After Virtue, 3rd edition: Outline and Commentary

Chapters 1-9: The Critique

An Introductory Scenario
Chapter 1, A Disquieting Suggestion

A. MacIntyre's opening scenario is taken from Walter M. Miller. Jr.'s science-fiction novel, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960). MacIntyre argues that contemporary philosophies, especially ethical philosophies, are equally blind to how they are using language and for similar reasons.

B. What is needed, then, is a narrative history of what happened, and a history that accounts for the changes in social practices and their accompanying ethical vocabularies.

Emotivism: How We Got Here
Chapter 2, The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism

A. MacIntyre begins with three examples of moral debates that suffer from incommensurable positions. Such debates have three basic problems:
1. Their rival premises make it difficult to come to any shared understanding that might change someone's mind.
2. Because they are presented in impersonal terms, the other positions accuse them of bad faith, of manipulation and hiding their true motives.
3. The diversity of moral vocabularies are products of history, and the meanings of terms have changed, so it is impossible to come to an understanding of the conflict without a sense of history.

B. Emotivism claims that all moral oughts ("This should be") are really just strongly held feelings or intuitions ("I approve of this."). This suffers from circular reasoning:
1. It is impossible to identify feelings of approval if they also have to explain the kind of approval in question.
2. There are differences between the way we use reason-giving utterances and the way we use utterances of simple preference.
3. The ways such utterances are used has to be accounted for, and emotivism would suggest that the meaning of moral utterances and their actual uses don't synch up well.

C. A history of emotivism shows why it was taken seriously at the turn of the twentieth-century, e.g. G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1902).
1. Moore's approach had three aspects not essential to each other:
   a. The non-natural properties of moral intuitions: they cannot be proven.
   b. Every action is evaluated by its consequences: a utilitarian calculus.
   c. The greatest goods are aesthetic experience and friendship.
2. Moore's milieu at Cambridge was rejecting a weak version of Christian social ethics.
3. The nature of their rejection and their moral approach made emotivism seem true.

D. The social conditions surrounding emotivism were a historic social decline:
1. An attempt to give genuine rational justification for ethical actions and judgments.
2. A breakdown in this attempt to provide impersonal standards.
3. An acceptance of the emotivist claim that such standards are really just feelings.

4. The analytical response is no more successful because it, too, is built on unjustifiable foundations.
5. The responses of Nietzsche and the existentialists suffer a similar fate.
6. They all concede the bad faith in Enlightenment attempts at ethical justification.
7. So, emotivism is true about a certain historical ethical incoherency.

Chapter 3, Emotivism: Social Content and Social Context

A. A moral philosophy is based upon a social context, and the social context of emotivism is one in which all social relations are manipulative. From an emotivist perspective, the social world cannot appeal to impersonal criteria—there are none. The social world can only be a meeting place of individual wills and competing desires.

B. The managerial world and its commitment to effectiveness is an example of this kind of social world. Max Weber's analysis of decisions is emblematic of this kind of reasoning, and he is unable to truly distinguish reasoning from power since all decisions are subjective and finally arbitrary.

C. MacIntyre appeals to socio-ethical characters to help explain how certain ideals shape our social content.
   1. Definition #1 (27): "They are a very special type of social role which places a certain kind of moral constraint on the personality of those who inhabit them in a way many other social roles do not."
   2. Definition #2 (28): "*Characters* are masks worn by moral philosophies. . . . *characters* merge what is usually thought to belong to the individual man or woman and what is usually thought to belong to social roles."
   3. Definition #3 (29): "A character is an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them. He furnishes them with a cultural and moral ideal. . . . Social type and psychological type are required to coincide. The *character* morally legitimates a mode of social existence."

D. Along with the Rich Aesthete, MacIntyre argues that the Manager and the Therapist represent two modern socio-ethical characters, though they need not garner universal consent to nonetheless be reflective of modern ideals.

E. The emotivist modern self, on the other hand, is a democratized self without set social context, deeply fluid and contingent, and without a narrative of moral commitments. This is because the emotivist self has lost the telos or end purpose that came with pre-modern social roles and obligations.

F. Taken together, the public character (i.e. the manager or therapist) and the personal emotivist self are a basic division in which individualism and collectivism are at continual odds. And MacIntyre thinks this has happened because of a particular history.

