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Theological Ethics After MacIntyre

The Significance of Alasdair MacIntyre's Moral Philosophy For Lutheran Ethics

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Ph.D. Thesis

1999



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Theological Ethics After MacIntyre: The Significance of Alasdair MacIntyre's Moral Philosophy For Lutheran Ethics

Abstract

Three aspects of MacIntyre's writings are significant for Lutheran ethics. These are his criticism of Enlightenment rationality, his constructive account of a rational morality, and the relationship of his moral philosophy to theology. I first discuss MacIntyre's critique of Enlightenment thinkers whose conception of rationality follows a path that leads to the denial of rationality in emotivism. Secondly, I consider MacIntyre's alternative account of rationality which entails the recovery of the notions of the teleological framework of morality and the rationality of tradition. Teleology and tradition provide the rational foundation whereby moral judgements are substantiated by their ability to advance moral progress. Thirdly, I argue that the incompleteness of MacIntyre's constructive account of rationality moves his philosophy in a theistic direction. My discussion then turns to the writings of Stanley Hauerwas whose appropriation of MacIntyre's writings demonstrates the importance of MacIntyre's notion of rationality for theology. I then discuss the significance of MacIntyre for Lutheran ethics by considering the writings of Gilbert Meilaender who demonstrates how a rational Lutheran ethic is possible. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the necessity for Lutheran theology to sustain rational moral reflection in these postmodern times.

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Finally, I should like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, the Reverend and Mrs. Eugene Weber, whose love and financial support made the improbable a reality. My one regret is that my father did not live to see the completion of this work.

DECLARATION

I confirm that no part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or any other university. I also confirm that the thesis conforms to the word limit set out in the Degree Regulation.

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INTRODUCTION

The widespread impact and general importance of Alasdair MacIntyre's moral philosophy is incontestable. This thesis pays tribute to the importance of MacIntyre's work by considering its significance for Lutheran ethics. Before entering into the heart of the argument, it is important to offer a general reflection on the current moral situation to which MacIntyre's writings are addressed. The past two decades have witnessed a growing consensus that American culture and the church in America are in the process of moral decline. Ironically, this growing consensus regarding our moral decline results from the perception that we are increasingly unable to sustain certain co-operative relationships and activities. Insofar as we are unable to agree on some standard of the good, we are increasingly incapable of ordering our lives through a common vision or of finding rational resolutions to our moral disagreements. Signs of this decline within the Christian community include the rise of divorce and contentious divisions within the church.¹ In culture, this moral decline is captured in the characterisation of American public life as a *culture war*. Let us briefly consider the culture war phenomenon as a sign of moral decline.

Father Richard John Neuhaus, whose book *The Naked Public Square* did much to bring the term *culture war* to the American political lexicon, argues that America has become dangerously divided along apparently irreconcilable moral fault lines.² 'It is no exaggeration to say', states Neuhaus, 'that our society is embroiled in a *Kulturkampf*, a war over the meaning of American culture.'³ The sociologist James Hunter presents systematic studies of the culture war phenomenon in his books *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* and *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for*

¹ Cf. Maggie Gallagher, *The Abolition of Marriage: How We Destroy Lasting Love* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1996). Gallagher's argument, simply stated, is that the American therapeutic culture has advanced the destruction of the family by elevating selfishness over moral commitment to the co-operative good of the family. In terms of division within the church, Gilbert Meilaender notes how it was the inability of Missouri Synod Lutherans to resolve their doctrinal disputes that led to the catastrophic schism in 1974. Gilbert Meilaender, 'How Churches Crack Up: The Case of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod', review of John H. Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile: Confessional Hope and Institutional Conflict* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), in *First Things* 14 (June/July, 1991), pp. 38-42.

² Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 21, 36-37.

³ Richard John Neuhaus, *America Against Itself: Moral Vision and the Public Order* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 14.

Democracy in America's Culture War.⁴ Hunter and Neuhaus see the culture war as, in MacIntyre's words, a 'civil war carried on by other means.'⁵ Furthermore, as the title of Hunter's second book indicates, the culture war increasingly threatens to become an all out civil war. To a significant degree, MacIntyre's analysis of our cultural situation has provided a historical and philosophical foundation for the work of Hunter, Neuhaus and others chronicling the cultural decline.

MacIntyre spells out the nature of the decline in a historical and philosophical narrative. The central feature of this story is that once a culture is rendered incapable of rationally sustaining its moral commitments and resolving its moral conflicts, order will be established by other means. In particular, MacIntyre argues that modernity is displacing moral order with manipulative therapeutic and bureaucratic techniques. Exemplifying the extent of this displacement, the Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas notes the ill effects of bureaucratisation on the public ministry. He observes that we have now come to

expect our ministers to exemplify the same kind of bureaucratic mentality so characteristic of modern organizational behavior and politics. I sometimes think that there is a conspiracy afoot to make Alasdair MacIntyre's account of the manager in *After Virtue* empirically verifiable. That the manager has become characteristic of liberal politics should not be surprising, but I continue to be taken aback by the preponderance of such character types in the ministry.⁶

As is evident in Hauerwas' criticism, the influence of the therapeutic and bureaucratic is ubiquitous. MacIntyre is troubled by the cultural acceptance of and dependence on bureaucratic and therapeutic technique not for what it presently is but for what it threatens to become. Hence what may presently appear to be a benign or even beneficial use of manipulative techniques develops into coercive control. David Toole (a former Ph.D. student of Stanley Hauerwas at Duke University) catches this feature of MacIntyre's argument when he writes:

[A]ccording to MacIntyre, Nietzsche gives to the twentieth...century one of its possible courses: an increasingly conflictual and violent world in which either truth is relative and we carry guns to settle inevitable disputes, or truth has left the world

⁴ James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) and *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture War* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd ed. 1984), p. 253. (Hereafter: *After Virtue*.)

⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Preaching As Though We Had Enemies', *First Things* 53 (May, 1995), p. 46.

altogether, which just leaves the guns — and our inability to offer any reasons at all for using them, though use them we will.⁷

While Hauerwas and Toole alert us to the practical upshot of this failure of rationality, Wendy Kaminer illustrates it in her recent consideration of the problem of crime.

Debates about crime are rarely sensible. They're ruled by politics and fear and the mindless exchange of attitudes that dominates the worst talk shows...I expect that we'll proudly become even less rational as the millennium approaches: more people will report being visited by aliens or abused by Satanic cults in childhood or graced by their guardian angels. In my worst moments, I imagine that this book would be taken more seriously by a broader audience if I claimed to be channeling the spirit of a two-thousand-year old shaman or an extraterrestrial.⁸

Kaminer argues that the irrationality of the therapeutic culture demonstrably threatens rational debate over crime and its solutions. In view of this threat, she states that her aim is emphatically not to solve the problem of crime but merely to *rationalise* the discussion of crime-related issues.

Kaminer's modest aim alerts us to what is perhaps the most important merit of MacIntyre's writings. He has made clear how moral reflection may fail or succeed in being rational as well as the practical consequences of success or failure. In this vein, the historian Robert Wilken concludes that the concern for rationality must be front and centre in the theological task:

At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium we are witnessing a major rethinking of the nature of human reason, and in particular how it functions in religious thought. The hegemony of the Enlightenment model of autonomous and critical reason, reason disengaged from its object, is swiftly coming to an end. We are, perhaps, living at a time when the understanding of reason and its relation to faith will be transformed as profoundly as it was in Anselm's day. Last fall Pope John Paul II issued a new encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*. It may be the last papal encyclical of the millennium, and it is not insignificant that it deals with the relation of faith and reason, anticipating a discussion that will certainly accelerate in the new century.⁹

I shall argue that MacIntyre's theoretical and practical arguments are crucial resources for understanding the importance of rational moral reflection within Lutheranism. My argument unfolds in the following way. The first chapter considers MacIntyre's critique of the cultural drift into the irrationality of emotivism, where moral judgements have no more force than personal feelings or tastes. Responding to this disorder, the second chapter considers MacIntyre's theory of rationality, which is

⁷ David C. Toole, *Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), p. 35.

⁸ Wendy Kaminer, *It's All the Rage: Crime and Culture* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), p. 8.

centred in the notions of a teleological framework and the rationality of tradition. The force of MacIntyre's argument is that, unless and until our moral discourse becomes teleological and acknowledges the notion of rival historical traditions, we will be unable to sustain a rational moral order.¹⁰ My third chapter moves from a description of MacIntyre's critical and constructive arguments to a critique of his account of rationality. In the main, my criticism is that MacIntyre's work depends on a theistic foundation which he has been too hesitant to acknowledge. After discussing this deficiency, I consider the theological implications of MacIntyre's work, briefly turning to the writings of Stanley Hauerwas. Hauerwas, for all intents and purposes, is the principal theological interpreter of MacIntyre's ethics, as he capably demonstrates MacIntyre's importance for ecclesial ethics. Hauerwas' appropriation of MacIntyre's ethics serves as a transition to the specific consideration of the importance of MacIntyre's writings for Lutheran ethics.

MacIntyre's work is an important critical and constructive resource for discussing the possibility and necessity of a rational Lutheran ethic. As MacIntyre and Hauerwas raise doubts about Lutheranism's ability to sustain a rational ethical reflection, chapter four discusses the *possibility* of a rational Lutheran ethic. Here I consider the writings of the Lutheran theologian Gilbert Meilaender who demonstrates how rational moral reflection is possible within the Lutheran tradition. The fifth chapter considers the implications of MacIntyre's writings as I discuss why a Lutheran ethic is *necessary* for the Lutheran church in the postmodern world. I argue that MacIntyre's critical writings make clear why it is necessary for the church to be a *refuge* from the moral disintegration in culture while his constructive account of rationality aids the church's *mission* to rationally engage a world which is increasingly sliding into irrationality.

⁹ Robert Louis Wilken, 'Gregory VII and Politics of the Spirit', *First Things* 89 (Jan., 1999), pp. 27.

¹⁰ Neuhaus' essay, 'The Idea of Moral Progress', *First Things* 95 (Aug./Sept., 1999), pp. 21-27, appeared too late for me to do anything more than commend it as a concise argument for the importance of progress. Neuhaus argues that the modern notion of progress, that 'change is good', conflicts with the Christian notion of progress that change must be in accord with the good. That is to

To the end that Lutheranism may better fulfil its task as refuge and mission, I offer the following argument.

say, progress requires the kind of teleology that modernity spurns. I discuss this at length in the third section of my second chapter.

CHAPTER 1

EMOTIVISM AND THE FAILURE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

1. Introduction

The publication of *After Virtue* is a defining episode in the recent history of theological and philosophical ethics. The theologian Stanley Hauerwas claims that this book ‘changed the agenda of contemporary philosophers and theologians by an almost violent redirection of their attention.’¹ This redirection includes such changes as a shift in focus from acts and consequences to the character of the agent; a questioning of modern individualism and the move toward a renewed appreciation of community; a recovery of the notion of tradition, and a turn from abstract analysis to narrative theory with its emphasis on relationships and coherence. In view of MacIntyre’s contribution to these changes, Giovanna Borradori observes that ‘Alasdair MacIntyre has enriched contemporary moral debate to an unparalleled extent.’² John Horton and Susan Mendus, introducing a volume of essays on MacIntyre’s work, remark that *After Virtue* ‘surprised the philosophical world by the depth of its disillusion with modern morality in general, and... “the Enlightenment project” in particular.’³

Few scholars disagree that *After Virtue* has made a marked impact on recent moral discussions. However, there is considerable difference of opinion on the philosophical, cultural and, most important to this thesis, theological upshot of MacIntyre’s argument. MacIntyre himself did not anticipate the theological direction

¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Character And The Christian Life: A Study In Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1985), p.xv. (Hereafter: *Character And The Christian Life*).

² Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Nietzsche or Aristotle?’ [Conversation with Giovanna Borradori]. in ed. Giovanna Borradori, *The American Philosopher* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 137.

³ John Horton and Susan Mendus, ‘Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue* and After’, in eds. John Horton and Susan Mendus, *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 1.

his argument would take. In a 1983 symposium, two years after the publication of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre reflected on the significance of *After Virtue*.⁴ His intention, he noted, was to write two books, one analysing the state of modern morality, the other, the philosophy of the social sciences. In developing each thesis, he discovered that the arguments were so interdependent as to be inseparable. The alternative was to offer for criticism to the academic community a single and essentially incomplete argument. One criticism was that *After Virtue* gave no serious attention to the role of theology in modern morality. MacIntyre is clear that this omission was not accidental. Rather, religion's short shrift reflected his erstwhile view that religion is relatively unimportant in the rise and fall of morality in the modern world. When asked how he might give more attention to religion, his answer was to improve his treatment of Kierkegaard, Hume and Pascal. Interestingly, Aquinas, who emerges as the hero in later works, merits no mention.

This exclusion of religion is only noteworthy in the light of MacIntyre's move toward Christian theology. Prior to this, he consistently viewed religion as morally irrelevant. For example, in his *Secularization and Moral Change* (1967), MacIntyre asserted that it is wrong to claim that modern moral change is due to the decline of religion or that the upshot of a reinvigorated religious life would be a change in society's moral life. 'In so far as there is a causal relationship between morals and religion', MacIntyre argued, 'it has been changes in the moral climate and in the forms of social life that have rendered Christianity apparently irrelevant or incredible, rather than unbelief in Christianity which has produced moral change.'⁵ Concepts such as urbanisation and industrialisation had greater explanatory power for MacIntyre than the function of religion.

MacIntyre's change of opinion about religion takes place in two steps, the first of which is evident in *After Virtue*. The first step, which I consider at length in this chapter, is the doubts that he raises regarding the claims of social-scientific expertise and the predictive ability of the social sciences. The second step, which I consider in the following chapter, concerns the necessity of theism for rescuing a teleological framework for ethics. Although the critique of the social sciences did not necessitate

⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Moral Rationality, Tradition, and Aristotle: A Reply to Onora O'Neill, Raimond Gaita, and Stephen R.L. Clark', *Inquiry*, 26 (1983), pp. 447.

