A History of Moral Thinking
according to MacIntyre, with additions from Sherrington
as compiled by Gareth Leyshon, April 2004

Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of moral systems evident throughout history, which we will label in this summary:

Ọ˙ **Deontological:** morality consists of doing the right thing, as revealed by divine revelation or nature herself. Such a morality is transmitted in the form of *rules* or *laws*, which might be embedded within tales (with morals!) or legends.

Ƭ˙ **Teleological:** morality consists of seeking the right end, an end shared with other members of your community. Certain kinds of behaviour are likely to achieve such ends, and dispositions towards such behaviour are *virtues*.

Ɛ˙ **Emotivist:** morality consists of doing whatever feels right, perhaps constrained by the libertarian imperative to allow equal freedom to others to do what feels right to them. The self is the ultimate arbiter of morality.

MacIntyre warns us that each philosopher must be understood in the appropriate historical context.

HOMER AND GREEK HEROIC SOCIETY

Ọ˙ In a heroic society, moral values are transmitted as narratives; these show the ideal, which may or may not have been lived out in practice. Status and kinship determine your duties in society; honour may require you to fight to the death.

Virtues are those qualities which sustain a free man in doing his duty. Morality is inseparable from social structure; the received tradition defines what your duty is. There is no concept of "stepping back" from cultural moral norms to seek universals. Indeed, knowledge of social expectations must be prior to the concept of virtue.

Greek αρετη, translates in Homer's period as virtue or excellence; applies to moral, social, and athletic prowess, even prosperity. The meaning of the term later evolves.

EARLY GREEK PHILOSOPHIES (4TH CENTURY BC)

Ọ˙ **Stoicism:** Zeno of Citium argues that the world is well ordered and providentially preordained. The sage lives in harmony with the world, doing what is right (acting virtuously) and ignoring "passions". Passing pleasures are not true happiness. One must understand one's true place in the world.

Ƭ˙ **Cynicism:** Diogenes of Sinope rejects the values of society, and the happiness to be found in fleeting things. This is a path of radical individualism (but towards an end) and self-sufficiency. [Compare Buddhism?]

Ƭ˙ **Epicureanism:** At the Garden of Epicurus in Athens, people pursued the "good things" of friendship and philosophical discourse. They were uninterested in political change as long as they could pursue these goods for their own happiness. They saw the true good as freedom from bodily pain and mental anguish, rather than excesses of alcohol and sensual pleasure.

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In the city-state, duties of kinship give way to duties of the free man in a democracy. ***Virtue*** is now what is accepted of a man qua citizen rather than a man qua kinship or rank.

ϒ˙ **Sophists** argue that virtue is local to the expectations of each city-state – military prowess at Sparta, aristocratic norms in Thebes, democracy in Athens. There are no absolutes.

ϒ˙ **Plato** (in the *Gorgias, Phaedo, Republic*) proposes four cardinal and universal virtues: **temperance, courage, wisdom and justice.** These must be practiced together to be truly virtuous.

ϒ˙ **Tragic** dramatists, such as Sophocles, recognise that it may not be humanly possible to resolve the competing claims of virtues; we are forced to choose one good knowing that we are rejecting another true good, because we lack the insight to achieve a truly just balance. The verdict of a god is the usual dramatic device to signal such an impasse.

ARISTOTLE

ϒ˙ Aristotle has a "metaphysical biology" in which each creature has an end (τελος) which flows from its very nature; man is the rational animal. *MacIntyre acknowledges that we need to clearly establish the τελος of human beings in order to use a theory of virtues similar to Aristotle's*, for virtuous behaviour is that which helps the actors towards his end. But that end is "internal" in as much as it includes the behaviour of acting virtuously. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle shows how ethical behaviour develops man as he is, into man as he could be – the flourishing of his nature.

"The good" is that for which human beings characteristically aim.

