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The Uniqueness of *After Virtue* (or 'Against Hindsight')*

Abstract: The paper questions the extent to which MacIntyre's current ethical and political outlook should be traced to a project begun in *After Virtue*. It is argued that, instead, a critical break comes in 1985 with his adoption of a 'Thomistic Aristotelian' standpoint. *After Virtue*'s 'positive thesis', by contrast, is a distinct position in MacIntyre's intellectual journey, and the standpoint of *After Virtue* embodies substantial commitments not only in conflict with, but antithetical to, MacIntyre's later worldview—mostly clearly illustrated in the contrasting positions on moral conflict and tragedy.

0. Introduction

In an interview given in 1991 Alasdair MacIntyre remarked that "[f]rom 1977 onwards I have been engaged in a single project to which *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* are central" (Knight 1998, 269). On this account, the crucial point at which MacIntyre's current view emerges is 1977; the year in which, working on the final draft of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre had come to identify "in main outline the framework and central theses of my subsequent enquiries" (Knight 1998, 268).[1] This characterisation[2] is perhaps the most familiar view to seasoned readers of MacIntyre's work (and the enormous critical literature it has generated): the '*After Virtue* project' is an ongoing enquiry in which subsequent books are sequels to *After Virtue*.

In the introduction to the newly published *Ethics and Politics*, however,

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[1] In "Prologue to the Third Edition, *After Virtue* after a quarter of a century", published just after this paper was originally given, MacIntyre re-iterates his commitment to approximately this position. He writes: "I have as yet found no reason for abandoning the major contentions of *After Virtue* [. . .] although I have learned a great deal and supplemented and revised my thesis and arguments accordingly" (MacIntyre 2007, vii).

[2] With the publication date of the first edition of *After Virtue* 1981 likely substituted for 1977, the year MacIntyre finished the final draft.

MacIntyre states that 1985 is the earliest published date of an included essay because it marks the year he recognised his philosophical convictions as "those of a Thomistic Aristotelian, something that had initially surprised [him]" (MacIntyre 2006b, vii). Every essay selected gives expression to this standpoint, ranging across a number of subjects in morality and politics. The strong implication is that 1985, the year MacIntyre recognised his "intentions and commitments" (MacIntyre 2006b, xi) as those of a Thomistic Aristotelian, should be regarded as marking the beginning of his present and ongoing enquiries. To do so, however, risks making the status of *After Virtue* unclear.

One might seek to reconcile the two positions by simply identifying a shift of 'emphasis': the move from Aristotle to Aquinas, or the repudiation of *After Virtue*'s insistence that an account of the virtues may not presuppose a metaphysical biology, are minor refinements or modifications in MacIntyre's overall project. On such an account, 1985 simply marks the point at which previous 'errors', particularly with regard to Thomism, have been ironed out. In what follows, I argue that to do so would be a serious mistake, and a failure to appreciate the dramatic nature of MacIntyre's change of heart in 1985 obscures not only his current position, but also, and crucially, the unique position outlined in *After Virtue.*

Through an examination of the relevant texts, I shall develop two claims. Firstly, I question MacIntyre's own account from 1991 that *After Virtue* and post-1985 work shares the same 'framework and central theses'. In so doing, I argue that although 1977 marks an important date in one key respect, it is 1985 that marks another of no less (and perhaps far more) significance. Secondly, I provide support for the first claim by showing that *After Virtue*'s 'positive thesis' is a distinct position in MacIntyre's intellectual journey, and the 'standpoint' of *After Virtue* embodies substantial commitments not only in conflict with, but antithetical to, MacIntyre's later Thomist Aristotelianism—most clearly illustrated in the contrasting positions on moral conflict and tragedy. A defence of this second claim, in particular, necessarily involves a good deal of textual comparison, but an initial pointer might be found in MacIntyre's admission that the conversion to Thomism was 'surprising' to him. The juxtaposition of the two positions will point to several important reasons why MacIntyre, and his readers, had very good reason to be surprised in 1985. But I begin with the importance of 1977.

1. Towards *After Virtue*

In the original preface to *After Virtue,* MacIntyre explains that the book's central thesis emerges from a period of reflection upon both the inadequacies of his own earlier work in moral philosophy and from "a growing dissatisfaction with the conception of 'moral philosophy' as an independent and isolable area of enquiry" (MacIntyre 1981, ix). As is clear from his earliest work, MacIntyre has always understood moral philosophy in relation to history, sociology and anthropology, an understanding which revealed the existence of a variety of moral

practices, beliefs and conceptual schemes even as in doing so it put MacIntyre directly at odds with the then dominant academic practice of ruminating upon *the* concepts of morality ("Oxford armchair style" as MacIntyre puts it). It is also clear that MacIntyre has maintained a fairly constant belief that the moral, social and political condition of modernity is seriously degenerate in a variety of ways.[3] However, in the early 1970s MacIntyre began to have doubts about the possibility both of adequately defending this negative judgement, and of moving beyond it. As MacIntyre recently said: reflecting upon *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (MacIntyre 1971)—a collection of essays bringing together fourteen years of work evaluating and rejecting a number of then prominent ideological positions, whether psychoanalytic, Christian or Marxist, about human nature, history and politics—made him "painfully aware of how relatively little had been accomplished in that book" (MacIntyre 2006a, vii). MacIntyre was unable to move beyond its essentially negative conclusions because he could not adequately diagnose the "conceptual and historical roots of our moral and political condition" (vii). Abandoning his early 'piecemeal' approach as inadequate, MacIntyre tore up the manuscript for a book on moral philosophy he had been writing (viii).

The realisation that prompted the kind of argument that eventuated in *After Virtue* struck MacIntyre some time between his emigration to the United States in 1971 and 1977. During this period—a "period of sometimes painfully self-critical reflection" (Knight 1998, 268)—he came to see that every previous attempt to evaluate various moral beliefs, practices and concepts, and to trace their rise and fall, committed him unavoidably to the adoption of some or other distinctive evaluative standpoint. As he says, again in the preface to *After Virtue*: "I seemed to be asserting that the nature of moral community and moral judgement in distinctively modern societies was such that it was no longer possible to appeal to moral criteria in a way that had been possible in other times and places—*and* that this was a moral calamity! But to *what* could I be appealing, if my own analysis was correct?" (MacIntyre 2007, ix)

The important 1977 essay "Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative, and the philosophy of science" represents MacIntyre's 'eureka moment'. Drawing on Imre Lakatos and Thomas Kuhn's philosophy of science, he came to understand the inadequacy of his previous enquiries as inherent in the terms within which he had been trying to work. Rejecting these terms pushed MacIntyre towards the central thesis of *After Virtue*: that the moral and political dilemmas of the modern world are adequately explicable only from the point of view of an older 'Aristotelian' tradition, for they are in fact the consequence of the displacement and fragmentation of that tradition. Such a claim could be vindicated through "intelligible dramatic narratives which can claim historical truth" (MacIntyre 2006a, 22).