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Secularization and Moral Change* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 58.

a reconsideration of MacIntyre's earlier rejection of religion, it cleared the way for this development to take place. Mark R. Schwehn, in a review of MacIntyre's *Three Rival Versions* (1990), reflects on this development as he credits MacIntyre with bringing religious questions to the centre of the academic agenda.⁶ Schwehn observes that while MacIntyre was once a 'relentless critic' of theology, 'he has done more than any other contemporary philosopher' to bring theology back to centre stage in philosophical ethics.⁷ Neuhaus observes that 'MacIntyre has had a singular part in changing the map of moral philosophy.'⁸ Finally, in an essay that is not altogether appreciative of the use to which MacIntyre's argument has been put by students of theological ethics, Fergus Kerr, the Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian, questions MacIntyre's 'vehement rejection of all moral philosophy, Humean, Kantian, utilitarian and Nietzschean' and the conclusion that Enlightenment philosophy is responsible for the 'moral wilderness of our culture.'⁹

MacIntyre's argument is important for Lutheran ethics in two ways. First (*pace* Kerr), I agree with MacIntyre's analysis that we are presently in the midst of a moral decline which, in large part, can be linked to a mistaken understanding of the relationship of morality to rationality. I consider this argument in the first chapter. Second, MacIntyre offers an alternative notion of rationality that is essential for the recovery of a post-Enlightenment Lutheran ethic because it levels important criticisms of Lutheranism's understanding of rationality, while offering resources to repair the disorder.¹⁰ In the present chapter, I will consider MacIntyre's criticism of the Enlightenment notion of rationality in the following way. The first section attends to MacIntyre's argument that the emergence of emotivism is the sure sign that morality is badly disordered—a disorder that reflects a wrong understanding of rationality. The second section considers MacIntyre's controversial thesis that emotivism is the unintended consequence of the failure of modern deontological and

⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre *Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). (Hereafter: *Three Rival Versions*.)

⁷ Mark R. Schwehn, 'Alasdair MacIntyre's University', review of *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), *First Things* 13 (May, 1991), p. 51.

⁸ Richard John Neuhaus, 'Reconnecting Morality and Religion', *First Things* 43 (May, 1994), pp. 66–67.

⁹ Fergus Kerr, 'Moral Theology After MacIntyre: Modern Ethics, Tragedy and Thomism', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 8 (1994), p. 33.

¹⁰ I consider MacIntyre's criticism of Luther in the fourth chapter and apply MacIntyre's positive account of rationality to Lutheranism in the fifth chapter.

utilitarian understandings of what constitutes a rational morality. The third section considers MacIntyre's suggestive opposition of Aristotle to Nietzsche, focusing primarily on the Nietzschean alternative. MacIntyre argues that the emergence of Nietzschean ideas, embodied in bureaucratic social order, signals the failure of the Enlightenment project. This account lays the groundwork for the following chapter's consideration of MacIntyre's Aristotelian alternative. Let us now consider MacIntyre's account of emotivism as a sign of the Enlightenment's failure.

2. Emotivism: The Sign of Moral Decline

2.1. Three Stages to Emotivism

After Virtue begins with what MacIntyre calls a 'disquieting suggestion.' In the form of a parable, MacIntyre advances the thesis that we are faced with a moral disorder that is beyond recognition and repair. MacIntyre's parabolic depiction of the modern moral dilemma begins with a series of environmental disasters that the general public blames on the scientific community. After this,

[w]idespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed. Finally a Know–Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still, there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all that they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance; parts of theories unrelated either to the other bits and pieces of theory or to experiment; instruments whose use has been forgotten; half–chapters from books, single pages from articles, not always fully legible because torn and charred.¹¹

This parable suggests a three–stage understanding of how emotivism emerged. In the first stage, moral language, norms, customs and practices are understood to be in the category of things that may be evaluated as true or false. Objective moral evaluations are possible insofar as they are rendered within a systematic framework.¹² In the second stage, the decline begins with the increasing abstraction of moral judgements, rules, customs and practices from the overarching moral framework. Rather than

¹¹ *After Virtue*, p. 1.

¹² The second chapter of this thesis gives a detailed treatment of this structure.

being parts in a coherent whole, each rule, each custom, each practice is treated as a self-sufficient whole that must be justified in isolation from any moral framework.¹³

This second stage on the way to emotivism is evident in Captain James Cook's (1728–1779) observations of the function of taboo rules in Polynesian society. Cook records the perplexity of the English explorers as they attempted to understand what appeared to them to be arbitrary rules of conduct that allowed lax sexual practices but prohibited men from eating in the company of women. When inquiry was made into the reasons for the regulation, the response was that eating together was *taboo*. *Taboo* did not mean, notes MacIntyre, 'forbidden for this or that reason.' Rather, because these rules were severed from a now forgotten cultural and moral framework that once provided a coherent rationale, they were incoherent and unaccountable prohibitions. That is, they were rules for which no justifying reasons could be offered.¹⁴

The theologian Jeffery Stout concludes that MacIntyre is rhetorically effective, thought finally wrong, in drawing an analogy between the incoherence of *taboo* rules and the failure of modern ethics.¹⁵ According to Stout, MacIntyre, who claims to champion plain language philosophy, fails to recognise how, in common use, 'ought' statements rarely suffer from the kind of incoherence he sees in Polynesian *taboo* prohibitions. In response to this criticism, MacIntyre further develops his point about the incoherence of modern moral language in an analysis of the morality of nineteenth-century academics and particularly the editors of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It was their belief that the empirical sciences and human rationality supplied a sufficient framework for a universally normative morality.¹⁶ MacIntyre surmises that if put to the question, these academics would have fared no better than the Polynesians in their attempt to justify their moral norms. Their rules and principles were fragments of a theistic moral system that had ceased to be relevant. This point is made by Nietzsche when he states, 'Naiveté: as if morality

¹³ For a more detailed consideration of the impact of abstraction on particular moral details, see, Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble? The Relevance of System and History', in ed. Patricia Cook, *Philosophical Imagination and Cultural Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 73 ff.

¹⁴ *After Virtue*, pp. 111–113.

¹⁵ Jeffery Stout, *Ethics After Babel: Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1988), pp. 67–68.

¹⁶ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 185.

could survive when the God who sanctions it is missing!’¹⁷ Hence MacIntyre states that the attempt to justify universal moral norms that were, in fact, the ‘incoherent fragments of a once coherent scheme of thought and action,’ was not merely an impossible, but a ‘quixotic’ task.¹⁸

Following this second–stage divorce of moral judgements from their framework, emotivism emerges in the third stage. It is probably a misnomer to call emotivism a moral system. It is better understood to be a cultural situation that has developed from the recognition that every attempt to justify moral systems has failed and must continue to fail.¹⁹ Rationally defensible moral judgements are justified by appeal to some objective moral standard. When such a standard is believed to exist, moral judgements may employ the metaphor of weights and measures, or the language of progress. The meaning of emotivism is that we have come to see that it is no longer possible to justify moral judgements according to some accepted standard of measure. Emotivism is an embodied conclusion that there is ‘no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture.’²⁰ At this stage of deterioration, the notion of ‘weighing moral claims is not just inappropriate but misleading.’²¹ Emotivism marks a shift in the paradigm of moral judgements from objective measures to subjective tastes. This view, which MacIntyre ascribes to Max Weber, is summarised by MacIntyre in the following way:

Questions of ends are questions of values, and on values reason is silent; conflict between rival values cannot be rationally settled. Instead one must simply choose...the choice of any one particular evaluative stance or commitment can be no more rational than that of any other. All faiths and all evaluations are equally non–rational; all are subjective directions given to *sentiment* and *feeling*.²²

According to MacIntyre, we are presently between the second and third stages. At this transitional stage, ‘the language and the appearances of morality persist even though the integral substance of morality has to a large degree been fragmented and then in part destroyed.’²³ We are in a precarious situation because the form of morality exists though its foundation is eroded. This means that, insofar as we continue to think that our moral judgements are rational, even though they are not, our moral

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. and trans., W. Kaufman (New York: Random, 1967), p. 147.

¹⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 55.

¹⁹ *After Virtue*, pp. 18–19.

²⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 6.

²¹ *After Virtue*, p. 246.

²² *After Virtue*, p. 26 (my emphasis).

decline must go undetected. We now live in the experience of moral disorder while being incapable of giving a rational account of this disorder. Like the occupants of Plato's cave, we lack the will or the ability to see our moral situation clearly. So long as the moral house still stands, we do not have to face the fact that it is built on sand.

Moreover, were our culture to recognise this disordered state, MacIntyre argues that it is too late; there are no remedies available to us. The last and best hope is that a new and different St. Benedict will provide a way of constructing communities that are capable of surviving the moral collapse. Having no large-scale remedy available, we must take our cue from the fifth-century monastic communities and construct moral refuges to survive whatever hard times may come.

MacIntyre admits that the depth of his disillusionment with modernity cannot be vindicated by a 'few brief striking events whose character is incontestably clear.' Because this moral situation 'is open to rival interpretation,'²⁴ the aim of *After Virtue* is to make the incoherent fragments cohere within a single philosophical/historical story. Where the fragments lack the necessary framework, he intends to render the fragments intelligible and coherent within a narrative structure. Reflecting on this story of decline, Richard Bernstein states that *After Virtue*

reads like a brief but extremely dense novel: its plot gradually unfolds; it has its moments of suspense and discovery; there are climaxes and anticlimaxes. Indeed, it is written in that very genre of dramatic narrative that MacIntyre tells us is so vital for understanding human action.²⁵

As indicated, MacIntyre begins his story in the present, and works backward through the genealogy of emotivism. Let us further consider how we have come to this present disorder of emotivism.

2.2. Emotivism in Theory and Practice

It may be surprising that MacIntyre accords such importance to the theory of emotivism. It is not, of course, that he is unaware of the theoretical and practical deficiencies of C.L. Stevenson's notion of moral language. Emotivism is important only because 'to a large degree people now talk and act *as if* emotivism were true.'²⁶

²³ *After Virtue*, p. 5.

²⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 3.

²⁵ Richard J. Bernstein, 'Nietzsche or Aristotle? Reflections on Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*', *Soundings*, 67 (Spring, 1984), p. 7.

²⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 22.

In a densely packed paragraph, MacIntyre summarises the moral importance of emotivism:

Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character. Particular judgments may of course unite moral and factual elements. 'Arson, being destructive of property, is wrong' unites the factual judgment that arson destroys property with the moral judgment that arson is wrong. But the moral element in such a judgment is always to be sharply distinguished from the factual. Factual judgments are true or false; and in the realm of fact there are rational criteria by means of which we may secure agreement as to what is true and what is false. But moral judgments, being expressions of attitude or feeling, are neither true nor false; and agreement in moral judgment is not to be secured by any rational method, for there are none. It is to be secured, if at all, by producing certain non-rational effects on the emotions or attitudes of those who disagree with one. We use moral judgments not only to express our own feelings and attitudes, but also precisely to produce such effects in others.²⁷

This quotation suggests three reasons for MacIntyre's sense of disquiet. First, emotivism, in accepting the fact/value distinction, collapses moral judgements into 'expressions of attitude or feeling.' As such, these judgements may be judged to be effective or ineffective. However as moral statements cannot be judged as either true or false, they have no purchase on reality. Thus, David Lewis' observation about philosophy is true of an emotivist culture's understanding of evaluative moral judgements as well. Lewis states: 'Once the menu of well-worked out theories is before us, philosophy is a matter of opinion.'²⁸ Regardless of the speaker's intention, moral statements are *never* truth statements. They cannot be vindicated or falsified by appeal to an objective, underlying moral structure. Morality is no longer a matter of fact. In later arguments, MacIntyre stresses that this divorce of morality from fact reflects both our changing views of morality as well as our changing understanding of 'facts'. The contrast is between 'fact' as understood within the mechanistic, empiricist worldview over against its use prior to the widespread mis-application of Newtonian categories to human behaviour. MacIntyre states:

On the former view the facts about human action include the facts about what is valuable to human beings (and *not* just the facts about what they think to be valuable); on the latter view there are no facts about what is valuable. 'Fact' becomes value-free, 'is' becomes a stranger to 'ought' and explanation, as well as

²⁷ *After Virtue*, pp. 11–12.

²⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends And Contemporary Philosophical Issues: The Aquinas Lectures* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1990), p. 66. (Hereafter: *First Principles, Final Ends*.)

evaluation, changes its character as a result of this divorce between 'is' and 'ought'.²⁹

Once moral judgement is sufficiently divorced from fact, moral utterances are reduced to taste, which presumably admit no rational disputation. MacIntyre observes that this reduction of morality to taste does not, in fact, put an end to arguments. Rather, the central characteristic of the emotivist culture is stated in the maxim *de gustibus est disputandum*. When there is no rational way of settling arguments, we do not cease to argue; arguments rather become interminable, shrill, and tend to escalate into greater violence.

Second, a practical problem arises from the inadequacy of emotivism as a metaethical theory. Stevenson claims that emotivism clarifies the use of plain moral language when it actually mystifies and confuses moral utterances by driving a wedge between the real function of moral speech and the speaker's intended use. Emotivism claims to simplify moral language by reducing all moral speech, such as obligation, commands, duty and imperatives, to expressions of personal preference. The problem is most evident when language users do not understand themselves to be expressing opinions or feelings but objective moral judgements based in a certain view of the world or of human nature. According to the theory of emotivism, such moral language still only expresses personal feelings and sentiments. Emotivism is a theory of language that explains away moral utterances by steadfastly ignoring the actual language and intentions of the language users. All contrary evidence aside, evaluative judgements finally mean nothing more than, 'I approve of this; do so as well' or 'Hurrah for this!'³⁰

Emotivism thus gives the hearer of moral utterances the broad license to deconstruct moral judgements as concealing personal will.³¹ This view introduces a certain arbitrariness into our public moral conversation. In theory, emotivism offers no hope of rational reconciliation of our disagreements. Moral discourse is reduced to assertions and counter-assertions about what are finally matters of taste. As I noted above, that our *moral* arguments are interminable and increasing shrill strongly suggests that we do not view our moral judgements to be in the same category of disagreement as whether coffee is better with or without cream. We argue over those

²⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 84.

³⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 13.

³¹ *After Virtue*, p. 14.

matters which do matter. For this reason, an emotivist culture cannot consistently reduce *all* moral language to taste. Rather, it will arbitrarily and selectively deconstruct some moral language while according moral authority to other judgements. This fragmentation of moral language allows moderns to simultaneously give moral weight to their moral assertions while the moral judgements of others are heard as ‘mere expressive assertion.’³² MacIntyre puts it in this way:

For the modern radical is as confident in the moral expression of his stances and consequently in the assertive uses of the rhetoric of morality as any conservative has ever been. Whatever else he denounces in our culture he is certain that it still possesses the moral resources which he requires in order to denounce it.³³

MacIntyre additionally notes: ‘It is easy also to understand why *protest* becomes a distinctive moral feature of the modern age and why *indignation* is a predominant modern emotion.’³⁴ We assert our view as if it is rationally defensible. But once we discover that we have lost the ability to argue rationally, we are left to express resentment that others ‘just don’t get it!’ What is very hard to get is the reason why some matters of taste ought to be treated as having more moral weight than other matters. This arbitrariness leads us to the third disquieting feature of emotivism, namely, the nonrational forms of persuasion that must be used to overcome the problem of interminable moral disagreement.

