an answer to the question of how something predetermined can best be accomplished - while the latter explanation is a moral one - an answer to the question of what is good in a given situation. Justice, then, is a combination of 'what is good' and the best means to achieve the good. Hence morality and efficiency are equally necessary aspects of political activity. Therefore, politicians must be, or be advised by, both moral philosophers and technicians.

Justice, in this view, is a delicate balance of moral philosophy and technique. This becomes clearer when we try to imagine politics without either of its two elements. Stripped of its technical aspects, politics would be reduced to what Plato calls a "city in speech", a city designed exclusively by philosophers which could never come into existence. Moral philosophy, however, is just as essential to the state as technique. In a state in which moral philosophers were not consulted, politicians would not know why they enforced a certain law; they would only know the best means to enforce it. This state would be efficient but not moral. Such a state would merely concern itself with

providing increasingly efficient distribution of goods and services. This distribution would be affected in terms of technical considerations only and not concerned with the good or bad inherent in the activity itself. This state could be either a Nazi Germany, a Soviet Union, or a United States. This is because, premised solely on technical considerations, it is neither moral nor immoral, but amoral. This thesis will describe how one writer, Alasdair MacIntyre, poses the problem of amoral politics.

According to MacIntyre, ancient and medieval societies exhibited a coherence of political technique and morality. Right and wrong were strictly defined by conventional arrangements to which all participants in politics implicitly assented. When a politician - Alcibiades, for instance - did wrong, he did so with the full realization that he had committed an immoral action. Conventions were established and well known and were, therefore, obeyed or transgressed knowingly.

Morality has a much different character in the modern age, however. Instead of being the established standards of the community, it is left in the private domain of the individual to decide what he or she believes to be good or bad. Morality is conceived as a matter of taste or preference, for there is no homogeneity of moral standards. Without standards accepted by the community, there can be no established definition of a good or a bad action. Thus there can be no agreement on the ends of political activity in the modern state, and politics becomes the exclusive sphere of the technician, who decides what to do on the criterion of efficiency. What results is a situation where there is no morality or immorality - only amorality - and, in the words of Nietzsche, everything is permitted. This is the modern problem of nihilism.

MacIntyre is among an important group of contemporary thinkers who, dissatisfied with the meaninglessness and nihilism of modern life, have looked for alternatives in the wisdom of antiquity. MacIntyre holds that modern moral theory leads to a dangerous relativism which is ultimately responsible for modern nihilism and the lack of moral standards. Morality, for MacIntyre, refers to the actions to which the standards of good and bad are applied. MacIntyre roughly divides moral theorists into modern and classical thinkers, and these are epitomized by Nietzsche and Aristotle respectively. Modern moral theory is responsible for the lack of standards in the modern world, and the solution to this problem can be found through a reexamination of the wisdom of the classical moral theorists.

MacIntyre is reacting against the modern contention that morality is subjective and a mere matter of individual preference. He holds that what results from this contention is the belief that we can do anything we like. Nietzsche once wrote that nihilism was the situation where everything is permitted. MacIntyre's critique of modern theories of morality addresses precisely this issue. If everything is permitted, then moral questions diminish in importance, becoming secondary to questions of technique.

Unlike modern thinkers, the Greeks refused to separate morality and politics. According to MacIntyre, the delineation of morality as a separate discipline took place in the Enlightenment, and this corresponded to the decline of morality as a force in society. Moreover, when morality is separated from politics, decisions are no longer made by those who can answer the question why (moral philosophers) but by those who can answer the question how (technicians). Political decisions thus are made not with reference to moral standards but to standards of efficiency. MacIntyre's work

attempts to explain the separation of morality and politics and thereby provide a solution to the problem of modern nihilism. The solution is found by going back to societies in which morality and politics were indistinct and examining the structure of moral life. For MacIntyre, then, we must either accept the consequences of modern moral theory or be prepared to find a coherent solution elsewhere. The essential choice for MacIntyre is between moral and amoral politics.

This thesis will examine MacIntyre's claims about moral theory. I will discuss MacIntyre's presentation of classical moral theory in Chapter One, concentrating on his interpretation of Aristotle and his historicization of Aristotle's thought. In Chapter Two, MacIntyre's criticism of modernity will be discussed. Chapter Three will be an evaluation of MacIntyre's argument. Here I will compare MacIntyre's thought to Nietzsche and Aristotle, using this comparison to bring to light some unexpected consequences of MacIntyre's philosophical position.

This study will examine comprehensively MacIntyre's most recent work, After Virtue, and his work on the history of moral theory, A Short History of Ethics. His other works, less important to the purpose of this paper, will also be discussed where relevant. MacIntyre's discussions of important thinkers will be augmented in some cases by my own commentary on MacIntyre's interpretation of these thinkers to more fully elucidate MacIntyre's meaning.

This thesis, then, will be a detailed and critical analysis of MacIntyre's claim that the antidote to modern nihilism lies in an approach similar to that of Aristotle and other thinkers of classical antiquity.

CHAPTER ONE

Alasdair MacIntyre and the Aristotelian Tradition of Moral Theory

CHAPTER ONE

Alasdair MacIntyre and the Aristotelian Tradition of Moral Theory

i. The Classical Notion of Virtue

MacIntyre thinks that all modern discourse on morality is meaningless because moral language has been changed beyond recognition from its classical sense. MacIntyre's premise is that different forms of social life inevitably provide distinct roles for standard moral concepts. Thus, in order to find the original meaning of these concepts, we must cease applying modern definitions to the morality of classical societies and attempt to understand the ancients on their own terms.¹ In this chapter then, we will analyze MacIntyre's argument that in earlier times, there existed a tradition, exemplified in the writings of Aristotle, in which moral language had clear and precise meaning and in which the virtues were the central concepts.

MacIntyre argues that the societies of the West, from the Homeric era until the beginnings of the modern age, shared similar notions of morality, which, despite superficial differences, had certain underlying characteristics in common. In these societies, there were objective standards and commonly held views of social roles to which all could appeal. A society shared a faith and a teleology which determined for them what were good and what were bad moral choices. Virtue and happiness were mutually interdependent qualities which were agreed by the community to constitute the good for man. These qualities were built into the structures of social life and were not comprehensible in abstraction from society. They did not

originate in the subjective will of individuals, and, therefore, no one was alienated from these norms. The quality of individual life was measured by how well one conformed to the socially established criteria. These criteria, although varying within the classical tradition, were nonetheless similar in content. Therefore, because the tradition is best exemplified in the Nicomachean Ethics, MacIntyre can claim that all such societies are engaged in a moral dialogue with Aristotle, though not a "relationship of simple assent."²

Hence MacIntyre distinguishes many modern thinkers, beginning with Machiavelli, from classical thinkers because the moderns refuse to engage in dialogue with the moral theory of Aristotle. MacIntyre asserts that modern societies are fundamentally different from the ancients because moral theory serves a different function in modern thought. Instead of reconciling the individual with the community, it alienates him. Therefore, we are faced with a crisis not only in moral philosophy but also in moral practice. If we are to examine this claim, we must analyze MacIntyre's concept of a virtue and discover the conditions which make the exercise of the virtues possible. Having done this, we will proceed to analyze MacIntyre's interpretation of what he considers to be the Aristotelian tradition in moral theory.

Before examining the Aristotelian tradition, we must note that the importance of the virtues for MacIntyre cannot be overstated. Thus we shall now turn to an examination of some ideas developed by MacIntyre in his recent work, After Virtue, to illustrate what is meant by the notion of a virtue. In this work, MacIntyre develops the notion of a practice, which is an example of a context in which virtuous actions can be performed. A practice is defined as:

(... any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends of goods involved, are systematically extended.³

We are accordingly informed that "arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, [and] the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept" of a practice.⁴ By internal - as opposed to external - goods, MacIntyre means that their achievement is possible exclusively through participation in the practice in question and mean nothing outside that practice.

MacIntyre explains that a practice also involved standards of excellence (or aretê) and the existence of a set of established rules. Participation in a practice entails the acceptance of such rules as authoritative. The virtues can be understood with respect to the rules inherent in a practice. A virtue is what makes possible the achievement of internal goods, and its absence renders the achievement of such goods impossible.⁵ Thus the notion of a practice helps MacIntyre to illustrate what he means by a virtue. But there are other ways that the virtues may be exercised; therefore, we must now turn to another notion without which our concept of a virtue is left incomplete - the idea that life must be viewed as a unified narrative.

(MacIntyre argues that we cannot understand the idea of a virtue unless we understand life as a story wherein the self is inseparable from the roles it plays in society. Every human action is understood in its moral significance by accounting for both the long and short term intentions of the subject. The action must be placed in causal and

spatiotemporal context to understand why it was done. We must assume that a human life has unity and, as such, has a beginning and an end between which all actions take place. Only when we regard life as a unified story can we see how actions can be good and bad.