Discussion Questions
- Why does MacIntyre begin with a science-fiction story?
- Why does he hold that the history of ethics and social roles is a key to the problem?

- Do you find his analysis of emotivism convincing? Is it still a contemporary problem?
- Why does MacIntyre consider it a failure as a moral theory?
- Can you think of other socio-ethical characters that exemplify MacIntyre's point?

The Failure of Enlightenment Arguments
Chapter 4, The Predecessor Culture and the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality

A. Some might object that the views of ethical philosophy can have little influence on the culture at large. MacIntyre argues that in the Enlightenment, a Northern Protestant culture involving England, Scotland, Southern Germany, and the Netherlands did have such influence, which also shaped the philosophes of France, as well as Naples.

B. Its secularization is symbolized by the changing understanding of *moralis* (morality), which began roughly as character, then practice, and finally, only as sexual continence.

C. To trace the history of the breakdown of the Enlightenment project, MacIntyre examines in particular four thinkers, all who support in the main traditional (i.e. Christian) ethical practices, yet who tried to appeal to one aspect of human agency—the will, reason, or desires:
   1. *Kierkegaard*—Kierkegaard's *Either-Or* explores the meaning of a radical, ultimate choice that is neither aesthetic nor ethical in and of itself. It is a choice beyond reason because the authority behind the ethical itself is treated as transcending rationality.
   2. *Kant*—Rational ethics must be the same for all persons, and all must have the will to carry them out. They must be categorical imperatives that are judged by duty, not happiness, and they must possess internal consistency among themselves. Yet these tests for universal maxims do not always succeed. Trivial and immoral maxims can be formulated according to his criteria.
   3. *Diderot*—He tries to build an ethic based on human desires, even as he recognizes the need to adjudicate between rival desires.
   4. *Hume*—Hume's project is more detailed and sophisticated than Diderot's, yet he, too, wants to make human desires (sympathy) the basis of ethics, and he fails in this.

D. MacIntyre concludes that each system was built upon the failure of the other two faculties. Their failure to find a foundation in the human person is set against the background of loss of religion and the failure to share a public rationality open to all.

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

A. Each Enlightenment moralist failed because, though he sought to base his ethics on human nature, he did not account for the totality of the human person. While they each have recognized the unformed state of humans and of rules, they have each overlooked what humans can become, the teleological aspect of human becoming.

B. The reason, will, and desires are all necessary within a specific practice, for reason employs the rules and precepts to instruct and shape the will and desires towards a specific end. This Aristotelian understanding is expanded in theistic cultures, including a greater respect for the divine law, the telos being located in the afterlife, and so on. And such has a high view of human reason and its ability to comprehend the virtues and that necessary for ethical rationality.

C. This synthesis began to unravel with the Reformation critique of human reason and the judgment that reason is not capable of guiding the passions. A judgment as to telos was lost and with this, the remaining two components of unrealized human nature and ethical rules were strained in their attempts to go forward. Kant realized the potential problem and attempts to reintroduce a kind of teleological argument.

D. Trying to adopt an objective principle based on 'facts' alone lead to failure. A key historical change in the moral language of the 17th and 18th centuries meant that no longer could one offer valid inferences from *is* to *ought*.
   1. Certain terms (including roles) have built in assumptions about their good practice.
   2. Assuming ethical oughts without contexts leads to incoherence.
   3. The loss of a telos and of social roles within an ethical practice reduces ethical matters to that of individuals.
   4. Survivals from classical theism were hypothetical yet treated as categorical, and yet they ignored the contexts necessary to make them meaningful.
   5. Social-political and moral history is one history, and the person separated from them is a crippled individual. Indeed, the individual is in some sense the creation of this loss.

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

A. The modern attempts at rational ethics fail due to the inconsistency of their various elements:
   1. A sovereign self believes it is free from hierarchy's authority and teleology's direction.
   2. The new rules of morality are mostly dependent upon pre-modern assumptions of divine command, human purpose, and certain social practices.
   3. Its systems attempt a new set of categorical imperatives and a secular principle of teleology.

B. Utilitarianism failed because its calculus of the greatest happiness for the greatest number of persons was too vague to offer any real practical conclusions.
   1. J.S. Mill realized that human happiness is too varied for a simple calculus.
   2. Sidgwick and his followers had to admit that there is no basis for the calculus except varying moral intuitions/feelings.
   3. American pragmatism suffers from a similar emotivist failure.