In most language use, ‘This is good’ does not merely mean ‘I approve of this.’ Rather, as emotivist theory claims, ‘this is good’ implies the imperative, ‘You (must) approve of this as well.’ Implicit in the statement ‘This is good’ is the intention to influence the attitude of the hearer.³⁵ However, if the ‘good’ does not refer to a shared, authoritative, factual, evaluative standard, then we are left to find nonrational means and methods to convince others to adopt this point of view as their own. Emotivism, says MacIntyre, ‘entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations.’³⁶ The problem with emotivism is that it cannot distinguish between something so simple and so important as manipulative and non-manipulative means of persuasion. The propaganda of Joseph Goebbels’ is indistinguishable from the preaching of Martin Luther King Jr. It does not matter if language treats others as ends or as means. What matters is what works.

³² *After Virtue*, p. 11.

³³ *After Virtue*, p. 4.

³⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 71.

³⁵ *After Virtue*, p. 12.

³⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 23.

MacIntyre makes his point by contrasting the Kantian concern for the person as end with the very different view of emotivism:

For Kant... the difference between a human relationship uninformed by morality and one so informed is precisely the difference between one in which each person treats the other primarily as a means to his or her ends and one in which each treats the other as an end. To treat someone else as an end is to offer them what I take to be good reasons for acting in one way rather than another, but to leave it to them to evaluate those reasons. It is to be unwilling to influence another except by reasons which that other he or she judges to be good.³⁷

An emotivist culture presumes that moral agreements are won by nonrational means. The two most obvious forms of nonrational means are manipulation and coercion. The force of MacIntyre's argument lies not in a theoretical account of the nonrational moral modes of control. Rather he shows how these irrational means are embodied in certain emotivist characters: the rich aesthete, the therapist and the bureaucrat manager. Let us briefly consider each of these characters.

MacIntyre presumes that the erosion of the distinction between persons as ends or means is alarming. To treat others as ends is to be rationally accountable to them, to offer them reasons for one's moral commitments. Conversely, to treat others as means turns persons into instruments of one's own chosen ends, to be utilised in whatever ways serve to achieve one's calculated goals. The rich aesthete instrumentalises persons because his or her world is characterised by consumption. This is a world where the aesthete aims to be a consumer of persons, and to avoid being a person consumed by others.³⁸ The aesthete's ideal is to use 'a plethora of means' in a restless search 'for ends on which he may employ them.' The social world of this leisured class is 'nothing but a meeting place for individual wills, each with its own set of attitudes and preferences and who understand that world solely as an arena for the achievement of their own satisfaction... for whom the last enemy is boredom.'³⁹

Given the unmitigated selfishness of the rich aesthete, it is not immediately obvious how the therapist, a 'helping' professional, embodies the obliteration of the distinction between the manipulative and nonmanipulative modes of relationships. MacIntyre notes that, in spite of the obvious differences, the therapist treats ends as chosen and not given. Hence the task of the therapist has nothing to do with facts or

³⁷ *After Virtue*, p. 23.

³⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 24.

³⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 25.

objective moral standards. Rather, the therapist's task is to use certain techniques effectively to transform 'neurotic symptoms into directed energy, maladjusted individuals into well-adjusted ones.'⁴⁰ Insofar as therapeutic ends are chosen, 'truth has been displaced as a value and replaced by psychological effectiveness.'⁴¹

MacIntyre's account of the therapist and aesthete is more suggestive than systematically developed. When, however, he discusses the bureaucratic manager, he offers a more extensive account of the problem of emotivism. The character of the bureaucratic manager most clearly discloses how the social and political embodiments of emotivism fail to distinguish persons from instruments. In order to adequately attend to this development of the bureaucratic manager, I must first rehearse the genealogy of the path that has brought us to emotivism. In tracing the evolution of the bureaucratic manager, we are following the trajectory of the Enlightenment's rise and fall. In contrast to the Enlightenment's claims to have uncovered rational morality, MacIntyre makes the remarkable claim that deontological and utilitarian forms of moral deliberation were the *praeparatio evangelica* of emotivism.⁴² Let us consider MacIntyre's account of those moral theories whose failure to justify a rational foundation for morality led to emotivism's emergence.

3. The Genealogy of Emotivism

Richard Bernstein notes that MacIntyre's account of the Enlightenment has struck many as

both shocking and scandalous. For what MacIntyre seeks to show, in what may be called his genealogical unmasking, is that despite the rationalistic pretensions of post-Enlightenment moral philosophy, it is nothing but a disguised expression of the emotivism which has become embodied and well-entrenched in modern society and culture.⁴³

It may seem unusual that MacIntyre, whose argument is finally directed against Nietzsche, should adopt a method of historical writing that is so closely tied to Nietzsche. In a recent essay, MacIntyre notes that his project to articulate a rational ethic requires a genealogy that discloses, rather than argues, how 'the predicaments of

⁴⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 30.

⁴¹ *After Virtue*, pp. 30–31. MacIntyre refers to Philip Rieff's works, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York: Harper & Row 1966).

⁴² *After Virtue*, p. 66.

⁴³ Bernstein, 'Nietzsche or Aristotle?', pp. 7–8.

contemporary philosophy...were generated and under what conditions, if any, they can be avoided or left behind.’⁴⁴

The genealogical narrative is a subversive history that makes no pretence of value–neutrality or impartiality.⁴⁵ Rather, it aims to disclose how Enlightenment thinkers came to that impasse where they could no longer ‘recognise or diagnose adequately out of their own conceptual and argumentative resources the nature of their predicament.’⁴⁶ As Marx Wartofsky points out, it was MacIntyre’s task to show how liberalism became ‘unaware of its own situation, its own limits, and its own incoherence,’ and so was ‘incapable of self–criticism.’⁴⁷ While MacIntyre recognises the critical importance of deontology and consequentialism, he largely ignores their positive contributions. This is not surprising as his aim is offer a counter–history that makes clear, to a morally blind age, how Kantian deontology and utilitarianism have historically and philosophically brought us to emotivism. Let us first consider MacIntyre’s account of what at first seems to be an unlikely intellectual path from Kant to emotivism.

3.1. From Kant to Emotivism

‘For many who have never heard of philosophy, let alone of Kant,’ MacIntyre writes, ‘morality is roughly what Kant said it was.’⁴⁸ Morality is understood as a system of categorical rules, duties and obligations to which compliance is the only rational alternative.⁴⁹ MacIntyre’s account of Kant is, in many respects, an answer to the question, ‘What happens when rules become the primary concept of the moral life?’⁵⁰ ‘In Kant’s moral writings’, says MacIntyre, ‘...we have reached a point at which the notion that morality is anything other than obedience to rules has almost, if

⁴⁴ *First Principles, Final Ends*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ MacIntyre states that his history is a decline and fall narrative that is informed by standards. ‘It is not an evaluatively neutral chronicle.’ *After Virtue*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *First Principles, Final Ends*, p.57.

⁴⁷ Marx W. Wartofsky, ‘Virtue Lost or Understanding MacIntyre’, *Inquiry* 27 (1984), p. 240.

⁴⁸ *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Collier Books, 1966), p. 190.

⁴⁹ There is, of course, much more to Kantian moral philosophy than the justification of action by means of moral rules. See, for example, MacIntyre’s, ‘Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers: What Can We Learn from Mill and Kant?’ *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 16 (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1995), pp. 335 ff. A more even–handed treatment of Kant would point out how, for example, the good behind Kant’s aspiration for universal justice and benevolence has been the right kind of therapy for past philosophical and theological errors. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 81ff.

⁵⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 119.

not quite, disappeared from sight.’⁵¹ Now the central problem facing Kantian moral philosophy is to answer the question, ‘How do we know *which* rules to follow?’ MacIntyre’s account of Kant’s inability to answer this question, begins with the jolting assertion that Kant is finally unable to avoid a moral philosophy that looks very similar to Kierkegaard’s notion of radical choice.

MacIntyre notes that in focusing on Kierkegaard’s polemics against Hegel, we tend to miss the importance of Kant to Kierkegaard’s philosophical conclusions. MacIntyre claims that Kant’s account of a rational religion and his moral philosophy provided the essential background for Kierkegaard’s treatment of the ethical.⁵² It is Kant’s failure to provide a rational foundation for moral choice which moves Kierkegaard to the conclusion that moral choice is finally a ‘leap of faith.’ This is a remarkable claim given Kant’s intent to anchor morality in the function of human reason which ‘lays down principles which are universal, categorical, and internally consistent.’⁵³ In the wake of Kant’s failure, moral choices had could have no rational moral foundation. Agents could still choose but could give no rational reasons for their choices. This severing of choice from rational accountability leads, argues MacIntyre, to Kierkegaard’s conception of radical choice.

According to MacIntyre, Kierkegaard’s *Either–Or* presents us with the discovery that arbitrariness characterises much of what we think are rational moral choices. Kierkegaard’s opposition of aesthetic experience to the ethical serves to demonstrate how deep this arbitrariness runs. For Kierkegaard, aesthetic experience leads one to act so as to ‘lose the self in the immediacy of present experience.’⁵⁴ The model of the aesthetic experience is immersion in the passions of romantic love. Alternatively, the guide of ethical action is that commitment to first principles and ultimate reasons, of which commitment in marriage is the ruling model. Here, sentiments, preferences or feelings are ‘irrelevant to the question of how I must live.’⁵⁵ Although Kierkegaard finally comes down on the side of the ethical, he presents both

⁵¹ *After Virtue*, p. 236. Although MacIntyre backs away from this point in his response to Onora O’Neill’s criticism of this account of Kant (Cf. MacIntyre, ‘Moral Rationality, Tradition, and Aristotle’, p. 448),

he continues to assert that the central problem of liberalism remains in how to identify those unarguable rules to which all rational beings must comply.

⁵² *After Virtue*, p. 43.

⁵³ *After Virtue*, p. 45.

⁵⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 40.

⁵⁵ *After Virtue*, p. 41.

alternatives as equally attractive, though mutually incompatible. The question is what criterion or criteria are to guide one's choice between these two goods.⁵⁶

Kierkegaard does not and cannot answer the question. His response is rather to assert that we do not choose because we have rational reasons; we have reasons because we have first chosen. Choosing our good gives us reasons for action. The problem is that the reasons cannot be given for this initial choice. It is 'a choice that lies beyond reasons, just because it is the choice of what is to count for us as reason.'⁵⁷ Clearly, Kierkegaard's fideism and Kant's notion of rationality could not be further apart. Nevertheless, MacIntyre argues that Kant's moral philosophy 'is the essential background for Kierkegaard's treatment of the ethical.'⁵⁸ Put differently, Kierkegaard's radical choice is not a departure from Kant but a disclosure of Kant's notion of rationality taken to its logical extreme. The plausibility of this thesis depends on MacIntyre showing how Kant's failure leads to Kierkegaard's notion of radical choice. Let us consider this account of Kantian deontology.

MacIntyre notes that his genealogy of Kant's notion of a rational moral choice is based on two deceptively simple theses. These are:

if the rules of morality are rational, they must be the same for all rational beings, in just the way that the rules of arithmetic are; and if the rules of morality are binding on all rational beings, then the contingent ability of such beings to carry them out must be unimportant—what is important is their will to carry them out.⁵⁹

The first thesis presumes that rational actions are justified by the appeal to universal moral rules. The second thesis presumes that free moral agents are always able and so must will to accept the obligations of universal moral commands. As such, a rational moral choice cannot be justified by an appeal to happiness nor by an appeal to heteronomous divine commands. For Kant, MacIntyre states, 'the realm of inclination is as alien to our rational natures as any divine commandments.' Neither Aristotle's *eudaimonia* nor Christ's commands have rational moral authority.⁶⁰

Consider Kant's rejection of happiness. Although happiness was viewed as a universal desire, Kant rejected it as a suitable foundation for morality. Happiness does not meet the test of universality because its moral authority is contingent upon meeting a nonmoral condition. Imperatives which are contingent on antecedent

⁵⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 40.

⁵⁷ *After Virtue*, p. 42.

⁵⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 43.

⁵⁹ *After Virtue*, pp. 43–44.

⁶⁰ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 195.

conditions are ‘hypothetical’ rather than ‘categorical’ imperatives. The form of the hypothetical imperative is, ‘You ought to do this *if* it makes you happy.’ The conditions which follow the *if* are the reasons which justify a certain course of action. The hypothetical imperative supplies a reason for action which is external to the agent. For this reason divine commands must be rejected because, as hypothetical imperatives they are heteronomous commands which do not originate in the rationality of the moral self.

This judgement does not necessarily mean that divine commands are irrational. MacIntyre points out that Kant, by and large, accepted the moral content articulated as divine commands. His argument was rather that divine commands were at one remove from the source of rationality. That is, their authority lay not in the belief that God had revealed his will but in the belief that the commands expressed that which had universal applicability. A rational rule was one that the agent could ‘consistently will that everyone should always act on it.’⁶¹ In order for moral agents to act in accordance with divine commands, they must already possess ‘a standard of moral judgment independent of God’s commands by means of which [they] could judge God’s deeds and words and so find the latter morally worthy of obedience.’ But if agents already know this standard by which God’s commands are judged to be rational or not, ‘the commandments of God will be redundant.’⁶²

For Kant, a rational moral rule was analogous to the function of laws in Newton’s cosmology.⁶³ In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he asserts that human agents know, a priori, that *all* human experience ‘will turn out to be law governed and to be law governed after the manner of Newtonian causality.’⁶⁴ Categorical moral rules must somehow imitate scientific knowledge.⁶⁵ As with the natural sciences, a rational morality must be expressed as ‘necessary and invariant laws.’ These laws admit no exception, are lucid and are beyond question by rational beings.⁶⁶ Second, natural

⁶¹ *After Virtue*, p. 45.

⁶² *After Virtue*, p. 45.

⁶³ *After Virtue*, p. 52. MacIntyre states that Enlightenment writers: ‘share in the project of constructing valid arguments which will move from premises concerning human nature as they understand it to be to conclusions about the authority of moral rules and precepts’,

⁶⁴ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 190. MacIntyre similarly sees Freud attempting to imitate a kind of Newtonian systematic explanation of the unconscious. See *The Unconscious: A Conceptual Study* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 15.