To the argument MacIntyre makes in *After Virtue* there are three aspects.

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[3] Jeffrey Stout, for example, identifies MacIntyre's central concerns since *A Short History of Ethics* (1967) as arising from the difficulty of finding an adequate 'point of view' from which to advance essentially the same rejection of liberal individualism (Stout 1989; see also Stout 1988).

The first is a claim that the language of morality in the modern world is in a state of grave disorder (MacIntyre 2007, 2); the second is that understanding this disorder requires a narrative history of the decline and fall of the language of morality; the third is that this narrative will be "informed by standards" and will not, therefore, be "an evaluatively neutral chronicle" (3). The form of the narrative of the whole of *After Virtue presupposes* "standards of achievement and failure, of order and disorder" (3) and these standards are those informed by the older 'Aristotelian' tradition. It is this third aspect of the argument of *After Virtue* that constitutes the most significant departure from MacIntyre's previous work.

It is quite true, therefore, that 1977 marks a decisive shift in MacIntyre's thought. The realisation that any vindicatory historical narrative will be written explicitly from a particular standpoint carries over into all of MacIntyre's later work, which is written from just such a standpoint. However, just because this is so it becomes crucially important to identify the precise character of the standpoint from which the narrative is written. It is my claim that once we do this, we notice that the differences between the 'Aristotelian' tradition in the case of *After Virtue*, and the Thomist tradition in the case of post-1985 work, are difference of kind, not merely differences of degree. It is to these differences that I now turn.

2. The Standpoint of *After Virtue*

In order to draw a meaningful contrast between two positions which (I claim) are different, we shall obviously have to be clear on each position. About MacIntyre's Thomist position it is easier to be clear. As well as the account of the Thomist tradition given in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (and, with refinements, in *Three Rival Versions*) there are several important papers in which MacIntyre clarifies the philosophical structure and commitments arising from a Thomist account of the moral life. In *After Virtue* things are less straight forward. Whilst it is true that a good deal of the 'positive' account is contained in chapters fourteen and fifteen ("The Nature of the Virtues", and "The Virtues, the Unity of a Life, and the Concept of a Tradition"), reading these in abstraction from the historical narrative can obscure several important elements of MacIntyre's overall account. In order to get clear about that account, I do not propose to focus, as others have done, on the relative merits of 'practice', 'narrative unity of a life' and 'tradition'. Instead, I aim to reconstruct the development of several key elements of the overall standpoint (not just the three-fold scheme) through an explication of their bases in the historical narrative.

I hope that two points will emerge. Firstly, that at three crucial stages MacIntyre draws upon resources in the history, and presents them as both integral to the tradition and a 'virtue' of that tradition, but then later (post-1985) recasts those same resources as either peripheral, incomplete, or mistaken from the point of view of the Thomist tradition. Secondly, the approach MacIntyre takes in *After Virtue*, in pursuing the expansive concept of the tradition of the virtues, is

to draw upon parts of the tradition from several historical eras. This has at least two further implications. One is that an account of the virtues given at one time may be subject to correction by the insights of a preceding or subsequent era. Another is that the tradition is 'built up', so to speak, from different elements in the narrative. The approach in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* is quite different. There, the historical narrative is presented such that the Thomist position, which receives its definitive statement in the writings of Aquinas, is to be defended and vindicated as a whole. Thus, in *After Virtue* the 'positive' position is much more a case of assembly, of drawing on various elements in a long history in order to reconstruct a core conception of the virtues; whereas in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and beyond the goal is to vindicate and articulate a concrete tradition against rivals past and present.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre often refers to his account of the virtues—his reconstruction of what he also calls a 'core conception of the virtues'—as an expression of the 'Aristotelian' tradition. However, this label is liable to mislead, because as MacIntyre also makes clear this core conception is "a complex concept, different parts of which derive from different stages in the development of the tradition [...] the concept itself in some sense embodies the history of which it is the outcome" (MacIntyre 2007, 186). Although this tradition of the virtues receives a crucial statement in Aristotle's work, it is far older than Aristotle and persists beyond him to the present day. Aristotle, though a central figure, is treated not as an individual theorist but "as the representative of a long tradition, as someone who articulates what a number of predecessors and successors also articulate with varying degrees of success" (146). Furthermore, as I shall show in due course, MacIntyre's reconstruction of a core conception of the virtues embodies substantial commitments antithetical to an Aristotelian view in a number of ways; and it is partly from the early, pre-Aristotelian, tradition, and partly from more 'modern' ideas, that these elements are drawn.

The search for a core conception in *After Virtue* begins in Homeric Greece, and it is this first crucial period that supplies the resources for the first stage of MacIntyre's account: the practice. In heroic societies a man is what he does. In such a society a man knows who he is by knowing his given role in a well-defined and highly determinate system of roles and statuses. In knowing this he knows also what he owes[4] and what is owed to him. "By performing actions of a particular kind in a particular situation a man gives warrant for judgement upon his virtues and vices; for the virtues just are those qualities which sustain a free man in his role and which manifest themselves in those actions which his role requires." (127) What is a virtue and what is not is determined easily, and the unity of the notion of a virtue resides in the concept of that which enables a man to discharge his role.

To cut a long (and important) story short, the Homeric hero's world, on MacIntyre's account, can be conceived of as something like a world organized only around practices: that is, what one ought to do is governed entirely by the role one plays in the particular practice within which one is engaged (and the virtues are qualities of character that allow one to discharge, and pursue

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[4] There is "no clear distinction between 'ought' and 'owe'", MacIntyre 1985, 122.

excellence in discharging, this role). The Homeric hero can only frame purposes at all within the framework of rules and precepts, and any question of choice arises *only* within the framework; for the framework itself cannot be chosen. Because morality and social structure are one and the same in heroic society (123), in the vocabulary available to Homer's characters there is "no way for them to view their own culture and society as if from the outside" (125).