C. Neo-Kantian attempts at a different categorical imperative (such as Alan Gewirth's) had to admit that the right to something is not the same as a desire for or benefit from something.
   1. A claim to benefiting from something doesn't itself show why such benefits should be universally extended to others.
   2. Rights have specific historical contexts, and are not easily transferable across contexts.
   3. Why should a particular moral agent be listened to without divine authority, hierarchy, or teleology?

D. Our contemporary moral experience is frustrating and incoherent, and this is seen in three phenomena:
   1. *The fiction of "natural" rights*: Every attempt to ground human rights on natural standards apart from divine command or specific practice has failed. Social utility and natural rights in particular contradict one another.
   2. *The politics of indignation*: Political discussion becomes shrill because there are no common bases for open consideration.

3. *The unmasking of one's ancestors*: Such a historic problem has meant that a practice of unmasking the bad faith of one's ancestors' ethics itself is historically traceable.

E. Out of MacIntyre's three moral characters (the aesthete, the therapist, and the manager), the manager best exemplifies the particular sociological fiction of effectiveness, which is itself not morally neutral.
   1. The claim to expertise is a sham given that long-term goals are not predictive of contingencies and short-term goals are too easily manipulated.
   2. The claim to knowledge of law-like generalizations is itself a social fiction deriving from the Enlightenment.

Discussion Questions
- Can you derive ethical principles without some sense of human character? Why and/or why not?
- Likewise, can one make ethical decisions without particular situations and contexts against which to judge them? Explain.
- Is MacIntyre correct to see modern (and now contemporary) Western ethics as being still dependent in some way on pre-modern (Jewish and Christian) ethics?
- Is there such a thing as natural human rights? Why does MacIntyre think not? Would you agree?
- Why do we still have a politics of indignation?

The Problem with Social Science as a Foundation for Ethics
Chapter 7, 'Fact', Explanation, and Expertise

A. Facts don't exist by themselves because all observations are theory-laden. Mere sense description is not possible without interpretation of some kind, even if it is revisable. The claims of empiricism and those of natural science actually don't go together comfortably because natural science is dependent upon interpretive exploration of the physical world.

B. The Enlightenment rejection of Aristotelian/Scholastic physical final causes led to an accompanying rejection of ethical final causes so that Enlightenment ethical theory tried, as did its natural science, to explain things via mechanistic causation.

C. W. V. Quine's standards for empirical science (refusal of intentions, a mappable calculus, repeatable prediction based upon limited causation) cannot be fulfilled by social science (or for that matter even by natural science in many circumstances).

D. The early philosophical Marx (of *Theses on Feuerbach*) understood that the manipulator's own actions are treated quite differently than the actions of the ones being manipulated.

E. Weber's flow model of bureaucratic efficiency is typical of the assumptions of both governments and corporations that they may organize human behavior on the pretext of value neutrality.

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

A. Social science hasn't (and can't) produce law-like predictions, yet in practice social scientists don't seem bothered by this. Do we have to conclude that social science has failed in its actual purpose?
   1. Social science has a high tolerance for counter-examples.
   2. It is unable to predict with certainty the scope of its generalizations.
   3. It is not quite subject to falsification in the same way that natural science is.

B. Machiavelli in his conception of *Fortuna* understood that our predictions on any given day could be overturned by unanticipated counter-examples. We should admit, then, that unpredictability is systematic:
   1. Conceptual innovation is itself unpredictable, as is the future of natural science. Some things can be explained in retrospect, but being explicable does not mean that it was predictable.
   2. Even our own human actions are often unpredictable. We can't guarantee the future decisions and actions of a future-self.
   3. The game-character of social life means that we often strive to operate in conditions of imperfect knowledge and take advantage of them as such, and we can't always know ahead of time what all the factors and players will be in any given scenario.
   4. Likewise, pure contingency cannot be accounted for ahead of time.

C. Nevertheless, there are some predictable elements in human life including behavior that humans normally schedule, statistical regularities, and the casual normality of nature and historic social conditions. Social science, then, is about the interaction between the predictable and unpredictable.

D. Human life is built about a measure of predictability and yet a desire for individuality. Social life, then, requires some degree of opaqueness. Our generalizations will always have to be qualified because of the constant arrival of counter-examples (which themselves won't be predictable counterfactuals).

