MACINTYRE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The papers, comments and reply to comments in this collection made up the October 16, 2009 MacIntyre Conference at Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri.

Introduction to Alasdair MacIntyre and the Ethics and Politics of Practice

Christopher Lutz (St. Meinrad School of Theology)

Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form

Micah Lott (University of Chicago)

Truth and Virtue: Comments on Micah Lott's *Moral Virtue as knowledge of Human Form*

Bruce Ballard (Lincoln University)

The Manager, the Everyday Plain Person, and the Philosopher

Gregory R. Beabout (St. Louis University)

Can Business Managers be Virtuous?: Comments on Gregory Beabout's *The Manager, the Everyday Plain Person, and the Philosopher*

Laurence Rohrer (Lincoln University)

A Brief Response to Professor Rohrer's Commentary

Gregory R. Beabout (St. Louis University)

The Plain Person and the Catholicity of Philosophy

Bryan R. Cross (St. Louis University)

Responsible Philosophy: Comments on Bryan Cross's *The Plain Person and the Catholicity of Philosophy*

Jeff Freelin (Lincoln University)

Introduction to Alasdair MacIntyre and the Ethics and Politics of Practice

Christopher Lutz

When people speak about Alasdair MacIntyre, they generally begin by talking about *After Virtue*, a book he first published in 1981 that has been spurring debates in contemporary ethics, politics, management, social theory, the philosophy of the social sciences, and the history of philosophy for more than a quarter century now. Speakers begin by talking about *After Virtue* because, too often, that is the only text by Alasdair MacIntyre that they have ever read. Unfortunately, this is as reasonable as it is lamentable, for the justifications for having read only *After Virtue* follow the divisions of the contemporary academy. *After Virtue* is an important book that draws from, and contributes to, many different academic specializations, thus it has commanded a reading from many people that his other works have not. *After Virtue* also stands at a turning point in MacIntyre's career; it is his last fully secular book, and introduces his movement toward traditional Christian thought, thus, for some, it marks the end of his works worth reading, while for others it marks the beginning. So a word of introduction is warranted here, not only for students who have never read Alasdair MacIntyre at all, but also for Christian readers unfamiliar with MacIntyre's early work, secular readers who have not taken up his later work, and specialists who have never had an opportunity to consider the larger picture of MacIntyre's philosophy.

Introduction to MacIntyre

Alasdair MacIntyre was born in Great Britain in 1929 and grew up mainly in London. Both of his parents were medical doctors.[1] He attended Queen Mary College of the University of London from 1945 to 1949, graduating with "an honours BA in Classics."MacIntyre went on to graduate school at the University of Manchester where he earnedhis MA in philosophy in 1951.[2] It was not yet customary for British humanities professors to earn PhDs, so this was MacIntyre's terminal degree.

From the very beginning of his career, Alasdair MacIntyre has been interested in ethics and politics as an interconnected whole. Where some scholars would present ethics as a study of personal obligations and politics as a study of forms of government, MacIntyre has always seen ethics as a study of the requirements of human relationships and politics as a study of the structures that support or hinder those relationships. We find this in his MA thesis, practically reproduced in paraphrase in Thomas D'Andrea's, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*, we also find it in MacIntyre's first published book, *Marxism: An Interpretation,*[3] and in many of his essays from the 1950s and 1960s, including "What Morality is Not,"[4] "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought,'"[5] "Freedom and Revolution,"[6] and "Breaking the Chains of Reason."[7]

One of the major influences on MacIntyre's early work on ethics and politics was Marxism, which MacIntyre viewed as an indispensable foundation for any truly democratic society, and since we are more accustomed today to think of Marxism as the

[1] D'Andrea, xvi.
[2] D'Andrea, xvii. The years are drawn indirectly from information about MacIntyre's age and the number of years spent teaching at Manchester.
[3] Alasdair MacIntyre, Marxism: An Interpretation
[4] ASIA
[5] ASIA
[6] MEM
[7] MEM

antithesis of democracy, it is worth taking a moment to consider why MacIntyre would have viewed Marxism in this way.

Marxism arose in response to the industrial revolution, the period when communities united around centuries old craft traditions were made to compete against machines operated by relatively unskilled workers that could produce high quality goods with a speed and consistency that had never been known before. Wherever these competitions took place, the craft communities were overcome by the efficiency of the factories. This meant that independent craft workers, who had owned their own tools and participated freely in the lives of their communities were forced to become employees in the mills, using tools that belonged to someone else, accepting a wage based not on the value of the goods they produced but on the market for the work they was willing to do. Labor itself had become a commodity. The transformation from skilled crafts to industrial production meant two things: First, no craft worker could ever afford the tools required to operate a factory; the means of production belonged instead to the capitalists who owned the factory. Second, since the machinery could be operated by relatively unskilled workers, the workers became increasingly dependent upon the factory, since their employment robbed them of the time to develop any other marketable talent, even as industrialization dried up the markets for any goods they might produce on their own.[8]

Karl Marx viewed the industrial revolution in two ways: as a crisis and as an opportunity. On one hand, maltreatment of industrial workers and the breakdown of traditional communities constituted a crisis of human relationships. On the other hand, the remarkable productivity of modern industry provided an opportunity for revolutionary

[8] See Karl Marx, "Machinery and Modern Industry," in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 405-556.

change. For Marx believed that if the people were to unite and take ownership of the means of production, they could establish a utopian democratic world, in which everyone contributed to their communities according to their abilities and received according to their needs. Summarizing the goals of the revolution in the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels concluded:

> In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.[9]

This was the vision of the future that animated Lenin and Trotsky in Russia's October Revolution of 1917, and it was the same vision that animated MacIntyre's early Marxist work. In 1960, MacIntyre rejected the notion "that socialism and democracy can be separated,[10] and argued that "the achievement of freedom and the achievement of the classless society are inseparably united."[11]

To say that Karl Marx viewed the industrial revolution as a crisis and as an opportunity is to say that Marxism has two distinct parts: first, it offers a critique of capitalist economic and political practices; second, it proposes a revolutionary alternative to capitalism. MacIntyre left the Marxist movement behind after he lost faith in its revolutionary solution, but the Marxist critique of capitalism remains a key resource for MacIntyre and an important theme in his mature work.[12]

---

[9] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, part II, "Proletarians and Communists.
[10] "Revolution and Freedom," in MEM, 123.
[11] "Revolution and Freedom," in MEM, 125.
[12] See "Three Perspectives on Marxism" in Ethics and Politics, pp. 145-158.

MacIntyre's career has been marked by two seemingly contrary traits: constancy and change; we will consider his changes first.

As a young academic, MacIntyre was both a Marxist and a member of the Church of England, his first book tried to show that Marxism and Christianity were not so opposed as they were generally taken to be, and that Marxists and Christians could learn from one another. By the early 1960s, he had lost his Christian faith, and had become a committed atheist; while he studied and published on Hume. MacIntyre's achievements in the 1960s included a pair of lectures delivered at Columbia University in New York City on "the Religious Significance of Atheism," and a new book, *A Short History of Ethics*. In the early 1970s MacIntyre finally broke off his affiliations with Marxists organizations and turned his attention to Aristotle. In 1977, MacIntyre published the essay "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," which marked a turning point in his work, which led to the publication of his landmark work, *After Virtue* in 1981. Around this time he also returned to Christianity, first to the Anglican church, and then to the Roman Catholic Church. In 1988, MacIntyre published *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, which took up some questions about the nature of rationality raised by *After Virtue*, and defended, for the first time, the thought of Thomas Aquinas and the adherents of the Thomistic tradition. Since then, MacIntyre has published three more new books, along with two volumes of essays selected from the hundreds of articles and reviews MacIntyre has published. So it is with good reason that commentators often remark that MacIntyre's career has been marked by change.

It is also true that MacIntyre's career has been marked by a virtue he calls constancy. Those who have read MacIntyre's work from all parts of his career know

very well that the main themes and concerns of his ethical and political work have remained the same for more than fifty years. Through his entire career, MacIntyre has written about the role of communities in establishing the goods pursued by their members, and the ethics of participating in the community's pursuit of the good, which includes an account of the discipline required to support the members' free participation in that work. This is MacIntyre's ethics and politics of practice.

Alasdair MacIntyre's Ethics and Politics of Practice

The most important text for understanding MacIntyre's ethics and politics of practice is *After Virtue*, but two other short works help to clarify MacIntyre's project. The first is "Notes from the Moral Wilderness," a pair of essays published in 1958 and 1959. The second is "The *Theses on Feuerbach*: A Road Not Taken," published in 1994. MacIntyre's account of practice is important because it provides a foundation for ethics and politics that appeals to human desire and human reason, and at the same time confirms the best critiques of alternative approaches.

There are generally two conventional theories of ethics in contemporary moral philosophy. The first is an ethics of duty, the second it an ethics of utility. According to the ethics of duty, normal adults are able to recognize that they have certain duties, and morality is about upholding these duties. These duties are unrelated to anything that the agent wants or needs, in fact, these duties are often contrary to human desire. This is the position of Immanuel Kant, who taught that our actions have true moral worth only when we do them out of respect for duty alone. How then am I to know my duties?

A fair assessment of Kant's position seems to entail that one knows one's duties through one's culture, but Kant does not teach that duties come from culture, rather he

teaches that they come from our own rational assessments, and that we give ourselves universal laws. But if it turns out—as it does—that respectable, intelligent, disciplined people from different cultures sometimes differ in their moral judgments in ways that reveal cultural differences, then it follows that Kant is wrong about the origins of duty.

Another approach to the ethics of duty asserts that everyone has a duty to respect the universal natural rights of individuals. The rights in question here are not the constitutional and civil rights that arise from positive law. They are not the traditional rights established by common law and community practice. They are not even the natural rights that John Locke and the Declaration of Independence claim to be granted by God. These are the kinds of natural rights asserted in the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789, which depend on nature alone, and not on any decree of God or any agreement among human beings.

This approach is also problematic for several reasons. First, it imagines the human person in a peculiarly modern, western, liberal, individualist way. Second, it asserts peculiarly modern, western, liberal, individualist judgments about human conduct and human relationships as a norm for all cultures. Third, pretends, as the Kantian individual pretends, to draw these judgments from the pure exercise of reason, rather than from the peculiar community in which they were first framed. Consequently, like Kant's duties formed according to the categorical imperative, natural rights—these peculiar natural rights of modern liberal individualism—must be recognized for what they are: the assertions of their authors.

The second conventional theory of ethics is an ethics of utility. John Stuart Mill, in his book *Utilitarianism*, agreed with Kant that morality could not be about the pursuit

of personal goals and the fulfillment of personal desires. He also agreed that moral philosophy should enable an individual to determine what was right according to a rational assessment.

We are not so apt these days to think of Marxism with the same kind of idealism that colored MacIntyre's work fifty years ago and there are two reasons for this. The first has to do with the historical failure of Lenin and Trotsky's Marxist revolution. The second is rooted in a theoretical critique of Marxism itself.

Historically, by Trotsky's account in his book, *Revolution Betrayed*, the socialist revolution in the Soviet Union was still in its infancy when Lenin died in 1924. Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin moved to consolidate power around a centralized bureaucratic apparatus supported by a violent and oppressive police state. This Stalinist form of government, which Trotsky called "a deformed workers' state" and "state capitalism," became identified with communism in the Soviet Union. And it was this form of communism that the Soviet Union imposed its satellite states in Eastern Europe when in the wake of World War II. Historically, professedly Marxist governments did much to ruin the reputation of Marxism.