⁶⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Hume, Testimony to Miracles, the Order of Nature, and Jansenism’, in eds. J. MacIntosh and H. Meynell, *Faith, Skepticism and Personal Identity* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1994), pp. 95–98.

⁶⁶ MacIntyre, ‘Hume, Testimony to Miracles, the Order of Nature, and Jansenism’, p. 96.

science leaves no gaps in the understanding of nature. Everything in the phenomenal world, be it biological, psychological or social, must be articulated in these invariant laws. This analogy between the laws of morality and natural science requires that human bodies behave in a mechanistic or predictable fashion. MacIntyre unpacks the implications of understanding human action in mechanical terms:

[A]t the core of the notion of mechanical explanation is a conception of invariances specified by law-like generalizations. To cite a cause is to cite a necessary condition or a sufficient condition or a necessary and sufficient condition as the antecedent of whatever behavior is to be explained. So every mechanical causal sequence exemplifies some universal generalization and that generalization has a precisely specifiable scope. Newton's laws of motion which purport to be universal in scope provide the paradigm case of such a set of generalizations.⁶⁷

Because morality aspires to the level of certainty of knowledge within the physical sciences, it must be capable of being fully articulated in general and irrefutable rules, principles or laws. This reduction of morality to a certain kind of rule is finally Kant's undoing.

Kant has committed a category error. Moral rules are not of a piece with laws of physical nature. MacIntyre illustrates this error with an extended metaphor:

If widespread brain lesions resulted in the loss of all our beliefs about atoms and molecules so that not a trace of such concepts remained in our thought or our language or was embodied in our practice, there would still be atoms and molecules, just as there are now, and nothing that is now true in particle theory would then be false. If similar lesions resulted in the loss of all our beliefs about representative government so that not a trace of that concept remained in thought or language or was embodied in practice, there would be no such thing as representative government any longer. Beliefs about the concepts of physical realities are always secondary to those realities; the physical world does not require us to have any particular beliefs about it or concepts of it, for it to exist. But with social reality it is quite otherwise. Social practices, institutions and organizations are partially constituted by the beliefs and concepts of those who participate in, have transactions with and attitudes towards them ...mere behavior by itself, abstracted from beliefs and concepts, is meaningless.⁶⁸

The reality to which scientific laws refer is not like the reality to which moral laws refer. This means that a rational morality cannot be law-governed in the way that Kant imagined. This error becomes clear in Kant's inability to justify the universal applicability of truth-telling.

In the essay, 'On the Supposed Right of Telling a Lie from Benevolent Motives,' Kant gives reasons why the categorical imperative can admit no exceptions,

⁶⁷*After Virtue*, pp. 82–83.

even when good comes from telling a lie. MacIntyre lays out the context of Kant's rigorous defence of truth-telling as he states:

Suppose that a would-be murderer inquires from me the whereabouts of his intended victim. And suppose that I lie in order to save the victim. The murderer then proceeds to follow my directions, but, unknown to me, the victim has in fact removed himself to precisely the place to which I have directed the murderer. Consequently, the murder is effected as a consequence of my lie, and I am responsible precisely because I lied. But had I told the truth, I could not have been held responsible, no matter what happened. For it is my duty to obey the imperative and not to look to the consequences.⁶⁹

For Kant, to admit variation in a rational moral rule would be to undermine its universal application and claim of rationality. The problem is that this universality is purchased by advocating a form of honesty that is morally repugnant.⁷⁰

Samuel Johnson offers an alternative to the Kantian understanding of truth-telling which is not consequentialist while admitting exception:

The general rule is, that Truth should never be violated, because it is of the utmost importance to the comfort of life, that we should have a full security by mutual faith... There must, however, be some exceptions. If, for instance, a murderer should ask you which way a man is gone, you may tell him what is not true, because you are under a previous obligation not to betray a man to a murderer... But I deny the lawfulness of telling a lie to a sick man for fear of alarming him. You have no business with consequences; you are to tell the truth.⁷¹

Johnson's view is much closer to Kant's contemporary, Benjamin Constant, who was 'outraged' at Kant's rigourism. He argued that 'obedience to a moral principle unconditionally enjoining everyone to speak the truth and unmodified by other principles would make all social life impossible.'⁷² While Kant's morality seemed to uphold a lofty moral ideal, it was unfit for historically situated beings. Kant seemed blind to the different obligations that the relationship of friendship required over against the obligations to one intent on malevolent action. Constant's rebuff of Kant was to argue that the duty to tell the truth is 'only towards a person who has a right to truth.'⁷³

⁶⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority', in ed. M.S. Falco, *Through the Looking Glass* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), pp. 46–47.

⁶⁹ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 195.

⁷⁰ MacIntyre rejects various attempts to interpret Kant in way that tempers his rigourism because 'no revision of Kant's moral scheme of the kind suggested is possible without abandoning too much that is crucial to Kant.' 'Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers', pp. 340–341 & 349.

⁷¹ MacIntyre cites James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, June 13, 1784) in 'Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers', p. 310.

⁷² MacIntyre, 'Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers', p. 341.

⁷³ MacIntyre, 'Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers', p. 342.

In Constant's and Johnson's position, there is a sense in which the conflict of two obligations can be weighed one against the other, in order to discern the greater good or the lesser evil. This notion of weighing does not necessarily commit one to a consequentialist ethic, as Kant argued. Nor does the weighing of one's relationship to the friend over against the murderer reduce moral choices to arbitrary choices. Rather, these considerations offer a way out of Kant's dilemma. MacIntyre states that this alternative would, *on principle*, prohibit lying in almost all circumstances, but on certain and rare occasions, lying would be *required*.⁷⁴ However, this view of truth-telling would require the rejection of two fundamental aspects of Kant's definition of a rational morality. These are that morality is articulated as invariant laws, and that these laws are self-legislated by an autonomous individual.

By abandoning these two assertions, MacIntyre argues that truth-telling could then be defined by its function in preserving the good of particular social relationships. He states:

Instead of first asking, 'By what principles am I, as a rational person, bound?' we have first to ask, 'By what principles are we, as actually or potentially rational persons, bound in our relationships?' We begin, that is, from within the social relationships in which we find ourselves, the institutionalized relationships of established social practices, through which we discover, and through which alone we can achieve, the goods internal to those practices, that give point and purpose to those relationships.⁷⁵

The solution to Kant's quandary of lying is not difficult. Once we consider the moral agent's web of social relationships, it is clear that the protection he owes to his friend *requires* that he lie to the would-be murderer.

In view of Kant's aspiration to articulate a universal morality, the admission of one's social circumstances into moral reasoning and the acceptance of exceptions would have seemed to subject morality to arbitrary forces. The criticism of arbitrariness is turned back on Kant in the ironic criticism that Kantianism may be called on to support a moral rigorism or an empty formalism.⁷⁶ It is an ethic that is able to sanction excessive moral content or no moral content. Kant himself supplies an anecdotal argument supporting the criticism of the arbitrary nature of his moral philosophy. When King Friedrich Wilhelm II demanded that Kant refrain from making his thoughts on Christianity public, MacIntyre reports that Kant *weighed* the

⁷⁴ MacIntyre, 'Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers', p. 350.

⁷⁵ MacIntyre, 'Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers', pp. 352–353.

⁷⁶ MacIntyre, 'Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers', p. 340.

consequences of compliance. He then declared his fealty to the King and his intent to ‘completely desist from all public lectures or papers concerning religion, be it natural or revealed!’ MacIntyre then states:

The Prussian censors and, if it was reported to him, the king himself would have understood Kant to be saying that he would never so publish. But that is not of course what Kant had in fact declared. As he later pointed out, his pledge to desist was made only ‘as your Majesty’s faithful subject,’ a status that Kant would lose when this particular king died. ‘This phrase,’ wrote Kant in recounting the story (in the preface to *The Quarrel between the Faculties*), after the king’s death in 1797, ‘...was chosen by me most carefully, so that I should not be deprived of my freedom ... forever, but only so long as His Majesty was alive’ and Kant knew that the death of Friedrich Wilhelm II was expected imminently.⁷⁷

Kant cleverly misled without, in his mind, technically lying.⁷⁸ This example shows the potential for legalism as well as elasticity in Kantian ethics. MacIntyre concludes that the content and application of Kant’s maxims are decided upon by ‘something other than reason as Kant understands it.’⁷⁹ Finally, MacIntyre notes, ‘with sufficient ingenuity’ almost any moral content can be justified in Kantian terms. ‘It follows’, says MacIntyre, ‘that in practice the test of the categorical imperative imposes restrictions only on those insufficiently equipped with ingenuity.’⁸⁰ Kantian ethics proves quite capable of the kind of arbitrariness that Kant attempted to avoid. This failure to avoid the arbitrary, as I noted above, becomes a central characteristic in Kierkegaard’s conclusion that moral choice is radical before it is rational.

We are now in a position to complete the movement from the categorical imperative to emotivism. MacIntyre’s essay, ‘Imperatives, Reasons for Action and Morals’ makes explicit the connection between deontology and emotivism. The argument presumes that rules are not sufficient moral guides to action. Consider the variation of meanings that a simple imperative may be given. For example, the command, ‘Pick that up!’, may be a simple command, a warning and threat (‘Pick that up or else!’), or advice (I think you should pick that up). Until we determine the sense of the imperative, we cannot understand how it is being used. This means that the command must take into account the tone and intention of the speaker.⁸¹ Abstract the imperative from the social context and intention of the speaker, and the hearer will

⁷⁷ MacIntyre, ‘Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers’, p. 337.

⁷⁸ MacIntyre, ‘Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers’, p. 337.

⁷⁹ MacIntyre, ‘Moral Rationality, Tradition, and Aristotle’, p. 449.

⁸⁰ *A Short History of Ethics*, pp. 197–198.

be unable to discern the aim of the utterance. Most importantly, were the agent called on to say why she acted on the imperative, her reasons would necessarily have more to do with how she subjectively perceived the imperative rather than with some objective understanding of its intent. This ambiguity in rules which are abstracted from social or narrative context leads MacIntyre to the conclusion that imperatives without contexts have ‘little but emotive force.’ Once morality is reduced to rules, MacIntyre claims that it is not surprising to find the flourishing of emotivist and prescriptivist theories. This is because ‘they would be describing correctly the role in language which a certain class of sentences had assumed when cut off from the background of beliefs necessary for them to be understood as they had been in the past.’⁸²

MacIntyre offers two reasons why emotivism follows on the heels of Kant’s failure. First Kant presents a formal theory of morality that may be called on to support incompatible moral assertions. Once moral rules and theory are abstracted from an overarching moral framework, they may be called on to fulfil any number of conflicting functions.⁸³ Second, where these rules do not function in an arbitrary way, it shows that they are still sufficiently connected to an unacknowledged moral framework.⁸⁴ MacIntyre argues that the content of Kant’s moral maxims were not, as he thought, timeless truths but rather reflected his eighteenth-century conservative German Pietistic Lutheran context. In the end, Kant acknowledged this dependence on religion by asserting that obedience to moral rules must in the end be crowned with happiness.⁸⁵ This leads MacIntyre notes that Kant, in the second book of the second *Critique*,

does acknowledge that without a teleological framework the whole project of morality becomes unintelligible. This teleological framework is presented as a ‘presupposition of pure practical reason’. Its appearance in Kant’s moral philosophy seemed to his nineteenth-century readers, such as Heine and later the neoKantians, an arbitrary and unjustifiable concession to positions which he had already rejected. Yet, if my thesis is correct, Kant was right; morality did in the eighteenth century, as a matter of historical fact, presuppose something very like the

⁸¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Imperatives, Reasons for Action and Morals’, in *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 132–133.

⁸² MacIntyre, ‘Imperatives, Reasons for Action and Morals’, p. 135.

⁸³ *After Virtue*, pp. 110–111.

⁸⁴ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 197.

⁸⁵ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 196.

teleological scheme of God, freedom and happiness as the final crown of virtue which Kant propounds.⁸⁶

Kant's moral philosophy is, MacIntyre notes, 'fully intelligible only when understood as a late and secularised rational moral theology...I should contend that, detached from its theological background, Kant's concept of the connection between moral worth and desert, so crucial to the structure of his thought, makes no sense.'⁸⁷ In this judgment, MacIntyre's account of Kant echoes Iris Murdoch's conclusion that 'Kant's conclusive exposure of the so-called proofs of the existence of God, his analysis of the limitations of speculative reason, together with his eloquent portrayal of the dignity of rational man, have had results which might possibly dismay him.'⁸⁸ MacIntyre concludes that any effort to understand Kantian moral philosophy apart from the theological framework is 'doomed to failure.'⁸⁹ Emotivism is a theory that acknowledges Kant's failure while attempting to explain the continued use of moral language as if Kant had actually succeeded.

Having considered MacIntyre's account of the path from Kant to emotivism, let us now consider MacIntyre's account of utilitarian rationality as an alternative path to emotivism.

3.2. From Consequentialism to Emotivism

MacIntyre observes that the British philosopher, economist, and jurist Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was aware of how enormous was the project to provide a rational foundation for morality. His task was to divide the Christian moral norm from its 'superstitious' teleology without undermining the categorical character of its commands. To fail at this task threatened to make morality 'appear as a mere instrument of individual desire and will.'⁹⁰ His task was to vindicate morality by articulating a new scientific teleology. By scientific, Bentham had in mind the study of human psychology, which he claimed demonstrated that the sovereign masters of the human will were attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain. This claim provided Bentham with the basis for an alternative teleology upon which his social ethic was founded.

⁸⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 56.

⁸⁷ MacIntyre, 'Moral Rationality, Tradition, and Aristotle', p. 450 (my emphasis).

⁸⁸ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 80.

⁸⁹ MacIntyre, 'Moral Rationality, Tradition, and Aristotle', p. 450.

⁹⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 62.

Furthermore, this claim led Bentham to interpret all action as avoidance of pain or desire for pleasure, no matter what account of the action was given by the agent. In social policy, Bentham was able to reject any ordering of society that did not, by his own calculations, aim at maximising pleasure and minimising pain. This thesis is plausible as it rests on a deceptively ‘lucid and convincing’ psychology of pleasure. Pleasure, it is assumed, needs no further justification. The acceptance of pleasure as a sufficient reason for action is evident in the view that ‘it is always silly to ask a man why he wants pleasure.’⁹¹ Moreover, Bentham asserted rather than demonstrated that in a properly organised society there was coincidence between ‘a man’s pursuit of his private pleasure and his pursuit of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.’⁹² The problem with this theory is that neither the belief that pleasure is *the* fundamental reason for human action nor that pleasure and justice are coincident can be verified. Nevertheless, pleasure as the foundation of morality continued to be a plausible theory for two reasons.