MacIntyre alleges that to see human life as a unity is to see its unpredictability but also to see its movement towards a telos:

We live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future, a future in which certain possibilities beckon us forward and others repel us, some seem already foreclosed and others perhaps inevitable. There is no present which is not informed by some image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a telos - or a variety of ends or goals - towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present.⁶

Thus, for MacIntyre, moral action is incomprehensible without the idea of a telos.

The narrative unity of human life also presupposes the continuity of personal identity. If we question this notion, then accountability for our actions is unintelligible. One who does not view life as a unity and who does not consider an integrated and identical self to continue through time must avoid all moral responsibility.⁷ MacIntyre thus introduces the notion that human life ought to be understood as a quest for the good. This quest provides the unity necessary for the maintenance of the idea of personal identity and also provides a social forum for the exercise of the virtues. In the course of this question, the virtues enable us to define the good life, and through the exercise of the virtues, we achieve happiness.

MacIntyre's definition of the virtues is as yet incomplete, however, for the individual needs a moral context in which his quest for the good can be appraised. This is because the good for an individual is defined differently in each specific role and in each distinct society. The choices which the individual can make are circumscribed by the community and its traditions. Man's function is to fulfill his telos, however that may be defined by the established conventions of the society. One is good or bad depending on how well one fulfills one's function. Consequently, one can never abstract from a particular situation and formulate universal or natural laws. If this occurs, the heroic tradition of morality has been challenged. Thus MacIntyre's notion of virtue is based on the acceptance of established conventions as authoritative, although these conventions evolve subject to changes in the moral tradition.

Consequently, MacIntyre's interpretation of the classical tradition, as MacIntyre himself recognizes, differs radically from Aristotle's. To regard Aristotle as the representative of part of a moral tradition, as MacIntyre does, is to take an un-Aristotelian approach. Aristotle, who regards his predecessors' work to be incomplete expression of his own thoughts, would not see himself as part of a moral tradition, in MacIntyre's sense. MacIntyre regards the conventions of the past not as something to be discarded, but rather to be interpreted, and transcended dialectically, by contemporary thinkers. A tradition may progress or it may decay; but, nonetheless, elements of the past are preserved in the present. This is to see Aristotle and other builders of ethical systems as, at best, accurate observers of the ethics of a particular time and place. MacIntyre thus holds that the importance of classical thinkers such as Aristotle

can only be asserted within a kind of moral tradition, the existence of which an unhistorical thinker such as Aristotle could not have acknowledged.⁸ We will now examine the different societies for which the classical type of moral theory is valid.

ii. The Aristotelian Tradition (1): Greece

According to MacIntyre, the virtues are found in the epics of Homer⁹, and the examination of Homer's account of the virtues is essential background to later developments in moral theory in the Athenian polis. Homer provided for Athenian society "a moral background to contemporary debate...[and] an account of a now-transcended or partly-transcended moral order whose beliefs and concepts were still partially influential, but which also provided an illuminating contrast with the present."¹⁰ Thus if we are to examine the validity of MacIntyre's argument, we cannot ignore his treatment of the ethics implicit in the heroic societies of prehistorical times.

The central ethical notion in Homer is that the individual has a well defined role or status which determines his moral standpoint. Thus the word agathos, ancestor of the word 'good,' is applied only to the nobleman in Homer.¹¹ A man is agathos if he performs his specific function well. Furthermore, the word aretê, which came to mean 'virtue', has for Homer the connotations of excellence at performing one's role or function.¹² The most important aretê is that of courage for a man and of fidelity for a woman - both of which are closely tied in meaning to the idea of friendship. The importance of friendship is that it provides the basis for intersubjective agreement about the content of the virtues. Therefore, it is impossible for any action taking place outside the public realm or not pertinent to the public status of the individual to have ethical significance.¹³

If virtue is only meaningful with regard to one's public status, then an individual cannot choose to create new values for himself but can only act within the standards of the community. Thus man is not a subject who acts independently but an individual who either performs or fails to perform his duty. "The self of the heroic age lacks precisely that characteristic...that some modern moral philosophers take to be an essential characteristic of human selfhood: the capacity to detach oneself from any particular standpoint or point of view,...from the outside."¹⁴ The individual, then, cannot imagine himself as separable from the community. Morality is only possible in relation to the culturally local and particular. It can be comprehended only as part of a tradition, and any attempt to impose external standards would be unthinkable. Therefore, these societies differ distinctly from modernity where there is a widespread belief that the individual is free to choose his own values.

MacIntyre's examination of the ethics of the Athenian polis provides us with a sharp contrast to the moral homogeneity of Homer's epics. We detect the beginnings of modernity in the relativism of the sophists and the semantic confusion demonstrated in the earlier dialogues of Plato. MacIntyre remarks on a widening awareness of the existence of different social orders among the inhabitants of the polis.¹⁵ In this context, an individual can question the laws and standards of his own community and attempt to universalize concepts such as justice. Success becomes a virtue, for "to function well as a man in the city-state is to be a successful citizen".¹⁶ Thus it is realized that the virtues vary from city to city. Works such as Antigone and Euthyphro illustrate the conflict of old and new values.¹⁷ Man is still accountable to the community, but he is now able to contemplate a plurality of interpretations of his role.

Plato, therefore, begins the task of reestablishing the meaning of moral concepts. For Plato, the ambiguity in moral discourse results from an imperfect political order; and meaning would only be possible in the ideal state, where perfect laws are established in accordance with the principles of justice. In this state, the virtues would not conflict with one another. Plato also thought, however, that there could be no such state. On this point, his ethics are modified by his student, Aristotle.

Aristotle attempted to find a coherent system of ethics in the traditions of an actual state - the Athenian polis. For MacIntyre, Aristotle's Ethics thus represents the best example of the classical tradition of moral theory, and subsequent thought takes the form of a conscious or unconscious debate with Aristotle. Later thinkers about the virtues may differ in content from the peripatetic philosopher, but their thought is similar in form. As we will see, this holds especially for medieval Christian thought in which new virtues take the place of the old but perform a similar function in the social order.

Aristotle can revise Plato's ethics (and solve Plato's dilemma) because he regards his own philosophy as the culmination of the Hellenic tradition and the polis as the ultimate political order. Moreover, like Plato, he lacks a vision of time as history and rejects the notion of progress. Yet it is precisely for this reason that he can write within the classical tradition. His discourse on morality can be coherent because he is unaware that the political form of the polis will be surpassed by history. Thus, in MacIntyre's argument, Aristotle does not invent his account of the virtues but articulates "what is implicit in the thought, utterance, and action of an educated Athenian".¹⁸ Indeed, Aristotle holds that anyone who is well

brought up will have no difficulty comprehending the first principles of morals.¹⁹ Thus Aristotle's method is empirical, as it involves the observation and classification of the virtues as he observes them in Athens.

According to MacIntyre,²⁰ Aristotle's ethical thought is universalized through a reconciliation with his theory of nature as outlined in the Physics. This involves the belief that human nature, like all nature, moves towards a telos or final cause, "an end...for those whose sake everything else is".²⁰ MacIntyre adds that for Aristotle, a man's telos is the good. This good is neither pleasure, honour, nor money but is considered to be eudaimonia.²¹ Though this is usually translated as "happiness", to MacIntyre it is a combination of the concepts of "happiness" and "virtue". Eudaimonia is the one state which is chosen for its own sake, but this does not mean it is an end to which all else is a means; it is simply the inevitable result whenever a virtuous and successful action is performed. As in other classical systems of morals, for Aristotle, happiness is always deserved.

Eudaimonia is a complex measure of the virtues and one which describes an entire life. Thus a man is only pronounced eudaimon after he dies. It involves the exercise of both the intellectual virtues and the virtues of character. Thus all of the aretai are necessary to and complement one another. Indeed, one cannot be said to possess any one virtue without possessing all of the others:

The just man does not fall into the vice of pleonexia which is one of the two vices [extremes] corresponding to the virtue of justice [the mean]. But in order to avoid pleonexia it is clear that one must possess sôphrosunê [temperance]. The brave man does not fall into the vices of rashness and cowardice; but the rash man seems to be a braggart and boastfulness is one of the vices relative to the virtue of truthfulness about oneself.²²

Thus Aristotle provides us with a complex measure with which to judge the individual. It is only the community as a whole, however, that can be considered competent to apply this measure and to judge a man. Such an arrangement is only possible within a small community held together by ties of friendship and kinship: a community such as the polis. The standards of conduct are meaningless outside such a community.

To the Aristotelian, justice "is the virtue of rewarding desert and repairing failures in rewarding desert within an already constituted community; friendship is required for that initial constitution."²³ Friendship must exist between members of a community in order that the laws already exist in implicit form before they are codified. Aristotle calls the initial agreement in ideals or opinions, which is essential for the creation of laws, homonoia or concord.²⁴ Moral laws must arise from the practices of a small group where there is already some concord between the parties involved and where "some friendly feeling is also presupposed."²⁵ Indeed, Aristotle implies that justice is secondary to friendship for "law-givers seem to make friendship a more important aim than justice."²⁶

The rational criteria of desert can only be provided by a morally homogeneous community where there is established social agreement on these criteria.²⁷ The idea of desert must be understood "in the context of a community whose primary bond is a shared understanding both of the good for man and of the good of that community and where individuals identify their primary interests with reference to those goods."²⁸ Therefore, it is only the concept of a community of men bound by friendship that can make the concept of desert understandable. Liberalism, premised as it is on the idea of the individual as an independent moral agent prior to the community, can involve no such notion as desert.