Theoretically, Marxism failed to live up to its pretension that it had a scientific character because its predictions rarely came true. It failed to predict the behavior of people. It failed to predict the actual history of the revolution. It failed to do these things because Marxism is a determinist theory; that is, it presupposes that people are not free when they make rational choices. It also failed because it did not adequately address the mystery of human selfishness; for the classless society may look interesting on paper, but anyone who seriously attempts to establish it is only volunteering to be overpowered by

those who see their effort as an opportunity to establish themselves as the new ruling class.

By Trotsky's account, the Soviet revolution had been betrayed by Stalin, and by Stalinism. It had been betrayed by the formation of a permanent bureaucracy and a permanent police force. It had been betrayed by Stalin's abandonment of efforts to spread the revolution internationally. It had been betrayed by the establishment of party bureaucrats as a new ruling class in the Soviet Union. It had been betrayed by its abandonment of the democratic goals of the revolution, and by Stalin's purges, which had killed nearly all of the leaders of the October Revolution, drove Trotsky into exile and imprisoned or exterminated most of Trotsky's Soviet followers. A Stalinist agent finally murdered Leon Trotsky in Mexico in 1940.

The criminality of the Stalinist regime began to come to light in the West after Stalin died in 1953. Three years later, Nakita Kruschev catalogued and condemned Stalin's offenses against "the Leninist principles of Soviet Socialist democracy" in the "secret speech" of February 1956, but when Kruschev directed the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising in October of that year, the result was widespread disillusionment with Marxism and Stalinism across the world.

By the time MacIntyre rose to prominence in Great Britain in the 1950s, British Marxists had split into three discernible camps: the British Labour Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain, and those aligned with neither group. It was from this third group that the New Left would arise, it included Trotskyist critics of Stalinism, and one of these Trotskyists was Alasdair MacIntyre.

For my own great-grandfather, a skilled carpenter who immigrated from Ireland in 1870 with a chest full of tradesman's tools, it meant taking a job at a steel mill. So for him, industrialization was absorbed into the experience of immigration. For communities in Europe, it meant moving from farms and shops to factory towns and becoming what Marx called the proletariat. America grew up with industrialization, and this makes the industrial revolution less visible in American history, but the same could not be said of Europe. MacIntyre explained what drew him to Marxism in an interview in the early 1990s:

> Liberalism in the name of freedom imposes a certain kind of unacknowledged domination, and one which in the long run tends to dissolve traditional human ties and to impoverish social and cultural relationships. Liberalism, while imposing through state power regimes that declare everyone free do pursue whatever they take to be their own good, deprives most people of the possibility of understanding their lives as a quest for the discovery and achievement of the good, especially by the way in which it attempts to discredit those traditional forms of human community within which this project has to be embodied.[13]

MacIntyre was drawn to Marxist theory because of its concern with human progress and liberation.

Modern professors are often highly knowledgeable specialists in a single field and unfamiliar with the details of most others, but MacIntyre never saw this as a positive development; his work spans classical literature, modern thought, contemporary

[13] Borradori interview, quoted in Lutz, TEAM, p. 14.

literature, and the social sciences, and *After Virtue* draws from, and contributes to, many different academic specializations. One consequence of this is that *After Virtue* has been read and reviewed by more people in more fields than most contemporary philosophy books, while many of those readers have been unable to appreciate points in the argument that lie outside of their own specializations.

A second consequence of academic specialization on the reading of *After Virtue* has to do with the book's place in MacIntyre's career. After Virtue is MacIntyre's last book of fully secular philosophy. His subsequent books would belong squarely to the literature of Christian, specifically Catholic thought. So MacIntyre's Christian readers have read After Virtue without the background of MacIntyre's earlier work, particularly his Marxist writings from the 1960s, while secular readers refuse to follow MacIntyre into what they take to be the occult realm of Catholic literature.

As a result of these two consequences of academic specialization, the early secondary literature on MacIntyre that developed in response to After Virtue suffered from a variety of errors. Liberal moral theorists read After Virtue to respond to MacIntyre's critique of modern liberal individualism. Bureaucratic Marxist social theorists read After Virtue to respond to MacIntyre's critique of what Trotsky had called "bureaucratism."[14] Aristotelians and Thomists of various kinds, along with contemporary virtue ethicists, read After Virtue because of the encouragement it gives to the project of reestablishing an ethics of virtue, although they—including myself—find it necessary to respond to what they—indeed we—take to be the shortcomings of After Virtue's account of virtue. Philosophers of the social sciences, philosophers of management, historians of

[14] See Leon Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed.*

philosophy, and many others, specializing in a wide variety of fields also read After Virtue to respond to MacIntyre's comments as they pertain to their various specializations.

Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form

Micah Lott

1. Moral Goodness and Human Form

In an essay discussing practical wisdom and its relation to philosophy, Alasdair MacIntyre makes the following claim:

> We all of us begin our adult lives with some classification and rank ordering of goods, some hierarchy of ends, some *implicit or partially explicit conception of human good* that we have acquired from our upbringing and from the culture into which that upbringing and was an initiation. (emphasis mine)[15]

In this essay and elsewhere,[16] MacIntyre elaborates an Aristotelian account of moral goodness, which gives central place to the notion of human good.[17] On the Aristotelian view, human good plays two important roles. First, human good determines what counts as goodness and badness in human action.[18] And hence human good determines what counts as moral goodness, for moral evaluations speak to excellence and defect in the action and character of human beings considered *as such*. As one proponent puts it:

> " 'That was morally good action' is equivalent to 'Qua human action, that was good' or 'That was good human action' and 'That was a morally bad human

[15] "Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians" in his collection of essays *Ethics and Politics* 33.
[16] See especially *Dependent Rational Animals* (Open Court: LaSalle: 1998)
[17] For the purposes of this essay, I am interested in the kind of Aristotelian account I take to be shared by MacIntyre, Phillipa Foot and Michael Thompson – among others. There are differences between these thinkers, but those do not concern me here.
[18] See, e.g., Philippa Foot *Natural Goodness*, 44.

action' is equivalent to 'Qua human action, that was bad' or 'That was a bad human action.' "[19]

According to this Aristotelian account, moral judgments share a conceptual structure with judgments of excellence and defect in other living things, including plants and animals. In each case, the goodness of parts and activities is understood in relation to the good of the being in question as defined by its life-form –in relation to a particular plant-good or animal-good, in the one case, and in relation to human good in the other. The notion of human good, then, is central to what counts as good action for human beings as such – i.e. moral goodness.

In addition, human good is also at the center of ethical *understanding*. What the morally virtuous person grasps – what she reasons well about in a practical way – is human goodness, with respect to action and choice. And here there is a difference between the human case and other life-forms. On the one hand, the Aristotelian asserts that the notion of human good is conceptually similar to the notion of good, or flourishing, as applied to other living things.[20] With humans, just as with oaks and tigers, we evaluate individuals in light of the *form* which they bear.[21] On the other hand, however, our *knowledge* of human form – or, equivalently, our knowledge of human good – is of a different sort from our knowledge of other life-forms. For in the case of other life-forms, humans come to learn about them through empirical observation. But in

[19] G.E.M. Anscombe "Human Action" in *Human Life, Ethics and Action*
[20] Cf. MacIntyre's assistance on the univocity of the concept of "flourishing" as applied to humans and other living things in *Dependent Rational Animals*.
[21] For an account of life-form judgments, see Michael Thompson *Life and Action* part I (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2008).

the case of human-form, we come to know what "the human" is by coming to know *how to act.* We acquire our (initial) understanding of human form from *living as a human*.

In this paper, I want to explore this idea, in order to spell out the claim that knowledge of human form is "from within", whereas knowledge of other life-forms is "from without." What is meant by "from without" is perhaps more clear: We learn about other life-forms by observing them. We learn about them empirically. However, what is meant by knowing "from within" is less clear. My question, then, is this: how and why does being brought up as a human being – being educated to have a developed rational will – provide one with a knowledge of human form (or, human good)? My question picks up the idea expressed in the quote from MacIntyre above, but it has a slightly different focus. For whereas MacIntyre speaks of all adults having "some" conception of human good, I am asking about *knowledge* of the human form, which implies a *true* conception of human good. My focus, accordingly, will be on the knowledge of human form as given through the practical virtues, since I take it that the virtues provide a person with a *correct* perception of human action and a correct understanding of human good. So the question is: how does the possession of the moral virtues provide a human being with knowledge of the very form she bear – the very form that is realized in her virtuous actions?

2. Moral Virtue and Connatural Knowledge

To make progress on this question, let us begin with Elizabeth Anscombe's discussion of connatural knowledge. Anscombe describes connatural knowledge as "the

sort of knowledge someone has who has a certain virtue"[22] It is "the capacity to recognize what action will accord with and what ones will be contrary to virtue."[23] The idea of connatural knowledge, then, embodies that thought that part of having a virtue is the ability to recognize which actions accord with it, and which are against it. However, what is distinctive about connatural knowledge is not only the object known – what actions will count as courageous, generous, just, etc. – but the *way* it is known. Connatural knowledge comes *through* a person's disposition toward virtuous actions, and away from vicious ones. In contrast, a merely clever person may know that a certain action would be just, or mean, but he knows it in a different way – "out of a certain sharpness of intelligence."

To see the difference between the connatural knowledge of the virtuous and knowledge of the merely clever, consider a particular case in which there is a debt owed. The person with the virtue of justice recognizes the fact of a debt as a reason to repay it. Thus her reasoning can be represented as follows:

1) I owe Sam a debt. (Or, to make it a case for charity: Sam is in need of help)
2) The time has come to repay, and I have the means to do so. (I am positioned to help)
3) So I'll pay! (So I'll help!)

If you were to ask the just person what action was in accord with justice here, she would be able to tell you – e.g. repaying the debt on Tuesday, when she usually sees Sam. And

[22] See her essay "Knowledge and Reverence for Human Life," 60. In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre also makes mention connatural knowledge as a form of moral knowledge that is not theoretical, 128.
[23] Ibid.

she could also tell you which actions would be against justice – e.g., lying to Sam and telling him she doesn't have the money, or changing her phone number to avoid him. She *knows* which action accord with justice, and which are against it. However, she knows what the just action is *through* her perception of the situation and what it requires – via her recognition that she would be justified in repaying the debt, her recognition that the fact of the debt owed is a good reason to repay it.[24] She perceives the situation in light of certain salient considerations, and she recognizes that those considerations have a claim on her actions.[25] That she does so such is partly constitutive of having the virtue of justice. She knows *that* a certain action is just through her understanding of *what she ought to do*.[26]

The merely clever man can also know that repaying the debt will count as just. But we cannot represent him coming to this knowledge as the virtuous does – i.e. through the recognition of the fact of the debt as a reason to repay. For the fact that he does *not* reason that way is part of his being merely clever, and not just. The clever man can recognize that repaying the debt is the just action, and that other options are unjust ones,

[24] Issue: How to think about this recognition in relation to *inclination*, which is what Anscombe herself emphasizes. Cf. Anselm Muller's point in "Acting Well" – the recogniton of such reasons is a *practical* recognition: the form it takes is drawing the inference *by acting*.

[25] Which is to say, she recognizes the validity of a form of practical inference, and she recognizes it in a practical way – by *making* the inference and acting.