The point, of course, is that a conception of virtue cast solely in terms of practices will *always* be insufficient for us now; for anyone not living as a Homeric character, a life informed by a conception of virtue derived solely from practices would be pervaded by constant conflict. Such a life would be continuously fractured by criterionless choices, because the acknowledgement of one allegiance over the rest would be arbitrary, and would entail the renunciation of conflicting but no more or less important allegiances. According to MacIntyre, it is Homer who, in a sense, first raises questions as to the good of a practice itself, and thus establishes the need to move beyond the moral horizon of one's roles in the pursuit of new ends and conceptions of ends. What is crucial, however, is that MacIntyre retains in his account the central importance of the link between roles and virtue that he derives from our Homeric inheritance. It is thus a historical, as well as a conceptual, conclusion that the notion of a practice to which this part of the history corresponds can be an initial, if partial, account of the core conception of the virtues (201).

The 'Aristotelian' contribution to the tradition of the virtues emerges from within the society which replaced the heroic society: the classical *polis*. Here the roles a person has, and their connexion to the virtues, continue to be a central condition of the social order; but in contrast to Homeric society these roles do not constitute the moral horizon of those who perform them. The specification of the virtues in the classical *polis*, and in particular the relationship between virtues, incorporated the scrutiny of different roles—it required specification in terms of the good for *man*. Aristotle (appearing at this key point in the history) gives the basic structure which expresses this specification (a scheme which survives from the classical world through the European Middle Ages until finally it is displaced by the Enlightenment project). This scheme is one within which there is a fundamental contrast between "man-as-he-happens-to-be", and "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-*telos*" (52). Through ethics we understand how to move from the former to the latter; precepts enjoining the virtues (and prohibiting the vices) instruct us how to realise our *telos* (52). It is through this three-fold teleological structure that the good for man is to be pursued and may be achieved. Man, in this scheme, is a 'functional' concept; the concept of a 'man' cannot be defined independently from the concept of a 'good man', because the criterion of someone's being a 'man' and being a 'good man' are not independent from each other (just as 'soldier' stood to 'good soldier', and 'king' to 'good king', in Homer). In Aristotle's own account, ethics is conceived of as a "science", which "presupposes his metaphysical biology" (162): human beings have a specific nature like all other species, such that we have certain aims and goals and we "move by nature towards a specific *telos*" (148). This part of

Aristotle MacIntyre completely rejects at the time of writing *After Virtue*. This rejection invites an alternative account of the *telos* of man.

This alternative account is to be partly found in the pre-Aristotelian standpoint (which, as we have seen, supplies the core conception of the virtues with the key concept of the practice); and it is found also in the tragic poetry in classical Athens. This turn to epic and tragedy (in preference to Aristotelian metaphysics) is motivated by a further crucial dissatisfaction MacIntyre has with the sort of account of the virtues Aristotle gives. Aristotle, MacIntyre says, delivers a view of *moral unity*. The problem, however, is that "Aristotle [. . .] simply offers too simple and too unified a view of the complexities of human good. If we look at the realities of Athenian society, let alone of Greek society as a whole or the rest of the ancient world, what we in fact find is a recognition of a diversity of values, of conflicts between goods, of the virtues not forming a simple, coherent, hierarchical unity." (157)[5]

MacIntyre's turn back to epic and tragedy is an attempt to find in that part of the tradition of the virtues resources to correct this (mistaken) tendency toward exaggerating moral coherence and unity *and* to preserve that part of Aristotle's own account which may not require it. So, for example, MacIntyre says that "on the unity of the virtues what [Aristotle] has to argue about the detailed variety in interrelationships between different virtues and vices does not seem to warrant anything like his own strong conclusion about the unity and inseparability of all the virtues in the character of the good man" (157). In fact, MacIntyre argues, it is from Plato that Aristotle inherits a "hostility to and denial of conflict either within the life of the individual good man or in that of the good city" (157). Conflict is evil, and "[c]ivil war is the worst of all evils". Because of this inheritance, "[f]or Aristotle, as for Plato, the good life for man is itself single and unitary, compounded by a hierarchy of goods" (157) Conflict is "the result of either flaws of character in individuals or of unintelligent political arrangements" (157).

What this denies, in part, is the "Homeric insight that tragic conflict is the essential human condition—the tragic hero on Aristotle's view fails because of his own flaw, not because the human condition is sometimes irremediably tragic" (157). It is clear that at the time of writing *After Virtue* MacIntyre sides with Homer (and, as we shall see, the tragedians) in this respect, and adopts a view which recognises the centrality of tragic conflict in the human condition.[6] He

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[5] MacIntyre makes this criticism by introducing it as one which "[a] spokesman for the modern liberal view [. . .] might argue with a good deal of cogency" and with which, he says, it is "perhaps [. . .] difficult to disagree" (MacIntyre 2007, 156–157). The modern liberal view MacIntyre has in mind is probably Isaiah Berlin's. The influence of Berlin, and MacIntyre's ambivalent relationship to his thought, is a fascinating undercurrent in *After Virtue*. Berlin is cited as the most "systematic and the most cogent" defender of the view that in the modern world there is not one 'vision of the world', but "a multiplicity of visions deriving from [an] irreducible plurality of values" (109). In a slightly different role again, he is used in several places as a 'modern' view to which MacIntyre can juxtapose his view of tragedy and the necessity of virtue to which the possibility of *true* tragedy gives rise. It is not clear, however, whether MacIntyre's view in *After Virtue* differs from Berlin as much as he may have suggested, see also Galston 1991, 72–75.

[6] This belief in the centrality of tragedy in the human condition I have cast in terms of a

believes, more generally and connectedly, that an understanding of the centrality of conflict in human life is a "source of human learning about and one important milieu of human practice of the virtues" (163) because "it is through conflict and sometimes only through conflict that we learn what our ends and purposes are" (164). MacIntyre further defends this conception by turning once again not to philosophy, but this time to the great rivals of Plato and Aristotle: the tragedians.