- The good is "well-being" / "blessedness": ευδαιμονια.
- Virtue is the cause of choosing a right action.
- Virtues are dispositions which influence action and feeling.
- Virtues assist the journey to ευδαιμονια; lack of them frustrate it.
- Virtue of character may be cultivated by habitual exercise.
- Intellectual virtues are acquired through teaching.
- A truly virtuous act requires knowledge of its virtuousness.
- Prudence (φρονεσις) is needed to exercise all virtues well.
- Friendship is a virtue, but founded on the common goals of the city-state.

The laws of a city state flow from the ends of the human being. *(MacIntyre notes that this ties ethics to the city and sociology.)* Such laws reinforce virtue and prohibit behaviour contrary to it. Some actions are intrinsically evil, since they can never contribute to human flourishing. Vicious behaviour damages the community, since all members should be working together for ευδαιμονια. But barbarians and slaves, who are not part of the political society, can never act virtuously. The free man recognises that the virtues of the city will lead to his own flourishing, and freely adopts them.

Aristotle rejects the possibility of insoluble conflicts between virtues, attributing them to flawed characters or political systems. *MacIntyre argues this is short-sighted.*

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This is his account of practical decision making:
- I have certain desires and goals for achieving ευδαιμονια.
- A certain kind of action will further this.
- This particular action is one such action.
- I do it!

The paradigm of the virtuous man is the Athenian citizen; virtue is beyond the reach of slaves and barbarians. Virtues include friendship (of common purpose), munificence, magnanimity.

JEWISH STRANDS IN APOSTOLIC TIMES

Sadducees – the Zadokite temple priesthood, ruling Hellenized aristocracy, dating back to the Maccabeen revolt.

- **Essenes** – rigorist sect following Torah strictly and viewing Temple as corrupted. Roots in the Hasideans of Maccabeen times; destroyed in AD 68.

- **Pharisees** – accept an oral Torah which allowed them to implement written Torah with less severity (despite Gospel accusations of hypocrisy), become critical of secularised Sadducee ruling classes.

Other factions – Zealots, Herodians.

General population – 80% were living a subsistence lifestyle under crippling taxes.

Jews understood that they were called to be holy, to imitate God Himself. How many laws were needed to enable this?
- Torah – 613
- Psalm 15 – 11!
- Micah – act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with God.
- Isaiah – Keep justice, act with integrity.
- Amos – Seek God and live!
- Habakkuk – the righteous shall live by faith.
- Rabbi Akiba – love your neighbour as yourself.

ROMAN EMPIRE IN APOSTOLIC TIMES

- The focus of authority is the Emperor, who wages war and levies crippling taxes. Morality focuses on the private sphere: the household is a microcosm of the city, with a clear pecking order. There is a code of honour and shame; to be a "friend of Caesar" is the highest honour. Human life is cheap; abortion and infanticide are common. Jewish defence of infant life (Seneca) and the radical equality of Christians (who treated their women better than pagans did) were totally countercultural.

- In the late 1st and 2nd Centuries AD, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius espouse *Stoicism*.

- In the late 1st and 2nd Centuries AD, two kinds of *Cynics* are found: rigorists who focus on their personal perfection, and those less severe who aimed to improve society.

FIRST MILLENNIUM CHRISTENDOM

Ò/τ˙ The New Testament treats of virtues, but its list is radically different from Aristotle's. Slaves can now reach beatitude, but the rich apparently cannot. Humility is a virtue, and faith, hope and charity *a fortiori*. Nevertheless, the NT shares with Aristotle a teleological scheme where virtues are a means to an end, yet part of that end is living a virtuous life.

Different concepts of the "Reign of God":
- An earthly political revolution.
- Individual believers living out God's commandments.
- An apocalyptic hope.
- A sabbatical jubilee – a restoration of the right order of things.