[26] In her essay, Anscombe also says that the just person has "a connatural knowledge of the worth of a human being, of the dignity of human nature."[26] At first, such knowledge seems very different from knowing what acts accord with virtue. But we can see the connection, I think, if we recognize that the worth of a human being *just is* the way that a human being merits a special kind of treatment. To say that a human being has dignity is to say that humans deserve to be responded to with respect. And the virtue of justice is a matter of showing this respect. In choosing just actions and avoiding unjust ones, the just person acts *in accordance with* and *in recognition of* the humanity of others as the grounds for dealing with them as he does. Thus, the practical reasoning of the just person *manifests* a recognition of the normative significance of others, and that is a practical recognition of their worth as human beings.

but this will be because of an understanding of how the concept of 'justice' works, and not in virtue of recognizing considerations of justice as having a direct claim on how he should act. Thus the merely clever man can recognize that an action would be just or unjust, but how this fact figures into his reasoning will be different from the case of the just. We can imagine him reasoning as follows:

1) I owe Sam a debt. (Or, to make it a case for charity: Sam is need of help)
2) Not repaying your debts counts as unjust. (Helping others is considered charitable)
3) People look down on unjust actions, punishing the unjust with social ostracism. (People look down on uncharitable actions, criticizing them).
4) I want to avoid social ostracism (I don't want to have my actions criticized).
5) So I'll repay the debt! (So I'll help!)

Here, the fact that an action counts as just figures into the reasoning of the merely clever person, but it is fact is of instrumental significance, and that is part of his being *merely* clever and not just. Unlike the virtuous, he cannot be said to know *that* repaying the debt is just simply by considering what to do in the situation.[27]

3. Virtue as Knowledge Human Form

[27] It seems we can say, then, that the vicious person's knowledge *that* an action will count as just is "from without" – it comes from observing how other humans talk and react. And one could gain this knowledge without living a human life; there is no essential connection between having knowledge in this way and *acting well* as a human being. For example, an alien anthropologist might realize that such-and-such an action will be considered 'just' simply by observing how our species works.

So far I have been trying to spell out a special sort of knowledge that the moral virtues give to their possessor, following some suggestions about connatural knowledge from Anscombe. I now what to show that this special sort of knowledge amounts to a knowledge of human form, and thus that the moral virtues provide knowledge of human form.

A moral virtue is distinguished by some characteristic type of response to a given type of consideration. Thus the virtue of courage is distinguished by a response of boldness, or steadfastness, in the face of things recognized as dangerous, while the virtue of helpfulness involves perceiving the needs of others and taking those needs as a reason to provide assistance. As the examples from the last section suggested, what distinguishes the virtuous person are the *reasons* for which she acts. The responses of the moral virtues embody distinctive patterns of practical inference. The premises for such inference are considerations present in the situation, and the conclusions are the actions which are justified by those considerations. Thus a virtue involves: 1) seeing situations in light of salient normative considerations –i.e. registering certain factors as considerations in determining one's actions (e.g. "there is someone who needs some help") and 2) drawing certain practical conclusions from those considerations (e.g. "so I'll help him!"). The virtuous person recognizes the features of the situation *as meriting* a practical response (in emotion and action) and she responds accordingly.

For example, the virtue of gratitude requires 1) that you recognize when another has given you a (undeserved) good and 2) that you regard this as a reason to express your thanks to that person. In addition, the practical reasoning relevant to virtue culminates in

particular action, and this means that the virtuous will take into account various factors in determining what is right to do *here and now*. The virtue of gratitude, then, will lead a person to express her thanks in a way that is responsive to particular features of the situation, including considerations relevant to the other virtues. (Thus, she will not steal something to give to another as an expression of thanks, since stealing is a violation of justice). So the grateful person's reasoning can be represented thusly:

1) she helped me out so much with that project, and really didn't have to

2) so I'll express my thanks!

3) a good way to express my thanks is getting her that novel she wants to read.

4) so I'll get her the novel!

So it is part of virtue that one reasons *well* – that one correctly grasps what one ought to do and does it. However, the virtues are also the practical excellences of human beings considered as such. That is, they provide an account of what counts as *acting well* for us as human beings. The moral virtues speak to our goodness *qua* human beings, and not to our goodness *qua* something more particular or local – *qua* Americans, or women, or people with our aesthetic tastes, etc. So if the virtuous person knows what she ought to do, and if the virtues characterize the goodness in human action, then the virtuous person also knows what a human being ought to do. To possess a virtue is to know *how a human should act*. However, to know how a human should act is to know what the good of the human being is, what counts as living and acting well for a human. And

knowledge of that *just is* knowledge of human form. Thus the virtuous possess, through the understanding embodied in practical inference, a knowledge of human form.

If this sounds odd, we should remember that virtue is not manifest only in discreet "acts of virtue," as if those could be set off from the "normal" or "neutral" things that a person does. Rather, as MacIntyre stresses, the virtues apply to all domains of life.[28] The moral virtues speak to *everything* a human being does in a way that is guided by reasons: how a human should eat her dinner, repay her debts, earn a living, play music with friends, etc. The *way* in which any of these things is do be done is a matter of virtue; considerations of virtue are relevant to all of them. Thus the knowledge of human form that comes via the virtues will be manifest across the whole range of human activities that are done on the basis of reasons. It is a knowledge that is on display in the living of a human life, and it *an essential part* of living that sort of life.

While oak trees and sparrows *have* a distinctive good, it is no part of those life-forms for the adults of the species to have a conception of oak-good or sparrow-good. In contrast, it belongs to "the human" to form a conception of its own form of life. And in this respect, our knowledge of our own form has a different *status* for us than our knowledge of other life-forms. For suppose it were true, as the result of a massive effort of botanical education, that every human now living entered adulthood with the knowledge of oak-form, with a conception of "the oak" and what its flourishing required. Even if all humans happen to be educated about oaks, and even if knowing about oak-form is valuable and worthwhile, such knowledge is not *proper* to the human in the way

[28] See *Dependent Rational Animals* –quote.

that knowledge of human-form is proper. Such knowledge of oak-form is accidental in the life of the human being in a way that knowledge of human-form is not: A human being as such is not defective for failing to knowing about oaks, whereas a human being with no grasp of human form is defective qua human.

This should come as no surprise, in light of what we have seen about virtue. For virtue brings with it a knowledge of human form that comes *through* the virtuous person's understanding of what counts as a reason for what. A person no grasp of human form, then, would possess none of the virtues and have no grasp of what counts as a reason for what, and surely that would be a defective sort of human life.

Truth and Virtue: Comments on Micah Lott's *Moral Virtue as knowledge of Human Form*

Bruce Ballard

Micah Lott presents a clear and intriguing account of the relation of virtue to knowledge, an account which raised two principal questions for this reader: (1) Can the merely clever person attain knowledge of human form and, if so, does that diminish the connection Lott finds between virtue and knowledge? And (2) how, if at all, is virtue necessary or at least helpful for doing philosophy? Here I will respond to MacIntyre's treatment of the issue in *Edith Stein.*

1

Lott distinguishes the knowledge a virtuous person has from that of the merely clever person,noting that for the former, knowledge of what it is right to do in a particular situation appears in the form of a personal imperative. The clever person, knowing, for example, how the concept of justice operates, can also *indicate* what a just person would do. But can the clever person also know the human form? Admittedly, the clever person fails to model virtue, but perhaps like the novelist, may have an imaginative eye for detail and concrete description even beyond that of the typical genuinely virtuous person. If so, actual virtue would seem to be unnecessary for knowing human form.

Against this, Lott might argue that (1) the clever person's knowledge of how the concept of justice operates ultimately depends on the conduct of the just, without whom no such concept would have been formulated and/or (2) the clever person depends on direct observation of just conduct and/or (3) even the most imaginative eye for detail will ultimately fall short of insider's knowledge. Like one become expert after long

experience in a practice, the one who knows from the inside is more attuned to all the subtleties and more original in his or her expression, for example, of how love behaves, more than even the most astute observer could imaginatively project. Altogether, then, the clever one's understanding is parasitic upon actual virtue and/or otherwise inferior. So actual virtue would still seem to be necessary for knowledge of human form.

Now when Lott claims that the virtuous "know" the human form *by knowing how to act*, we may ask whether this is only "practical knowledge" or also includes a conceptual account of human form? In either case, the conceptual account will require some philosophy. And the relation of virtue to philosophizing is important for MacIntyre.

2

In *Edith Stein*, MacIntyre sees Stein's practice of philosophy as a collaborative effort requiring humility and her social view of the self developed in the phenomenology of empathy as informed by her care for others as a nurse. Stein also developed the virtues necessary to sustain philosophically-important long-term friendships. That is, her virtues made her philosophical progress possible.

On the other hand, Martin Heidegger is seen to fail in these respects. While intriguing, I want to argue that MacIntyre's proposed relation between virtue and philosophy exemplified in these philosophers is problematic. To the extent Lott would argue for virtue as a condition of conceptual knowledge, his account may be subject to the same challenges.

MacIntyre considers the claim of Heidegger's defenders that his philosophical development is separable from his political engagement with National Socialism. For

MacIntyre, it is unimaginable that someone's political and philosophical life should be disconnected since they express a single underlying character.[29] In the Carus Lectures, MacIntyre claims that, "our intellectual errors are often, although not always, rooted in our moral errors," and that "from both types of mistake the best protections are friendship and collegiality."[30] Two such avoidable errors are (1) taking a false position based on our dislike of someone, and (2) misinterpreting a situation by projecting our own private fantasy.

There is certainly good evidence that Heidegger might have avoided involvement with National Socialism had he not committed the second type of mistake since, by all accounts, he colored that movement with philosophical motives quite foreign to it. And Heidegger had friends at the time who disagreed with him. On the other hand, if we follow Aristotle or Cicero, it is the true friendship of the good which serves the protecting role MacIntyre assigns to friendship generally. A friend group could be corruptive. MacIntyre acknowledges this point and the consequent need to break with others at times.[31] So how we know whether to follow the advice of friends, or of which friends when they disagree**,** turns out to be a problem for the virtue and philosophy relation MacIntyre advocates.

Cases in which expressed character traits do vary between philosophy and politics MacIntyre considers psychologically remarkable, something like schizophrenia. Yet this phenomenon should not really surprise us, even if it were true of Heidegger, for reasons MacIntyre argues so well in chapter fifteen of *After Virtue*. As he observes, the way

[29]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), p. 5.
[30] Ibid., p.96.
[31] Ibid., p.97.

modern societies tend to segment life into public and private, corporate and personal, work and leisure, makes a unified narrative self with integrated virtues a difficult achievement. So on MacIntyre's analysis, divided character traits are likely to be the rule in a society of fragmented roles.

Where does the difference in virtue between Stein and Heidegger ultimately take us philosophically? In view of her comparatively limited contribution to philosophy, it is hard not to conclude that her exemplary Christian life and martyrdom are what continue to draw even philosophical biographers. As Erwin Straus remarks in the foreword to the second edition of Stein's *On the Problem of Empathy* some forty years ago, "Today the fate and legend of Edith Stein, who in silent heroism enacted the transition from phenomenology to existentialism, keeps interest in her book alive."[32] And since her canonization, interest in Stein has increased all the more and for the same reason.

[32] Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, 2nd edition (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p. v.

The Manager, the Everyday Plain Person, and the Philosopher

Gregory R. Beabout

Let me begin with a standard caveat that professional philosophers often give when making a presentation: what I am presenting here is part of a book project, so it is a work in progress, drawn from a larger argument. I appreciate comments and suggestions. The book on which I'm working is tentatively titled, *The Character of the Manager: From Bureaucrat to Wise Steward*, and this paper is taken from sections of it.