As we have already noted, the conception of a virtue, in Athens, became detached from that of a particular social role to become a question of good for a man (132–133). Yet significantly it was the tragedians, not the philosophers, who recognised the truth of *conflict* that this generates. Homeric values—the claims of kinship—survived in substantial form in fifth-century Athens, but conflict arose because these Homeric values of kin-loyalty no longer defined the moral horizon as they did for Homer's characters (132). So, for example, "Neoptolemus confronts Philoctetes in Sophocles' play in a way very different from that in which his father confronted Agamemnon in the *Iliad*. In Homer the question of honor is the question of what is due to a king; in Sophocles the question of honor has become the question of what is due to a man." (133)

In Sophocles, 'Homer's insight' is echoed in the tragedian response to the conflicts over the right conception of virtue, and the insights of tragedy are also retained in MacIntyre's reconstruction of a core conception of the virtues. MacIntyre stresses that his account of the virtues is formulated in terms of the multiplicity of goods, and as such it allows "for the possibility of tragic conflict" (201). Sophocles (especially in the *Antigone* and the *Philoctetes*) explores such rival allegiances to incompatible goods (conflicts that can be within a single person, as it was for Neoptolemus, as much as between them (179), as it was for Antigone and Creon) and in so doing confronts us with the possibility that the possession of one virtue can exclude the possession of some other virtue; that two genuine virtues can be temporarily at war with one another; and that the exercise of the virtue of doing what is required of one role can conflict with the exercise of other virtues (142). Sophocles shows that there are "crucial conflicts in which different virtues appear as making rival and incompatible claims upon us. But our situation is tragic in that we have to recognise the authority of both claims. There *is* an objective moral order, but our perceptions of it are such that we cannot bring rival moral truths into complete harmony with each other [. . .] [yet] to choose does not exempt me from the authority of the claim which I chose to go against." (143) This view of the world—that tragic conflicts between virtues, between claims, are possible—is a fundamental component of MacIntyre's core conception of the virtues. It is present, as we have seen, in much of what he draws from the earliest part of the tradition of the virtues, and it a view he defends against the most prominent figures in that tradition.

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worldview. I think that this is a survival into *After Virtue* of a view MacIntyre held throughout the '70s up until his adoption of the Thomist Aristotelian standpoint. One example, from the early '70s, illustrates the point nicely. In his review of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, MacIntyre said: "[w]e do not live in a universe of great moral coherence. Rawls' demand for overall coherence and homogeneity perhaps wins logical elegance at the cost of sacrificing our grasp of the tragic character of moral reality." (MacIntyre 1972, 334)

Recall that MacIntyre has rejected Aristotle's use of metaphysical biology in finding an account of the *telos* of man. Instead, MacIntyre turns to an earlier part of the tradition of the virtues, and this is additionally justified, he says, because "[t]he use of 'man' as a functional concept is far older than Aristotle and it does not initially derive from Aristotle's metaphysical biology. It is rooted in the forms of social life to which the theorists of the classical tradition give expression. For according to this tradition to be a man is to fill a set of roles each of which has its own point and purpose: member of a family, citizen, soldier, philosopher, servant of God." (58–59) Furthermore, Aristotle stands accused not only of lacking a convincing account of *telos*, but of lacking any sense of "the specifically historical" (147). This second problem not only "debars Aristotle from recognising his own thought as part of a tradition, it also severely limits what he can say about narrative" (147). So it is both because of the need to furnish his account with an alternative *telos* for man, and because of his desire to integrate the defensible part of Aristotle with "the kind of thesis about the relationship between virtues and forms of narrative which [MacIntyre argues] is present in epic and tragic writers" (147) that he turns to Homer and the tragedians. The conjunction of the importance of one's role and the importance of narrative gives rise to the second stage of MacIntyre's core conception: the narrative unity of a life.

The second stage of MacIntyre's reconstruction expresses the need to give an account of the good for *man*; a problem which itself corresponds to the conflicts we noted in classical Athens. A vital feature of such an account will, MacIntyre argues, be the ability to account for the unity of a virtue in a whole life. As we have seen, MacIntyre has rejected Aristotelian metaphysical biology as the source of such an account; instead, he pursues an understanding of the narrative of a life conceived of as a unity; "which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end" (205). "I am what I may justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from my birth to my death." (217) The status of this distinctive attempt to account for the unity of a virtue (and thus, a central part of the answer to the question "what is the good for *man*") is unique to *After Virtue*. It is also, in contrast to the insights gleaned from epic and tragedy, in part an explicitly 'modern' view[7]; and it too, again in contrast with the Aristotelian metaphysical demand, can allow for the possibility of conflict and tragedy of a particular sort.

MacIntyre's view in *After Virtue* is that narrative is in fact *basic* and *essential* for the characterisation of human actions (208); for "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (216). Intelligibility in human transactions requires narrative, for we cannot "characterize behavior independently of intentions, and we cannot characterize intentions independently of the settings which make those intentions intelligible both to agents themselves and to others" (206). Furthermore, we allocate human transactions— conversations, battles, games—to genres just as we do literary narratives. Using such words as 'tragic', or 'comic' is "not marginal to such evaluations" (211). It is very much to the point to enquire to which genre a life belongs, or the history

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[7] It draws on, for example, the work of Hardy 1968.

of a life belongs, because to do so is to ask what "account of their history will be both true and intelligible" (213). Life is an "enacted dramatic narrative" within which characters are also authors (215).

Lived narratives naturally have a teleological character, for "[w]e live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future" (215). But this teleology coexists with constrained unpredictability, for "like characters in a fictional narrative we do not know what will happen next [. . .] it is always that case that there are constraints on how the story can continue *and* that within those constraints there are indefinitely many ways that it can continue" (216).[8]

The move from this teleology to the narrative *unity* of a life is achieved by asking, of a life, "what is good for me?", and to answer that question (as we have noted) one must know "what is the good for man?" A moral life is unified as a narrative *quest* for this good.[9] The good life conceived of as a quest in this way (where relevant virtues include not only those that sustain practices, but those enabling people to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions, encountered on their quest) admits the possibility of tragedy as *built into* one's predicament in a way Aristotle (and certainly Aquinas) did not; for one cannot always know if one will encounter tragedy, and one is constrained by in a tragic situation if it does.

Each individual quest for the good is conducted by persons who are differently circumstanced; but also by those who are "bearers of a particular social identity; so the good for me has to be 'the good for one who inhabits these roles" (MacIntyre 1985, 220). The individual's quest for his or her good is conducted, and is defined, within the "traditions of which the individual's life is a part, and this is true of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life" (222). Traditions begin as one's social identity—the historically understood 'roles' I have (son or daughter, cousin or uncle, citizen of this or that city, member of this or that guild, profession, clan, tribe, or city). One's moral life has a starting point, it has, "debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations" (220, all examples MacIntyre's) that transcend the self. "I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognise it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition." (221) A tradition is the history of a practice or practices, a history through which a practice or practices is transmitted and reshaped. These histories in turn must exist within larger 'social traditions' (221).