Moral perspectives of Scripture:
- Paul seeks how to live in Christ, and discern God's will. He is concerned not to create stumbling blocks for others. Respects civil authority and takes traditional line on homosexuality. Slightly Stoical in approach to marriage?
- Mark uses parables. Note the hard teaching on divorce. Jesus recognises a *Roman* law on divorce but takes a hard line with an eschatological dimension, and is aware of the woman's dignity (adultery sins against her, not the other husband) as well as the husband's rights.
- Matthew has Jesus present a new Torah, for the righteousness of the Pharisees has gone wrong. Strict teaching (beatitudes which foster dispositions of surrender to God rather than action; "but I say to you" developments which do not allow just retribution, divorce, pay tax); eschatological judgement of the quality of our loving. (Jeremias argues sermon on the mount is meant as moral catechesis for those who have accepted the kerygma.)
- Luke favours the least in society, and challenges us not to hoard wealth, but to be generous with what we do not need.
- John shows the humanity of Jesus and his compassion for sinners, e.g. adulterous woman.

Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics in this period:
- A love which goes beyond mere justice (righteousness).
- Forgiveness and love of enemies.
- Reversal of social values and rank, including dignity of women.
- Prohibition of divorce.
- End of morality is relationship with Christ. (teleological)
- Eschatological perspective – Christians not at home in this world.

Before Constantine, the Church can only practice social morality *ad intra*, manifested in charity to its own members. *Didache* etc present dichotomy of Life or Death. Clement of Alexandria is first to provide a hellenized exposition of Christianity rather than an apologia; his rich man can be saved through poverty of spirit without discarding possessions.

Christianity, especially when it dominates the Roman Empire after Constantine, brings a morality drawn from Platonic ideals and Scriptural norms. Augustine follows Neoplatonism in seeing evil as a privation of good, but develops the possibility of a person's wilful "fundamental option" to delight in evil, which then colours subsequent choices.

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MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENTS

☿ Medieval society is a cultural melting pot. Northern Europe is still influenced by heroic ideals – Norse, Celtic, Teutonic and Anglo-Saxon sagas have now been Christianised (e.g. Arthurian legends). Tellingly, German law makes murder by stealth a crime, but open killing is left for revenge by kin.

☿ Meanwhile (partly through Islamic scholarship), much classical literature is being discovered – not only Aristotle but also Cicero and others, and thinkers are asking: Can Christendom accommodate the pagan (Greek) cardinal virtues alongside the Christian theological virtues? Abelard critiques pagan thought for its incompleteness, it does not know God as the ultimate good. He argues that the will alone makes an interior decision; virtue is but one factor impinging on it. This is effectively stoicism, with a one-dimensional concept of virtue as "doing the right thing regardless of consequences", a natural position in a Christendom which has inherited the rigidity of Jewish Law.

In feudal societies, loyalty is a key virtue; and the ability to appeal for justice is also important. In Christian kingdoms and empires, the law-makers are aware that they are trying to implement a shadow of God's justice on earth. Henry II quarrelled with Becket in a shared paradigm.

Christian **charity** includes love for the sinner, a call to repentance and rehabilitation. This is a radical departure from Aristotle's scheme of virtues, where a man could have no friendship with one who did not strive for the good of the city. A Christian life can be redeemed at its very end ("the good thief"); the good life for Aristotle was to be found in the living of it.

The Christian schema developed virtues as a *via media* between two positively evil vices of extreme, rather than as bipolar against a single vice, understood merely as lack of the corresponding virtue.

THE REVIVAL OF ARISTOTLE

♉ Thomas Aquinas and others rediscover Aristotle in the 12th Century. For Aquinas, humans are creatures of intellect and will who freely choose to move towards the goals which they believe to be good (not all attractive goals are good). It is God who is our ultimate good and draws us to Himself, where we will find total fulfilment.

Humans can by themselves work out what will lead to imperfect happiness, and pursue such goals (here Aquinas closely follows Aristotle), by shaping their enduring dispositions (virtues); there are virtues both of intellect and well-formed appetite.