E. Social science at its best will have the character of told proverbs (of wisdom literature). MacIntyre argues that predictive error is permanent but perhaps not equally distributed. In the same manner, organizational success requires flexibility and adaptability not airtight predictability. The best manager is really a good actor, pretending to expertise and control that do not actually exist.

Where Do We Go Next?
Chapter 9, Nietzsche or Aristotle?

A. The modern world is Weberian in its organizations and claims, including the Marxist world. Marxist ideology turned out to be one more example of what it critiqued—false social science and bad faith.

B. The example of *taboo* illustrates how a social ethic can have lost its reasons for existing. Nietzsche saw clearly that such had happened to the ethics of the Enlightenment, that modern language, such as that of the good, the right, and the obligatory had lost its original contexts. Likewise, Goffman's sociology of everyday life is a good example of the modern world's

playacting.

C. The choice between Aristotle and Nietzsche is partly because of the historic relationship each has to the Enlightenment project. Aristotle is the strongest version of what came before and was rejected, while Nietzsche is the obvious analysis of its failure at the end. What, then, if rather than just rules, we also needed all along to attend to character?

Discussion Questions
- Is social science (psychology, sociology, economic, etc.) true science? Explain.
- Should governments, organizations, and governments be organized around efficiency and expertise? Can they be?
- Should our ethics be based on social science and its predictions?
- Would an emphasis on the ethics of character change anything? If so, what?

Chapters 10-18: The Proposal

The History of Virtue Ethics
Chapter 10, The Virtues of Heroic Societies

A. Heroic societies educate morally through stories (epics, sagas, and cycles). The heroic society is one in which persons have given roles within kin and status groups, and they know the specific actions required for these roles.
   1. For example, *arête* meant excellence of any kind. In such a culture, courage and the fidelity in friendship were essential, as was the knowledge of what to do in a given circumstance.
   2. Fate and death were two great realities beyond one's control that one had to adjust to.
   3. Character and incident could not be conceived separately. Accountability and identity were tied together, as was the scope of one's choices within the framework given by social life.
   4. Thus, honor and shame were key aspects of maintaining those roles.
   5. In such a culture, exile and slavery were tantamount to death itself.

B. Therefore, the individual inhabits a given social role; character is the virtues necessary to fulfill that role; and this in a world where the human condition is fragile and dangerous, destined for eventual death.

C. Nietzsche's mistaken version of this heroic culture imported nineteenth-century views of aristocracy and individualism.

Chapter 11, The Virtues of Athens

A. Plato's writings show us than Athenian moral society had become incoherent, while the dramatists (e.g. Sophocles and Aeschylus) embody the tragedy of that incoherence, both within various practices and between various social groups, such as the kin group/household and the polis.

B. The virtues are not conceived in such a way as they allow their practitioner to question the social order. (e.g. Are its laws just?)

1. *Dikê* means the order of the universe by which success is uncovered, so translating *dikaiosune* as "just" can conceal its cosmic assumptions. [MacIntyre admits that the picture offered here is simpler than the historical reality.]
2. The world of friendship, companionship, and citizenship are essential to the classical Greek order in ways that are historically distant from us. The free man is praised for certain virtues that make this kind of life possible, though these can be at odds with one another in practice:
   a. *Sôphrosunê*—restraint of the aristocratic power
   b. *Polupragmosunê*—energy, daring, ingenuity
   c. *Hêsuchia*—peacefulness of spirit
   d. *Pleonexia*—acquisitiveness (an ancient vice)
3. The social order of the contest, the *agôn*, provides a social space where the philosophical, dramatic, and legal can be debated and tested.

C. The Sophists parallel the Homeric hero in that they value success and the acquisition of power within a particular city, which gives their teaching a kind of relativism, even when they adopt non-relative moral language in a particular city.

D. Some have thought the only way to answer such a position (i.e. Callicles) is to separate out duty to the good from one's desires, but Plato in holding the good of what we desire, refuses this and defends wisdom and a cosmic order.
1. Plato understands *dikaiosunê* as "the virtue of allocating each part of the soul its particular function and no other." Thus, he is committed to a vision of the virtues in which they cannot be at odds with one another, while the dramatists still portray the opposite tragedy of conflicting goods.
2. The dramatists' appeal to a god ends such conflict but does not resolve its incoherence.