Moderation in all things is also important to the classical notion of justice. To be moderate is to steer a clear course of virtue between the extremes of the corresponding vices. Justice in its general sense means that an individual possesses a virtuous character and a disposition to observe the mean in all things.²⁹ For an individual to be just is for him to possess a sense of "more or less of what is fair." Thus a good judge decides not according to any prescribed rule but according to right reason (kata ton orthon logon.) The adjudication of justice according to right reason instead of according to rule distinguishes the classics from the moderns. "Right reason" presupposes the idea of desert which in turn is made understandable by a community-based definition of virtue. Thus, for Aristotle, the virtues of character and those of the intellect are closely related, and it is impossible to possess the virtues in isolation. The good judge is the virtuous man.

iii. The Aristotelian Tradition (2): Rome

The irony of Aristotle's moral theory was that the institution of the polis was being superseded as the dominant political form even while the Ethics and the Politics were being presented to the students at the Lyceum. The idea of universal empire was incompatible with Aristotle's ethical teachings. Thus MacIntyre argues that the Stoics were able to produce a radically different type of ethics which regarded man not as a citizen of the polis but as a citizen of the kosmos.³⁰ Stoicism was the belief in an eternal, rational order, independent of convention and law, to which all men could assent. According to Stoic doctrine, men become conscious of the natural law through their reason and are free to assent to or dissent from this law. This doctrine also divorced the ideas of virtue and happiness and rejected Aristotelian teleology. Virtuous action was desired for its own sake.

According to MacIntyre, Stoicism bears some important resemblances to the thought of certain modern thinkers. He argues that "given the disappearance of [the polis],...any intelligible relationship between the virtues and law would disappear."³¹ Since the decline of the polis, man's sense of community has become negligible. When community goods are no longer important, men's individual goods come into conflict. To be moral becomes synonymous with altruism. Thus, for MacIntyre, Stoic thought represents the first example of non-Aristotelian moral theory. However, it also differs from modern thought in the essential respect that it lacks historical consciousness. Stoicism was found wanting by the propertyless classes, MacIntyre argues, because it promoted acquiescence in the established social order.³² It could not guarantee that the virtuous man would be provided with

happiness either during or after his life. These needs were to be met by Christianity, which could explain how a man could be virtuous in the universal empire and reap the benefits in the hereafter.

MacIntyre alleges that Christianity provides a solution by allowing man to hope. In St. Augustine, there is the notion that we can tolerate coercive government if this allows us to enter the kingdom of heaven. With this development, writes MacIntyre, virtue and happiness were reconciled and man adopted a revised Aristotelianism, where the biblical virtues such as patience, humility, and piety replaced such classical virtues as prudence, temperance, and liberality. These virtues were accepted because salvation or eternal happiness took the place of eudaimonia as the telos of a man. Thus, for MacIntyre, Christianity takes the form of Aristotelianism although the content of its ethics differs. Revelation provides the Christian community with the intersubjectivity of meaning which friendship had provided for the polis.³³ The Christian world is regarded as being in dialogue with Aristotle but in the same tradition of moral theory.

We have now presented MacIntyre's argument that there existed a tradition of moral theory, exemplified by Aristotle, where the virtues were central and where a moral act was in accordance with one's telos. The cultures in this tradition are able to maintain a coherent discourse on morals because, within each of them, there is intersubjective agreement about first principles. The Greeks share an horizon because of the bond of friendship; the Christians can do so because of a universal faith.

MacIntyre thus believes that the classical moral teachings can be applied to the contemporary world. He holds that the classical ideal of the virtues, exemplified by Aristotle in the Ethics, can enable us to rediscover the lost meaning of our moral notions. MacIntyre, nonetheless, has modified the classical notion of the virtues by understanding the virtues as part of a particular practice in a continually changing moral tradition. Thus MacIntyre regards the virtues as valid within a historical context. MacIntyre, therefore, views the classical teaching from a modern point of view and thus achieves a synthesis of the two. This synthesis is used as a vantage point from which he criticizes modern thinkers, whose relativism leaves the way open for the loss of all meaningful moral discourse. His critique of modern moral theory will now be discussed.

Footnotes

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 2. See also MacIntyre, "Ancient Politics and Modern Issues", in Arion, 1973-1974, p. 426.

2. MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., and Notre Dame: University Press, 1981), p. 154.

3. Ibid., p. 175.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 178.

6. Ibid., p. 200.

7. In view of this, it is perhaps symptomatic of modernity that Immanuel Kant, [Critique of Pure Reason, (trans. Norman Kemp Smith, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929) pp. 341-344.] demonstrates in the "Paralogisms of Pure Reason" that pure reason is incapable of solving the question of the continuance of personal identity. Kant's dilemma will be more fully developed in Chapter Two of this essay.

8. After Virtue, p. 137.

9. MacIntyre's discussion, also includes similar heroic legends of Norse and Celtic origin. See Ibid., p. 114.

10. Ibid.

11. Significantly, Nietzsche also remarks on this. See Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals, (trans. Francis Golffing, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1956) pp. 163-164.

12. Short History of Ethics, p. 8.

13. After Virtue, p. 115.

14. Ibid., p. 118.

15. Short History of Ethics, pp. 10-12.

16. Ibid., p. 14.

17. Ibid., pp. 21 and 99.

18. After Virtue, p. 138.
19. See Aristotle, Ethics, (trans. J.A.K. Thompson, Harmondsworth, U.K., Penguin Books, 1953), p. 30.
20. See Aristotle's Metaphysics in The Works of Aristotle, (trans. W.D. Ross, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), v. 2, p. 994.
21. After Virtue, p. 139. See Ethics, p. 36.
22. After Virtue, p. 145.
23. Ibid., p. 146.
24. Ethics, p. 270.
25. Ibid., p. 244.
26. See After Virtue, p. 146.
27. Ibid., pp. 143-144.
28. Ibid., p. 233.
29. Ethics, p. 141.
30. Short History of Ethics, p. 107.
31. After Virtue, p. 158.
32. Short History of Ethics, p. 109.
33. In After Virtue, p. 161, MacIntyre explains: "I, whatever earthly community I may belong to, am also held to be a member of a heavenly, eternal community in which I also have a role, a community represented on Earth by the church."

CHAPTER TWO

MacIntyre's Critique of Modern Moral Theory

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1. The Rise of the Individual in Moral Theory .

For MacIntyre, modern moral theory begins with the breakdown of Christianity as a community religion (brought about by the Renaissance and Reformation.) This generated the Enlightenment project of a rational secular justification for morality. According to MacIntyre, it was the failure of this project which left moral language in a state of incoherence. Thus we contemporaries are the heirs of the Enlightenment. In this chapter, we will examine how MacIntyre approaches the demise of community definitions of morality, the attempts of the Enlightenment thinkers to rebuild the idea of morality on the basis of the freedom of the rational individual, and how their failure led to the modern conception of morality as a matter of preference.

According to MacIntyre, the question "Why ought I to do what God commands?" is first asked in literature by Milton's Satan.¹ That this question is even asked epitomizes the breakdown of the universal authority of Christianity. If divine authority is not accepted a priori, nothing makes the Christian community morally homogeneous. Once men need evidence in order to believe, the seeds of utilitarianism are already sown. When utility replaces authority as a reason for moral action, the content of moral notions is no longer determined by the community but is chosen by the individual. The rise of the individual as an independent moral agent, capable of making independent choices, is, for MacIntyre, the most significant aspect of modernity.