Intellect interprets our sense experiences, reasons to reach theoretical and practical conclusions, and informs our will. Aspects of theory are *understanding* (general), *science* (truth about the world) and *wisdom* (truth about God); aspects of practical intellect are *art* (in the widest sense of artisanship) and *prudence*..

Volition is our appetite for doing good, and is perfected by prudence and justice: prudence is the virtue of choosing the right means to the right end; justice is the virtue of ensuring that in so doing, others are treated rightly. Particular Justice may be commutative (fair dealing between two persons) or distributive (allocation of resources in society according to the rank of each person). General (a.ka. universal or legal) Justice concerns the citizen in relation to society at large. Epikeia is the virtue of doing the true good where the universal law produces injustice.

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Emotion is our appetite for sensual experiences, subject to concupiscence and irascibility, perfected by temperance (the appropriate investment of energy) and courage (to overcome fear or hardship).

While Aristotle admitted that some could never reach ευδαιμονια, due to ugliness, low birth, or other misfortunes, medieval society offered the prospect of ultimate blessings for everyone. Virtues are qualities which help one survive the journey. Although Aquinas tries to include virtues such as humility and patience as aspects of the four classical cardinal virtues, this seems forced; indeed, humility was a vice in Aristotle's thinking.

To the classical virtues, Christianity adds the three *theological* virtues. These are made known through revelation, gifted by God and direct us to our happiness in God.
- *Faith* is assent to God's revelation, leading us to an understanding of Him. Those who have never heard the Gospel suffer a "punishment" stemming from the Fall, and are judged according to behaviour OTHER than unbelief.
- *Hope* seeks God's help in future difficulties, in order to attain eternal happiness with him.
- *Charity* is friendship with God, moving towards enjoying God; and friendship with those God has made *because* they are His creation.

Like Aristotle, Aquinas held that if there was apparent conflict between virtues, this was due to past sin or error – but for Aquinas, this is rooted in the theology of the Fall. In either case, a strong theory of the unity of the virtues is challenged by the example, say, of a member of an evil regime who nevertheless is courageous in doing what seems to be his duty. Is this true courage?

Aquinas addresses the problem of reconciling the deontological *Torah* with the teleology of Aristotle: the plausible resolution is that obedience to God's law is a means by which man achieves his τελος.

NOMINALISM AND REFORMATION

Ò᛫ Early medieval writers share a conception of human nature, rooted in Aristotle. Jewish, Christian and Islamic currents tweak the details but retain the basic teleological idea: if God wills something, it is because the very nature of the thing is good. This is challenged first by nominalism, which proposes a voluntarist approach (things are good because God wills them) and later by Protestant and Jansenist thought, which denies the possibility of human nature being understood apart from divine revelation. In the face of the unknown, we would have to reason the virtues from human nature unimproved by virtue – unpromising! Theism provides both commandments and heavenly incentive; remove both, and teleological morality is in trouble!

William of Ockham (14th Century) developed voluntarism, where God can will whatever He likes. The problem of morality is discerning God's will, and the morality of an act is entirely in the will, not the external action, of the person who acts. This leads to a tradition of debate on what laws oblige, up to the 16th Century:
- Probabilism – follow any course of action for which there is a reasonable argument, even if an alternative course might have a better case (even so, you are willing for a good). *Danger of laxity!*
- Vasquez and then Suarez rescue Thomist thought but cloak its teleological morality in the language of laws: their precepts express the nature of man. Suraez explains how following the natural law IS God's will, and if there is apparent conflict, use epikeia according to the mind of the Legislator.

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- Grotius tries to make natural law a science like the empirical sciences (deontology based on nature), and develops the concepts of rights.
- Probabiliorism – follow the law when its case is at least as strong as any other option (err on the side of God's apparent will).
- Tutiorism – only follow the letter of the law (Jansenist rigour: play safe!) – but this condemned by the Church except in grave cases (e.g. concerning personal salvation, or validity of sacaraments).