E. The dramatists also exhibit a number of other aspects of the classical moral order:
1. The free man is what society takes him to be, yet he is also more than that.
2. Lives have a narrative form that can measure the success of its life.
3. The community also has a narrative that can be weighed.
4. Thus, the self transcends the polis and yet is accountable to it.

Chapter 12, Aristotle's Account of the Virtues

A. Given that Aristotle didn't think of himself as part of a tradition, but as correcting the misconceptions of his predecessors, can one appeal to a tradition of Aristotelianism? MacIntyre says we can.
1. A tradition develops by responding to problems as it encounters them, having some continuity with the past and some openness to an unanticipated future.
2. The *Nichomachean Ethics* are the classic text at the center of this tradition of inquiry.
3. Aristotle did assume that he was reflecting on the best practice of excellence in Athenian life.

B. *Eudaimonia* (blessedness, prosperity, flourishing) is what the person possessing the virtues is seeking to achieve, and the good is itself a kind of virtuous life and character.

C. The virtues are dispositions to act and to feel in a certain way, inclinations accompanied by a rationality that understands how and why one does so.

D. Aristotle was not terribly concerned with rules, though he did acknowledge that political laws should reflect a natural and universal justice.
1. Such a system is teleological but not consequential, for the laws are concerned with bringing about some good the community recognizes, and the codes of behavior a community sets out are concerned with the end the community is seeking.
2. Thus, a person could be deficient in the virtues, yet also violate the standard intended to protect and promote those virtues. Being good and acting well are interrelated.
3. That there are rational criteria and social presuppositions means that laws have to be interpreted when new situations arise. Thus, judgment is a necessity as to what is virtuous under unique circumstances.

E. *Phronesis* is the intellectual virtue that makes such judgment possible. Hence it is different both from the modern expert and from the modern (untrained) individual. The interrelationship of the virtues assumes a complex and interconnected measure.

F. Friendship involves a common pursuit of a good. It has a telos, rather than an emotional center. Does this require the strong assumption of the unity of the virtues? Perhaps not, yet it does remind us that Plato and Aristotle both saw conflict as a fault in a polis.
1. The social character of *phronesis* and the metaphysical end of humanity seem at odds, yet Aristotle held that true friendship and the true polis both need metaphysical contemplation as a goal.
2. That Aristotle and his culture were blind to the capabilities of non-Greeks and to the problems of slavery shows their ahistorical limitations.

G. Practical reasoning includes beliefs, circumstances, and actions, specifically the wants and goals of the agent; the major premise that such-and-such is a good; the minor premise that a particular circumstance is a case of that good; and the action taken.

H. Aristotle's ethics leave open three problems:
1. We cannot simply return to his system as if history has not happened, including the rejection of Aristotelian biology;
2. We now live in a post-polis world; can his approach apply to new political times and communities?
3. Aristotle fails to account for the ethical conflict between rival communities and within tragic confrontations.

Chapter 13, Medieval Aspects and Occasions

A. The medieval encounter with Aristotle began rather late, and was an attempt to solve some of its own ethical incoherencies.
1. Many medieval societies had just emerged and still valued their own heroic traditions.
2. Aristotle was encountered as part of the project to recover classical texts.
3. This was in spite of a stream of medieval culture that distrusted all classical learning.

B. Criticism of Aristotle, such as Abelard's, focused on what he omitted—the breaking of the divine law and the internal disposition of the will.

1. Medieval Christianity drew these particular emphases, not only from the New Testament, but also from Roman Stoicism.
2. Stoicism drops the telos for a uniform cosmic order and the doing of the good for its own sake. Likewise, it tries to address the law by suppressing the private self.
3. Stoicism has problems similar to those of modernity.

C. Some medieval thinkers struggled with a way of solving political incoherencies.
   1. John of Salisbury focused on the character of the statesman.
   2. Alan of Lille looked to pagan writers as resources for solutions to contemporary issues, such as negotiating the loyalties owed to local authorities and the universal Church.

D. MacIntyre uses the case of Henry II and Thomas Becket as an extended example of two great causes which each saw community as parsing the human good, unlike Henry VIII and Thomas More who were divided by an incompatible ethos.