A new form of moral theory arose in Europe between 1500 and 1850 which was distinctly opposed to the Aristotelian tradition. In A Short History of Ethics, MacIntyre points to Luther and Machiavelli as its first spokesmen. To these thinkers, the community is no longer the setting for moral activity. The rise of the individual as a free moral agent coincides with the rise of the nation-state as the forum for ethical life. For Machiavelli, moral laws are technical rules for achieving and holding power and for maintaining order and prosperity.² Thus MacIntyre argues that, in the thought of Machiavelli, the individual is for the first time sovereign - free of both social and divine constraints. The individual's importance becomes manifest

...because society is not only the arena in which he acts but also a potential raw material, to be shaped for the individual's own ends, law-governed but malleable. The individual is unconstrained by any social bonds....Thus we meet in Machiavelli for the first time what will become a familiar crux: the combination of an assertion of the sovereignty of the individual in his choices and his aims with the view that human behaviour is governed by unchanging laws.³

The Machiavellian world is divided into those who are the rulers because they understand Machiavelli's social science - and those who, lacking such knowledge, are ruled. Consequently, Machiavelli's princes are the forerunners of modern empiricists and behaviourists.⁴

Post-Machiavellian ethics, although often expressed in the language of Christianity, were distinctly utilitarian and individualistic. MacIntyre holds that theorists such as Hobbes and Locke argue for a morality based on the rule of law in order to protect the institution of property. We are to obey the law because it is in our interest to do so. Hence it is held that we create political authority in order to protect the rights of those who are already stronger.⁵

(Nevertheless, MacIntyre argues that, for Hobbes and Locke, our reasons for obeying the law are far from community-spirited. Furthermore, for these thinkers, there was no sense of a community where values could be held in common, to which one could be responsible. For the first time, there was no foundation for ethical behaviour outside the individual subject. The rise of the individual as sovereign, free to create his own values, meant that community-held moral conventions were no longer valid. Thus what was needed was the discovery of an objective source of moral authority based on human reason. This was to be attempted by the thinkers of the Enlightenment.

ii. The Enlightenment

According to MacIntyre, the source of this attempt to rediscover objective standards for human conduct was the intellectual world of eighteenth century Northern Europe. Here, morality became for the first time a subject for discussion, distinct from other aspects of community life. This was explained by the emergence of a socially integrated educated class, nurtured by Protestantism and nascent industrialism, where the traditional community was in the most advanced stage of decay. It was thus in the heavily modernized areas of Britain, Germany, and the Low Countries that the need for the Enlightenment project of reestablishing the objective status of moral traditions was most deeply felt.⁶

Kant is the most significant thinker of the Enlightenment for MacIntyre, but Kant's work is an attempt to come to terms with the radical skepticism of Hume.⁷ Hume's work on morality, in turn, was largely a rejection of the philosophy of his predecessors. These included utilitarians such as Paley and Tucker who, according to MacIntyre, were committed to the view that if God did not exist, there would be no good reason for altruistic behaviour.⁸ Accordingly, Hume, an atheist, wanted to argue for a morality which justified altruism independently of theological considerations.

In rejecting the belief in God as a basis for morality, Hume also rejects all notions of a human teleology. For Hume, morality is evaluated with reference to human desires and passions and thus originates in the individual with reference to his long term interests.⁹ Hume invokes the notion of 'sympathy' to logically connect selfish human passions and altruistic virtues. This notion, however, is

(discarded by MacIntyre as a philosophical fiction which Hume uses to try to save a bad argument.¹⁰ According to MacIntyre, Hume's attempt to find the ground for a universal moral law in man's fluctuating passions and desires is unsuccessful because, as Diderot discovered, we have many desires which are radically incompatible with altruism. The Enlightenment thus failed to refute the notion that the claims of moralists are only disguises "for self-love, seduction, and predatory enterprise."¹¹ Therefore, it was necessary to find a more substantial foundation on which to ground universal moral laws.

Kant, "the typical and supreme representative of the Enlightenment"¹² wished to ground universal moral laws in the principle of human rationality. This mistaken enterprise is given a brief but important description by MacIntyre.

MacIntyre's critique begins with the notion that Kant

was not in fact for the most part the incoherent and inconsistent analyst of a set of coherent and consistent moral concepts, implied in the practice and utterance of ordinary moral agents, but rather that Kant was the coherent and consistent recorder and analyst of an incoherent and inconsistent set of moral concepts which were embodied in an incoherent and inconsistent moral practice....¹³

MacIntyre thus holds that the Enlightenment belief that the individual created his own moral laws was fundamentally incompatible with the notion that a set of universal laws could be discovered by examining human nature. Moreover, MacIntyre argues that, in order to have a coherent science of ethics, there must be "some account of potentiality and act, some account of the essence of man as a rational animal, and above all some account of the human telos. To understand this, we must recall that, for the Greeks, a man was judged by his performance of a role in society. Hence morality

was what made a farmer a good farmer, what made a potter a good potter, and what made a man a good man. Thus there was no moral judgment of a man without reference to his telos. Reason could allow a man to understand his true end.

Thus to tell someone "You ought to do this," was to say what course of action would, under a given set of circumstances, lead a man towards his true end as enjoined by community convention or law. This law, which was held to be ordained by God, could be apprehended through the rational exercise of the human intelligence. While morality was understood within the conventions of a community, it could be understood in terms of claims about what was good and what was bad which could be rationally evaluated as true or false. Moreover, reason could help a man to make the transition from his given situation to the fulfillment of the telos of someone in his situation. Therefore, according to MacIntyre, the classical notion of reason held that it could comprehend essences and thus move in the ethical sphere from potentiality to action.

The Enlightenment, lacking a teleological view of man, was unable to conceive of reason in this instrumental way. For these thinkers, reason could only be used to calculate matters of scientific and mathematical fact.¹⁵ Reason could be used to discern the means to a given end, but it could not comprehend the end itself. It was impossible, then, for reason to discern the end of human action. Hence Kant was unable to extend the powers of pure reason beyond what he could perceive with the senses, and Hume understood the impossibility of deducing what ought to be from what is. Because of this, the attempt of the Enlightenment thinkers to find rational, objective moral standards could not succeed.

MacIntyre's critique of the Enlightenment, then, is essentially a rejection of the modern conception of reason. The Enlightenment thinkers attempted to arrive rationally at abstract first principles which were divorced from the cultural traditions of a people. They attempted to find moral standards which were valid for all time but were unable to rationally and objectively validate these standards. Reason, taken out of a socio-cultural context, was unable to tell us anything about morals. Hence MacIntyre condemns the Enlightenment for removing reason from the domain of the particular traditions of a people and attempting to create a moral order of universal value. This task MacIntyre regards as impossible.

According to MacIntyre, the growth of commerce and urbanization in Western Europe and the appearance of liberal-individualism in political theory account for the rise of this new conception of reason. The decline of the heterogeneous cultural community made it impossible for the classical conception of reason to operate. Social norms were no longer community-centred but now could originate in the individual. When norms were defined by the community, they had at least the sanction of intersubjective agreement concerning content; however, when they were created by the individual, it was easy to recognize their artificiality. Kant, before MacIntyre, saw the powerlessness of unaided reason to replace faith in the establishment of first principles. What the Enlightenment thinkers did not see was the detrimental effect that this new conception of reason would have on moral theory.

As MacIntyre is aware, Kant recognized that morality would indeed be unintelligible without the idea of a telos.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Kant's idea of telos differs from Aristotle's, first, because it was incapable of verification and thus hypothetical, and second, because it was a telos not of individual men but of mankind as a collection of sovereign individuals. Thus, for Kant, history is a movement towards this telos, the ideal state or realm of ends outside of which moral responsibility itself is only a possibility. The idea of the realm of ends is discussed by Kant in the Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals.¹⁷ In this work, Kant assumes that moral responsibility is not merely possible but actual in order to illustrate what its content would be. He argues that nothing but the good will of a rational being could possibly be called unconditionally good, for any other human characteristic could be turned to either good or evil. The only unconditionally good action would be one performed by the good will of a free and rational being, in accordance with 'duty.' Kant's categorical imperative enjoins all rational beings to act in accordance with their duty to treat others as ends only and never as means. MacIntyre claims that Kant's categorical imperative is empty of content because it considers reason to act independently of the myths which nourish it. For this reason, Kant, too, fails to resolve the dilemma of the Enlightenment moralists.

One attempt to provide a rational and objective account of morality was made by the utilitarians. Bentham and others thought that they could deduce what was good and bad from the most basic human perceptions, the feelings of pleasure and pain. These thinkers argued that, if an individual did what gave him personal pleasure and happiness, it would also benefit all of humanity. According to MacIntyre, the rational consequences of this project were only discovered by thinkers such as J.S. Mill and Sidgwick in the late

nineteenth century. It was discovered that our pleasures were diverse and incompatible and did not necessarily lead to the pleasure of others. Once the impossibility of deriving morality from human psychology was thus established, philosophers became disheartened with the prospect of finding an objective justification for morality.

In MacIntyre's account, Sidgwick, and later, Moore, realized that the good could not be rationally deduced but could only be intuited. Nonetheless, it became clear to observers that Moore was attempting to pass off his own moral preferences as goods through force of rhetoric. The result of this was the emergence of a theory of morals which held that all moral utterance must have been, like Moore's, an expression of preference. These theories are known to us as emotivism.

iii. Modern Moral Theory: Emotivism

MacIntyre maintains that emotivism is the dominant and most descriptive moral theory of the contemporary world. To MacIntyre, emotivism - the thesis that all statements about morality are only expressions of personal preference - is correct in its description of modernity, but its thesis concerning the history of moral philosophy is not valid. Emotivism makes a distinction between statements of fact, which can be verified, and statements of moral value, which are arbitrarily chosen. The general acceptance of this thesis leads to the common belief that moral philosophy is impossible, and all opinions about morality are of equal value. Emotivism prevails in moral philosophy because of the Enlightenment's failure to justify a set of rational first principles for moral philosophy. The failure of the Enlightenment to justify morality through unaided reason made rationality disreputable as a determinant of moral choice. Thus modern moral debates are interminable because there is no shared frame of reference from which we can assert one set of ideas over another. Ordinarily, when two disputants share a common premise, there is the potential for one to convince the other. However, where no such common premises exist by community convention, moral debates must be resolved arbitrarily or through rhetoric. Nonetheless, the knowledge that an arbitrary choice underlies an action undermines the authority of the decision. Emotivism is thus the correct diagnosis of the state of contemporary moral practice.