Out of this develops casuistry, and the tradition of moral manuals which last until Vatican II.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

In the 17th Century, Alphonsus Liguori develops *equiprobabilism*:
- Do not change your status except for a more probable reason.
- If it is more probable that a law obliges, follow the law.
- But if there is equally probable doubt, you need not.
- Once you are following the law, you can only cease to do so if the probability of doubt has increased above the probability of the law being correct.
- Mere arguments for not following the law are inadequate unless they directly conflict with the reasons for the law.
- A prudential judgement is probably meritorious, even if the judgement is in error.
- No need to disabuse the ignorant sinner, unless it concerns salvation or the common good. (Contraception concerns neither.)

What is a FACT? Empiricism tries to close the gap between what seems to be and what is; but empirical science stresses the gap, documenting pure observation for later interpretation. If the human sciences try to understand man without reference to his inner beliefs, then no empirical full description of man is possible. But can we claim to know facts about the ends and true values of human beings? Bureaucrats use social science to justify interfering in people's lives; if the science is in question, so is their right to interfere.

MacIntye makes a radical critique of the social sciences, because their predictive power is hopelessly compromised by:
- The impossibility of predicting (and thereby anticipating) truly radical innovation.
- The dependence of each moral actor on the free actions of all the others (possibly including the problems posed by an omniscient deity).
- The complexity of analysing people whose relationships to each other exist in many simultaneous parallel contexts, and who recursively speculate on how others will respond to their actions.
- Truly unforeseen circumstances – meteorites and molehills.

ε˙ The industrial revolution separates work from home. For many labourers, work is no longer an art in which they find fulfilment, but a necessary drudge to earn money to support their families and indulge their leisure time. MacIntyre sees no virtue in the labour of mass production. Only a minority of skilled labourers take pleasure in their craft; the rest aspire to become rich aesthetes, under the direction of bureaucratic managers. There is also a shift to the rise of the individual as a unit of economic society with no stake in the wider well-being of society. Only now is it possible to speak of "my good" as opposed to "your good" – where Athenians would mutually pursue "the good". (Republicanism in this era is characterised by a move to restore a common morality based on civic virtue.) "Virtues" are reinterpreted as either being passions, or resistance to passions. Only now is altruism a prized yet unreasonable phenomenon.

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ε˙ Hume argues that it is in our own interests to be just even when this is a disadvantage in a particular case – but the younger Rameau argues it is only in our interests that people in general should be just. How do we identify true virtue? Hume is emotivist (a passion-based morality), since he wants to deny Pascal's & Diderot's appeals to an objective standard. In practice, Hume canonises values of the Hanoverian aristocracy: stability of property; land won by war eventually becomes legitimate property; female chastity is prized because it ensures rightful inheritance. In such a society, ideas about honour degrade to aristocratic status, which is tied to property. Virtues such as justice and chastity will need redefinition. In Hume's time, virtue becomes a grammatically singular concept; morality, virtue, duty and obedience converge on a singular meaning (for Aristotle, not all virtues were moral!)

Ω˙ Adam Smith, a deist, proposes three virtues: the man who practices perfect prudence, strict justice and proper benevolence may be called virtuous. To these must be added the Stoic virtue of self-command in order to exercise the others. Smith admits that in borderline cases we must be guided by feelings, and is disdainful of casuistry. (Dawson later argues that deism does not reject Christianity, merely desupernaturalises its ideas.)

Ω˙ By Kant's time, morality is so deontological that it effectively reduces to: "Which rules should we follow?" He proposes that they must be the same for all people, and that if the rules are binding, we are culpable according to our will, not our ability, to carry them out.

Ω˙ Kant rejects utilitarianism (the new teleology) because "happiness" is too vague, and too subjective a basis of a universal objective morality. Divine commandments are inadequate because they presuppose a rational decision to adopt divine law in general – in which case, why not judge particular divine laws? Kant searches for a maxim which we can consistently will for all people, and concludes: We must always treat persons as ends not means; they must never be coerced, but always given reason to co-operate freely. MacIntyre's critiques is that universalisability is too broad a criterion.