E. Using Aristotle in this context called for recognizing virtues that Aristotle did not know:
   1. Charity and forgiveness; forgiveness is extended by the one offended.
   2. The meaning of the quest as a certain kind of life and telos.
   3. The virtues become the qualities needed to complete the quest.
   4. Aristotle's *eudaimonia* had no sense of the historical, while the medieval had begun to have such an ideal.
   5. Patience and purity stress the dangers of distraction and the necessity of endurance.

F. Aquinas was rather a unique figure in the period, and here MacIntyre questions his treatment of the virtues in reductive tables. A hierarchy is needed to work through these.

Discussion Questions
- Does it matter whether heroic societies actually existed in the form that the epics and sagas picture them?
- What do we appeal to when two good things are at odds with one another?
- What virtues do we hold up as most important for a successful life?
- Why does Aristotle see friendship as so necessary to the good life?
- Do the limitations of Aristotle's system make any application of it impossible?
- How similar is *phronesis* to the ancient notion of wisdom?
- How do the Christian notions of the charity, forgiveness, and the quest change the way one looks at virtue ethics?

Historically-Informed Virtue Theory
Chapter 14, The Nature of the Virtues

A. Extended Objection: There are too many varied conceptions of the virtues for there to be a singular tradition to which one can appeal.
   1. Homer's are that of the warrior; Aristotle's that of the gentleman; the New Testament praises humility and opens the virtues to slaves; Jane Austen stresses constancy and amiability, while Franklin looks to cleanliness, silence, and industry.

2. These differing lists also have differing theories as to why the virtues should be cultivated: Homer's is built around social roles; Aristotle's a definition of the good life; The New Testament looks to a supernatural end and purpose; Austen combines aspects of Aristotle and Christianity; Franklin has a utilitarian account.

3. MacIntyre will argue, nonetheless, that they all share a core concept of pursuing the good life.

B. MacIntyre holds, then, that there are three key components to a theory of the virtues: a practice, a narrative, and a tradition.

1. <u>Definition of practice</u>: "By a practice I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended" (187).

2. Extrinsic motivation versus intrinsic motivation; the later achieves goods that are endemic to the practice and which can only be achieved by participating in the practice.

3. To do this requires that the practice has standards of excellence and that practitioners submit to the best standards so far.

4. External goods tend to be the goods of competition, while internal goods, even if realized through competition, involve the good of the whole community.

C. <u>First and partial definition of virtue:</u> "*A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods*" (191).

1. Every practice requires a relationship of mutual submission and honest connection.

2. Truth-telling, trust, impersonal justice, and courage are each virtues necessary for the practice to flourish.

3. Practices flourish where their virtues are valued with a corresponding authority, respect for standards, the initiation into them, and so on.

4. Practices cannot be reduced to a set of skills, for they have a history of their development.

5. Neither should practices be reduced to the institutions which help make them possible.

6. Institutions can be corrupting influences, and a history of institutions and practices would requires a better sense of the virtues that were cultivated or undercut.

D. MacIntyre's model does not require Aristotle's biology and can account for the variety of practices in history. At the same time it is Aristotelian in three important ways:

1. It employs major Aristotelian measures: voluntariness, intellectual virtues and virtues of character, and natural abilities as related to passions and practical reasoning.

2. It brings in Aristotle's view of pleasure as opposed to the utility of Franklin, for the virtues must be practiced regardless of contingencies.

3. It brings together evaluation and complexity in a way that Aristotle would recognize.

E. Objection: What about evil practices?

1. MacIntyre admits they are a possibility. Practices are capable of corruption and are subject to moral criticism.

2. At the same time, they must be able to answer what the good life is.

3. A telos is needed to help adjudicate rival goods. (Patience is an example of a virtue that assumes a greater end goal.)

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

A. The conditions of modernity (both philosophical and sociological) work to undercut the unity of a life, and virtue must be a success in multiple areas of life to be more than a skill. Thus, there is a need for narrative to help hold together a life's aspects.

B. A history is needed to characterize the setting that shapes the way we view an individual agent's actions, and this requires some sense of the agent's beliefs about his actions. In the same way, short-term intentions have to be characterized in light of longer-term intentions.

C. One can't describe behavior well without intentions, beliefs, and setting, so narrative history is necessary to characterize an agent's intentions and their role in a certain setting. The analytical philosopher who tries to reduce actions to chains of other actions misses this.