There is a particular danger here of projecting back onto the closing chapters

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[8] An important part of this 'constrained unpredictability' derives from the fact that one narrative can be embedded in another, and one person may be a character in a number of narratives at once (MacIntyre 2007, 213–214).

[9] In a quest, one has to have a partial conception of the object of the quest, but it is not the search for something clearly characterised, "as miners search for gold or geologists for oil" (MacIntyre 2007, 219). A quest is always "an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge" (219). Thus, the good in a life and its relationship to the object of the quest has the same simultaneous means/ends relationship that virtues have within practices; and this explains MacIntyre's otherwise puzzling conclusion that "the good life for man is the life spent seeking the good life for man" (219).

of *After Virtue* MacIntyre's later notion of tradition. In *After Virtue* the notion
had not yet acquired the meaning MacIntyre would subsequently impart to it.
Whilst tradition is the final context for the three-part core conception of the
virtues, and embodies the shared quest for *the* goods of life; in an important
sense the notion is also minimally conceived of as a source of rationally underde-
termined authority[10] that puts the inevitable conflicts between incommensurable
goods being pursued within that tradition to 'creative' use in pursuing the good
of that tradition. This conception of tradition, and the role it plays in the
account, is very different to the notion of a rationally constituted tradition of
enquiry that MacIntyre develops in later work.

Let me now draw together the various strands of the positive account we
have examined. In *After Virtue,* "the conception of good has to be expounded in
terms of such notions as those of a practice, of the narrative unity of a human
life and of a moral tradition [...] and with them the *only* grounds for the
authority of laws and virtues" (258, my emphasis). This three part grounding of
the authority of laws and virtues must account for the existence, at each stage,
of "rival and contingently incompatible goods which make claims to our practical
allegiance [. . .] [and] some determinate conception of *the* goods of life for man"
(221).

MacIntyre's conception of the good life conceived of as a quest (in which
relevant virtues include not only those that sustain practices, but those that
enable people to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions,
encountered on their quest and within the moral tradition through which they
collectively pursue common goods) implies in its own terms the ever-present
possibility of tragedy. As he says, "[q]uests sometimes fail, are frustrated, aban-
doned or dissipated into distractions and human lives may in all these ways also
fail" (219). Of course, many of these failures might stem from inadequate virtue
on the part of individuals (or traditions), but not all failures can be traced to this
source. As we saw in MacIntyre's disagreement with Aristotle, "what constitutes
[. . .] *tragic* opposition and conflict is the conflict of good with good embodied
in their encounter prior to and independent of *any* individual characteristics"
(163). In a tragic choice between rival goods, "*both* of the alternative courses of
action which confront the individual have to be recognised as leading to some
authentic and substantial good. By choosing one I do nothing to diminish or
derogate from the claim upon me of the other; and therefore, whatever I do, I
shall have left undone what I ought to have done." (224)

MacIntyre's core conception of the virtues is the expression of a worldview
which holds that tragic dilemmas are possible, and because they *are* possible

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[10] In a Postscript to "Social Science Methodology as Ideology", first published in 1979, Mac-
Intyre introduces the idea of the 'social tradition' specifically in order to counter the implication
that he endorses "a Heraclitean view of social life in which conflict, rivalry and strife are the
fundamental features of the social universe" (Knight 1998, 67). "The most important social
conflicts occur within traditions as well as between them [. . .] Such conflicts are conflicts be-
tween the various incommensurable goods which men within a particular tradition may pursue.
A viable tradition is one which holds together conflicting social, political and even metaphys-
ical claims in a creative way." (Knight 1998, 67) Crucially, here, "[t]he activities which inform
a tradition are *always* rationally underdetermined" (67, my emphasis).

the virtues have an additional point and purpose. This is because there are different ways to live through a tragic confrontation of good with good (224). Independently of the choice between the alternatives that the tragic protagonist makes (a choice in which there is, *ex hypothesi*, "no *right* choice to make"), they may perform their moral task "better or worse". The tragic protagonist "may behave heroically or unheroically, generously or ungenerously, gracefully or gracelessly, prudently or imprudently" (224). And, as we have seen, the virtues are essentially tied to the practices, roles, and the tradition of which the individual is the bearer; so to perform the task better or worse "will be to do both what is better for him or her *qua* individual and *qua* parent or child or *qua* citizen or member of a profession, or perhaps *qua* some or all of these" (224). What is better or worse "depends upon the character of that intelligible narrative which provides X's life with its unity" (225); so without the virtues, and crucially without the central notion of the narrative order of a human life, we shall not attain the understanding necessary to live through tragic conflicts. But if we do have the virtues, even in situations "defined by the necessity of tragic, dilemmatic choice", virtuous agents will still be able "to pursue both their own good and the good of the tradition of which they are the bearers" (223).

3. Aquinas in *After Virtue*

Having set out the key features of the distinctive position pursued in *After Virtue*, we are now in a position to consider the relationship between this view and those of Aquinas. Aquinas, as we know, becomes *the* central figure around which all of MacIntyre's later philosophy revolves in one way or another; but in *After Virtue*, just like Kant, Aquinas is given short shrift, and his contribution is dismissed in three pages (Kant gets nearly four). However, it is also true that specifically in the case of Aquinas, MacIntyre has explicitly recanted his judgement in *After Virtue*. In the introduction to *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre explains that he has come to recognise "more than one error in *After Virtue,* although not in any of its main contentions. I now, for example, think that my earlier criticism of Aquinas' theses on the unity of the virtues was simply mistaken and due in part to a misreading of Aquinas." (MacIntyre 1988, x) Perhaps, therefore, the discussion of Aquinas in *After Virtue* is explicable merely as a case of error subsequently amended.

In fact, as the discussion of the paper has so far indicated, Aquinas' position on the unity of the virtues *must* be dismissed from the point of view of the narrative of *After Virtue*. This is due not to a mistaken reading but to an accurate reading *from the standpoint of After Virtue*. The account of the virtues which I have so far presented is, at its core, incompatible with Aquinas' account of the unity of virtues in particular and his moral theological structure in general, and this explains why MacIntyre felt it necessary to dismiss Aquinas so quickly. Drawing on the tradition of the virtues that he develops in *After Virtue* (and the criticisms of Aristotle that we have already noted), MacIntyre raises two questions about Aquinas' treatment of the virtues; the first about his overall

approach—his "classificatory scheme"—the second, following on from this, about his consequent denial of the possibility of moral conflict.