First, the acceptance of utilitarianism signalled the general belief that the attempt to ground morality either in philosophical principles or in religious commands had now failed. MacIntyre explains that the success of utilitarian philosophy was due less to the merits of its positive argument and due more to the failure of its philosophical and religious predecessors. Bentham, MacIntyre states, was ‘trenchant in his criticism of the revolutionary doctrine of the rights of man, a doctrine which he declares to be nonsense, and in his criticism of the doctrine of imprescriptible natural rights “nonsense on stilts.”’⁹³ Furthermore, Bentham argued that where morality was seen to be centred in religion or metaphysics, its plausibility depended on the implicit appeal of pleasure or the threat of pain. Where religion or metaphysics were correct, they were merely echoes of the rational calculations of utilitarianism. Second, utilitarianism offered a materialistic and scientific foundation for social reform. Whatever social reforms Bentham proposed, he claimed that their moral authority was founded on the objective, scientific calculation of cost and benefits.⁹⁴ Such objectivity was possible, because of the four historical foundations of pain and pleasure – the

⁹¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Pleasure as a Reason for Action’, in *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 173, quoting Anthony John Patrick Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963) p. 134.

⁹² *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 235.

⁹³ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 234.

physical, the moral, the religious, and the political – the physical had priority. Physical sensation was empirically quantifiable in terms of the categories of intensity, purity, duration, approximation, certainty, fruitfulness, and the extent to which either pleasure or pain were shared among the greatest number of people. Desire and aversion would provide ‘an empirical basis for morality’ that supplied ‘good reasons for adopting one type of standard for making such judgments and discriminations rather than another.’⁹⁵ Those who shared Bentham’s vision presumed that it was the rational and practical conclusion of the utilitarian calculus. In reality, Bentham’s utilitarianism was a theory constructed to support conclusions already in place.

The ability to calculate and weigh the relative utility of possible actions proved ambiguous and elusive because, MacIntyre writes, ‘different pleasures and different happinesses are to a large degree incommensurable: there are no scales of quality or quantity on which to weigh them.’⁹⁶ This problem was considered by J.S. Mill (1806–1873). MacIntyre states that Mill’s nervous breakdown was precipitated by his inability to accept the view that unenlightened self-interest, guided from within by the avoidance of pain and the increase of pleasure, and guided from without by the enlightened social reformer, would lead inexorably to the greatest social happiness. For Mill, the ethical and social foundation of pleasure was always beyond the realm of empirical justification.⁹⁷ Rather, the empirical evidence supported the conclusion that happiness was irreducibly ‘polymorphous’, and so was ‘useless for utilitarian purposes.’⁹⁸ Happiness furnishes not one but many standards.

In coming to this conclusion, Mill had to determine how one chooses between conflicting pleasures. MacIntyre writes:

If someone suggests to us, in the spirit of Bentham and Mill, that we should guide our own choices by the prospects of our own future pleasure or happiness, the appropriate retort is to enquire: ‘But which pleasure, which happiness ought to guide me?’ Consequently appeal to the criteria of pleasure will not tell me whether to drink or swim and appeal to those of happiness cannot decide for me between the life of a monk and that of a soldier.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Pleasure as a Reason for Action’, p. 186.

⁹⁵ *Whose Justice*, pp. 74–75.

⁹⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 64.

⁹⁷ *After Virtue*, p. 63.

⁹⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 64.

⁹⁹ *After Virtue*, pp. 63–64.

As persons are as different as monks and soldiers, pleasures are similarly dissimilar.¹⁰⁰ Yet Mill thought that it was possible to distinguish higher and lower pleasures, so that one might objectively make the moral judgment that it was better to be a dissatisfied Socrates than a satisfied pig. This preference for a dissatisfied Socrates over a satisfied pig cannot be justified by appealing to pleasure. This inability to sustain such a clear moral judgement suggests two weaknesses in utilitarian theory.

First, utilitarianism does not articulate a single, unitary moral account that is able to distinguish between conflicting claims of happiness. Hence where the happiness of the military conflicts with the happiness of the cloister, utilitarianism can offer no rational means to resolve the conflict.¹⁰¹ The failure of utilitarianism is its inability to say how incommensurable pleasures can be judged within a 'single scale of evaluation.'¹⁰² As such, it could not say why the pleasures of nineteenth-century social elites and educated classes were superior to the pleasures of crass hedonism, or why it was more rational to act out of benevolence rather than egoism. Second, where utilitarianism was successful in generating consensus regarding social reform, the consensus owed itself to the inherited morality and practice of the religious culture. Utilitarianism was a potent social reform movement built on a conceptual fiction. MacIntyre's judgement is that while one might wholeheartedly agree with reforms in woman's suffrage and health policy, it does not alter the fact that 'a conceptual fiction in a good cause does not make it any less of a fiction.'¹⁰³

The moral seriousness of utilitarian thinkers was evident in their continued willingness to subject their theory to critical questioning. The culmination of this questioning was Henry Sidgwick's conclusion that the rational justification of one set of beliefs over its rivals requires that there be something like a moral cosmos. MacIntyre notes that Sidgwick, who set out to find this moral cosmos, finally came to the conclusion that the moral world was chaos.¹⁰⁴ This led to the conclusion that ultimately morality is based on beliefs for which 'no further reason can be given.'¹⁰⁵ Intuition and not reason is the basis of moral judgement; and this appeal to intuition, in MacIntyre's view, 'is always a signal that something has gone badly wrong with an

¹⁰⁰ MacIntyre, 'Pleasure as a Reason for Action', p. 185.

¹⁰¹ *After Virtue*, p. 64.

¹⁰² *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 236.

¹⁰³ *After Virtue*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁵ *After Virtue*, pp. 64–65.

argument.’¹⁰⁶ In MacIntyre’s narrative, this appeal is a sure sign that the Enlightenment project to defend a rational and objective foundation of morality had discovered its own failure. Having failed in this task, Enlightenment ethics could not resist the charge that its claims of objectivity were effective masks that disguised ‘the preferences of arbitrary will and desire.’¹⁰⁷

To conclude that ours is an emotivist age is, for MacIntyre, to recognise a certain despair of rational solutions for moral problems and conflicts. In that emotivism is not a solution to the Enlightenment’s failure, it must be recognised as a transitional stage. This leads one to ask: ‘A transition to what?’ MacIntyre offers two possibilities, Nietzsche or Aristotle. That is to say, we are faced with a choice of either returning to a premodern understanding of rationality or accept the postmodern abandonment of a rational morality. The remainder of this chapter is given to discussing MacIntyre’s understanding of the Nietzschean alternative, while the discussion of the Aristotelian alternative follows in the next chapter.

4. Nietzsche and the Bureaucratic Order

4.1. The Nietzschean Sequel

Nietzsche plays a complex role in MacIntyre’s narrative of rise and fall. He is one of the contributing philosophical sources of emotivism, and, over against Aristotle, Nietzsche is one of two possible sequels to emotivism.¹⁰⁸ Recognising the undeniable importance of Nietzsche to our contemporary moral understanding, MacIntyre states that ‘it was Nietzsche’s historic achievement to understand more clearly than any other philosopher... not only that what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will, but also the nature of the problems that this posed for moral philosophy.’¹⁰⁹ After Nietzsche, moral judgements are increasingly seen as

¹⁰⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁷ *After Virtue*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁸ MacIntyre writes: ‘In contrast with the universalism on which Enlightenment rationalism was nourished, a plurality of theses flourished in the post-Enlightenment epoch – Kantian, utilitarian, contractualist – revealing the fundamental bankruptcy of the ethics of Aufklärung, a defeat that projects its effects into the twentieth-century. Having denied morality its historical roots and its social context, the Enlightenment must bear the burden of having pushed Western culture from modernity toward Nietzsche: that is, toward the systematic refusal of morality expressed in extremes of genius and nihilism.’ MacIntyre, ‘Nietzsche or Aristotle?’ [Conversation with Giovanna Borradori], p. 138.

¹⁰⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 113.

nothing more than ‘the non–rational phenomena of the will.’¹¹⁰ MacIntyre notes that in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche jeered at the various attempts to contrive some account that provided morality with an objective foundation. His genealogy disclosed that ‘the deontological character of moral judgments is the ghost of conceptions of divine law,’ while ‘the teleological character is similarly the ghost of conceptions of human nature.’ As divine law and the notion of a single human nature were grounded in a theism that was no longer ‘at home in the modern world,’ the ethical systems based on these outdated beliefs were also to be rejected.¹¹¹

Moreover, moral judgements that were thought to be grounded on these suspect foundations were now to be heard as fulfilling a function other than what they claimed.¹¹² According to Nietzsche, moral judgements are neither dispassionate nor objective: they are disguised expressions of human will intent on power. In the wake of the rejection of premodern notions of rationality and the modern failure to give morality a rational foundation, the Nietzschean alternative of the will to power to rational morality is increasingly plausible. One of the reasons that MacIntyre can claim that Nietzsche has triumphed is that the will to power is now exercised in a decidedly non–Nietzschean character. That is, the will to power is not found in ‘the absurd and dangerous fantasy’ of the *Übermensch* nor in the tragic, heroic characters of the Greater Dionysian festival. Rather, the contemporary manifestation of the Nietzschean will to power is in the emotivist character of the bureaucratic manager. In advancing this surprising association of the bureaucrat with Nietzsche, MacIntyre states, ‘in our culture we know of no organized movement towards power which is not bureaucratic and managerial in mode... All power tends to coopt and absolute power coopts absolutely.’¹¹³

Locating the contemporary expression of the will to power in the bureaucratic manager is somewhat confusing as the bureaucrat is for MacIntyre an Enlightenment character who develops into a post–Enlightenment character. This is to say that the character of the bureaucrat outlives the failure of modern bureaucratic theory through a seamless transformation into a Nietzschean character. According to MacIntyre, it was Max Weber who best understood that just beneath the modern bureaucratic

¹¹⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 117.

¹¹¹ *After Virtue*, pp. 110–111.

¹¹² *Three Rival Versions*, p. 48.

¹¹³ *After Virtue*, p. 109.

claims and practices were ‘suppressed Nietzschean premises.’¹¹⁴ MacIntyre brings to light these suppressed premises by unpacking the nineteenth-century lament, ‘if only government could learn to be scientific.’¹¹⁵ The plea refers to the practical application of a mechanistic view of human action. Because human action was subject to law-like predictability, it was assumed that there were conditions when it was appropriate for those with the special insight into these laws to manipulate and control others. MacIntyre further explains this license to manipulate as the duty of those who have special knowledge of the antecedents and outcomes of actions:

As an observer, if I know the relevant laws governing the behavior of others, I can whenever I observe that the antecedent conditions have been fulfilled predict the outcome. As an agent, if I know these laws, I can whenever I can contrive the fulfilment of the same antecedent conditions produce the outcome.¹¹⁶

According to MacIntyre, the name of this license to control is ‘bureaucratic expertise’ which presumably meets five conditions. These are: 1) That the subject of study admits discrete variables that are themselves subject to statistical analysis. 2) These variables are evaluatively neutral and treated as being beyond dispute. 3) Even as the variables are beyond dispute, the conceptualisation of the subject matter cannot admit that there are rival conceptualisations. (It is important to note that two of the five conditions depend on assertions that are treated as indisputable and so beyond rational debate.¹¹⁷) 4) The subject of study may be characterised by law-like generalisations which imitate, though they do not rise to the level of, laws in the physical sciences. 5) Based on these generalisations, the bureaucrat is able to claim knowledge of predictable human behaviour and a kind of manipulative ability over this behaviour.¹¹⁸

The plea for a more scientific government turns out to be a plea for the few with special insight to exercise manipulative control over others. Furthermore, this

¹¹⁴ *After Virtue* p. 114.

¹¹⁵ *After Virtue*, p. 85. MacIntyre responds to the claim that bureaucratic expertise is nothing more than a ‘modest and unpretentious competence’ rather than what it claimed to be in Weberian theory or Comtian empiricism, pointing out that his argument does not impugn such modest claims. Nevertheless, it was not by modest claims that such power and authority has accrued to bureaucracy. *After Virtue*, p. 107.

¹¹⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 84.

¹¹⁷ MacIntyre states: ‘For it is characteristic of the adherents of rival social interpretations embodied in a complex social practice to deny the reality of rivalry in the interest of a claim that there is an incontestable underlying structure; social victory at this deep level is the achievement of inducing those who participate in the practice to agree in conceptualizing their activities in such a way that one of the contestable interpretations no longer appears contestable, but simply how things are—‘the facts’.’ MacIntyre, ‘Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority.’ p. 48.

¹¹⁸ MacIntyre, ‘Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority’, pp. 52–53.

exercise of manipulative control requires that the manager apply laws of human behaviour to others while being himself exempted from these laws. As such, the manager stands over the manipulated in a way analogous to the chemist's exercise of his will over the elements of an experiment.¹¹⁹ This results in the loss of the distinction between persons as means rather than ends as the bureaucrat's function is to adjust 'means to ends in the most economical and efficient way.' To achieve this the bureaucrat, in Weber's, view presumes to 'deploy a body of scientific and above all social scientific knowledge, organized in terms of and understood as comprising a set of universal law-like generalizations.'¹²⁰ In this understanding of the relationship between bureaucratic expertise and the ability to predict and calculate human behaviour, MacIntyre states that 'Weber provided the key to much of the modern age.'¹²¹ Expertise is thus defined as the exercise of manipulative power in a value-neutral way. The question is whether the manager possesses this kind of predictive power and whether his or her manipulations can be effected in a value-neutral way. The following section considers MacIntyre's argument against the displacement of moral order by a managerial calculus.

4.2. Questioning Bureaucratic Expertise

Bureaucratic expertise is a fiction. It depends on a kind of knowledge that is unavailable and a notion of human predictability that is untenable. It is a theory that is finally wrecked on the shoals of systematic unpredictability. MacIntyre notes that Machiavelli had a correct appreciation of this kind of unpredictability in his understanding of governance because he (Machiavelli) recognised that 'no matter how good a stock of generalizations one amassed and no matter how well one reformulated them, the factor of *Fortuna* was ineliminable from human life.'¹²² While an increase in knowledge may limit unpredictability, *Fortuna* was the bitch-goddess who could never be dethroned.

¹¹⁹ *After Virtue*, pp. 84–85.

¹²⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 86.

¹²¹ *After Virtue*, p. 86.

¹²² *After Virtue*, p. 93.