D. "Purposes and speech acts require contexts." Conversation is a kind of narrative, and this is also true of a great many human transactions. They have beginnings, middles, and endings; transitions, reversals, and recognitions; digressions and subplots.

E. Louis Mink objects that narratives are told after the lived event, but this overlooks the meaning of our expected deaths, as well as how we embed our narratives within others' narratives and see our own life as parallel with that of other characters.
   1. Our lives are lived under constraints; we don't get to make up our lives' limits.
   2. An action is a moment in a history and in histories which require each other for meaning.

F. Sartre denies that our lives have an unified self, yet this ignores that even a disconnected list of events gestures towards a narrative, and that we conceive ourselves as characters *in medias res*. We don't know what will happen yet we pursue our lives towards a desired (or feared) telos.
   1. We explore the various possibilities towards that telos in the face of various unpredictable contingencies.
   2. One can't find one's identity in simple continuity or discontinuity. Myth and story gives us a stock of scripts, i.e. resources for existence.
   3. A narrative renders possible an account of one's life and places parts of it within others' stories. Personal identity needs narrative, accountability, and intelligibility.

G. <u>Second clarified definition of the virtues</u>: "The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good" (219).
   1. A quest needs some sense of a telos, but not one entirely worked out.
   2. The virtues help sustain the quest for the good life lived and help us in seeking self-knowledge.

3. I am morally constituted by the roles I play in others' lives and they in mine, including in the history of a community.

H. Traditions do not exist in isolation from large social traditions and their histories, and a living tradition must be in debate about the best pursuits of its goods/ends.
   1. The living tradition extends the search across generations and over a larger and larger history which makes its individuals' lives intelligible.
   2. Third clarified definition of the virtues: "The virtues find their point and purpose not only in sustaining those relationships necessary if a variety of goods internal to practices are to be achieved and not only in sustaining the form of an individual life in which that individual may seek out his or her good as the good of his or her whole life, but also in sustaining those traditions which provide both practices and individual lives with their necessary historical context" (223).
   3. This includes the virtue of knowing one's tradition well and of having a capacity for judgment within it.
   4. The tragic choice between rival goods is not the same as incommensurable moral languages.

Discussion Questions
- Do you find Macintyre's definition of a practice convincing?
- Can practices be evil? Why and/or why not?
- What about his first definition of a virtue? (191) What about his two subsequent developments? (219, 223)
- How important is the story we tell about our lives?
- Does a living tradition always develop and grow? Explain.
- Is there a clear relationship between the narrative of our lives and the tradition of which we are apart?

Practicing Virtue
Chapter 16, From the Virtues to Virtue and after Virtue

A. Modernity's pluralism threatens to submerge subcultures that still practice something like the virtues, yet art and life cannot entirely be separated, so our art still has aspects of the virtues present in them.
   1. A key shift was the movement of most productive work to outside the household.
   2. With the transformation of social life came the predominance of the aesthete and the bureaucratic manager.

B. With the loss of setting and narrative unity, ethical reflection reduced the virtues to either expressions of the natural passions and/or dispositions necessary to guard against the abuse of those passions. (In Aristotelian thought, the good is not private property but a shared good.)

C. David Hume represents part of the shift in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hume divided the natural and artificial virtues, simultaneously trying to act as if his chosen table of virtues should be obvious to all, while he also treated the virtues as simple feelings of approval or disapproval. (He was really just promoting the values of the Hanoverian ruling elite.)
   1. Hume shared with Kant and Diderot the loss of a conception of a shared good.
   2. Virtues are reduced to dispositions necessary to produce obedience to the rules.

3. The virtues increasingly become virtue singular or morality, which is accompanied by a Stoicism that practices the virtues for their own sake.
4. Samuel Johnson is a Christian version of this reduction.

D. Adam Smith, a Stoic and a deist, represents another form of this early modern loss.
   1. The Republican Jacobins represent yet another, which treats the public realm as an arena of negotiation even as they tried to return to Stoic Roman virtues—equality, fraternity, liberty, as well as patriotism and the family.
   2. Their example shows the problem with trying to impose a set of virtues upon a public that does not share them.