MacIntyre holds that the theory of emotivism itself helps to unmask arbitrary moral authority. It does this by articulating the modern notion that all moral ideas are merely expressions of personal preference and that, consequently, all opinions are of equal value. Emotivist thinkers distinguish moral judgments, or values, from

empirical facts because, according to the emotivist definition of a value, it is something that cannot be judged true or false.¹⁸ The general validity of this distinction between facts and values is indeed taken for granted by modern moral philosophers and by non-philosophers as well.¹⁹ However, these thinkers believe that this distinction is true not only for contemporary moral debates but that it also describes classical moral philosophy. Consequently, these thinkers hold that all previous attempts to provide a rational justification for morality have failed because such expectations to assert a morality on the basis of something other than preference have been misguided. The consequence of this is that no moral idea is considered superior to any other, and, therefore, moral statements lose their authority altogether. MacIntyre, then, must refute the emotivist claim that the moral philosophy of the classical thinkers is nothing more than an expression of preference. To do this, MacIntyre must demonstrate that there have been some successful attempts to justify morality, and he must discover on what basis the moral systems which were constructed in the past were justified.

MacIntyre argues that emotivism is a cogent theory of use but not of meaning. He agrees that emotivism is essentially correct in its analysis of modern moral usage but finds it to be fundamentally incorrect about the nature of moral discourse as such. The idea that emotivism correctly describes all possible moral thought is not based on proper historical or sociological evidence, and thus it fails to accurately depict moral usage in societies where there is conventional agreement on the first principles of morality. According to MacIntyre, emotivism is a dangerous doctrine because it refuses to acknowledge the possibility of coherent moral discourse. For an emotivist, morality is adherence to a given set of rules and justice is the adjudication of

such a set of rules. Because these rules are seen as arbitrary, emotivism leads to a dangerous relativism where men treat each other as means instead of as ends.

According to MacIntyre, such a situation is best exemplified by the thoroughly rationalized modern bureaucracy. Indeed, Weber's understanding of bureaucratic structures comes ostensibly from his reading of Nietzsche, who, for MacIntyre, epitomizes the emotivist theorists. MacIntyre's Nietzsche is a thoroughgoing individualist who rejects all claims of the community to define morality. Although MacIntyre's reading is unfair to Nietzsche, as I will show in Chapter Three, this does not affect the coherence of his critique of modern bureaucracy. The alleged impossibility of discerning ends leaves a moral void, and, therefore, the emphasis in modern bureaucracies is placed on political means - on the how of an activity instead of on the why of that activity.²⁰

MacIntyre thus condemns bureaucracies because, instead of being concerned with the moral aspect of justice, they concentrate on technique and try to assert social control based on the methods of the behavioural sciences. MacIntyre, however, refutes the notion held by social scientists that human nature is predictable, asserting that the predictions of social scientists have been notoriously inaccurate and that the discipline has failed to establish any immutable laws which could give it qualification as a science. We cannot predict the actions of others, he argues, for we are incapable of predicting even our own as yet unmade decisions. Consequently, the effectiveness of the bureaucrat can be no more than a pious hope or fiction. But this fiction and the rationalization of society which it engenders leads to intolerance and, thereby, to actual social control.²¹

Thus, although in actuality it is impossible to possess scientific knowledge about human nature, the very idea of its possibility can deceive both its practitioners and those on whom it is used and can provide the illusion of social control necessary for actual control. MacIntyre concludes by asserting that God, unlike man, is predictable because "he confronts no as yet unmade decision. It is precisely insofar as we differ from God that unpredictability invades our lives. This way of putting the point has one particular merit: it suggests precisely what project those who seek to eliminate unpredictability from the social world or to deny it may, in fact, be engaging in."²² However, since man is unpredictable, total social control is impossible.

Because of the predominance of emotivism, modern political authority, according to MacIntyre, is based on the idea of utility, or the science of matching the best means to a predetermined end (cost-effectiveness). Instead of representing the values of the community, government imposes a universal homogeneity of norms through the bureaucratic administration of justice. Politics, instead of providing the community with moral leadership, becomes "a set of institutional arrangements for imposing a bureaucratized unity on a society which lacks genuine moral consensus...."²³ The result of this is that justice, instead of being an intelligent decision based on the individual case, becomes the mere application of a rule. Consequently, human needs are homogenized, and power is increasingly centralized in large 'cultural empires'. Such is the situation in both liberal and Marxist regimes. Thus emotivism has led to the substitution of efficiency for justice and the good life for man. For MacIntyre, this represents an irreparable loss to our culture.

iv. The Character of Modernity

For MacIntyre, modern political life is concerned with resolving the tension between the notion of utility and a tradition left over from the Enlightenment - the belief in the existence of natural rights. Furthermore, modern disputes about the nature of justice, such as the Rawls-Nozick debate, are versions of the argument between natural rights and utility. Nonetheless, MacIntyre claims that authority based on either of these two concepts is illegitimate and that both ways of life are intolerable.²⁴ In effect, neither of these theories of justice give justice itself priority.

MacIntyre's critique of Nozick's position is twofold. First, he attacks the idea of natural rights as being a modern creation without grounding in reality. Belief in inalienable human rights, he argues, was never held until recently in history, and there is an absence of good reasons for holding such a belief.²⁵ Second, Nozick's argument that justice should be based on legitimate entitlement begs the question of how legitimate the original acquisition of property had been. MacIntyre holds that most property in the West has at one time changed hands through violent means.

Nonetheless, Rawls's position is considered to be more dangerous than Nozick's, for a utilitarianism based on need is inevitably concerned with an efficient instead of just distribution of wealth. The notion of utility has spawned the myth of bureaucratic and managerial effectiveness as the most efficient method of matching ends and means. The bureaucrat or manager, considering his decisions to be morally neutral and value free, chooses his means for their cost-effectiveness. But this neutrality itself can lead, according to MacIntyre, to social manipulation.²⁶

MacIntyre criticizes both Rawls and Nozick for their lack of attention to the community origins of values. Both base their notion of justice on slavish adherence to arbitrary rules, neglecting the Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom. Thus modern liberal theories of justice are distinct from the principles MacIntyre discovers in Aristotle's Ethics. Instead, these modern theories originate in a misinterpretation of Kant's theory of ethics. If one takes the categorical imperative as a prescription for existing societies and not as an utopian metaphysical construction, one will arrive at the modern liberal theories of justice. Kant, as we have seen, provides a formula for the universalization of moral laws. In the perfect state or realm of ends, a judge would have no more to do than to apply the universal law provided by the categorical imperative to the specific case.

However, liberal theories of justice, like the categorical imperative, are empty of content and thus meaningless. "The precepts of liberalism enjoin upon us certain constraints on our political activities; but they set before us no ends to pursue, no ideal or vision to confer significance upon our political action. They never tell us what to do."²⁷ The individual is considered prior to his social bonds and confronts a realm of determinate facts with a set of value judgments he has arbitrarily chosen. Indeed, the modern separation of facts and values is taken for granted when one accepts the emotivist thesis that there is no supreme moral authority and all opinions about values are equal. Where this is the case, politics concerns itself with means instead of ends, for ends are considered to be a matter of personal preference and hence unimportant. In Kant's liberal utopia, humanity is to be treated as an end always and never as a means. Moreover, in the imperfect modern state, this relationship is reversed, and thus justice

becomes secondary to efficiency. Consequently, instead of providing meaningful moral leadership, the modern state "imposes a bureaucratized unity on a society which lacks genuine moral consensus."²⁸ Justice in the modern state is, for MacIntyre, the application of universal rules to the particular case, without thoughtful deliberation about the individuals concerned. For this reason, MacIntyre questions the nature of our obligation to modern political orders.

Although MacIntyre rejects modern notions of justice, he does think that there are legitimate roles for the modern state to play. These are the maintenance of the rule of law, the reduction of poverty, and the defence of liberty.²⁹ However, this set of aims must be met in accordance with a reexamination of the fundamental nature of political association, the role of government and its application in particular situations, and the conformity of this role with the traditions of the community.³⁰

MacIntyre believes that such a reexamination of politics will help us restore meaning and order to the chaos of contemporary moral discourse. Hence the intention of After Virtue is to reconstruct the conditions under which a coherent moral discourse is possible so that we can return meaning and order to the social world. It is also necessary that this restoration take place immediately:

What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without ground for hope. 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.³¹

In order to make the idea of morality meaningful again and to avert a cultural disaster, we must use the remnants of the classical tradition to rebuild the human community. Thus we must reincorporate the virtues as the classics understood them, the concept of a practice, the unity of a human life, and the sense of a moral tradition. This will involve a repudiation of the doctrine that morality is a matter of preference and of the separation of facts and values. It will also necessitate the popularization of a conception of reason as capable of discerning moral truths from cultural mores and traditions. According to MacIntyre, Nietzsche must be refuted by Aristotle.