In the first case, the criticism of Aquinas is used to illustrate a central feature of MacIntyre's social teleological reconstruction of the virtues: that the account *must* allow for a significant degree of 'open-endedness' as regards both the acquisition of, and our understanding of the relationship between, the virtues. We must be wary of Aquinas' approach precisely because there is "necessarily a kind of empirical untidiness in the way that our knowledge of the virtues is ordered, more particularly in respect of how the practice of each relates to the practice of all the others" (MacIntyre 2007, 178). Furthermore, we cannot accept the theoretical backing for Aquinas' scheme, MacIntyre thinks, because one part is "a reiteration of Aristotelian cosmology and the other is specifically Christian and theological" (179). Finally, Aquinas claims that "if we encounter genuine moral conflict, it is always because of some previous wrong action of our own." But, as we would expect in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre cannot accept this conclusion. "Clearly", he says, "this is *one* source of conflict. But will it cover Antigone and Creon, Odysseus and Philoctetes, or even Oedipus? Will it cover Henry II and Thomas Becket?" (179) MacIntyre thinks not, in *After Virtue,* and this in itself is reason to doubt Aquinas' account.

Clearly the time has come to turn to the Aquinas of MacIntyre's later writings. We shall see that because MacIntyre has changed the standpoint from which Aquinas' thought is evaluated, what had previously appeared as a fault now appears as a virtue of his account. Thus, it is Aquinas' unique genius to be able to synthesize Aristotelian metaphysics and Augustinian theology; a synthesis in whose fecundity and intellectual power MacIntyre locates the rational superiority of the Thomist tradition over all other traditions with which it has come into conflict. This rational superiority is justified in no small part by the unity of the overall Thomist scheme; a rational unity which renders the notion of a genuine moral conflict not the fault of the agent not only impossible, but absurd.

4. Aquinas after '85

I shall try to set out, in a necessarily truncated way, a picture of what MacIntyre takes to be the defensible Thomist position with regard to the virtues, natural law, and the relationship between natural law and practical rationality. Most importantly, Thomism is a unified scheme, so that the position MacIntyre espouses as regards moral conflict is itself derived from an overall teleological framework of unitary understanding and enquiry. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre emphasizes that "Aquinas' work of philosophical and theological construction is systematic, in a way and to a degree which surpasses even Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine. It is therefore important when one treats of Aquinas' developed views on particular topics or issues [...] not to abstract these in piecemeal fashion and treat them in too great isolation from the context supplied by his overall point of view and method." (MacIntyre 1988, 164)

"Aquinas' work," MacIntyre argues "is informed by an overriding unity of purpose, expressed both in his conception of the ultimate unity of good and in the way he writes about it" (166).

As MacIntyre makes clear in "First Principles, Final Ends", the structure of the Thomist account presupposes an understanding of the universe "in terms of certain determinate, fixed and unalterable ends" (MacIntyre 2006a, 146), our apprehension of which is informed by an understanding of our progress towards our *telos*—"an understanding completed by an apprehension of first principles" (145). All enquiry, whether philosophical or moral, "aspires to and is intelligible only in terms of its aspiration to finality, comprehensiveness, and unity of explanation and understanding" (158).[11] Upon the achievement of this finality, rational justification *within* a 'perfected' science is "a matter of demonstrating how derivative truths follow from the first truths of that particular science [. . .] and the justification of the principles of a subordinate science will be similarly demonstrative." (MacIntyre 1988, 173) The goal is a final and complete understanding, and because of this "[f]irst principles themselves will be dialectically justifiable; their evidentness consists in their recognizability, in the light of such dialectic, as concerning what is the case *per se*" (173).

The principles governing the moral life are the principles of natural law, and the principles of natural law are identified through an understanding of practical reason. Confrontation with the natural law is, in fact, "inescapable for anyone who persists in the enquiry as to what his or her good is—and anyone who does not so persist will of course thereby have put him or herself in the wrong" (MacIntyre 1988, 180). Practical human activity is always informed by different sorts of *inclinatio* ['directedness']: the *inclinatio* of each person *qua* being towards self-preservation; the *inclinatio* of each person *qua* animal toward the bearing and educating of children to participate in the various forms of human life; and the *inclinatio* of each person *qua* rational and social being toward the pursuit of the goods of knowledge and above all the knowledge of God (174). Furthermore, and importantly, these *inclinationes* are ordered (so that, for example, we subordinate our *inclinatio* toward self-preservation "if the lives of our children or the security of our community are gravely threatened" (174)).

Given these *inclinationes*, each individual is confronted with the practical need to answer such questions as: How am I to achieve the goods set before me? Which is it best for me to try to achieve now? Is it really a good or does it only seem so to me? Aquinas held that there are right and wrong ways of answering these questions, and though each person has "a capacity for giving the right answers, [. . .] this capacity has to be elicited". Crucially, what is involved in eliciting the right answer is "the discovery of principles, formulated with varying

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[11] This view is unavoidably theological; for it follows that "for each distinctive form of achieved understanding [. . .] there is a set of first principles [. . .]which provide premises for demonstrative arguments and which specify the ultimate causal agencies [. . .] for that science [. . .] [I]nsofar as the perfected sciences are themselves hierarchically organized, the most fundamental of sciences will specify that in terms of which everything that can be understood is to be understood. And this [. . .] we call God." (MacIntyre 2006a, 157)

degrees of explicitness in different cases, which will guide one." (174) These are the principles of natural law.

The first (or fundamental) principles of natural law all "give expression to the first principle of practical reason: that good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided" (MacIntyre 2006b, 64). As human beings, there are three sorts of good to be pursued: the good of physical nature (the preservation of our lives and health from the dangers that threaten our continued existence); the good belonging to our animal nature (which include the good of sexuality and of educating and caring for our children); and the goods belonging to our nature as *rational* animals (the goods of knowledge—of nature and of God, and the goods of social life informed by the precepts of reason) (64). Corresponding to these different goods to be pursued there are several distinct precepts of natural law, "each a precept of reason directed to our common good that enjoins the achievement of one or more of these shared human goods or forbids what endangers that achievement" (64). So, for example, the precepts of natural law include: "[n]ever take an innocent life or inflict gratuitous harm; respect the property of others; shun ignorance and cultivate understanding; do not lie" (64).