My central goal in this paper is to suggest a way both to interpret and to extend MacIntyre's philosophical writings. I do so by focusing on three characters: the manager, the everyday plain person, and the philosopher. After describing the character of the manager, I turn to MacIntyre's effort to recast what it means to be a philosopher. I conclude by suggesting that MacIntyre's project leaves an important issue unsettled: How can we re-conceive what it means to be a manager? Time constrains me from providing a detailed answer to this question, but I point in a direction that I think we should pursue to extend MacIntyre's project.

MacIntyre's work has received unusually high praise, and this for several reasons. His prose is accessible and non-technical (in contrast to the jargon-laden style of so many academic philosophers of his generation) while his insights are rich and thoughtful. More significantly, MacIntyre's writings are also controversial, provocative, challenging and compelling; some have called MacIntyre's work "striking" and "stunning."[33] "*Wake up*,"

[33] See the back cover of the Third Edition of *After Virtue*.

he is saying to us. I want to propose that we should engage MacIntyre's work precisely because his writing aims to strike and stun us; he is our gadfly.

At the same time, a strand of MacIntyre's thought moves beyond awakening to upbuilding. He wants to *build up* in his reader those virtues one must possess in order to persist in the quest for understanding and practical wisdom. He hopes to bring about a transformation in his audience. The character development that he wants is a movement from hazy unawareness, through arousal and distress, to a recasting of oneself in terms of the virtues required for human flourishing.

Alasdair MacIntyre's most important accomplishment as an author, it seems to me, is to awaken his readers by sounding an alarm. He is trying to warn us that contemporary culture is in crisis insofar as we lack an ability to engage in rational discourse about questions of human purpose. Beneath the veneer of debates about social and moral issues, whether those arguments occur in the academy or in the wider public realm, MacIntyre insists that there is a deep disorder, an unrecognized disagreement about the meaning of central moral concepts and an inability to move forward in any non-arbitrary manner. This was the topic of MacIntyre's M.A. thesis, and this issue has persisted throughout his publishing career.[34] His charge is that the same philosophy that was taught by his teachers and debated by his colleagues – that purposes are non-rational preferences – is embodied in contemporary social life.

In MacIntyre's best-known book, *After Virtue* (1981), he claims that this philosophy of emotivism is embodied in the character of the manager. MacIntyre calls

[34] For a summary that helpfully connects the arguments from MacIntyre's early writings to his "*After Virtue* Project," see Thomas D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*. Ashgate, 2006.

the manager a central figure in "the social drama of the present age."[35] What does this mean? What does MacIntyre mean by calling the manager a *character*? And who is this character?

Throughout his writing, MacIntyre frequently italicizes the word *character*, signaling that he is using the term in a distinctive manner. He is synthesizing several notions, drawing from Max Weber's sociology of "ideal types" while linking the notion of character as it is used in moral philosophy and dramatic literature. He clarifies his meaning when he says, "I choose the word 'character' . . . precisely because of the way it links dramatic and moral associations."[36]

Drawing an analogy between contemporary social life and medieval morality plays, MacIntyre claims that the manager is a "stock character." On the ancient Greek stage, each actor wore a mask that depicted one's character. From medieval times to contemporary Hollywood films, stories rely on stock characters. For example, the clown and the jester are stock characters immediately recognizable to audiences. In a similar way, MacIntyre assumes that his audience is familiar with the manager as a type. Such characters, according to MacIntyre, "partially define the possibilities of plot and action."[37]

The character of the manager is for MacIntyre an abstraction – not a particular person. As a type, this character is the embodiment of a moral philosophy in a social

[35] *AV*, 27.
[36] *AV*, 27.
[37] *AV*, 27.

role. He writes, "Characters are the masks worn by moral philosophies."[38] Philosophies enter social life in various ways. The most direct way, of course, is through lectures, books, sermons, and conversations. Less directly, moral and metaphysical ideas can enter social life through literature and the arts. MacIntyre is encouraging us to look beyond formal arguments to notice other ways that a philosophy can be embodied and transmitted into social life. He draws a connection between a philosophy as it is presented in a literary character and its analogue: the embodiment of a philosophy in a social role. In this sense, a character is a type in the life of a society who embodies, perhaps implicitly, a moral philosophy. For the one who inhabits the role, the character acts to guide, structure, and constrain action. For others who encounter this character, it is crucial to be able to recognize and interpret the intentions of such characters. Those who encounter the character define themselves in part by the way of response.[39]

So, what is this type – the manager? Who is this character? Let's listen to a brief passage from a British newspaper article written during World War II about Albert Speer. Speer was Hitler's Minister for armaments and war production and the so-called architect of the Third Reich. Speer is described as

> very much the successful average man, well-dressed, civil, noncorrupt, very middle class in his style of life, with a wife and six children. Much less than any of the other German leaders does he stand for anything particularly German or particularly Nazi. He rather symbolises a type which is becoming increasingly important in all belligerent countries: the pure technician, the classless bright

[38] *AV*, 28.
[39] *AV*, 27 ff.

> young man without background, with no other original aim than to make his way in the world and no other means than his technical and managerial ability. It is the lack of psychological and spiritual ballast, and the ease with which he handles the terrifying technical and organizational machinery of our age, which makes this type go extremely far nowadays . . . This is their age; the Hitlers, the Himmlers we may get rid of, but the Speers, whatever happens to this particular special man, will long be with us.[40]

Alas, we don't need to look far to find such characters today. They abound in the sub-prime lending meltdown, the leveraged buyout destroyers of Wall Street that have been dubbed the "Barbarians at the Gate,"[41] or a few years ago with the "Smartest Guys in the Room" at Enron.[42] Even Bernard Madoff, the Wall Street veteran who is alleged to have perpetrated one of the largest frauds in the history of the financial world, is described by those who knew him as an ordinary, friendly person. Madoff's neighbors describe him as presenting an outward persona that masked his vices. "He appeared down-to-earth friendly and always greeted everyone by their first name."[43] But Madoff seems, from what I can tell, to be quite consciously corrupt. The manager that MacIntyre is describing is more like someone who worked for Madoff without asking questions. The

---

[40] Cited by Geoff Moore, "Re-Imagining the Morality of Management: A Modern Virtue Ethics Approach," *Business Ethics Quarterly* (2008). Moore is citing Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*. Duke University Press, 2001, p. 214, and Hauerwas is citing an April, 1944 article from *The Observer*.

[41] Bryan Burrough and John Helyar, *Barbarians at the Gate: The Fall of RJR Nabisco*. HarperCollins, 1990.

[42] Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind, *The Smartest Guys in the Room: The Amazing Rise and Scandalous Fall of Enron*. Portfolio, 2004.

[43] Robert Frank, et. al. "Fund Fraud Hits Big Names," *The Wall Street Journal*. December 13, 2008. http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122914169719104017.html

business world seems to provide a steady stream of these morally hollow, profit-driven characters.

MacIntyre draws from Max Weber's account[44] of the manager: an office executive, a career professional, appointed on the basis of certifiable qualifications and compensated accordingly, charged with managing a specific, limited area to accomplish a given purpose according to written policies and rules and applying those in an impersonal manner within a hierarchical structure while being subject to a hierarchical chain. In the capitalist system, the manager's given purpose is typically to increase profits, although the very same character could inhabit a government bureaucracy or a leadership role in a non-profit institution with a given goal of bringing about some measurable specified end. In any case, the manager's task is to organize a social group to accomplish a given end efficiently and effectively. As such, the manager that MacIntyre describes is an embodiment of the philosophy of emotivism, the notion that ends or purposes are preferences not subject to rational evaluation. The manager, understood this way, is an amoral character entirely unconcerned with and, in certain ways, unable to embody the virtues. The bureaucratic manager has no rational way to evaluate the purposes being pursued. Indeed, because of the denial that purposes are subject to rational evaluation, the danger is stronger. Without any rational way to guide organizational effectiveness, the manager's expertise is a perilous weapon. MacIntyre describes this character both to help his reader recognize the worthlessness and barbarism of the manager and to hold up a mirror. By reflecting on the emptiness of this character, MacIntyre hopes that his

[44] See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Translated by A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. New York: Free Press, 1947, especially 324ff.

reader will be inclined to turn away from the fragmentation and self-alienation of this form of life.

As MacIntyre's authorship unfolded, especially during the 1990s and this decade, he extended his criticism beyond the manager to focus on the "professional with expertise." As he once put it, "Ours is a culture dominated by experts, experts who profess to assist the rest of us, but who often instead make us their victims."[45] This tendency applies not only to managers, but also perhaps to professional philosophers, especially with regard to the tendency to turn questions about the good and the nature of things into intellectual puzzles formulated in a specialized technical jargon and disconnected from concrete human existence. Whether one's arena is corporate effectiveness (as with the manager) or philosophical problem-solving (as with the professional philosopher) each specialist claims expertise based on effective problem-solving-ability drawn from skilled analysis. The expert's analytic method, relative to each field, involves breaking things down to fix manageable problems.

In this process, one "problem" inevitably remains unaddressed: does human life have any integrated meaning or deeper purpose? Contemporary culture, that is, the culture of endless specialists, leaves us without any rational way to evaluate the various attempts to provide such a synthesis. Every effort to discern an integrated understanding about what makes for a good human life is reduced to individual preferences. Each

[45] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Theories of Natural Law in the Culture of Advanced Modernity," in *Common Truths: New Perspectives on Natural Law*. Edited by Edward B. McLean. ISI Books, 2000.

proposal about how to live well seems stymied by a complaint analogous to that of the smart-mouthed adolescent: "That's just your opinion."

Modern culture seems to offer enlightenment and freedom's sweet fragrance. Progress promises liberation – through education from the constraints of ignorance, by democracy from the strictures of class, by technology from the drudgery of labor, etc. But modernity's promise, that each can "live however one sees fit," turns out to be a Faustian bargain. The result is thousands of specialists offering to satisfy every conceivable consumer need. The promise of a culture of enlightenment devolves into a culture of consumption. Experts become particularly adept at marketing products and services that promise to soothe one's endless malaise; those experts rely on the cultivation of an ever-growing sense of dissatisfaction with life and an increased sense of need for the services of more experts. The modern self (detached, criterionless, disengaged) appears calm and neutral, but is ultimately left without rational resources for evaluating whether one particular way of life is better than another.

MacIntyre famously concludes *After Virtue* by proposing that we should take up a politics of local resistance. He calls for a new, perhaps very different, St. Benedict, that is, one who will help form small-scale communities where the tradition of the virtues might be sustained.

After awakening his reader to the profound contradictions within contemporary culture, MacIntyre's his next move is to propose that his reader imaginatively take up the role of the everyday plain person. MacIntyre wants to move his reader beyond this moment of unmasked awakening to a state where one is disposed to pursue answers, in

conversation with others, about matters of deep purpose: How shall we live? What makes for a good life? How can we shape the communities of which we are members to help make them humane and civil?

Let's focus for a moment on the character of the "everyday plain person". This character is "plain" in the sense that he or she is not a professional philosopher and not someone who has studied academic philosophy. This character is an "everyday person" in the sense that he or she is an individual with an everyday life who is engaged in concrete social practices with internal excellences, the pursuit of which promotes the cultivation of the virtues, allowing the possessor to take up the quest for life's deeper questions.[46]

Everyday plain persons may live without sensing a desire to reflect on questions of purpose and meaning. In this mode, which may extend for long periods, plain persons may seem unreflective and not philosophical. While existing in this unreflective state, the plain person unwittingly presumes the philosophical views embedded in the customs and culture in which one has been raised, perhaps in a fragmentary manner filled with unnoticed inconsistencies. In that context, the plain person may be confronted by a crisis that provokes deep questions. As MacIntyre writes,

> Someone who has believed the he was highly valued by his employers and colleagues is suddenly fired; someone proposed for membership of a club whose members were all, so he believed, close friends is blackballed. Or someone falls

[46] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues and Goods," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66:1 (Winter 1992) 3-7.