Footnotes

1. MacIntyre, Against the Self-Images of the Age, (London: Duckworth, 1971), p. 149.
2. Short History of Ethics, p. 127.
3. Ibid., p. 128.
4. After Virtue, p. 88.
5. Short History of Ethics, p. 134.
6. MacIntyre, Sceularization and Moral Change, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 58.
7. See MacIntyre's introduction to David Hume, Hume's Ethical Writings, ed. A. MacIntyre, (Toronto: MacMillan, 1965).
8. Short History of Ethics, p. 168.
9. Against the Self-Images of the Age, pp. 109-124.
10. After Virtue, p. 47.
11. Ibid., p. 46. This quotation refers to Diderot's Rameau's Nephew.
12. Short History of Ethics, p. 190.
13. MacIntyre, "The Debate about God" in A. MacIntyre and P. Ricoeur, The Religious Significance of Atheism, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 41.
14. After Virtue, p. 50.
15. Ibid., p. 52.
16. Ibid., p. 53.
17. Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, trans. Ellington, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), p. 7.
18. After Virtue, pp. 12-13.
19. MacIntyre himself took the thesis of emotivism for granted in an early essay, "What Morality is Not", in Against the Self-Images of the Age.

20. After Virtue, pp. 23-24.

21. MacIntyre, Marcuse, (London: Fontana, 1970).

22. After Virtue, p. 92.

23. Ibid., p. 236.

24. Ibid., p. 33.

25. This critique bears an interesting similarity with MacIntyre's critique of the Enlightenment which was discussed earlier.

26. After Virtue, p. 71.

27. Against the Self-Images of the Age, p. 283.

28. After Virtue, p. 283.

29. Ibid., p. 237. Unfortunately, MacIntyre does not argue this point, he asserts it. It is, therefore, unclear why this escapes the sweep of his critique of subjectivity in moral and political thought.

30. Marcuse, p. 92. This is the substance of MacIntyre's criticism of Marcuse's Critique of Pure Tolerance.

31. After Virtue, p. 245.

CHAPTER THREE

MacIntyre and the Debate on Nihilism

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MacIntyre and the Debate on Nihilism

i. MacIntyre and Nietzsche

We have now completed the exegesis of MacIntyre, having discussed MacIntyre's conception of classical moral theory and having examined his critique of modernity. Now that we are familiar with MacIntyre's work, we can proceed to evaluate his ideas. In this chapter, then, we will assess the method and substance of MacIntyre's arguments and the consequences of MacIntyre's contribution to political theory. Because MacIntyre envisages Aristotle as his most important philosophical ally and Nietzsche as his adversary, it will be most illuminating to begin our evaluation of MacIntyre by comparing his thought with that of the aforementioned thinkers.

MacIntyre informs us that Nietzsche is emotivism's most convincing and honest spokesman, and he agrees with Nietzsche's diagnosis of the crisis of modernity: the eclipse of traditional moral horizons and the failure of the Enlightenment to reestablish these horizons result in rampant nihilism. Nevertheless, MacIntyre cannot, like Nietzsche, celebrate the obliteration of the distinction between good and evil. He sees this celebration as a disguised form of liberal individualism and regards Nietzsche's Übermensch as a moral solipsist.¹ Thus MacIntyre considers Nietzsche the arch spokesman of liberal modernity against which the only alternative is to reinstate the classical tradition of moral theory with its clear definition of the virtues as moral standards. Yet, while MacIntyre reads Nietzsche as

arguing that there are no truly acceptable moral standards, he is actually convinced that morality, and moral codes, are undesirable altogether.

Consequently, Nietzsche presents his reader with a starkly different interpretation of the meaning of morality from that of MacIntyre. Where MacIntyre asks how conventional morality can be reestablished, Nietzsche asks why morality came to be created in the first place. The central image in Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals is the stratification of primitive societies into masters and slaves. The psychological or physical inferiors, the slaves, invent the distinction between good and evil because of their resentment against those who are stronger. Morality originates as an ideological weapon enabling the priestly classes to increase their social control by using their superior intelligence to overcome the physical advantages of the warrior classes. For Nietzsche, morality is nothing more than technique, a means, to the end of political power.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, admires the warrior classes who do not speak of good and evil and to whom good simply means noble (agathos). The warrior accepts no authority, although he realizes that life itself is intrinsically unjust.² "The noble type of man", writes Nietzsche, "feels himself to be the determiner of values...he creates values."³ This individual is what Nietzsche calls an active nihilist; he is, in the words of one commentator, "a man who does not bow down before any authority, who does not take any principle on faith, whatever reverence that principle is enshrined in."⁴ MacIntyre is critical of Nietzsche for his portrait of the Homeric nobleman, claiming that he imposes nineteenth century individualist values on a society where morals were firmly based in the community. "What Nietzsche portrays is aristocratic self-assertion; what

Homer and the sagas show are forms of assertion proper to and required by a certain role. The self becomes what it is in heroic societies only in and through its role; it is a social creation and not an individual one."⁵ According to MacIntyre, the rules of the agon are determined by the implicit assent of the community. The aristocratic leader must succeed in the contest, whose rules are traditional and cannot be ignored. But MacIntyre's portrait of Nietzsche is an unfair one. Nietzsche admires the living values of a society such as that depicted by Homer, where an individual can excel; he despises traditions where moral laws are codified, unchangeable, and stagnant. It is, indeed, to misrepresent Nietzsche to claim that his nobles are moral solipsists.⁶

Nevertheless, Nietzsche regards moral laws as a means for the weak to exercise domination over the strong. This is done by manipulating the signs of a culture and replacing individual spontaneity by adherence to commandments. This tendency, which originates in oriental religions and comes to fruition in the law of Israel, has left a legacy of ressentiment to western moral philosophy. In the Christian world, both religion and philosophy provide ideologies whereby the weak can imagine themselves to be morally superior to the strong. Nietzsche writes that philosophy "always creates the world in its own image, it cannot do otherwise: philosophy is the tyrannical drive itself."⁷ Moral philosophy, then, is essentially a manifestation of the slave's will to mastery. "What philosophers called 'the rational ground of morality' and sought to furnish was, viewed in the proper light, only a scholarly form of faith in the prevailing morality, a new way of expressing it...and in any event the opposite of a testing, analysis, doubting, and vivisection of the faith."⁸ The contemporary manifestations of slave morality are thus belief in science, modern

religions, socialism, and nationalism. These modern faiths merely postpone the inevitable admission of the meaninglessness of all such ideals. Perhaps MacIntyre's neo-Aristotelianism may be added to this list of idols. To Nietzsche, these ideologies share the attributes of providing power for a set of technicians until their falsity is demonstrated. Modernity is characterized by a proliferation of such ideological systems which have been accorded equal status by the implicit acceptance of the thesis of emotivism, that all opinions about morality are equal. For Nietzsche, there is almost by definition no worthy moral authority, and all pretenders to this stature are manifestations of the will to power of the slave.

The consequence of our closer examination of Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals is that MacIntyre's programme must face a much stronger Nietzschean argument which agrees fundamentally with his diagnosis of modernity but questions the very presuppositions of MacIntyre's vindication of classical moral theory.

MacIntyre is convinced that his theory and that of Nietzsche are diametrically opposed and that, if he can make a case for classical moral theory, he can escape the Nietzschean critique and hence refute both Nietzsche and the emotivists. However, this view is based upon a superficial reading of Nietzsche and a misunderstanding of the concept of the Übermensch. Nietzsche's philosophy is a deliberate questioning of the very idea of moral philosophy itself, and the Übermensch is the way to overcome the stagnation and lifelessness which Nietzsche considers to be the consequence of most moral philosophy. Nietzsche is critical of morality which is the product of obsolete written laws established as rules for all time:

"Over the stream everything is firmly fixed, all the values of things, the bridges, concepts, all 'Good' and 'Evil': all are firmly fixed!

But when hard winter comes, the animal-tamer of streams, then even the cleverest learn mistrust; and truly, not only the simpletons say then: 'Is not everything meant to--stand still?'

'Fundamentally, everything stands still'--that is a proper winter doctrine, a fine thing for unfruitful seasons, a fine consolation for hibernators and stay-at-homes.

'Fundamentally, everything stands still' the thawing wind, however, preaches to the contrary!

...O my brothers, is everything not now in flux?...Who can still cling to 'good' and 'evil'?"⁹

Therefore, Nietzsche's doctrine, simply expressed, is a condemnation of a moral philosophy which attempts to ground stagnant and outmoded law tables in some non-existent philosophical first principles. Nietzsche thought that such attempts to justify conventional modes of thought through reference to eternal principles was futile and more an expression of will-to-power than of a desire for moral correctness. Because everything is in flux, Nietzsche does not mean that there is no such thing as morality, only that morality cannot be imposed on an age by the codifiers of a previous age. The ideal of the Übermensch is that of a man who is not hindered by ancient commandments but invents his own living values.