These precepts that give expression to the first principle of practical reason are the primary precepts of natural law. They are known noninferentially, and are not derived from any more ultimate precept. They are one and the same for everybody; they are "unchanging and unchangeable"; they "are known to be what they are by all human beings insofar as they are rational"; and "knowledge of them cannot be abolished from the human heart" (MacIntyre 2006b, 65). Furthermore, because the principles of natural law are precepts of reason the Thomist is committed to the position that to violate them commits one to *incoherence* (64). In order to explain why this is so, we must understand two important concepts in Aquinas' account of practical rationality, which bear directly on our consideration of *After Virtue*'s rejection of Aquinas' denial of the genuine moral dilemma: *synderesis* and *conscientia.*

Synderesis is "the natural disposition exhibited in our most basic apprehension of [the precepts of natural law] which we do not comprehend as a result of enquiry if only because a knowledge of their truth is already presupposed in all practical activity" (MacIntyre 1988, 184–185). It should be understood, MacIntyre says, as "a particular potentiality of reason" (185). *Synderesis* is "infallible" (185). Any moral or practical judgment which is false, which mistakes the good for bad, will always turn out to be derivative and not an expression of *synderesis.*

Conscientia refers to the capacities necessary to apply the fundamental principles of natural law to a particular situation; both to deduce more specific principles from the fundamental principles, and deriving from both sets of principles practical judgments about what is to be done. *Conscientia*, unlike *synderesis*, can be in error (185). This may be because "its judgment was deduced from a true premise or from a set of true premises conjoined with a false premise, which happened in this case to yield a false conclusion, or because its judgment was derived from true premises by fallacious reasoning" (185). Although there are cases where *conscientia* cannot err, these are cases where the deduction from the true principles affirmed by *synderesis* is so immediate that there is no room

for error.[12] However, in all but these sorts of cases, "our apprehension of basic true practical judgments as true does not involve that we understand what is involved in the living out of those judgments in the specifications and particularities of practical life. By coming to understand this we gradually enlarge our understanding of the fundamental judgments and of the entire system which they partially constitute." (185)

According to MacIntyre, Aquinas held that because of the possibility of error in *conscientia*, there are, "even for those who do not avert their attention from the primary precepts of natural law, radical possibilities of error, error which can assume tragic dimensions" (185). So it may seem that in fact MacIntyre finds in Aquinas that which he previously identified as lacking: an account of the tragic. To see why this is not so (not in the sense of 'tragic' presented in the early account) we must consider both what MacIntyre says in *Whose Justice* and the further clarification of his position in "Moral Dilemmas". There are two sorts of cases that are relevant here. The first is generated by the relationship between *conscientia* and *synderesis* as presented in *Whose Justice*, and the second the question of the irresolvable dilemma as discussed in "Moral Dilemmas". In the former case, an agent can be in a dilemma even if he or she is unable to recognize it as such; in the second, the agent sees themselves as involved in an irresolvable dilemma. In both cases, the key is the possibility of error in the relationship between the fundamental principles of natural law and the secondary principles and practical action of the agent.

As MacIntyre says in *Whose Justice*, Aquinas held that *conscientia* binds *and* that it can be in error (185). Since this is so it must be possible that it be true of someone both that they ought to do such and such as enjoined by *conscientia* and that they ought not to do the same thing because it is wrong (being expressly forbidden by natural law). But it would seem that Aquinas is committed thereby to asserting a contradiction, which is held to be absurd. The solution, MacIntyre explains, is to distinguish between the two 'oughts' in question. Someone "is bound *per se* to do what *conscientia* enjoins when it judges truly, but only *per accidens* to do what *conscientia* judges falsely" (186). There is no contradiction because "of the person who judges what he or she ought to do on the basis of a false deliverance of *conscientia* it is true that he or she is bound and ought to act in such and such a way *per accidens*, but not true that he or she is bound and ought to act *per se*" (186). This is in direct contrast to the position we noted in *After Virtue*.

It is important to note that in *this* case "Aquinas is not", MacIntyre says, "prescribing a way of recognizing and so eliminating dilemmas, but only explaining how someone may be in what is *objectively* a dilemma precisely because it is unrecognized" (186, my emphasis). Paradoxically, this case of dilemma is a case where an agent believes that they are obliged to do such and such, but are in fact obliged not to do the same thing. The apparent dilemma is one which is unrecognized. But it seems clear that to such a person MacIntyre does assign

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[12] MacIntyre's example is the move from "God is to be loved by everyone" (a fundamental precept of natural law) to "God is to be loved by me" (MacIntyre 1988, 185).

the error that can be described as having "tragic dimensions", but the tragedy, if there, is the result only of an error by the agent in question.

Aquinas' view requires, MacIntyre says, that someone who has accepted as true a false deliverance of *conscientia* must have admitted into their set of moral beliefs and judgments a contradiction. This must be so because a false judgment of *conscientia* will be inconsistent with *synderesis*—which is infallible. Because from a contradiction anything whatsoever follows, "[s]uch a person will therefore be liable to find him or herself affirming what he or she cannot fail to recognize as contradictory assertions, even if their original source is by its very nature [...] unrecognized" (186). And, MacIntyre says, this is often the case with "persons who confront the dilemmas constitutive of tragedy" (186). For Aquinas, the dilemmas of tragedy "will *always* rest upon an underlying mistake, [though] nothing in Aquinas' view precludes it being the case that recognizing this may be for the moment out of the question" (186–187, my emphasis).

A more familiar sort of dilemma (at least for contemporary philosophy) is discussed in "Moral Dilemmas". These are cases in which it seems to the person that they are caught in a situation in which there is no right choice to make. MacIntyre distinguishes between three types of situation: the first arising for someone who has assumed the responsibilities of more than one social role and discovers that discharging the responsibilities of one role will prevent them discharging the responsibilities of the other; the second involving apparent conflicts between alternative ideals of character; and the third involving the potential failure of someone to do what is generally required of generally accepted norms for human beings as such (MacIntyre 2006b, 86–87).