> in love and needs to know what the loved one *really* feels; someone falls out of love and needs to know how he or she can possibly have been so mistaken in the other.[47]

Confronted by such a crisis of meaning, the plain person finds himself or herself asking philosophical questions. Is it possible to distinguish appearance from reality? Can we know the thoughts and inner life of another? Can we reliably predict the future based on generalizations from the past? Faced with these sorts of questions, the plain person finds himself or herself on a quest. To take up that quest with seriousness, MacIntyre proposes that the plain person will need to withstand the temptation to dismiss that search as non-rational, thereby learning to use practical reason with others to uncover the order implicit yet actually present in the world while calling into question the norms espoused by one's contemporaries.

MacIntyre further suggests that taking up this quest will be particularly difficult for plain persons situated in the contemporary culture of advanced capitalism influenced by the enlightenment liberalism of modern Western society, and this for two reasons. On the one hand, we lack an institutional arena in which plain persons "are able to engage together in systematic reasoned debate designed to arrive at a rationally well-founded common mind."[48] On the other hand, if the plain person turns to philosophy – which might appear to be the discipline best suited to take up questions of deep purpose – one

[47] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist* 60:4 (October 1977) 453. This important essay has been republished in various collections.
[48] MacIntyre, "Some Enlightenment Projects Reconsidered," in *Ethics and Politics*, Cambridge, 2006, 185.

regrettably finds too often a deep split between what philosophers say (in their professional articles or in the seminar room) compared to what those same philosophers do as flesh-and-blood persons. Indeed, MacIntyre advances this not only as an indictment, but also as a confession of some of his own past shortcomings.[49]

MacIntyre wants his reader to take up the role of the everyday plain person who has become awakened to the importance of pursuing a quest for understanding. His strategy, then, is to *awaken* his reader to a profound inadequacy in the culture of consumption and the ethos of expertise, and then to *build up* in his reader those virtues that plain persons must possess in order to persist in the quest for understanding and practical wisdom.

Along the way, MacIntyre offers both an indictment of contemporary professionalized philosophy and a proposal for a way to re-conceive of what it means 1) individually to be a philosopher, and 2) communally to be a university. This theme,

[49] During his interview with Giovanna Borradori, when asked about his life prior to the publication of *After Virtue* and his apparent existential inquietude, he stated, "When I look back on my asserted beliefs during that period, I see my thinking as having been a clumsily patched together collection of fragments." Giovanna Borradori, in *The American Philosopher*, 142. This interview is included in *The MacIntyre Reader*, edited by Kelvin Knight, Notre Dame, 1998. In a personal conversation with Daniel McGlynn, (a neighbor of mine who was enrolled in one of MacIntyre's classes at the University of Notre Dame in the fall 2008 semester), I was told that Professor MacIntyre actively encouraged his students to challenge his positions. MacIntyre aimed to impress upon his students that he had benefited in the past from such challenges by students and colleagues, and that he had changed his position when he became convinced of shortcomings in previously held views. (Personal conversation with Daniel McGlynn, March 22, 2009.)

which is the focus of the final chapter of his 1989 Gifford Lectures[50], is central to MacIntyre's two most recent books.

In his 2006 book, *Edith Stein*, MacIntyre forges a new genre of philosophical writing that moves beyond both biography and the history of philosophy to explore the relationship between attitudes expressed in a philosopher's writing compared to the philosopher's life. What emerges from MacIntyre's text is an investigation of what it means to live a philosophical life. MacIntyre wants to dispose his reader to see that Stein's life, her flesh-and-blood existence, is far more philosophical than that of her better-known contemporaries, such as Martin Heidegger.

In his most recent book, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, which was published just a few months ago, MacIntyre criticizes both the modern research university and a widespread understanding of professional philosophy. At the modern research university, each academic discipline is treated as "autonomous and self-defining."[51] "In order to excel in any one particular discipline, one need in general know little or nothing about any of the others."[52] Prestige and influence at such universities most often attach to intensely and narrowly specialized research and scholarship, so in this context, it is imprudent to expend time learning a discipline other than one's own. The same is true of the discipline of philosophy, at least according to a widely held contemporary attitude. For example, Scott Soames has written that contemporary philosophy "has become an

[50] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1989. The final chapter is titled, "Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre."
[51] Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2009. 15.
[52] *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 16.

aggregate of related, but semi-independent investigations, very much like other academic disciplines."[53] As such, philosophy is "done by specialists primarily for other specialists."[54]

The rest of MacIntyre's recent book aims to offer an alternative by re-conceiving what it means to be a philosopher. Such a philosopher is not a specialist with an expertise in a narrow sub-discipline. Rather, the activity of such a philosopher is to cultivate a set of dispositions that allow one to address the philosophical questions faced by everyday plain persons. To excel in this practice, one must learn not only how to analyze arguments, but also how to understand, describe and evaluate the history of the debates that are integral to philosophy and which have been sustained through multiple generations. Further, philosophers need to recall that, although it is altogether appropriate for their work to become rigorous and for their discipline to develop a technical vocabulary, their enquiries "begin from and extend the enquiries of plain persons."[55] Philosophers should, according to MacIntyre's reconceived notion of what it means to be a philosopher, engage in their activities "for the common good" and while taking "the trouble to engage in sustained conversation with plain persons, so as not to lose sight of the relationship between their enquiries, no matter how sophisticated, and the questions initially posed by plain persons."[56]

---

[53] Soames, Soctt. *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton University Press, 2003, 2:463. Quoted by MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy. Universities*. 17-18.
[54] Soames, 2:463.
[55] *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 10.
[56] *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 11.

I recognize that my description of MacIntyre's "reconception" of the philosopher is quite compressed. Despite this, let me conclude by pointing to a project that MacIntyre has left unfinished.

Returning to the character of the manager, suppose we grant MacIntyre his criticisms of the bureaucratic manager, and suppose we follow his advice to take up a politics of local resistance. Further, suppose we find a new Benedict, and having retreated into small-scale communities, we are able to sustain the tradition of the virtues. In that situation, could we live without managers? It seems to me that the answer is "no". After all, even small-scale communities need someone to plan, lead, organize, monitor and correct the activities of those in the community.

I am willing to grant that small-scale communities are crucial as seedbeds of virtue and that a politics of local resistance is needed to withstand some of the destructive tendencies of global capitalism and the culture of consumption. However, it strikes me as unrealistic to think that such communities can exist without someone to organize (or manage) their activities. Further, it seems unrealistic and unhelpful to pursue a form of life purged of all large-scale projects. Entirely withdrawing into local communities seems to neglect crucial features of our humanity, especially our global interconnectedness and solidarity. For these reasons, I propose that we stand in need of a transformed conception of the manager, not as one who exercises bureaucratic rationality solely to effectively and efficiently accomplish a given end, but as one who cultivates the virtue of practical wisdom, including the ability to use reason to evaluate purposes by engaging in civic discourse while considering whether certain purposes are conducive to

a good life, and as one who conceives of one's task in terms of stewardship, that is, as one charged with caring for the goods of another or of the community. Hence, it seems to me that, for those of us who want to extend MacIntyre's project, one worthwhile way of doing so involves exploring what it would mean to re-conceive of the manager as a "wise steward."

Can Business Managers be Virtuous?: Comments on Gregory Beabout's *The Manager, the Everyday Plain Person, and the Philosopher*

Laurence Rohrer

Greg's description of MacIntyre's reconception of the philosopher, while condensed, is quite good. However, I would like to raise one concern about Greg's hopes to reconceive what it means to be a manager. Part of what I take MacIntyre to be doing in his reconception of philosophy is actually reclaiming what it meant to be a philosopher in the classical and medieval tradition, a tradition that has been largely abandoned by contemporary philosophers. However, this means that MacIntyre is able to reconcieve what it means to be a philosopher only because he can reach back into the previous tradition, which was in a comparatively better working order. In this tradition, the role of the philosopher, his virtues, were connected to a genuine practice, aimed at the human good. Within this vein I would characterize MacIntyre's reconception of philosophy more as a reclamation of the tradition in order to inform us about how to practice philosophy now. Indeed, I agree with Greg that MacIntyre is perhaps one of the only major philosophers living who actually embodies this practice.

However, these observations lead me to a rather more skeptical first glance at the project of reconceiving what it means to be a manager, although I certainly sympathize with Greg's desire to do so. In the case of the manager today, as Greg aptly describes, it is not clear that there is anything to reclaim that is analogous to the manner in which MacIntyre reclaims philosophy, or at least perhaps in any manner that would satisfy MacIntyre. Why do I say this?

The most troubling features of the managerial character today is that the mask it wears has decidedly positivistic function—it is a role that has a history and a narrative identity – but one that is uniquely both informed by and embedded in the larger development of advanced capitalism. The modern manager is a child of that tradition. However, as we are well aware, MacIntyre has thrown serious doubts on whether "business," broadly or narrowly conceived, is in fact even a practice in an Aristotelian sense. This leads me to wonder what, if anything that is genuinely virtuous there is to reclaim, in regard to the role of the manager, in order to reconceive what it means to be a manager, albeit in smaller communities. Could such a manager ever emerge in an advanced capitalist society, as long as this form remains the dominant engine of our culture and its activities? Perhaps in monastic orders, and cooperatives, we might come closer to the vision of a community in which Greg's new manager might emerge, but even today, such communities subsist largely by intersecting and doing business within the larger economy, an economy that is now global in scope. Where are we to run? Like Greg, I often despair as to how realistic MacIntyre's prescription, to retreat into smaller communities, really is. So, as Greg points out, we are stuck with managers – but could this role ever develop and change in the positive direction that we hope for, even in smaller communities, provided that such communities continue to operate within the larger context of capitalism?

While I am skeptical at first glance, I hope and pray that I am wrong and that my pessimism is misplaced. I, too, look for a new Benedict. Thus, I look forward to reading Greg's forthcoming book when it is published.

A Brief Response to Professor Rohrer's Commentary

Gregory R. Beabout

I'd like to thank Professor Rohrer for his comments and for this opportunity to say a bit more in response.

Professor Rohrer raises this concern: isn't there a significant disanalogy between MacIntyre's effort to reclaim what it means to be a philosopher and my proposal to re-conceive the character of the manager? Rather than stating that MacIntyre is "reconceiving" what it means to be a philosopher, isn't it more accurate to state that MacIntyre is "actually reclaiming what it meant to be a philosopher in the classical and medieval tradition, a tradition that has been largely abandoned by contemporary philosophers"? In contrast to this, when it comes to the character of the manager, it seems there is nothing to reclaim. Isn't the character of the manager thoroughly "informed by and embedded in the larger development of advanced capitalism," and this to such a degree that there is nothing "genuinely virtuous to reclaim"?

The task of my book has me responding to this challenge, and it takes me many chapters to do so. My response here certainly will be too brief, but I hope I can point to the direction of my response.

My central strategy relies on retrieving two ancient characters: the person of practical wisdom and the steward. Hence, the subtitle of my book is "*From Bureaucrat to Wise Steward*." Thus, an important part of my task involves retrieving the ancient character of the *phronimos*, i.e., the person of practical wisdom, especially from

Aristotle's philosophy, and another part involves retrieving the biblical notion of the steward. The *phronimos* is a person with experience and maturity who knows how to deliberate well, recognize when more information is needed, make good judgments, and carry out good decisions. The steward is one who has the privilege and responsibility of caring for the goods and property of another. Of course, I am not alone in calling attention to these ancient characters; there are many contemporary thinkers aiming to retrieve insights from Aristotle about *phronesis* and insights from the biblical tradition about stewardship. Part of my task involves bringing these to bear upon the character of the manager, and then considering how such a reconceived notion of the manager might be institutionalized, for example, in business education.