MacIntyre, like Nietzsche, condemns the Enlightenment for its attempt to eternalize contemporary values. A further similarity is that MacIntyre, like Nietzsche, condemns the modern notion of justice as an adherence to prescribed rules. For MacIntyre, the crucial difference between modern liberal theories of justice and classical or Aristotelian

ideas is that modern theorists are preoccupied with rules. MacIntyre argues that the application of rules to the decision in a particular case is blind to the distinctive elements of the case. To find the remedy for this, we must go to Aristotle. The virtue of phronesis, to Aristotle, signifies "someone who knows how to exercise judgement in particular cases."¹⁰ Thus, for MacIntyre and Aristotle, justice is not dispensed according to written rules and commandments but by the judicious application of practical intelligence. In the classical conception of moral theory, judgments are made according to right reason, which finds its source in the ever-changing values of the human community.

Thus there is a fundamental similarity not only between the diagnoses of the crisis of modernity in MacIntyre and Nietzsche but also in their prescriptive ideals. The two thinkers are thus exempt from each other's critiques. Nietzsche's Übermensch, far from being a moral solipsist, associates goodness with living wisdom and thus exercises the noble virtue of phronesis.¹¹ MacIntyre's thought would in the most part be acceptable to Nietzsche, despite his rationalism, because his philosophy is premised on the idea of a living tradition of moral theory, on judgment according to intelligence, and not the bureaucratic application of rules. Therefore, both Nietzsche and MacIntyre would agree with Dorothy Emmet that "neither an ethics of rules, nor of ends, nor calculation of consequences, can be simply applied to give sufficient answers to the question, 'What ought I to do?'. There is no way of evading the need for moral judgement, fallible but like other skills capable of improvement, and particularly through exercise in difficult situations...."¹²

The debate in question, therefore, is not between MacIntyre and Nietzsche but between these two exponents of classical moral theory and the thinkers of liberal modernity. The classical thinkers are characterized by their belief that morality can originate only in the shared experiences of a community but must find their expression in each individual as a thoughtful interpreter of the tradition. On the other hand, modern moral theorists regard morality as originating in a set of rigid commandments which the individual chooses arbitrarily to follow from among other such law codes. Thinkers such as MacIntyre and Nietzsche have discovered that modern moral theory is merely an expression of 'will-to-power' or 'manipulative social relations'. In the modern world, anyone can assemble a set of moral commandments, it can gain popularity (sanctioned by emotivist moral theory), and social control will accrue to those who administrate it. I have in mind certain religious cults. Thus the modern view of morality is that of a commodity to be consumed. It has nothing to do with the living traditions of a human community, for it has its origin in the arbitrary choices of 'independent moral agents'. This approach to morality is condemned by both Nietzsche and MacIntyre.

ii. The Consequences of Historicizing Aristotelianism

MacIntyre condemns contemporary, emotivist-sanctioned approaches to morality because they are indifferent to the cultural traditions of a society and to the rational, objective deduction of goods from such traditions.

MacIntyre, following Aristotle, thinks that the principles of morality are available to any reasonably intelligent and mature citizen of a given place. Morality is made possible by justice, and what is just is determined by the right reason of the individual in accordance with the community conventions which originate in the bond of friendship between members of the community. Each individual acts virtuously by fulfilling his or her telos or function within the community. This telos is defined by the laws of the community.

MacIntyre's account differs from Aristotle's, however, in one important respect. Aristotle's Ethics refers to the moral standards of one specific polis, Athens. For Aristotle, the absolute good was available to those who reasoned correctly from what was known empirically about morality in the polis. Aristotle thought that moral standards were fixed and eternal and rejected the notion that they could be historically relative. Yet MacIntyre writes about Aristotle, Homer, Jane Austen, and others as if they enunciated moral standards which were true for their own time and place only. The telos of a doctor in Athens is different from the telos of a doctor in Boston. Consequently, the task of the moral philosopher becomes that of writing the history of morals.

Leo Strauss defined historicism as the belief that there is no difference between the questions asked by philosophers and those asked by historians.¹³ The historicist is distinct from the philosophical relativist in one way: the historicist holds, as does MacIntyre, that there were once eternal verities which can be discovered through a study of history; the relativist argues, as do MacIntyre's emotivists, that such eternal truths never existed. Both think that philosophy is incapable of discerning eternal truths, for all truth is contingent. For the historicist, moreover, there is no distinction between the work of the moral historian and that of the metaphysician of morals. Hence it is not surprising that, while Aristotle wrote the Ethics, MacIntyre wrote A Short History of Ethics.

It is because of the failure of the Enlightenment to provide objective moral standards that MacIntyre must historicize the teachings of the classics. He asserts that we could not understand the virtues as objectively valid except as part of a moral tradition. The notion of a practice and of the unity of human life are also essentially historical ideas. These notions make the virtues comprehensible within a historical framework, and thus MacIntyre's notion of the virtues makes sense only when man is viewed as an historical being. For MacIntyre, then, the good is identical with the history of the good. He must, therefore, explain how he effects the synthesis of Aristotelianism and historicism.

MacIntyre takes the approach to Aristotelianism that, "it will be necessary to consider Aristotle's own moral philosophy not merely as it is expressed in key texts in his own writings, but as an attempt to inherit and sum up a good deal that had gone before and in turn as a source of stimulus to much later thought. It will be necessary, that is, to

write a short history of conceptions of the virtues in which Aristotle provides a central point of focus, but which yield the resources of a whole tradition of acting, thinking, and discourse of which Aristotle's is only a part, a tradition of which I spoke earlier as the 'classical tradition' and whose view of man I called 'the classical view of man'.¹⁴

MacIntyre realizes that this treatment of Aristotle is distinctly un-Aristotelian, for Aristotle himself saw himself as giving a clear and comprehensive account of ethics, correcting and surpassing his predecessors. At this point in his argument, MacIntyre introduces the notion of progress within a moral tradition. "But when a tradition is in good order", he writes, "when progress is taking place, there is always a certain cumulative element to a tradition."¹⁵ But Aristotle, he holds, could not have been a sophisticated enough thinker to be aware of historical progress, and thus our revision of Aristotelianism must correct this error. However, there is evidence, given by MacIntyre himself, that Aristotle did not consider history to be a reliable form of inquiry because it does not deal with individuals but only with the particular and contingent. Indeed, Aristotle rejected contingent goods and explicitly desired to find what was good absolutely (Ethics Book I). If this is true, then we will have to look for another explanation why Aristotle would write a book such as the Ethics, admittedly about a conventional and historically contingent moral code. The answer for this can perhaps be found in Plato, Aristotle's teacher.

MacIntyre's notion of the virtues closely resembles a description of virtue given by the character Meno in the Platonic dialogue which bears his name. Meno defines a virtue as follows:

...the virtue of a man consists in managing the city's affairs capably, and so that he will help his friends and injure his foes while taking care to come to no harm himself. Or if you want a woman's virtue, that is easily described. She must be a good housewife, careful with her stores and obedient to her husband. Then there is another virtue for a child, male or female, and another for an old man, free or slave as you like, and a great many more kinds of virtue, so that no one need be at a loss to say what it is. For every act and every time of life, with reference to each separate function, there is a virtue for each one of us, and similarly, I should say, a vice.¹⁶

Meno attributes this definition to the rhetorician, Gorgias. It shares two essential characteristics with MacIntyre's definition, that the exercise of the virtues is defined differently for different people and thus is subject to contingent circumstance, and that it is defined by conventions rooted in the institution of friendship. In Meno's view, the good is the same as what is good in and for my community, my family, my city. Justice is indistinguishable, then, from loyalty to one's own. Such a definition, however, rules out any goods which are eternal and independent of contingent existence.

The Meno-MacIntyre argument is refuted by Socrates in Republic, where it is argued that philosophy can distinguish what is good from what is merely conventional. The wise man distinguishes between what is good and what is only considered good by popular opinion, between friends that seem to be good and those that are good. This is because "to the extent that the just man erred about the goodness of men, he would benefit bad men and harm good men and hence be unjust."¹⁷ MacIntyre's community of friends would not be virtuous in this sense because they only practice justice within their own community and not universally. Furthermore,

they do not know why their conventions are good and will only obey them when it is advantageous to do so. Therefore, in order to be truly just and virtuous, one must subordinate love of one's own to love of the good, and contingent standards rooted in friendship to the eternal.

For MacIntyre, truthfulness is essential to the maintenance of a practice, but Plato's Socrates, in the Republic, establishes that justice often involves eschewing the virtue of truthfulness. Although the philosopher must not be bound by convention in his search for the good, according to Socrates, his duty is to tell a noble lie to make the best conventional regime appear to be natural in order to ensure obedience to the regime.¹⁸ This was what Aristotle attempted to do in writing the Ethics. The Ethics was written in order to make a historically contingent moral order, that of Athens, appear to be natural. In such a regime, however, there is no place for either philosophy or tyranny, for both the philosopher and the tyrant favour nature in opposition to convention. The Ethics thus serves the dual purpose of eradicating nihilism by providing a rational and objective set of moral standards and assuring the loyalty of Aristotle himself to the Athenian nomos, for Aristotle was, unlike Plato, a foreigner.