♈˙ Jacobin Clubs (oriented to a republican end) had their own code of morality: liberty, fraternity, equality; patriotism and love of family. To do good productive work, dress simply, live modestly, attend your club and do your civic duty to assist the revolution. This position is a radical challenge to both the ruling classes and the plebs.

♈˙ Utilitarianism (developed by Mill after Kant) attempts to provide a new τελος. **Benjamin Franklin** is a notable utilitarian. His virtues are practices for external ends – success and prosperity. Cleanliness, industry and silence feature in his list of explicit virtues. Acquisitiveness is virtuous, where the Greeks would have it as part of the vice of pleonexia. Chastity is understood as practicing sex for right motives (including health) but not for the injury of another.

♈˙ **Jane Austen**, a Christian, betrays certain primary virtues in her writing. She seeks to carve out a domestic enclave for morality, where her heroines can enjoy a certain kind of marriage and a certain kind of household, supplied by money properly acquired. Constancy is her cardinal virtue, and amiability (with a true affection which goes beyond agreeableness, which is mere simulation) is also in her canon. But if some "virtues" are simulacra, how to tell the difference? She introduces self-knowledge as a virtue for many of her heroines. Since she pays attention to social role, her stance is somewhere between Aristotle and Homeric poetry.

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The Enlightenment Project therefore fails to establish any moral system – based on passions (rejected by Kant), reason (rejected by Hume), or a choice between the two (Kierkegaard), let alone divine command, since society no longer has a common religion (also rejected by Kant).

MacIntyre argues that its failure was inevitable because of a discrepancy between the Enlightenment conception of human nature, and the conception of what kind of rules they were seeking to extract – their failed project was to start with rules and consider the virtues necessary to live them out.

THE MODERN MORAL CATASTROPHE

MacIntyre introduces 3 key characters – the rich aesthete, the therapist and the business manager.

ε/ὸ˙ Kierkegaard's *Enten-Eller* contrasts A, who chooses aesthetic pursuits, with B, who chooses the dutiful family life. A is forced to choose whether to make the pursuit of duty his first principle or not. In Kierkegaard's ethical realm, we must decide whether to let principles win out over our feelings; but on what rational basis can we choose this fundamental option in the first place? (The path of duty was not so obviously strewn with incommensurable conflicts in Kierkegaard's time.)

ὸ˙ In the Victorian era, "vice" takes on a narrow meaning. When the proper end of virtue disappears from sight (the teleological understanding is lost), a kind of Stoicism advocating virtue for its own sake steps in.

ε˙ C. L. Stevenson, G. E. Moore & others advance **emotivism** – moral judgments are solely expressions of feeling (a development from the utilitarianism of happiness). But what kind of feeling? What do moral statements mean, and why are they not stated as being about feelings? Moore is utilitarian, right action maximises the good, and we know what is good by *intuition*. Friendship and beauty are the highest goods. Emotivism makes the claim that there was never a non-emotive system. While moral reasoning is not emotive, every chain of reason needs a starting point, and this is the nub.

MacIntyre contends then that at the end of the 20th Century, we live in a milieu of incommensurable moral theories, which analytical or phenomenological philosophy cannot resolve. There are fragments of divine law, and shades of a teleological concept of human nature. Emotivism results in shrill arguments as proponents throw uncritically accepted personal norms at each other. Only in the light of history do we realise that we have mixed ideas of what we mean by "good" – an intuited property? An exhortation to share my autonomous feelings? A universal imperative?

Nietzsche disposed of both Kant's deontology and forms of emotivism based on mere sentiment. Enlightenment claims of objective morality, he argues, were in fact expressions of subjective will. For Nietzsche, the imposition of one's own will is paramount – a reasonable argument, even if we disagree with him about what one should will. He also rejected the Enlightenment teleologies (utilitarianism etc.) – but not explicitly the older Aristotelian teleology, already discarded in the Enlightenment. Paralleling Nietzsche's supremacy of the will is Goffman's sociology in which success is defined as receiving acclaim regardless of actual merit – a culture in which spin doctors thrive! For Nietzsche – and Aristotle! – virtues come first and the rules of the virtuous society follow.