In each of these cases, it may seem to the agent that there is no right choice to make, because whatever they choose they will do wrong: that they are caught in an irresolvable dilemma, or, to use Aquinas' terminology, they seem to be *perplexus simpliciter*. If we recall the discussion of *After Virtue* once again, certain conflicts are there deemed tragic *because* of their irresolvability. As we have seen, MacIntyre had argued forcefully that "what constitutes [...] *tragic* opposition and conflict is the conflict of good with good embodied [in an] encounter prior to and independent of *any* individual characteristics" (MacIntyre 1985, 163). In a tragic choice, "*both* of the alternative courses of action which confront the individual have to be recognised as leading to some authentic and substantial good. By choosing one I do nothing to diminish or derogate from the claim upon me of the other; and therefore, whatever I do, I shall have left undone what I ought to have done." (224) Furthermore, there *are* situations where the possession of one virtue can exclude the possession of some other virtue; where two genuine virtues can be temporarily at war with one another; and where the exercise of the virtue of doing what is required of one role can conflict with the exercise of other virtues (142).

Post-1985 however, MacIntyre follows Aquinas in denying that anybody is ever *perplexus simpliciter* (MacIntyre 2006b, 98) in any of these ways. Instead, he holds that those who appear to themselves as being *perplexus simpliciter* are in fact *perplexus secundum quid*: "perplexed [...] but only relative to some factor, identification of which will be the key to resolving the dilemma" (99). One may

appear to be in an irresolvable dilemma, "but one always has to remind oneself [...] that *this cannot really be so*" (99, my emphasis). In "Moral Dilemmas", MacIntyre proceeds to explain how each dilemma is resolvable; and in each case, the dilemma is resolved with reference to the overriding moral commitment present in each case (100), the moral commitment which corresponds to the overriding authority of the natural law.

This denial of the possibility of genuine dilemmas indicates in the clearest way the fundamental change MacIntyre's position. Connectedly, the particular significance of tragedy, central in the positive account given in *After Virtue,* is now diminished.The Aristotelian and Thomist insistence that tragedy occurs *only* as the result of error on the part of the protagonist is reinstated. The unrecognized dilemma (arising from the erroneous *conscientia*) is now identified at the heart of the unfolding action of tragedy: "Neoptolemus' acceptance of Odysseus' unjust plan to defraud Philoctetes" for example (MacIntyre 1988, 187). In *After Virtue,* by contrast, the tragedy in the *Philocetes* was identified in the tragic conflict between Neoptolemus' role as hero and the requirements of the virtue of justice, both requirements carrying an authority of their own; now his 'error' is plain in the light of considerations arising from the overriding status of natural law. In general, moreover, such "[l]iterary examples", so important to the account in *After Virtue*, "might be suggestive, but no more than this" (MacIntyre 2006b, 94). Tragedy, in fiction and life, is viewed from the standpoint of a unifying Thomist metaphysics; so that the position MacIntyre defended against both Aquinas and Aristotle in *After Virtue must* now be rejected. It must be rejected not because, as a matter of fact, Aquinas held a different interpretation of the tragedies in question, and not because MacIntyre 'misread' Aquinas. Rather, the whole structure of Aquinas' thought necessitates the conclusion that tragedies that do not involve error on the part of the agent are impossible. Because of this structure, Aquinas cannot allow that it is, "not human sinfulness, but the nature of things or the divine will which generates tragedy" (MacIntyre 1988, 187).

5. Conclusion

MacIntyre concludes "Moral Dilemmas" with the observation that although any theory of the Thomistic kind must be committed to the denial of the genuine moral dilemma, "it is equally clear that from any standpoint committed to the occurrence of irresolvable dilemmas...these conclusions would provide insufficient reason for the rejection of any such theory and of its moral precepts". This is because "[j]udgments about the occurrence and nature of moral dilemmas are [...] not independent of either moral or theoretical standpoints" (MacIntyre 2006b, 100). As we have seen, *After Virtue* is a distinct standpoint which is committed to the possibility of the occurrence of the tragic moral dilemma. If this is so, then on MacIntyre's own argument the Thomist position outlined later is insufficient to overturn *After Virtue*'s central commitments. The adoption of a different set of commitments in 1985 certainly was a 'surprising' move.

Advancing such a conclusion is not a mere matter of MacIntyrean bookkeeping. One of the most interesting things about the positive project in *After Virtue* is the extent to which it may be seen as a direct and personal response to a deep crisis of faith MacIntyre suffered in the early 1970s. To a significant degree, MacIntyre's enquiries in the ten years preceding *After Virtue* may be seen as an attempt to come to terms with the apparent unavailability of moral truth and authority given the 'death of God'.[13] If in 1985, and from the standpoint of Thomism, it seemed that reports of His death had been greatly exaggerated, in 1977, and from the standpoint of an exhausted atheism, *After Virtue* constituted a last ditch attempt to claw back some semblance of moral truth in the modernity he found (and still finds) so degenerate.[14] The positive argument takes the form that it does because of the collapse of earlier certainties in MacIntyre's thought, and it is unique just because it draws on resources from epic, tragedy and narrative conceptions of selfhood later rendered peripheral, incomplete, or mistaken. From the standpoint of the author of *After Virtue*, the adoption of Thomism is as much an absurd impossibility as a return to Barthist Protestant faith or communist party membership. This, I think, makes the argument of *After Virtue* of continuing and independent interest. It is more and other than a 'dry-run' for *Whose Justice?* and its sequels, and it opens possibilities that others, if not MacIntyre himself, might yet and fruitfully explore.

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[13] though this may refer, of course, both to the discovery that there is no God and never has been, or to the worry that in modernity we seem to have killed Him.

[14] The argument in *After Virtue* to a large extent represents an account of how MacIntyre saw the world in the absence of Christian belief. The re-adoption of Christianity is the discovery of an account that again makes sense, as he sees it in 1985, of the "belief in Christianity [he] thought [he] had" (Knight 1998, 257; see also Lutz 2004, 7–29 in particular). We can have no real idea how this might have been for MacIntyre, but I suggest that a clue may be found toward the end of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. "[One characterisation of someone's coming to inhabit a particular tradition is that of] a person for whom what an encounter with some particular tradition [...] [does is provide] an occasion for self-recognition and self-knowledge [...] Upon encountering a coherent presentation of one particular tradition [...] such a person will often experience a shock of recognition: *this* is not only [...] what I now take to be true but in some measure what I have always taken to be true. What such a person has been presented with is a scheme of overall belief within which many, if not all, of his or her particular established beliefs fall into place." (MacIntyre 1988, 394) Two points emerge from this. Firstly, this sounds like a 'conversion'—which incidentally fits rather neatly with admission that 1985 discovery was 'surprising' to MacIntyre. Secondly, it is made quite clear that not all established beliefs will survive. It has been an aim of this paper to draw out just those beliefs that don't make it into the post-1985 standpoint.

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