MacIntyre offers several examples of this kind of unpredictability. Citing Sir Karl Popper, he states that the claims of expertise are called into question by invention, novelty and discovery. If the world is predictable, then the atypical and original will generally be anticipated. Popper considers the wheel and notes that this invention could not have been predicted because, ‘a necessary part of predicting an invention is to say what a wheel is.’¹²³ To predict would be to invent. Another example is found in military strategy, where unpredictability is intentionally introduced. MacIntyre’s example is that of Napoleon, who recognised that the Prussian Generals had codified the military practices of Frederick the Great into a series of rules, which they now took to be the military equivalent of a natural law. Napoleon’s response was to constitute ‘himself a counter-example to their law-like generalizations.’ Then, with tactical and organisational innovation, he planned his movements to upset their putative laws. This intentional unpredictability resulted in decisive victories.¹²⁴ The history of military strategy is in large part a history of the failure of strategists to predict the movements of their enemies. These and other examples of systematic unpredictability lead MacIntyre to conclude, ‘Our social order is in a very literal sense out of our...control. No one is or could be in charge.’¹²⁵

Kant, MacIntyre notes, saw further problems in the mechanical explanation of human behaviour. If human behaviour were predictable in ways analogous to predictability in mathematics, astronomy or physics, then the notion of freedom would be jeopardised. This quandary led Kant to conclude that ‘actions obeying and embodying moral imperatives must be from the standpoint of science inexplicable and unintelligible.’¹²⁶ However, the plea for a more scientific government requires the very kind of mechanical predictability that Kant could not admit and still maintain the notion of moral freedom. MacIntyre states that ‘if social science does not present its findings in the form of law-like generalizations, the grounds for employing social scientists as expert advisors to government or to private corporations become unclear and the very notion of managerial expertise is imperilled.’¹²⁷ Expertise turns out to be

¹²³ *After Virtue*, p. 93

¹²⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority’, p. 43.

¹²⁵ *After Virtue*, pp. 105–107.

¹²⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 82.

¹²⁷ *After Virtue*, p. 89.

more a fiction than a reality 'because the kind of knowledge which would be required to sustain it does not exist.'¹²⁸

MacIntyre concludes that managerial expertise is 'a masquerade of social control rather than a reality.'¹²⁹ The expertise of the bureaucratic manager lies in histrionics. The effective manager does not effectively manage but successfully acts 'the part of the natural scientist on the stage of the social sciences with the more technical parts of the discipline functioning as do grease point, false beards and costumes in the theatre.'¹³⁰ The notion of 'expertise' is a fiction that functions in similar ways to Carnap and Ayer's understanding of 'God's' function in religion, namely as a fiction that gives credibility to religious pronouncements and insulates religion from criticism.¹³¹ However, with increased knowledge of actual causes, belief is displaced by explanation and faith withers away. Faith in bureaucratic expertise functions in the same way. So long as it is believed that the reduction in crime, or improved educational testing scores, or a higher standard of living have been effected by bureaucratic manipulation, no evidence to the contrary can effectively subvert this belief, even when history proves to be a record of 'predictive ineptitude.'¹³²

Finally, the incoherence of bureaucratic theory is captured for MacIntyre in the locution *bureaucratic individualism*.¹³³ While the two terms seem to suggest a way of ordering the individual in society, they are antagonistic. To combine the terms together does not solve the problem of reconciling the claims of individual autonomy with the notion of a scientific and manipulative social order. This leads to the paradoxical situation where we simultaneously strive for personal autonomy while being engaged in the kind of manipulative relationships with others that 'each of us aspire to resist in our own case.'¹³⁴ Individual autonomy require limits on the autonomy of others. Like the rich aesthete, we desire to be a 'consumer of persons' while looking for some form of safety from being consumed by others.¹³⁵ How then are the demands of individualism squared with the demands of social order?

¹²⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 75.

¹²⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 75.

¹³⁰ MacIntyre, 'Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority', p. 50.

¹³¹ *After Virtue*, p. 76.

¹³² *After Virtue*, pp. 89–90.

¹³³ *After Virtue*, p. 35.

¹³⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 68.

¹³⁵ *After Virtue*, p. 24.

The theory of bureaucratic individualism presumes that there is a kind of nonmoral, neutral expertise which is capable of balancing these complex demands. Against this notion of expertise, MacIntyre argues that the attempt to meet both demands must result in incoherence rather than balance. This incoherence becomes clear when one pits the demands of universal rights against the standard of utility. MacIntyre states:

The concept of rights was generated to serve one set of purposes as part of the social invention of the autonomous moral agent; the concept of utility...for quite another set of purposes...Hence when claims invoking rights are matched against claims appealing to utility or when either or both are matched against claims appealing to claims based on some traditional concept of justice, it is not surprising that there is no rational way of deciding which type of claim is to be given priority or how one is weighed against the other.¹³⁶

Autonomy requires rights. Society requires utility. To conclude that there is no *rational* way to adjudicate the conflicting claims of the individual and society does not mean that bureaucracies cease to function. It means that they function in ways very different from the theory of a scientific management of society. The bureaucrat's claim that he or she is able to order society scientifically, by means of dispassionate neutrality, proves to be untenable and incoherent. If, as MacIntyre asserts, the acceptance of managerial expertise is based in faith in value neutrality and the effectiveness of manipulative power, we must ask what it means when trust in the bureaucratic order continues after the notion of neutrality has been undermined.

This question returns us to a central characteristic of emotivism – that of the ‘obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations.’¹³⁷ The choice between Nietzsche or Aristotle is stark: either we order our lives together by means of an ongoing rational debate about the good or we must resort to non-rational power transactions mediated through nonrational means of persuasion.¹³⁸ G.E. Moore's appeal to intuition is exemplary of this kind of nonrational persuasion. John Maynard Keynes, notes MacIntyre, observed how the disciples of Moore had used his theory of intuition to advance private preferences ‘under the cover of being able to identify the presence or absence of Moore's notion of a non-rational property of goodness.’¹³⁹ When disagreement arose between two advocates of intuition, the resolution of the dispute owed itself to the rhetorical

¹³⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 70.

¹³⁷ *After Virtue*, p. 23.

¹³⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 24.

effectiveness of the disputants rather than to any kind of appeal to an objective evaluative standard. While it was asserted that discerning the absence or presence of the property of goodness could resolve moral disagreement, this appeal only disguised certain effective social manipulations. Keynes reports that ‘In practice, victory was with those who could speak with the greatest *appearance* of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility,’ all supported with properly placed ‘gasps of incredulity,’ ‘head–shaking,’ ‘grim silences,’ and ‘shrugs’.¹⁴⁰ When actions are justified by their apparent effectiveness, rather than by some objective standard, ‘success is whatever passes for success.’¹⁴¹ When truth matters less than effective persuasion, the most effective bureaucrat,’ MacIntyre states, ‘is the best actor.’¹⁴²

Emotivism, as I stated above, is a transitional stage. MacIntyre states that when one considers what the philosophical and historical argument reveals about the failure of the Enlightenment, one must either accept

the Nietzschean diagnosis and the Nietzschean problematic or one must hold that the Enlightenment project was not only mistaken, but should never have been commenced in the first place. There is no third alternative and more particularly there is no alternative provided by those thinkers at the heart of the contemporary conventional curriculum in moral philosophy, Hume, Kant and Mill.¹⁴³

This analysis leads MacIntyre to the remarkable assertion that ‘It is no wonder that the teaching of ethics is so often destructive and skeptical in its effects upon the minds of those taught.’¹⁴⁴ The inescapable conclusion is that any public discussion of the good or ends proper to a human being must be regarded ‘as systematically unsettling.’¹⁴⁵ As such, ethics ceases to be that science which enables persons to move from disorder to order and is reduced to a ‘mock rationality,’ the sole purpose of which is to conceal the arbitrary exercise of the will to power.¹⁴⁶

Moral order stands as the only alternative to managerial manipulation. Only by a return to a moral order will others be treated as persons rather than objects. MacIntyre states: ‘To treat someone else as an end is to offer them what I take to be good reasons for acting in one way rather than another, but to leave it to them to

¹³⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 107.

¹⁴⁰ MacIntyre provides no reference for this quote. *After Virtue*, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ *After Virtue*, p. 115.

¹⁴² *After Virtue*, p. 107.

¹⁴³ *After Virtue*, p. 118.

¹⁴⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 118.

¹⁴⁵ MacIntyre credits Ronald Dworkin with this insight. *After Virtue*, pp. 118–119.

evaluate those reasons. It is to be unwilling to influence another except by reasons which that other he or she judges to be good.’¹⁴⁷ We have come to a point where it is possible to present MacIntyre’s project in the very simple opposition of *moral accountability* to *moral inarticulacy*. In a moral universe, persons are always entitled to request of another, an account of another’s actions. To provide such an account is to treat the other as an end rather than a means to be manipulated or coerced.

4.3. Conclusion: Moral Inarticulacy

In a critical essay on MacIntyre’s work, philosopher Charles Taylor defines and develops the notion of moral inarticulacy.¹⁴⁸ ‘Inarticulacy’ seems to best characterise the current situation where manipulative or coercive means of order become more plausible as we become increasingly unable to give a rational public account for our moral commitments and actions. Taylor’s development of this term offers a way to understand the importance of MacIntyre’s critique of the Enlightenment as well as new insights into an appropriate response.

According to Taylor, the failure of Enlightenment rationality is closely related to the Enlightenment’s inability to reconcile freedom with rationality. Freedom is defined as self-determination and choice. Rationality, understood substantively, undermines freedom because it is concerned to articulate a concrete form of the moral life that is prior to the agent’s choice. Given the commitment to self-determination, rationality must be defined as procedural rather than as substantive. Taylor describes these two versions of reason, stating:

[R]eason is no longer defined substantively, in terms of a vision of cosmic order, but formally, in terms of the procedures that thought ought to follow, and especially those involved in fitting means to ends, instrumental reason; the hegemony of reason is consequently defined, and now means not ordering our lives according to the vision of order, but rather controlling desires by the canons of instrumental

¹⁴⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁷ *After Virtue*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁸ Charles Taylor, ‘Justice After Virtue’, in eds. John Horton & Susan Mendus, *After MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 16–43. For a more complete account of inarticulacy see, ‘The Ethics of Inarticulacy’, in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 53–90. Also *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 12–23.

reason. Freedom consequently takes on a new meaning, and entails breaking loose from any external authorities in order to be governed solely by ones' own reasoning procedures. And the source of obligation is no longer a cosmic order without, but rather my own status as sovereign reasoning being, which demands that I achieve rational control.¹⁴⁹

Like MacIntyre, Taylor thinks that the flawed Enlightenment project has left contemporary moral philosophy hopelessly muddled in its understanding of the relationship of freedom to rationality. Unlike MacIntyre however, Taylor does not think that the focus on individual freedom and autonomy is a project that 'should never have been commenced in the first place.'¹⁵⁰ The problem with the Enlightenment project is that it adopted a view of reason that viewed all moral authority or an external shape of the moral life as 'profoundly repugnant' because they pre-empted a freedom defined as autonomy. Reason, in this view, would only be the instrument of the autonomous subject and never a rational framework which could make moral claims on the self. Taylor explains the attractiveness of the instrumental idea of reason, stating:

To be guided by reason now means to direct one's action according to plans or standards which one has constructed following the canons of rational procedure, for instance to be proceeding according to clear calculations, or to be obeying a law one has prescribed to oneself according to the demands of reasons. Rational direction is therefore seen as synonymous with freedom understood as self-direction, direction according to orders constructed by the subject, as against those which the subject is supposed to find in nature.¹⁵¹

A substantive ethic is too comprehensive and hierarchic to be compatible with freedom. Moreover, it offers no 'critical distance' by which agents may stand outside the moral system in order to criticise and revise it. A substantive ethic was viewed as essentially conservative, and so bypassed and downgraded any autonomous self-direction.¹⁵² Modernity could find no way to reconcile freedom with substantive rationality.

While modernity has made much of the distinction between the right and the good, Taylor thinks it more important to focus on the dependence of the right on the good. He states: 'It is not just: do you determine the right from the good or the good from the right? Rather, it is something like: do you recognize a hierarchic order in

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, 'Justice After Virtue', p. 19.

¹⁵⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 118.

¹⁵¹ Taylor, 'Justice After Virtue', p. 26.

¹⁵² Taylor, 'Justice After Virtue', p. 26. Taylor later refers to Habermas' view that 'an ethic of the good must inevitably forfeit universality, and hence a critical standpoint towards any and all cultural forms.' p. 34.

goods?’¹⁵³ Coherent moral systems cannot but advance some authoritative account of goods hierarchically ordered. This is clearly evident in the disagreement between utilitarians and deontologists over which system is better, more adequate, and true. Once the idea of goods ordered to a higher good was rejected, the utilitarian philosophers shifted the teleological locus from the good to tangible, *de facto* goods. For this move they were met with Kant’s criticism that they failed to attend to the ‘hierarchy of motives’ and so tended to collapse moral judgements into prudential judgements. For Kant, it appears, some procedural ethics were *better* than others. But then we must ask, ‘Better by what external, objective standard?’ And this question suggests a critical incoherence in Kant’s thought.

Taylor argues that the coherence of Kant’s criticism depends upon an inarticulated hierarchy. Kant’s ‘good’ is that man *qua* rational moral agent ‘is of infinitely higher worth than anything else in the universe.’¹⁵⁴ Man has an essence and this essence makes it possible to say that there are things that one ought never do to another human being (like lying) no matter how beneficial the consequences. However, the argument that there are such things as categorical imperatives that cannot be negotiated away depends, Taylor argues, on an implicit or explicit appeal to ‘the logic of “nature”, “telos” and “the good.”’¹⁵⁵ Modernity cannot finally offer a coherent justification of its commitments to some rules over others or some practices over others unless and until it is committed some substantive account of the good. However, the more modernity accepts a view of reason that is disengaged and context free, the more ‘practical reasoning comes to appear impossible.’ Then, Taylor states, ‘You cannot prove that man is a rational life, or rational agency, or the image of God, the way you show the kinetic theory of heat or the inverse square law. The gains of practical reason are all within a certain grasp of the good.’¹⁵⁶

Taylor argues that modern philosophy’s refusal to acknowledge its dependence on some substantive account of the good produces a kind of ‘shyness, to the point of inarticulacy about these goods.’¹⁵⁷ Ironically, the result of this ‘self-willed inarticulacy about the good,’ makes it impossible to rationally defend the notion of free and rational agency, which Taylor says is ‘one of the most important, formative

¹⁵³ Taylor, ‘Justice After Virtue’, p. 27.

¹⁵⁴ Taylor, ‘Justice After Virtue’, p. 28.

¹⁵⁵ Taylor, ‘Justice After Virtue’, p. 28.