Our current world-view, argues MacIntyre, is **Weberian** – about efficient management of individuals. In Weber's thought, the ends of a particular project justify the means. People are

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held responsible for actual achievements. This accommodates a certain pluralism of moral outlooks, and even Marxists fall into Weberian ways when they achieve political power.

Gewirth seeks to bootstrap a rational moral system. Free-willed action needs a world with a measure of well-being for actors and freedom from constraint. We must will that these conditions exist for others – and Gewirth translates this into a RIGHT to such conditions. MacIntyre questions this move, denying the existence of universal rights, and disparaging all appeals to intuition or self-evident truths. Conflict erupts when one person's happiness impinges on another's supposed "rights". Indeed, MacIntyre's deep scepticism of rights leads him to suspicion of the therapist who has embraced the fiction of rights, and the business manager who manipulates them. [Note Sherrington's point that there is much agreement on rights, e.g. UN Declarations.]

MacIntyre's Thesis

MacIntyre takes us on a three-stage journey of understanding virtue:
- Practices (isolable activities within a human life);
- Narrative (the unifying feature of a particular human life);
- Tradition (the shared moral quest of a society).

MacIntyre defines *practices:* any coherent and complex form of social human co-operation, where goods *internal* to the practice are achieved, and may be done so with excellence; human conceptions of the ends and goods involved may be systematically extended. A *virtue* is a human quality which makes it possible to perform a practice well, and without which it cannot be performed well. Since there is something objective about the techniques of a particular practice, this virtue can be cultivated by learning from others, and excellence recognised. Virtues are cultivated *both* for their own sake *and* as a means to the internal end of the practice, including innovation and extention in adducing the true end of the practice!

This departs from Aristotle by confining the *end* to a particular practice, and by allowing the possibility of true conflict between virtues which stem from the multiplicity of practices and not merely character flaws in the actors. This in fact overcomes the two major weaknesses of Aristotle! There needs to be also an external τελος, one which transcends individual practices and seeks the good of the whole of a human life – without this, a life will be torn by the competing demands of different practices. One particular virtue – purity of heart – only makes sense the context of a whole life.

The goods internal to a practice are incommensurable with those outside the practice; this means that standard utilitarianism cannot be applied with a simple calculus of happiness. And the exercise of a virtue within a practice does not always lead to morally good results. It is not impossible that rival virtue (or other moral) theories will conflict within a practice; but as well as incommensurable elements, there will usually be some common ground in which the rival systems can be weighed against each other.

MacIntyre then develops from this starting point so that a true virtue is not only relevant for a thriving practice, but also in the whole life of an individual (*narrative*) AND humanity as a whole (*tradition*). Contemporary philosophy and sociology tends to be reductionist and consider isolated acts, isolated aspects of human lives; but every human life is a unity. The actions of a rational person only make sense when that person is understood to have been born into a historical context, and to make choices in accord with some end. Without an end, the morality of individual practices would be arbitrary.

It seems, then, that each person must have an "end" in mind or else they will complain of life being meaningless, and perhaps become suicidal. Now, just as the pursuit of a practice

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furthers the understanding and skill of the practice, so the quest (which MacIntyre calls a *narrative* quest) for the good life will deepen a person's understanding and appreciation for human good. The relevant virtues are those which can sustain such a quest in the face of obstacles, and which sustain human societies in which the good may be sought.

Now, since a person's identity is part of a particular social context with a history; and within a social context, or *tradition*, actors consider the good life and refine the communal understanding of what is truly good. Truthfulness, courage, intellectual virtues and the virtue of knowing one's own tradition are important in this communal effort. Living this out needs a very different kind of society from bureaucratic individualism.