If the Ethics is a noble lie, then MacIntyre, by rendering the teaching of Aristotle historically relative, destroys its credibility. To MacIntyre, the good is defined by the moral tradition and by the individual's status within the community. It has already been shown that where the good is defined by convention only, there is no true philosophy. But when such conventionalism is historicized, the noble lie is exposed and moral language becomes meaningless. Thus MacIntyre undermines not only philosophy, but also obedience to the authority of convention. This leaves no reason for us to act morally and no standards to obey.

This situation is one of nihilism. Nietzsche defines nihilism as the occasion when everything is permitted, and this is the inevitable result of MacIntyre's historicized conventionalism. MacIntyre holds that reason discerns values from the historical situation in which it operates. Reason is admittedly incapable of discerning eternal goods but only those goods which are operative within a practice or a moral tradition. Reason should show how morality can be derived from convention; and it is thus the task of the philosopher to interpret, not to transcend convention. MacIntyre identifies the good with 'what happens' by saying that this is the only way that a notion such as the good could possibly make sense. The consequence of this position is that man is considered to be the measure of all things. Since man makes meaning, what he does not make is meaningless.¹⁹ We cannot evaluate a practice or a tradition if we refuse to allow for the possibility of goods external to it. How then can MacIntyre evaluate modernity? His project can thus be reduced to what Stanley Rosen calls "the arbitrary attribution of sense to nonsense."²⁰

The consequence of MacIntyre's argument, then, is the position that philosophy cannot discern truths which are valid for all time but can only establish the validity of historically relative moral standards. Hence it follows that the philosopher is the same as the historian of morals, and his task is not to search for truth but to try to properly interpret convention. MacIntyre, then, cannot give his own theory of morals but can only review the historical literature on morality as he does in his Short History of Ethics and in After Virtue. If the philosopher is incapable of revealing eternal truths, as MacIntyre holds, then MacIntyre's own historicism may be surpassed, and this perhaps by an actual absolute discourse on morals. Thus MacIntyre, like Nietzsche, believes that the solution to modern nihilism is historicism. Unlike Nietzsche, however, he fails to realize the nihilistic consequences of holding an historicist position.

Footnotes

1. After Virtue, p. 240. MacIntyre writes: "To cut oneself off from shared activity in which one has initially to learn obediently as an apprentice learns, to isolate oneself from the communities which find their point and purpose in such activities, will be to debar oneself from finding any good outside of oneself."
2. Genealogy, p. 208.
3. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Hollingdale, trans., (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 176.
4. Robert Solomon, "Nietzsche, Nihilism and Morality", in Solomon, Nietzsche, (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1973), p. 206.
5. After Virtue, p. 122.
6. The idea that the Homeric period is one of individualism is a misrepresentation of Nietzsche, as shown in an early fragment, "The Greek State" in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Oscar Levy, ed., (Edinburgh: Foulis, 1911), v. 2, p. 13. See also Human, All-too-Human in vol. 6, (1909), p. 65.
7. Beyond Good and Evil, p. 21.
8. Ibid., p. 91.
9. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Hollingdale, trans., (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 218.
10. After Virtue, p. 144.
11. Human, All-too-Human, Zimmern, trans., p. 76.
12. Dorothy Emmet, Rules, Roles and Relations, (London: MacMillan, 1966), p. 88.
13. Leo Strauss, What is Political Philosophy and Other Studies, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1959), p. 57.
14. After Virtue, p. 112.
15. Ibid., p. 137.
16. Plato, Meno, J.A.K. Guthrie, trans., in The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Hamilton and Cairns, ed., (New York: Pantheon, 1961), p. 355.

17. Allan Bloom, "Interpretative Essay" in Bloom, The Republic of Plato, (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 323.

18. Ibid., p. 366. Noble lie is a translation of pseudos gennaion.

19. Stanley Rosen, Nihilism, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 17.

20. Ibid., p. 27.

CONCLUSION

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Now that we have analyzed MacIntyre's moral theory, we can determine what consequences his work has for the relationship between morality and politics. The central feature of MacIntyre's critique of contemporary thought is that it accepts implicitly the separation between morality and politics which is a consequence of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, by isolating morality as a specific discipline and by thus detaching the moral individual from the community, effectively made morality and politics distinct disciplines.

MacIntyre finds that, within a world where morality is distinct from politics, morality and moral language make no sense. MacIntyre accuses contemporary moral theorists not of inconsistency with regard to the contemporary situation of meaninglessness, but with acquiescence in a bad situation. Emotivism is criticized for its lack of attention to the historical truth that, at one time, a coherent set of moral rules did exist, and morality was exercised within the public realm, or in politics. The result of the belief that morality can be no more than an expression of preference is that moral laws can have no place in political life. Unlike ancient societies, where the conventions of morality were sanctioned by the city or state, modern society is the battleground of competing moral codes which are incompatible with the smooth functioning of the state. Morality is relegated to the level of the individual, for only thus its self-contradictory nature cannot cause the state to fragment.

MacIntyre alleges that modern theories of justice are based on fictitious claims. The ultimate criteria for their defense is and can only be efficiency. This is because morality and politics are seen as distinct spheres: morality is

concerned with the actions of the individual, and politics is concerned with the acts of the community. Therefore, the moral criteria of right and wrong are inapplicable to the world of politics. Instead of asking "Is this right or good?", the politician or bureaucrat asks "What works best?". Instead of why, he asks how. Thus the consequence of MacIntyre's critique of modernity is not that modern politics is immoral but that it is amoral. For MacIntyre, the way to remoralize politics is to return to the classical world, where morality and politics were indistinct as both were expressions of nomos or convention. The ideal example of this is Aristotle's Ethics.

Yet, while MacIntyre claims to be an Aristotelian, his tendency to historicize the thought of the classics and assert the relativism of ethical systems distinguishes him from the thinkers of antiquity. As we have seen, it is MacIntyre's contention that a moral teaching must be rationally derived from the cultural traditions of a people. A contemporary American thinker, for instance, would not arrive rationally at the same moral principles as would Aristotle, Aquinas, or Maimonides. Hence, to MacIntyre, the idea of an eternally valid moral teaching is an impossibility. Therefore, MacIntyre cannot himself propose any moral standards, for they would admittedly be surpassed by changes in the nomos; by the time MacIntyre's Ethics went to print, it would already be outdated. Hence MacIntyre is limited to equating convention with what is good. Unfortunately, MacIntyre gives us no reasons why he can identify 'what happens' with 'the good'. Neither can he show us why his discourse on the nature of morality (and his premise that philosophy can only discern contingent truths) will not itself be surpassed by an eternally valid moral teaching. Furthermore, MacIntyre's analysis of moral theory thereby reduces the philosopher from a lover of eternal wisdom to a lover of conventional wisdom. The philosopher is thus equivalent to the cultural historian. To

MacIntyre, then, the task of the moral philosopher is to rationally deduce what is good from the traditions of a given culture in order that men may act within these traditions. Hence the philosopher is not competent to evaluate the tradition itself but can only tell us what is good within that tradition. Knowledge about morals is still descriptive and not prescriptive, or evaluative. Therefore, MacIntyre can inform us that modern moral theory is incoherent but cannot tell us whether the actual practice of morals in contemporary society is good or bad.

MacIntyre desires to demonstrate not only that moral discourse was incoherent but that there was a classical tradition or morality which we could examine in order to apply its teachings to our modern situation. A strict application of the teachings of Aristotle, however, would involve an ethocentrism or an ignorance of cultural differences impossible today. Consequently, MacIntyre compromises, providing a synthesis of classical moral theory and modern historicism. By doing this, MacIntyre accepts the modern doctrine that morality is historically contingent. Thus, in order to make politics and morality coincide, MacIntyre asserts the impossibility of moral philosophy. MacIntyre acquiesces in the notion that contingent standards are the best any society could hope for and that discovering what is right and wrong per se is impossible. Therefore, even if politics and morality are reconciled, it can only be through an acceptance of MacIntyre's nihilistic identification of 'what happens' with 'the good'.

MacIntyre's intention was to lament the incoherence of moral discourse and attempt to provide the foundation for the reestablishment of coherence in moral theory. For this to occur, however, it is evident that the language of morality used must coincide with the political conventions of the community. However, bringing morality and politics together

can only be achieved within a community of friends where there is some common basis of understanding. This task, however possible in Aristotelian Athens, would be difficult today, assuming that our systems of transportation and communications remain as they are. These technologies make cultural integrity impossible and thus undermine all indigenous moral standards. Historicism can only contribute in the end to the heterogeneity of moral systems. In the face of global systems of communication, only a noble lie told on a global scale could ever provide the synthesis of politics and morality MacIntyre desires. While MacIntyre might wish the end, he would certainly not condone the means.

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