Professor Rohrer comments that MacIntyre has thrown serious doubts on whether business is a practice with goods internal to it. Isn't business simply aimed at an external good, such as profit maximization? I would like to note that this question, which arises out of MacIntyre's *After Virtue,* has inspired significant debate in the scholarly literature.[57] Without retracing this discussion, I would like to indicate three ways that moral philosophers might promote thoughtful reflection in this regard: 1) by helping call

[57] Kathryn Balstad Brewer, "Management as a Practice: A Response to Alasdair MacIntyre," *Journal of Business Ethics* June 1997 (16:8) p. 825. Paul du Gay, "Alasdair MacIntyre and the Christian Genealogy of Management Critique." *Cultural Values* 2:4 (1998) 421-44; Geoff Moore, "On the Implications of the Practice-Institution Distinction: MacIntyre and the Application of Modern Virtue Ethics to Business," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 12:1 (2002)19-32; Ron Beadle and Geoff Moore, "MacIntyre on Virtue and Organization," *Organization Studies* 27:3 (2006) 323-40; Laura Nash, "Whose Character? A Response to Mangham's `MacIntyre and the Manager'" *Organization* 2 (1995) 226-232. Dobson, J.: 1996, 'The Feminist Firm: a Comment', *Business Ethics Quarterly*, (6:2) pp.227-232 (sparking debate); A.C. Wicks, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 1996 (6:4) pp. 523-532, (responding to Dobson); Dobson, J.: 1997, 'MacIntyre's position on business: a response to Wicks', *Business Ethics Quarterly*, **7**(4), pp.125-132; A.C. Wicks, "On MacIntyre, Modernity and the Virtues: A Response to Dobson," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 1997 (7:4) 133-135. Also see volume 7:1 (2008) of the journal *Philosophy of Management*, which is devoted to the topic, "MacIntyre, Empirics and Organisation."

attention to the activities and functions that constitute and are integral to managing, and then considering what constitutes excellence in those activities and functions; 2) by drawing out the traits that one is required to acquire in order to excel in those activities and functions, and 3) by helping managers ask whether those traits are qualities of character that make for an excellent human life.

Professor Rohrer also comments that the reconceived notion of the manager that I intimate might emerge from "monastic orders" and "cooperatives." These certainly strike me as good starting points. It seems to me that it would be good if those who were charged with managing would look to excellent instances of such communities to learn how to plan, lead, organize, monitor, correct, and celebrate.

My project could be described as a work of "creative retrieval." In other words, while agreeing with much of MacIntyre's criticism of the manager, I am suggesting that the best way forward involves creatively retrieving elements from the past that have been pushed aside. The manager as bureaucrat is very much the product, not just of industrialization and capitalism, but also of print culture, especially as it reached its peak at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. To what extent is the culture of the "bureau," that is, the office or the desk, reaching a saturation point during the rapid shift that is occurring from print culture to electronic digitalization? When social authority based on the bureaucratic manager is pushed to the limits of its potential, what might it reverse into? The information age, with its more highly educated workforce, decentralized decision-making, continuous re-structuring, deeper awareness of the quest for work that is worthwhile, and increased desire to balance employment

with other parts of a meaningful human life, provides an opportunity for transforming the character of the manager, from bureaucrat toward wise steward.

The Plain Person and the Catholicity of Philosophy

Bryan R. Cross

In 1981 Alasdair MacIntyre published his famous work *After Virtue*.[58] This work opens with an invitation to imagine a catastrophe suffered by the natural sciences, a catastrophe in which laboratories are destroyed, physicists are lynched, libraries are burned, and the teaching of science is abolished. Some generations later, certain individuals attempt to revive science, but they have largely forgotten it. They recover the vocabulary of the sciences from the manuscripts they discover, and they use these rediscovered terms in reinstituted practices bearing the names 'physics,' 'chemistry,' 'biology,' and so on. But these persons do not fully understand the original meaning of the scientific terms they have rediscovered. They have only a "very partial knowledge" of the original meaning of each term. The underlying conceptual system in which these terms had their original context is entirely lost to this later generation. That however, is not the strangest aspect of the picture MacIntyre paints. What is disconcerting about this imaginary scenario is that these persons think that they are doing what scientists prior to the catastrophe did. They are oblivious to what they do not know. They are like children who are playing hospital, but, whereas children know that they are only *playing* hospital, these persons believe that their play is the real thing.

What is MacIntyre's purpose in laying out this imaginary world? He explains:

> The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder

[58] *After Virtue*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

> as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I described.[59]

The problem that MacIntyre describes is not limited to that subcategory within philosophy called ethics. How could it be? Ethics is intimately related to our philosophical conceptions of human nature, teleology, epistemology and metaphysics. Hence the problem that MacIntyre points to in *After Virtue* is a disorder within contemporary philosophical practice, especially as it is ordinarily conceived and practiced in the university.

Today we find widespread and even severe disagreement among philosophers concerning the answers to most philosophical questions. Regarding this, MacIntyre writes,

> "On most of the major issues that contemporary academic philosophers address – and it makes little difference whether their philosophical teachers were Wittgenstein, Quine, and Davidson or Husserl, Heidegger, and Derrida – there are currently two or more rival and competing views, giving expression to disagreements that run deep. There appears in almost all such cases to be no signs of any future resolution of such disagreements. Each contending party advances its own arguments, presents its own understanding of the relevant concepts, and responds to criticisms and objections in ways that satisfy its standards, but without

[59] *Ibid*, p. 2.

> providing those who disagree with anything like what they would take to be a sufficient reason for withdrawing from their own position."[60]

In many if not most cases the disagreements appear chronically irresolvable, without even an imaginable path toward resolution. These disagreements among philosophers have also contributed to the general disregard for the discipline of philosophy as a truth-discovering practice, both by those in other areas of academia and in the general public. This has also led to the marginalization of philosophy as an integrating science in the university and in society, and its *de facto* replacement by physics, biochemistry, neurophysiology, psychology and other similar sciences.[61] The chronic and irresolvable character of these disagreements has contributed over time to a shift in the conception of philosophy, even the self-conception of philosophy by philosophers, from a truth-discovering practice to an activity or set of activities unified by a much less clearly defined nature and end.

Concerning the difference between philosophy as a truth-discovering practice, and the contemporary conception of philosophy, Hilaire Belloc writes:

> "We have used in this connection the word "discovery," in connection with philosophy. It needs a line of explanation; for the modern world has

[60] *God, Philosophy, Universities*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

[61] In his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II referred to this marginalization of philosophy, writing, "It should also be borne in mind that the role of philosophy itself has changed in modern culture. From universal wisdom and learning, it has been gradually reduced to one of the many fields of human knowing; indeed in some ways it has been consigned to a wholly marginal role. Other forms of rationality have acquired an ever higher profile, making philosophical learning appear all the more peripheral. These forms of rationality are directed not towards the contemplation of truth and the search for the ultimate goal and meaning of life; but instead, as “instrumental reason”, they are directed—actually or potentially—towards the promotion of utilitarian ends, towards enjoyment or power." (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 47).

> come to use the term "philosophy" to mean something very different from its true meaning. Philosophy signifies primarily the love of knowledge – ultimate knowledge upon the ultimate realities; and, by extension, it especially signifies the solving of questions which the mind puts to itself relative to the most important subjects with which the mind can deal. Thus this word "discovery" is especially applicable to the philosophic function – the action of the mind when it succeeds in philosophical research. … It is the discovery of a new piece of reality; the establishment of a new certitude in the place of guesswork. … Now because many of these questions have seemed at first sight insoluble, there has arisen, from the beginnings of the philosophic discussion, a sort of imitation of philosophy which the later Greeks called "sophistry," and of which it is a fair definition to say that it is the art of making up systems which do not really solve problems and which are hardly intended to do so by their authors; which are, in a word, not discoveries, but merely guesses at the best, or at the worst a mass of verbiage. This kind of stuff, which antiquity early learned to separate from true philosophy (which is the search for reality and the definition of it when discovered) has flourished prodigiously … from the end of the 18th Century to the latter part of the 19th; and to it most modern educated men … still give the term philosophy today."[62]

In this respect, we might revise MacIntyre's imaginary scenario, and ask ourselves the following question: If the practice of philosophy had at some point in recent history been

[62] McNabb, Vincent. *The Catholic Church and Philosophy*. New York: MacMillan, 1927, p. ix.

replaced by sophistry, how would we know? What would be different? But I do not intend to answer that question here. Instead I want to focus on why philosophy cannot simply rest with widespread internal disagreements, and address the problem that underlies these seemingly irresolvable disagreements. In this paper I draw from MacIntyre's account of the plain person, and from a consideration of the implications of the catholicity of philosophy to present a means by which to overcome the seeming incommensurability of chronically irresolvable philosophical disagreements.

The Catholicity of Philosophy

Philosophy as a social practice distinct from sophistry not only seeks truth; it seeks agreement concerning the truth. The pursuit of agreement is itself part of the philosophical pursuit of truth. Of course charity bids us share what we have discovered. But the pursuit of agreement is intrinsic to the practice of philosophy. That is partly because our pursuit of philosophical truth is a social pursuit, not merely an individual pursuit. But the essential social dimension of the practice of philosophy is itself rooted in the very nature of what it is that the practice of philosophy pursues. Philosophy as a practice pursues the truths about the reality we share with each other, that is, the world in which we all live. The very nature of philosophy is to seek out truths about the big questions, not so much questions about particular times, particular places, particular causes, particular beings or particular persons, but truths about the nature and origin and end of time, causality, being, purpose, and person. MacIntyre points this out when he writes,

> "What is philosophical knowledge knowledge of? It is knowledge of Truth, the truth concerning "all that exists" and the complex relationships between the myriad of particular facts that comprise the universe."[63]
>
> "Human beings in every culture pose fundamental existential questions about the order of things, about their own nature, and about their place in the order of things. Every religion advances its own answers to those questions, such questions as "Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?"[64]

The universality of these questions entails that philosophy cannot rest in the merely provincial, the ephemeral or the merely individual or subjective. The very nature of philosophical questions entails that philosophy as a practice must ever seek to be universal. We can refer to this universality as the *catholicity* intrinsic to the practice of philosophy. The philosopher as such seeks answers to questions that are not limited only to him or to her, in his or her time or place or culture, but are the universal and perennial questions asked by human persons of all times, places, languages and cultures. That is why catholicity is intrinsic to philosophy; anything lacking catholicity is something less than philosophy, at least in philosophy's fullest and most mature expression.

---

[63] *God, Philosophy, Universities*, p. 145.

[64] *Ibid*, p. 165. In the last part of this excerpt, MacIntyre is quoting from the opening paragraph of *Fides et Ratio,* which reads: " Moreover, a cursory glance at ancient history shows clearly how in different parts of the world, with their different cultures, there arise at the same time the fundamental questions which pervade human life: *Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?* These are the questions which we find in the sacred writings of Israel, as also in the Veda and the Avesta; we find them in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, and in the preaching of Tirthankara and Buddha; they appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles, as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. They are questions which have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart."