Although there are some societies with virtue-based ethics in the contemporary world, their claims are drowned out in the mix of emotivism. We have no clear picture of which dispositions are virtuous; of what adopting such a canon of virtues would require; or how they stand in relation to other moral systems, particularly concepts of *rights* or *utility*.

Since the world no longer has an agreed set of virtues, it also lacks a coherent concept of justice. The state no longer represents the enactor of an agreed set of moral values, but merely the bureaucratic manager of a national group of individuals.

> Nozick argues that entitlement to property is based on just acquisition, either of something originally sourced, or obtained fairly from another (as gift, purchase, barter etc.) Since this ownership is an inalienable right (an unproven axiom), distributive justice demands that everyone today own precisely what they have justly acquired. It is rooted in past actions, but of a very specific type; and in practice is stymied (i) by the unproven axiom, and (ii) by the legacy of unjust property transfer by theft, war, and settlement.

> Rawls considers a rational being totally ignorant of his future prospects in society. Such a being would choose a principle of maximum liberty consistent with the same liberty for others. Inequality will be tolerated and promoted only when of the greatest benefit to the least advantaged, and available according to equal opportunity. This makes justice wholly dependent on the present state of things, with no account of the past (e.g. *how* someone became disadvantaged). Equality is in practice with respect to needs. [Ryan critiques this: might not the ignorant rational being choose to gamble the chance of being a millionaire or slave-owner against being a pauper or slave?]

> The average citizen might invoke the language of *deserts*. The right-wing investor defends his entitlement to assets without heavy tax because he "deserves" what he has worked for. The left-wing activist defends the entitlement of the socially disadvantaged who "deserve" to receive someone else's tax dollars.

MacIntyre therefore returns to his question: Nietzsche or Aristotle? Nietzsche demolishes the concepts of "rights" and "utility", and wins by default if no other moral systems stand; but if we peel back the linguistic fog, MacIntyre claims that a virtue-ethic cured of Aristotelian flaws is possible. Further, in Nietzsche's thought, the "great man" is the one whose individual will prevails. But this great man cannot become the apprentice who learns a practice for another, nor aspire to the goods to be found in friendship or mutual co-operation, or any other aspect of a society of co-operating citizens. He is merely another symptom of the individualism of the fragmented morality of contemporary society.

The fundamental dispute, then, is between liberal individualism and a morality founded on a common and communal τελος for human beings. This affects not only moral philosophy, but the way social science is conducted.

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MacIntyre allows three lines of attack on his thesis:
- His unstated presuppositions about the nature of rational discourse.
- The correct interpretation of Aristotle (this debate is itself a natural development within the tradition).
- Liberal individualism needs to be opposed not to Aristotle's communitarian virtues, but to Marxism's vision of dealienised community. (Marxists forced to apply morality tend to degrade into Kantian or utilitarian ways; those exercising power fall into Weberian bureaucracy.)

MacIntyre concludes that we have fallen into new dark ages, ruled by the bureaucrats of a declining empire. We no longer find moral standards to adopt for the unity of our nation; once we realise our predicament, local communities will emerge, shaped according to agreed ends which define what it is to be virtuous. The leader who gives this shape, MacIntyre likens to St Benedict. [Did Benedict provide a teleological set of virtues or a deontological Rule?]

Possible exam questions:
- Discuss MacIntyre's analysis of the breakdown of current moral values.
- Evaluate MacIntyre's claim that the Enlightenment Project was "bound to fail".
- Evaluate MacIntyre's claim that we must follow Nietzsche or Aristotle.
- Discuss MacIntyre's call for a new St Benedict in the context of his rehabilitated virtue theory.
- Does MacIntyre's virtue theory overcome Enlightenment relativism?
- Does MacIntyre's virtue theory restore a lost rationality?
- Does MacIntyre seek a socially conditioned *telos* rather than one of human nature?

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