E. William Cobbett and Jane Austen represent yet a third set of contrasting responses in the early nineteenth century. Cobbett's social reformation project was not successful, while Austen sought critique on a smaller scale in the middle-class household economy.
   1. Austen brought together Christian and Aristotelian themes in an attempt to educate the passions, to promote self-knowledge, and to teach constancy, patience, and courage.
   2. She wrote ironic comedy because as a Christian she held to the eternal telos.

Chapter 17, Justice as a Virtue: Changing Conceptions

A. MacIntyre sets out the positions of A and B to model the contemporary incommensurability of modern moral positions.
   1. A holds that individual rights and private property are central to political and economic concerns.
   2. B holds that the needs of all classes of persons should be met equally, and that the redistribution of wealth is an acceptable means to accomplish this.

B. Rawls represents an academic version of B—"All social primary goods—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of those goods is to the advantage of the least favored."

C. Nozick represents an academic version of A—"The complete principle of distributive justice would say simply that a distribution is just if everyone is entitled to the holdings that they possess under the distribution."

D. Both positions overlook the notion of just desert within a shared or common good. Both have a liberal individualist view of society as an aggregate, and thus, do not recognize the shared task of the just society. (MacIntyre also holds that Nozick's history is simply wrong.)

E. Patriotism, in the face of wide-spread bureaucracy, cannot be practiced by the people as basic virtue. The tasks that need to be carried out by modern government are unable to be evaluated as a whole.

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

A. If Aristotle is not a possibility, then Nietzsche wins by default. But Nietzsche does not win.
    1. The *Űbermensch* (the superman) lacks relationships and is unable to enter into the goods pursues by communities.
    2. The own measure of his authority, the superman is really just one more facet of the incoherence of modernity.

B. MacIntyre anticipates objects from liberal individualism, from neo-Thomism, and from Marxists. Marxist history in particular undermines its own claims, resulting in just another Weberian bureaucracy. It must face its own tragedy.

C. <u>The famous last paragraph</u>: a new dark ages and the need for a "doubtless very different---St. Benedict" to give birth to new creative practices in the midst of incoherent and barbaric late modernity.

<u>Discussion Questions</u>
*   Is an approach like Austen's the best we can do in the modern world? Why or why not?
*   What do you think? Could A and B find any common ground from which to come to a rational position on taxation? Could either one change the other's mind?
*   Is MacIntyre correct to argue that unless something like Aristotle is correct, then Nietzsche is the only other road one can take?
*   What do you make of the last paragraph? What does he seem to be saying even now?

<u>Later Reflections</u> [Not required reading]

Chapter 19, Postscript to Second Edition (1984)

"<u>The Relationship of Philosophy to History</u>"—MacIntyre argues that the history of moral philosophy and the history of morality are intertwined just as the history of science and the history of the philosophy of science are interdependent, that analytical philosophy cannot claim to offer universal claims outside historical contexts and developments. The history of enquiry is built upon challenge and overcoming challenges, so that the best answer so far is the one that continues.

"<u>The Virtues and the Issue of Relativism</u>"—Clarifies that he meant the virtues, to qualify as such, must be satisfactory within practices, narratives, and traditions and not just in practices. All three stages are necessary. Members of traditions that continue to encounter rival traditions and overcome their objections are entitled to be accorded a large measure of trust that they will continue to do so.

"<u>The Relationship of Moral Philosophy to Theology</u>"—He admits his account in *After Virtue* needs expanding to deal with this theme.

Third Edition Prologue, *After Virtue* after a Quarter of a Century (2007)

McacIntyre discusses several points of development in his thought since *After Virtue*:

1. He became a Thomist as he saw that Aquinas was a better Aristotelian than Aristotle.
2. He realized the need for a metaphysical and a biology to ground his argument, the later which he explored in *Dependent Rational Animals*.
3. He argues that he is not guilty of nostalgia because he employs an historical argument. His method is dependent on the historicist changes to thought that happened in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
4. He insists that he is not a relativist because the tradition he upholds pursues truth and soundness, but it does recognize that there is no neutral space from which to make these claims.
5. He insists that rival traditions may only critique each other when one can understand the other tradition and why it cannot solve its own dilemmas.
6. He also argues that he is not a communitarian, as he has sometimes been charged with, and he thinks the conservative moralist has become another character in the modern social world.
7. He owns that he still owes much to Marxist thought, though he long ago saw its limitations and failures.