This does not imply that we must begin our philosophical pursuit by first divesting ourselves of all our particularity or historical rootedness. On the contrary, argues MacIntyre, what we in all our particularity, our time, our place, our culture, our religion, our memories, our tradition, our concrete historical perspective, bring to the pursuit of philosophical truths is essential to the very success of that pursuit, because the particularity we bring with us to this inquiry is that through which and in which we find the universal answers to our philosophical questions.

Precisely because of philosophy's intrinsic catholicity, philosophers by the very nature of their practice seek agreement with other philosophers concerning the truths of philosophy. To refuse to seek agreement with other philosophers, or to rest content with seemingly irresolvable disagreements would be to deny the catholicity of philosophy. It would do so either by begging off philosophical questions altogether, or by performatively denying that there are any true answers to philosophical questions, or at least that those true answers are discoverable by us.

Hence philosophers as such cannot rest content with the present state of discord and disagreement within philosophy, but must pursue agreement. Yet merely plucking up our intellectual courage is not enough to overcome the chronic disagreement. We need to consider the underlying reasons for our internal disagreements, the fundamental points of disagreement explaining why the present disagreements seem irresolvable. This is one of

the tasks MacIntyre has taken up over the last thirty years. This is what has brought him to write about first principles and plain persons.[65]

The Plain Person as the Material Ground for the Catholicity of Philosophy

The catholicity of philosophy entails that its true answers be the answers to every human person's deepest questions about reality. But to reach such answers we must reason in a universal or catholic way. That is, the reasoning by which philosophy reaches these answers must be accessible, in principle, to every human person, and thus must begin with premises that are shared either explicitly or implicitly. Without shared premises, our arguments would beg the question from the point of view of those who do not share our premises. Hence we must find common ground, a universal common ground from which to reach conclusions accessible in principle to every human person.

Where do we find this common ground? We find it in what MacIntyre refers to as the plain person. He has referred to the plain person in multiple places, but here consider one example. In discussing the 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, MacIntyre writes:

> "The questions that philosophers ask are, the encyclical declares, questions that they first ask, not qua philosopher, but qua human being, qua plain person. They are the same questions as those asked by other plain persons and every plain person is potentially a philosopher. By asking those questions rigorously and systematically philosophers therefore, we may

[65] See, for example, his article titled "Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues and Goods," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. LXVI, No. 1., 3-19. See also "First Principles, Final Ends, Contemporary Issues," in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays*, Vol. 1, 143-178.

> infer, are to practice their trade, their craft, on behalf of all plain persons. They contribute to the common good by so doing, just as other plain persons, say carpenters or farmers, do. So philosophers owe it to other members of their community to speak and write in such a way that, so far as possible, what they say is accessible to those who are not academic philosophers. The philosopher shares with the plain non-philosophical or pre-philosophical person the need for and the search for truth: for the truths of everyday life, for the truths to be discovered by scientific research, for the truth about human goods and about the final human good."[66]

MacIntyre points out that the philosopher pursues the answers to philosophical questions not first as philosopher, but first as human being. The initial starting point of every philosophical inquiry is the common sense of the plain person, which MacIntyre also describes here as the pre-philosophical person. Catholicity could not be intrinsic to philosophy unless there were a shared common ground from which we reason. This shared common ground is also the shared resource by which seemingly irresolvable philosophical disagreements may in principle be resolved. The shared common ground is not only a shared capacity for reasoning, but also a shared body of knowledge acquired in the pre-philosophical period of every human life.

Regarding this relation of pre-philosophical knowledge to philosophy, Vincent McNabb writes,

[66] *God, Philosophy, Universities*, pp. 166-167.

> "We shall therefore define philosophy as *organised and supreme common sense*. By *common sense* we mean two things.; both [understood by] the people. First we mean "good sense," i.e. the plain view and certitude of the plain man-in-the-street. If any of the readers of this book do not know what this "good sense" is, they are plainly disqualified from reading further into its pages. Indeed they seem to qualify instead of psychological or medical treatment. Secondly, by *common sense* we also mean "common consent." Thank heavens, the majority of mankind (i.e. "the poor," as Lacordaire used to say) who have daily less and less material goods, still hold the bulk of the world's sound good sense. … When we have defined philosophy as organised, supreme common sense, we have not discredited but have further accredited common sense. If the few who think, or who think they think, find themselves in opposition to the man on plain matters of fact, it is not the many, but the few who must mend their thinking. Philosophy's first duty is to justify mankind's intuitions. In other words, the philosopher is not the advocate of the devil, but the guardian of the poor."[67]

This conception of the relation between the knowledge had by the plain person, and philosophy, is not widely held today. But it is very much in keeping with MacIntyre's understanding of the philosopher's relation to, even duty to, the plain person.

One objection to the claim that the common human experience of the plain person

[67] McNabb, Vincent. *The Catholic Church and Philosophy*. New York: MacMillan, 1927. pp. 3, 5-6.

is that common ground by which seemingly irresolvable philosophical disputes may be resolved, is that if there were such a common body of knowledge, the chronic and seemingly irresolvable philosophical disputes that have characterized the contemporary practice of philosophy would have been resolved. In short, the objection is that such a hypothesis oversimplifies, and is too facile. According to MacIntyre, the objection itself oversimplifies the situation, because it overlooks the possible ways in which persons can diverge from the body of knowledge possessed by the plain person, as I shall now explain.

The Plain Person and Resolution of the Unresolvable

We know that to avoid begging the question, the premises of our arguments must at least be plausible to our interlocutors. That is because in order to reason together, we need to have common ground from which to reason. Rational mutual comparison of differing philosophical claims requires shared recognition of standards by which these claims and positions are weighed against each other. The presence of seemingly irresolvable disagreements among contemporary philosophers calls into question both the catholicity of philosophy and the availability of common ground by which to resolve these disagreements. Let's consider the various contexts in which philosophical disagreements occur.

In his book *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre lays out four different theoretical contexts in which justification of an ethical or philosophical claim can be made. The first is that of the "genuinely uninstructed plain person." The second is that of the person who understands and shares a virtue-theoretical philosophical scheme

that provides an explanatory framework for the ethical principles already operative within the moral practice of plain persons.[68] The third type of context for philosophical justification, according to MacIntyre, is characterized by a "large degree of incommensurability." Debate at this third level can take place only by comparing comprehensive standpoints or paradigms.[69] Concerning this third type MacIntyre claims that "A mistake of much nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Thomism was to suppose that the task of rational justification against their Cartesian, Humean, or Kantian adversaries was of the second rather than of this third type."[70] In other words, nineteenth and twentieth century Thomists mistakenly assumed that Cartesians and Humeans and Kantians shared the same broader explanatory framework. This mistake resulted in a disconnect, and a seeming irrelevance of the Thomistic arguments. But the Nietzschean

[68] "[Q]uestions of rational justification may arise at four different levels. There is first of all that of the genuinely uninstructed plain person, posing the question "What is my good?" in a number of particularized ways, whose teacher has to assist him or her in the actualization of those potentialities which will carry such persons from their initial bare moral apprehensions to a discovery of the place of those apprehensions in a larger scheme. There is secondly the person who shares that larger scheme and is already able to articulate it in the Aristotelian terms which are its most adequate expression, so that demands for rational justification are framed in terms of a shared understanding of natural enquiry and a shared conception of first principles, even if what is at issue is on occasion their precise formulation. It was from within this kind of agreement that Aquinas conducted his debate with some rival Islamic, Jewish, and Latin Averroist positions. Such debate is necessarily very different from that between antagonists each of whom systematically rejects to some significant degree the other's first principles and conception of rational enquiry." (*Three Rival Versions*, pp. 145-146)

[69] *Ibid*, p. 146. MacIntyre writes: "It is … the claim to provide a standpoint which suffers from less incoherence, is more comprehensive and more resourceful, but especially resourceful in one particular way. For among those resources, so it is claimed, is an ability not only to identify as limitations, defects, and errors of the opposing view what are or ought to be taken to be limitations, defects, and errors in the light of the standards of the opposing view itself, but also to explain in precise and detailed terms what it is about the opposing view which engenders just these particular limitations, defects, and errors and also what it is about that view which must deprive it of the resources required for understanding, overcoming and correcting them. And at the same time it will be claimed that what is cogent, insightful, and true in that opposing view can be incorporated within one's own view, providing on occasion needed corrections of that view."

[70] *Ibid*, p. 146.

opponents were not even at this third level in relation to the Thomists. MacIntyre claims that the Nietzscheans represent a fourth, and most removed level of rational justification viz-a-viz Thomism. Of this he writes:

> "Yet against Nietzschean opponents it would not be enough to recognize this error. For it may well be the case, and it is in large part to Nietzsche himself that we are indebted for our understanding of this, that a philosophical or theological position may be so organized, both in its intellectual structures and in its institutionalized modes of presentation and enquiry that conversation with an opposing position may reveal that its adherents are systematically unable to recognize in it even those errors, defects, and limitations which ought to be recognized as such in the light of their own and its standards. When such a situation is encountered … then yet another task of a fourth kind is added to the work of rational justification. What has to be supplied is a cogent theoretical explanation of ideological blindness[.]"[71]

This fourth level differs from the third in the following respect: with the third the disagreeing parties can at least compare their overall explanatory systems against each other. There is a shared implicit rationality by which they both can evaluate their respective paradigms, by means of shared criteria that not only explain the shared data but also explain why the other paradigm or theory fails to explain the data sufficiently. But at the fourth level, there is no present shared criteria showing the superiority of the

[71] *Ibid*, pp. 146-147.

one and the inferiority of the other. This is a case of *prima facie* incommensurability. MacIntyre proposes that in such a case, instead of pointing to a shared standard by which to compare paradigms, we have to explain why those holding the opposing position are blind.

How is this to be done? Again, given the catholicity of philosophy, this explanation of blindness cannot be question-begging. It must be an account capable of being seen and understood by those whom we believe to be blind in some respect. In a passing phrase elsewhere discussing Aquinas on natural law, MacIntyre gives us an important clue as to how this may be done. He writes:

> "Aquinas … is speaking of a knowledge of the natural law which human beings have by nature and that, since we are all human beings after all, we can surely all judge equally of what he says, plain persons and philosophers or theologians alike. Consider then Aquinas's portrait of the plain person in relation to the precepts of the natural law. The plain person initially, *as plain child*, exhibits his or her knowledge of the principium of the natural law; which is the principium of practical reasoning, in the same way that he or she exhibits his or her knowledge of the principle of non-contradiction, that is to say, not in any ability to formulate the principle explicitly, but by showing a potentiality to do just that, in the way in which the truth of the principle is presupposed in a multiplicity of

particular practical judgments."[72]

MacIntyre refers to the plain person as initially a plain child, at least like a plain child. No human person begins philosophical enquiry, or sets off on some particular philosophical narrative or constructing some philosophical system, without first having been a plain person, and experienced childhood. And the humility requisite for acquiring the wisdom of philosophy in the fullness of its catholicity requires of every philosopher that he or she become as a little child, as it were, remembering the philosophical journey, and always connecting his or her intellectual movement in such a way that what was known with certainty to be good and true is retained.

This common ground in the plain person, or the plain child, provides the resource by which seemingly irresolvable philosophical disagreements can be resolved. Even though in the fourth level of rational justification, the disagreeing parties seem *prima facie* to have no common ground, they each retain memory of the process by which they themselves moved from the epistemic condition of plain person to their current epistemic philosophical position. They retain the memory of what they knew as plain children in a pre-philosophical state. So when faced with seemingly irresolvable philosophical disagreements, we find here, in principle, by way of memory, a way to move forward by first moving backward. The disputing parties can, in principle, engage in recollection, finding common ground in their former selves as plain persons, or even plain children. From that point they can trace forward their respective paths of philosophical development from that previously shared common ground, accessible to them by

[72] *Ibid*, pp. 135-136, emphasis mine.

recollection. By this mutual recollection they can trace forward their respective intellectual development until they arrive at the point in the past where their philosophical paths diverged regarding substantive philosophical claims. At this point of divergence, they can rationally evaluate their respective intellectual trajectory from shared common ground. Then, when one position has been shown to be preferable to the other, according to standards both parties shared at that time, it becomes clear that one party needs to retrace its steps, as it were, to the point where it took a wrong turn, and get back on the authentic path of philosophical development.

Notice that in this process of resolving the seemingly irresolvable disagreement the disagreeing parties are not presently addressing the present disagreement itself. Instead, they are presently addressing a diverging of their philosophical positions that took place at some point in the past. And they are presently evaluating this past divergence, from the shared viewpoint of their former selves as plain persons. In this way they can engage in what is analogous to the second or third level of rational justification. This mutual recognition and remembrance of our philosophical development from our prior plain-person-self to our present philosopher-self is a development we can mutually evaluate by recollection. And this provides a means, in principle, by which disagreement at the fourth level of rational justification can be resolved. Only by retrieving the common ground shared both by plain persons and by philosophers who each began their philosophizing as plain persons, can such disagreements be resolved.

Implicit in the claim that such disagreements are in principle resolvable in this way, is the notion that authentic philosophical development from the pre-philosophical

standpoint of the plain person cannot lead to contradictory or incommensurable positions. Why should we believe such a notion to be true? The shared starting point of the plain person includes a common body of beliefs acquired through common human experience, as well as a common conception of rationality. If that is the case, then whatever divergences are possible in authentic philosophical development are not ultimately contradictory, but in fact are different expressions of an underlying shared philosophy. Authentic philosophical development from the starting point of the plain person may lead to diversity of expressions of the implicit philosophy possessed by the plain person, but not to contradictions or incommensurable positions. To deny this is to deny the catholicity of philosophy, by denying that philosophical questions and their answers are universal. But the denial of the catholicity of philosophy is not intrinsic to the position of the plain person, nor can it be arrived at by authentic philosophical development from the starting point of the plain person.[73] The plain person, for MacIntyre, makes use of first principles that are not the result of arbitrary stipulation but are necessary preconditions for the very possibility of rational inquiry and ethical practice.[74] Denying the catholicity

[73] MacIntyre's description of each person's development in ethical understanking follows the pattern, distinguishing between genuine development and one that involves an intrinsic contradiction. He writes,"[T]he plain person is fundamentally a proto-Aristotelian. What is the force of fundamentally here? What it conveys can be expressed in three claims, first that every human being either lives out her or his life in a narrative form which is structured in terms of a *telos*, of virtues and of rules in an Aristotelian mode of life…. "I am also committed to holding that every human being is potentially a full-fledged and not merely a proto-Aristotelian and that the frustration of that potentiality is among his or her morally important characteristics. We should therefore expect to find, within those who have not been allowed to develop, or have not themselves allowed their lives to develop, an Aristotelian form, a crucial and irresolvable tension between that in them which is and that which is not, Aristotelian. The standard modern anti-Aristotelian self will be a particular kind of divided self, exhibiting the complexity so characteristic of and so prized by modernity." ("Plain Persons and Morality," American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, Vol.LXVI, No.1, pp.13-14).

[74] "Genuine first principles … can have a place only within a universe characterized in terms of certain determinate, fixed and unalterable ends, ends which provide a standard by reference to which our individual purposes, desires, interests, and decisions can be evaluated as well or badly

of philosophy is not a philosophical claim, but a skepticism equivalent to the abandonment of philosophy itself. Recovering the relationship of philosophy to its organic starting point in the plain person provides the resource to maintain the catholicity of philosophy and overcome the seemingly irresolvable disagreements currently challenging the legitimacy of philosophy as a truth-discovering practice.

directed." "First Principles, Final Ends, Contemporary Issues," in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays*, Vol. 1, p. 146.

Responsible Philosophy: Comments on Bryan Cross's *The Plain Person and the Catholicity of Philosophy*

Jeff Freelin

Bryan Cross, in his paper *The Plain Person and the Catholicity of Philosophy*, argues that contemporary philosophical practice is in disorder. Intractable disputes amongst philosophers lead to widespread and severe disagreements regarding most major philosophical questions, which in turn have led to a shift in the conception of philosophy (and even the self-conception of philosophy by its practitioners). This has resulted in the relegation of philosophy to a cultural 'back seat', so to speak, *vis a vis* other disciplines, most notably science. As a solution to this problem, Mr. Cross advocates an invocation of MacIntyre's 'plain person'. Roughly put, to resolve the seemingly irresolvable disagreements that philosophers have amongst themselves, we must reason 'in a universal way' from a shared body of knowledge already acquired 'in the pre-philosophical period of every human life' (Cross, p. 8). Finding this common ground (which includes reasoning that is accessible in principle to every human being from implicitly or explicitly shared ground principles) will allow philosophers to resolve disputes and find agreement on these fundamental questions. This will preserve the universal nature of the answers that philosophy as a discipline not only requires, but are entailed by the nature of philosophical questions themselves.

I will limit my comments on Mr. Cross's paper to three areas: 1) It may be that the problem of irresolvable disputes among the philosophical community is not as serious as it seems to be for two reasons. First, historically, philosophers have done good work in coming up with knowledge which has engendered general agreement. In these cases,

the subject-matter simply ceased to be the subject-matter of philosophy. Second, even under the category of modern philosophy, some areas seem to be more subject to Mr.Cross's worries than others. While ethics especially may be in disarray, other areas of philosophy enjoy a symbiotic relationship with other disciplines. For example, philosophy of mind and neurophysiology seem particularly well-suited to inform one another and to come to conclusions which display the general agreement about the truth that both philosophers and science are after. 2) Regarding ethics in particular, I have two worries about the use of the 'plain person' solution. First, if moral concepts are acquired by some combination of psychological conditioning, social conditioning, upbringing, and life-experience, then there is no guarantee that there *is* a 'plain person' perspective in which there are agreed-upon premises. Second, our pre-theoretic moral intuitions are in relevant ways hopelessly jumbled and at times contradictory themselves. If the job of philosophic inquiry is, in part, to correct these conflicting intuitions and to clarify concepts, even if there is agreement in a pre-philosophic state, must we do philosophy to get to *rational* agreement? If so, are we able to invoke the 'plain person' to resolve disputes? 3) Finally, as Mr. Cross alludes to in his paper (p. 2), the nature of these disputes may well be exacerbated by the way philosophy is done in a university setting. Perhaps one way to reach agreement (or, at least, greater agreement) is to look at the way philosophy is done professionally, and fix the system.

While I am sympathetic with Mr. Cross's concerns and in general agreement with his recommendations for resolving these intractable disputes within the philosophical community, I wonder whether the nature of these disputes is as grave as he takes them to be. Historically, what philosophers did under the name of 'philosophy' included topics

that we now include under the rubrics of physics, physiology, neurobiology, cosmology, astronomy, and so on. As philosophers discovered a shared body of (confirmed) knowledge, bits and pieces of philosophy 'fell off', so to speak, and became what we now call the sciences. We are in a period now in which psychology is attempting to break off from philosophy and become a science; while the attempt has, in my opinion, failed as of this time, we can still hold out hope that, with help from neurobiology (among other disciplines), psychology can escape philosophy and become a science on a par with physics, etc. The point here is that, if the above is correct, it becomes unsurprising that philosophy is riddled with seemingly irresolvable disputes, since philosophers are left with the questions that have not been answered to the satisfaction of all (or most) yet. Once these answers are achieved, the confirmation or disconfirmation of theories will no longer be the subject matter of philosophy, as there will be nothing left for philosophers to do. Philosophy is a despairing enterprise; on one account of what it is to do philosophy, the end of philosophy is to not have to do it anymore.

Further, some sub-disciplines in philosophy may be more subject to the 'intractable disagreement problem' than others. Philosophical ethics and philosophy of religion come to mind as areas in which we have widespread disagreement. It may well be that the invocation of the 'plain person' could be of some use here. However, other areas seem to be doing fairly well. Philosophers of mind particularly seem to take the discoveries of neurobiology seriously, and in so doing are making some kind of progress. I see this relationship as a symbiotic one; the role of philosophers is to raise questions and 'point the way', so to speak, for scientific research. Scientific research will also inform philosophic inquiry; if we have a theory of mind which is inconsistent with well-

confirmed neurobiological theories, then we might well say 'so much the worse' for the philosophical theory. We may be able here to distinguish between what we might call 'pure speculative philosophy' from 'scientific philosophy'. Pure speculative philosophy, with little or no input from science, must rely upon method. Here is where I think the 'plain person' can be informative; if we go back to our pre-philosophic state, and can agree upon a method of reasoning and some basic premises, then that would seem to help insure our conclusions as well as engender agreement.

In its application to the disputes in ethics, I have two worries regarding the 'plain person' solution. First, one could argue that our pre-theoretic moral concepts are cobbled together from psychological facts about ourselves (human nature?), psychological conditioning, social conditioning, and life-experience. Of course, one could see the above sentence as a philosophical claim, and thus not pre-theoretic at all. In any case, one wonders whether there even are any (pre-philosophic) moral concepts to which plain persons would agree. Even if there are such concepts, would we be able to qualify that agreement as rational? Second, our pre-theoretic ('common sense') moral concepts are often muddled, and sometimes result in contradictions. It has often been taken as the job of philosophy to clarify and codify concepts. If we must, in order to get moral philosophy 'off the ground', at the very least use philosophical inquiry to clarify our starting-point, are we already past the 'plain person'? One possible answer to this would be to say that, pre-philosophically, we must at least agree on methodology. Presumably this would require a commitment to rationality, or the notion of having reasons. Can we do even this pre-philosophically? The worry here is that in order to do meta-philosophy as Mr. Cross advocates, we must first agree upon a methodology (in this case,

presumably, reason or rational argumentation). However, there are still some questions that would need to be answered here in order to define our 'starting point' of the plain person. What if we have disagreements about the very nature of rationality (which have, of course, occurred in the literature)? Can we resort to the plain person to resolve these sorts of disputes?

As a final point, the cause of the seemingly intractable disputes may lie in the system under which professional philosophy is produced today. While there are some advantages of the system under which professional philosophers work today (e.g., peer-reviewed journals, and an increased speed and quality of communication between philosophers), there are disadvantages. Most professional philosophers work in a university setting in which copious work/research output is rewarded by advancement and job security. In this sense, then, professional philosophers (*qua* human beings) have reason to possibly pay less attention to the virtues of the practice of doing philosophy (and by extension, the goods internal to the practice of doing philosophy), and more attention to the goods external to the practice (job advancement, prestige, job security, and so on). It may be of little wonder that philosophy produced under such circumstances has less regard for the truth and more sophistry than it formerly did. Bluntly put, for contemporary philosophers, disagreement puts bread on the table. I do not mean to paint the practice of philosophy with too broad a brush; no doubt there are many (hopefully a vast majority) of philosophers that pay close attention and (dare I say) revere the quest for truth. But in order to put our house in order, we may need to look closely at the system under which philosophy is produced today. As MacIntyre noted, sometimes institutions that govern practices become corrupt. It is up to professional

philosophers today to re-dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of the goods that are internal and integral to the practice of philosophy. In this, I think Mr. Cross and I are in complete agreement.