¹⁵⁶ Taylor, ‘Justice After Virtue’, p. 36.

transcendent goods of our civilization.’¹⁵⁸ In order to overcome this problem, Taylor insists that modernity must ‘liberate itself from these ill–conceived inhibitions, so that we can once again talk intelligibly about goods.’¹⁵⁹ This impasse confronts us with the crucial question as to whether we are to go down the Nietzschean path of irrationality or, whether something like a postmodern Aristotelianism can be vindicated.¹⁶⁰ In the following chapter, I shall consider MacIntyre’s constructive account of an Aristotelian/Thomistic rationality as the way to overcome the problem of moral inarticulacy.

¹⁵⁷ Taylor, ‘Justice After Virtue’, p. 35.

¹⁵⁸ Taylor, ‘Justice After Virtue’, p. 36.

¹⁵⁹ Taylor, ‘Justice After Virtue’, p. 42.

¹⁶⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 118.

CHAPTER 2

TELEOLOGY, TRADITION AND RATIONALITY

In the previous chapter I considered MacIntyre's narrative of modern moral philosophy's path from its claim of having secured a rational foundation for morality to the falsification of this claim expressed in emotivism. If, as MacIntyre argues, emotivism is the sign of the Nietzschean triumph, we must ask, what, if anything, can be done about this moral situation? In the introduction to a recently published MacIntyre reader, Kelvin Knight offers a response to this question.

[T]he most evident characteristic of Alasdair MacIntyre's work is its provocativeness. MacIntyre's critique of 'the Enlightenment project' may be well known but his own Aristotelian project is not. This is unfortunate because... The full significance of MacIntyre's demolition job in *After Virtue* is only comprehensible in the light of his construction, in subsequent essays, of the premises of an alternative.¹

MacIntyre's critical philosophy is not fully understood unless we consider his positive alternative. This Aristotelian alternative has not had the kind of impact that, according to Knight, it deserves.

One reason why MacIntyre's alternative account to modern inarticulacy has not had wide-spread purchase may be found in the conclusion of *After Virtue*. There MacIntyre seems to say that his Aristotelian alternative is not possible except in monastic-like communities. This alternative is presented by MacIntyre as he draws an analogy between the present situation with that of the Christian church in the fifth-century where

men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman imperium and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that imperium. What they set themselves to achieve... was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness.²

¹ Kelvin Knight, in ed. Kelvin Knight, *The MacIntyre Reader* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), p. 1.

² *After Virtue*, p. 263.

As with the church of the ‘dark ages’, moderns need another St. Benedict to teach us how to construct ‘local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.’ It must be noted, however, that this appeal to a new St. Benedict has been widely cited though largely ignored. This may tell us something of why MacIntyre’s positive Aristotelian alternative has not achieved the kind of attention Knight thinks it merits. MacIntyre’s closes his putatively historicist argument with a solution which has at its centre an ahistorical community. This is clearly problematic coming from one who criticises modern claims of universality because it proposes a morality ‘which is no particular society’s morality’ and so, is ‘found nowhere.’³ If MacIntyre’s constructive morality turns out also to be a morality ‘found nowhere’, central aspects of argument would be threatened with falsification.

MacIntyre’s apparent advocacy of withdrawal into sectarian communities has been an unnecessary distraction from considering the merits of his constructive philosophy. In the introduction to *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre states that the aim of his constructive work is to say ‘what makes it rational to act in one way rather than another and what makes it rational to advance and defend one conception of practical rationality rather than another.’⁴ I shall argue that, according to MacIntyre, a rational account of morality involves the closely related and overlapping concepts of teleology and tradition. Though each concept is individually discussed, they are intelligible only in their relationship to each other. Hence my discussion of teleology and tradition remains incomplete until the two concepts are brought together in the final section on moral progress. Let us first consider the place of teleology in MacIntyre’s understanding of moral rationality.

1. The Teleological Shape of Rationality

MacIntyre states that ‘the predicaments of contemporary philosophy, whether analytic or deconstructive, are best understood as arising as a long-term consequence of the rejection of Aristotelian and Thomistic teleology at the threshold of the modern world.’⁵ The cause of modernity’s moral disorder is its misunderstanding of

³ *After Virtue*, pp. 265–266.

⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. ix. (Hereafter: *Whose Justice?*)

⁵ *First Principles, Final Ends*, p. 58.

teleology. Edward Oakes, in an essay on MacIntyre's moral philosophy, explains the central role of teleology in MacIntyre's thought:

That word 'teleological' is the key to MacIntyre's solution, the loss of which is the cause of the catastrophe described in his science-fiction parable. Teleology is the study of final causes, goals, purposes, and aims: a style of explanation that saturates Aristotle's philosophy. After the combined impact of Newton and Darwin, however, this type of explanation seems mostly quaint – and once Aristotle's science seemed quaint, his ethics soon followed: when Newton demonstrated how motion can be better explained as resulting from the outcome of mechanical laws, and when Darwin posited natural selection as the 'mechanism' for explaining an organ's functionality, the use of teleology in ethics was doomed. This is perhaps the greatest category mistake ever made in the history of philosophy.⁶

The mistake was to think that moral agents and actions were subject to laws that were analogous to the laws of time, mass and motion, and when such a conception of moral law proved untenable, the mistake was compounded by a wrong conclusion. That is, if moral laws are not analogous to the rationality of the physical sciences, then morality must not be rational. This faulty conclusion leads to the view that moral judgements are reducible to personal preferences. The pervasiveness of this view is evident in the weight given to public opinion polls. Oakes notes that 'surveying public opinion about moral issues is so important for liberalism, since the act of surveying confirms the thesis that moral issues boil down simply to opinions.'⁷

MacIntyre argues that moral norms may be understood as something other than scientific laws without relegating them to the realm of mere opinion. The teleological framework serves a crucial function in this task. According to MacIntyre, the cause of this present moral disorder is that

there is no over-all shape to the moral life but only a set of apparently arbitrary principles inherited from a variety of sources. In such circumstances the need for a public criterion for use in settling moral and evaluative disagreements and conflicts becomes ever more urgent and ever more difficult to meet.⁸

For MacIntyre, the most explicit account of the teleological framework is in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle divides moral reasoning into three parts. The first part is man in his present, disordered state. A crucial antecedent of ethical reflection is the view that the world is somehow morally disordered. The first task of ethics is then to establish agreement on the nature and cause of this disorder. We need look no further than the first nine chapters of *After Virtue* for

⁶ Edward Oakes, 'The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre', *First Things* 65 (Aug./Sept., 1996), p. 25.

⁷ Oakes, 'The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre', p. 25.

⁸ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 243.

paradigmatic example of the use of history and philosophy to advance a certain account of disorder. Moreover, the many articles and debates which *After Virtue* has ignited further illustrates the difficulty of establishing agreement on the antecedent disorder as well as the importance of dialectical engagement if such an agreement is to be secured. The second aspect of the teleological structure is the moral vision which considers the notions of human essences, purposes and meaning in giving an essentially incomplete account of human potentiality and right order. Having considered the antecedent disorder and the vision of right order, the third feature of rational teleological reasoning is the proper work of ethics, which MacIntyre says is ‘the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter.’⁹ Rational moral reflection articulates the importance of choices and actions in an agent’s intentional move from disorder toward the teleological good(s).

MacIntyre’s claim is not merely that teleological reasoning is one way to rationalise moral discussion, but that moral deliberation is rational only insofar as it is teleological.¹⁰ This assertion is supported with two closely related discussions, the first which considers the importance of the teleological framework for rendering unintelligible actions intelligible, and the second which considers the teleological form of the narratives which all moral reflection finally depends upon. We first consider the notion of an intelligible action.

1.1. Intelligibility and Teleology

MacIntyre begins by asking how we render our actions intelligible to ourselves and to others. An intelligible action, he notes, is one that flows ‘intelligibly from a human agent’s intentions, motives, passions and purposes.’ A person acting intelligibly is able to respond adequately to the command, ‘Explain yourself.’ If an act is intelligible, an agent will be able to give an adequate account of that act to others. This is why, MacIntyre states, ‘it is always appropriate to ask the agent for an intelligible account.’¹¹ Moral inarticulacy is a sure sign that human beings do not possess a natural ability to explain themselves to others or defend the authority of

⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 52.

¹⁰ Specifically, this assertion means that rational moral deliberation must necessarily address the three features of the teleological framework, the nature of our disorder, a life rightly ordered, and the means by which one moves from disorder to order.

their moral judgements. Emotivism is destructive because it deprives persons of the ability to understand their moral commitments which are embodied in particular actions and to render these commitments and actions intelligible to others.¹²

Consequently, we find ourselves unable to say why our actions are rational and why it would be rational for others to act in similar ways.¹³

While the notion of an intelligible action may be elusive, the notion of an unintelligible action is not. ‘Unintelligible actions,’ writes MacIntyre, ‘are failed candidates for the status of intelligible action.’¹⁴ These are actions without adequate explanations. MacIntyre offers the following example of an unintelligible action striving for intelligibility:

I am standing waiting for a bus and the young man standing next to me suddenly says: ‘The name of the common wild duck is *Histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus*.’ There is no problem as to the meaning of the sentence he uttered: the problem is, how to answer the question, what was he doing in uttering it?¹⁵

So long as the peculiar action is without an explanation, it remains unintelligible to others. Intelligibility would be achieved if the man were to explain that he had mistakenly thought he was speaking to the same librarian to whom he had previously asked for the Latin name of the common duck. Or the man might say that he suffered from shyness and was instructed by his therapist to engage strangers in small talk. ‘In each case,’ says MacIntyre, ‘the act of utterance become intelligible by finding a place in a narrative.’¹⁶ The narrative explains the point of the action by showing its relationship within a rational sequence.

MacIntyre develops his understanding of an unintelligible action in a survey of the two modern errors of determinism and unencumbered freedom. Consider how determinism undermines intelligible action. MacIntyre is careful not to launch an argument against determinism that damages the central importance of historical antecedents, the first feature of the teleological framework.¹⁷ Determinism’s error is not in its aim to identify antecedent grounds of human action. Its error is in its

¹¹ *After Virtue*, p. 209.

¹² *First Principles, Final Ends*, p. 61.

¹³ *After Virtue*, p. 275.

¹⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 209.

¹⁵ *After Virtue*, p. 210.

¹⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 210.

¹⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘The Antecedents of Action’, in *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), pp. 204–205.

understanding of causes of action which leaves little space for moral accountability and agency. In the essay 'The Antecedents of Action', MacIntyre writes:

If actions are the determined outcome of prior events, and presumably of prior physiological events, it has seemed difficult to draw a distinct line between an action and a mere reflex, and certainly difficult to draw the kind of distinction which would lead us to impute responsibility in one case and not in the other.¹⁸

For determinism, to rationalise human action is to render it predictable. This aim tends to reduce and finally destroy the notion of a free human agent. Once rationality comes to mean a kind of mechanical predictability, there is little space left for agency or accountability.

MacIntyre argues against determinism while also acknowledging the importance of the antecedents of action. To do this he must invoke the distinction between necessary and sufficient causes.¹⁹ A necessary cause is without exception, repeatable and uniform.²⁰ Under this description, a caused human action admits no space for moral freedom. Conversely, when antecedents are sufficient causes, they are like a 'lever' that is likely to produce a predictable behaviour without making the behaviour necessary.²¹ For example, while we might say that the combination of oil and rain 'caused' the car to skid off the road, we mean that the accident was probable, even predictable, but not inevitable. The overarching question is whether or not the notion of freedom can be reconciled with the notion of rationality or whether these notions are somehow mutually exclusive. On the one hand, if we argue that human behaviour follows rationally predictable patterns, there will be little or no room for moral responsibility. On the other hand, if we assert that human beings are radically free, defined by no prior essence or external *telos*, there is little or no room for the notion of rationality.

MacIntyre takes up the task of reconciling freedom with rationality by demonstrating how the distinction between actions having causes versus actions having antecedents is crucial for passing moral judgement. I shall develop this distinction in terms of how we distinguish between the actions of the thief, the alcoholic and the tuberculosis patient. If human action is no more than a complex mechanical reflex or unexplained happening, neither the criminal, alcoholic nor the

¹⁸ MacIntyre, 'The Antecedents of Action', p. 195.

¹⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 204.

²⁰ MacIntyre, 'The Antecedents of Action', p. 200.

²¹ MacIntyre, 'The Antecedents of Action', pp. 195 ff.

diseased are morally culpable. All three are, in both the medical and philosophical senses of the word, patients. Yet legal and moral distinctions between these three cases are made with little difficulty. Tuberculosis patients are not sent to prison or subjected to fines even though their condition causes social hardship. While alcoholism may manifest disease-like symptoms, alcoholics who drive under the influence are morally and legally culpable. While thieves may have a history that conduces to a life of crime, they are generally considered perpetrators rather than victims. The key question these cases raise is, 'What, if anything, makes me responsible?'²² If determinism accurately accounts for human action, then we can no more assign blame to the thief than we can to the victim of tuberculosis.²³ Determinism offers a rigidly *rational* explanation of action that denies the agent the necessity and the ability to be morally accountable. Let us now consider the antithetical problem of unencumbered freedom.

MacIntyre argues that the kind of radical freedom, which is central to Sartre's literary and philosophical writings, finally undermines the notion of an intelligible action. For Sartre, the self is whatever the self chooses to be. Any sense in which one's life is predetermined by antecedents or essences is inauthentic and so teleology and tradition undermine freedom. It also follows that the narrative framework distorts authentic freedom because actions 'do not have narrative form, since they do not have any form at all.'²⁴ In the end, choice rather than meaning is the defining feature of an authentic human life.²⁵ The problem is that this understanding of freedom finally deprives the self of intelligibility because it denies that the self is a character 'upon a stage which it did not design, as part of an action which did not originate with the self.'²⁶ MacIntyre derides this view of the self as being in a category of things that include 'unicorns, glass mountains, and squared circles.' It is a view of freedom that must deny that 'moral agents who actually exist are all living at some particular time and place, situated in some highly specific type of social role and situation, itself embedded to greater or lesser degree in some tradition or some confluence of

²² MacIntyre, 'The Antecedents of Action', p. 209.

²³ MacIntyre, 'The Antecedents of Action', p. 207.

²⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Can One Be Unintelligible to Oneself?', in eds. Christopher McKnight and Mercel Stchedroff, *Philosophy in its Variety: Essays in Honour of Francois Bordet* (Belfast: Queens University, 1987), p. 25.

²⁵ *After Virtue*, p. 214.

²⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 213.

traditions.’²⁷ The actions of the self defined by this understanding of radical freedom need not be nor can they be, morally accountable without denying the authenticity of that self.

An unintelligible action is one that lacks accountability. An intelligible action is then an accountable action. MacIntyre hints at the importance of narrative for accountability in his close association of intelligible actions with accountability, writing:

The intelligibility of actions is therefore closely linked to the accountability of agents. That of which an agent cannot give a certain kind of account, whether in explanation or in justification – and since the account has to specify the agent’s reasons and thus make those reasons available for evaluation as better or worse reasons, one and the same kind of account is required for both purposes – must be unintelligible as an action both to her or herself and to others.²⁸

For MacIntyre, accountability is not centred in the assigning of moral praise and blame to particular deeds. His concern is much less with moral opprobrium and much more with accountability as the positive skill of joining explanations to actions. Actions may be accountable because they are the ‘deeds of those who have words.’²⁹ This notion of a positive skill does not of course assuage the ill–feelings that the term accountability evokes. Nevertheless, accountability seems to be a stubborn feature of the moral life, even with those who, in theory, reject such moral responsibility.

For example, consider how someone might commend the philosophy of Richard Rorty to another. Rorty’s philosophy, MacIntyre notes, rejects the notion of ‘a unified, even if complex, ultimate and final true account of the order of things in nature and human history.’³⁰ This view denies the kind of teleological reasoning that MacIntyre maintains is essential for accountability. How then would a Rorty sympathiser give an account of the merits of Rorty’s work? Would he not need to say that Rorty’s philosophy *ought* be taken seriously because he represents philosophical progress? If these claims are not implicit in the advocacy of Rorty’s philosophy, one would have no reason to pay heed to the invitation to engage this philosophy. If the advocate is indeed claiming that Rorty represents an advance in thinking, the claim is

²⁷ *Moral Rationality, Tradition, and Aristotle*, p. 454.

²⁸ MacIntyre, ‘Can One Be Unintelligible to Oneself?’, p. 24.

²⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 211.

³⁰ *First Principles, Final Ends*, pp. 29–30.

only intelligible insofar as one can say from where the advance comes and to where it is pointed.³¹

As indicated in the introduction, I do not take up the question of progress until the third section. My concern here is rather to illustrate MacIntyre's claim that as accountability is a stubborn feature of human relations, the teleological structure is a stubborn feature of human rationality. We may, with Rorty, deny the possibility of ultimate truth-claims. However, the Rorty disciple will presume that his denial is real *progress* in knowing and a *better* understanding of the world. The predicament is how one can sustain the claim that they have achieved a *better* understanding or have made *progress* when they deny the very teleological framework within which these claims are intelligible.³² How can one speak of progress unless or until one identifies the goal by which such progress is measured?³³

MacIntyre asserts that moral accountability is unavoidable and that the key aspect of every account is some implicit or explicit teleological appeal. Even those who reject teleology in theory must always lapse into 'something like a teleological understanding of their own activities.'³⁴ The unavoidable character of teleological reasoning becomes ever more obvious as we turn to consider the relationship of narrative to moral accountability.

1.2. The Teleological Structure of Narrative

Wayne Meeks observes that narrative is for MacIntyre not merely 'a help for moral teaching...it is essential to proper moral reasoning.'³⁵ For MacIntyre, as I argue above, the intelligibility of an action largely depends upon an agent's ability to give an account of her actions.³⁶ This account invariably takes a narrative form that addresses antecedents, aims and the concerns of practical rationality in moving toward these aims. 'The intelligibility of an action,' MacIntyre asserts, 'derives ultimately from narrative continuities in the agent's life. The form of our understanding of intelligibility is therefore narrative form.'³⁷ The teleological shape of these narratives

³¹ *Whose Justice?*, pp. 385–387.

³² *First Principles, Final Ends*, p. 58.

³³ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 149.

³⁴ *First Principles, Final Ends*, p. 55.

³⁵ Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 189.

³⁶ MacIntyre, 'Can One Be Unintelligible to Oneself?', p. 24.

³⁷ MacIntyre, 'Can One Be Unintelligible to Oneself?', pp. 24–25.

is indisputable. Actions make sense because they are embedded in a narratable story that shows how these actions cohere (or fail to cohere) with an agent's past and movement toward the fulfilment of potentiality. Both determinism and unencumbered freedom fail because they deny agents the ability to narrate this kind of teleological account. That is, in isolating one or another feature of an action (i.e. antecedents or volition), they deny some aspect of the teleological framework and deprive an action of its place within that sequence or web of human transactions by which the action becomes accountable.

MacIntyre asserts that a rational moral account is essentially narrative. L. Gregory Jones supports this assertion as he notes that for MacIntyre, 'because narrative and action are mutually complicate, "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal."' ³⁸ In support of this close relationship of rationality to narrative MacIntyre first refers to Bruno Bettelheim's argument that children who grow up without the right kind of fairy tales become incapable of interpreting their historical experience.³⁹ Children who are deprived of the right kinds of story are deprived of that narrative framework whereby their questions that concerning *inter alia* personal identity, their relationship to others, and meaning cannot be answered.⁴⁰ To deprive children of the right kind of stories, MacIntyre concludes, leaves them 'unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words.'⁴¹ Another support of narrative rationality is the dependence of moral theories on stories. The question which is *always* asked of any theory is, says MacIntyre, 'what *type* of enacted narrative would be the embodiment, in the actions and transactions of actual social life, of this particular theory?'⁴² Until we know how a theory is practically embodied, we do not have an adequate grasp of the theory itself. This account of an embodied theory is not another theory but a narrative. This is true of all theories, even theories that deny the importance of teleology. MacIntyre writes:

³⁸ L Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 36. Jones, quoting MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 216.

³⁹ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

⁴⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative And The Philosophy Of Science', *The Monist*, 60 (October, 1977), p. 457.

⁴¹ *After Virtue*, p. 216.

⁴² *Three Rival Versions*, p. 80.

But when teleology was rejected, and Aristotelian conceptions of first principles along with it, human beings engaged in enquiry did not stop telling stories of this kind. They could no longer understand their own activities in Aristotelian terms at the level of theory, but for a very long time they proved unable, for whatever reason, to discard that form of narrative which is the counterpart to the theory which they had discarded.⁴³

Theories always seek a narrative because we are essentially historical beings. As such, moral theory is always striving for a narrative form and is understood to be incomplete until it is embodied in a narrative. Narrative is the appropriate and necessary form of reasoning for beings who are simultaneously bodies and souls and whose existence is characterised by thought and action. As historical beings, we soon recognise that we begin in the middle of things. Thus the initiating question of our moral inquiry is ‘What is going on here?’ Because there are rival answers to this question, our answers must be subject to dialectical testing. ‘Dialectic’, MacIntyre asserts, ‘is the instrument of enquiry which is still *in via*.’⁴⁴

The importance of the question of what is going on and the possible answers may be illustrated with a common experience. Those who come into a film after it has begun commonly ask the question ‘What is going on here?’ The question expresses the desire to make sense of the unfolding action. In order to know what is going on, they need to have enough of the story retold so to establish the context, identify the characters, and explain the meaning of past and present events and actions. This account renders the complexity of characters, context, and plot intelligible by giving a coherent account of their roles and relationships.

When, in our historical lives, we begin in the middle, it is imperative that we too know what is going on; we need to know how the parts fit into the whole story. As MacIntyre puts it,

We *always* move towards placing a particular episode in the context of a set of narrative histories, histories both of the individuals concerned and of the settings in which they act and suffer. It is now becoming clear that we render the actions of others intelligible in this way because action itself has a basically historical character. It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others.⁴⁵

To say that ethics is essentially historical means that the intelligibility of our lives depends upon being able to know what story we are a part of and what role we play.

⁴³ *First Principles, Final Ends*, p. 58.

⁴⁴ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 88.

⁴⁵ *After Virtue*, pp. 211–212 (my emphasis).

The late Gillian Rose eloquently stated how the narrative structure relates to our evaluative judgements.

[I]t is the beginning and the end which give authority to the way, and meaning to being lost – especially to any conceivable relishing of being lost. If the beginning and the end were abolished, so that all were (divine) middle – *Mitte ist überall* – we would not achieve joyful erring; nor pure virtue, ‘without resistance’; we would be left helpless in the total domination of the maze, every point equally beginning and ending. We encounter not pure freedom but pure authority and become its complete victim.⁴⁶

Without the teleological structure, we risk being dominated by the totalitarian present. Without a beginning or end there is no notion of life as a way or a story that unfolds. When there is no *way*, we cannot tell from where we have fallen or to where we must rise. The moral world is somehow levelled so that even temptation ceases to be tempting, and straying is drained of its excitement. While the notion of ends, goals, essences and purposes will always be put to pernicious uses, there does not seem to be any escape from this teleological structure.

Our ability to live together in moral rather than manipulative communities depends upon sustaining the theory and practices of moral accountability. I have considered MacIntyre’s argument for the teleological shape of these narrative accounts. MacIntyre summarises this crucial relationship between moral reflection and narrative:

If a human life is understood as a progress through harms and dangers, moral and physical, which someone may encounter and overcome in better and worse ways and with a greater or lesser measure of success, the virtues will find their place as those qualities the possession and exercise of which generally tend to success in this enterprise and the vices likewise as qualities which likewise tend to failure. Each human life will then embody a story whose shape and form will depend upon what is counted as a harm and danger, and upon how success and failure, progress and its opposite, are understood and evaluated.⁴⁷

Our evaluative judgements are dependent on the teleological structure in narratives. Lacking the right kind of stories, we find ourselves morally inarticulate, being unable to rationally advance or defend our moral commitments, and so increasingly forced to resort to nonmoral and nonrational forms of order. Much more shall be said about moral judgement when I consider the notion of progress in the third section. Presently, we move from the discussion of teleological form to MacIntyre’s account of tradition which supplies the teleological framework with its content.

⁴⁶ Gillian Rose, ‘The Diremption of Spirit’, in eds. Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick, *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 54–55.

⁴⁷ *After Virtue*, p. 144.

2. Tradition as Authority and Argument

Analogous to modernism's understanding of teleology, tradition has also tended to be judged as irrational. Against this view, MacIntyre effectively argues for the restoration of the concept of tradition to intellectual respectability. Like his argument for the unavoidable nature of teleological reasoning, tradition also has an inescapable quality which reflects our human identity as historical and social characters. 'What I am, therefore,' MacIntyre writes, 'is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, *whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not*, one of the bearers of a tradition.'⁴⁸ Having said this we must quickly attend to MacIntyre's distinction between a tradition in good order versus one in disorder. Briefly put, a tradition in good order is able to sustain moral order without coercion and manipulation by means of moral commitment to the goods of that tradition.

A moral tradition in good order exercises a moral authority which is nonauthoritarian. This is because the authority of a tradition is not merely asserted but continually subject to dialectical testing. MacIntyre observes that a tradition is in large part known by the kinds of arguments that that tradition has sustained and by which that tradition has been shaped. A tradition, MacIntyre states, is 'an historically extended, socially embodied argument...about the goods which constitute that tradition.'⁴⁹ The moral authority of a tradition in good order is not an unquestioned authority. Indeed, one of the main functions of a tradition is to generate and sustain certain kinds of intramural arguments. The history of a tradition is a narrative about the 'conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible to rival interpretations.'⁵⁰

For example, in MacIntyre's account of the 'craft tradition', there is a complex interplay between authority and critical questions and judgements.⁵¹ Traditions are not static. Rather they develop in the middle ground between authority and questioning. Within a craft, this interplay offers 'a kind of ability to recognize in the past what is and what is not a guide to the future which is at the core of any adequately embodied tradition. A craft in good order has to be embodied in a

⁴⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 221 (my emphasis).

⁴⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 222.

⁵⁰ MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science', p. 460.

tradition in good order. And to be adequately initiated into a craft is to be adequately initiated into a tradition.’⁵² The rationality of a craft tradition is evident in its ability to initiate others into that craft. Those who are adequately initiated are not merely introduced into the craft’s authoritative assertions. They must acquire that skill of critical judgement which is necessary in applying the authoritative tradition to new problems that may arise.

Unless authority stands in a tensed relationship with ongoing dialectical criticism, it suffers from the disorders of either dogmatism or scepticism. Dogmatism is authority divorced from argument while scepticism results from criticism divorced from authority. A tradition of inquiry in good order sustains the tension between authority and criticism. The following section offers a more detailed account of the complex relationship between authority and argument. The first part considers MacIntyre’s theoretical account of authority and argument in a tradition, and the second part attends to his account of Galileo as the model of the positive function of dialectical disagreement in the development of a tradition.

2.1. The Relationship of Authority to Argument

The intelligibility of any doctrine, truth–claim or argument depends upon some explicit or implicit tradition. Every assertion has a particular history. This view is central to MacIntyre’s claim, made near the end of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality*, that either ‘we have to begin speaking as protagonists of one contending party’ or our moral inquiries must ‘fall silent.’⁵³ In our inquiries as in our lives, we are advocates of particular authoritative truth–claims, which derive from some particular historical perspective. MacIntyre states:

It is central to my argument that the practice of the moral life by plain persons always presupposes the truth of some particular theoretical standpoint and that, when confronted by rival claims to her or his moral allegiance, the plain person’s reflective practical choices will implicitly at least be a choice between theoretical standpoints.⁵⁴

For MacIntyre, a tradition in good order functions between the stability of authority and the testing functions of dialectical argumentation.

⁵¹ I discuss the ‘craft tradition’ in much more detail below.

⁵² *After Virtue*, p. 128.

⁵³ *Whose Justice?*, p. 401.

⁵⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy’, pp. 16–17.

According to Stephen Holmes, MacIntyre's commitment to authority is a license for 'conformist bigotry.'⁵⁵ Holmes concludes that MacIntyre has fully moved into the camp of political conservatism. Against this judgement, the sociologist Peter McMylor notes that one of MacIntyre's aims is to restore the notion of tradition by distinguishing it from certain conservative conceptions of tradition. To do this, McMylor argues that MacIntyre first exposed liberalism's error in rejecting all tradition as false authority. The upshot of this rejection was to have 'left the concept (of tradition) to be taken over by conservatism, starting with Burke, who made a positive virtue of the implicit liberal contrast between reason and tradition.'⁵⁶ To define what he takes to be an acceptable understanding of tradition, MacIntyre contrasts the understanding of tradition in Cardinal John Henry Newman with that of Edmund Burke.

For MacIntyre, Burke's advocacy of an uncritical acceptance of tradition was a license to allow conservative political prejudices to go unchallenged.⁵⁷ As such, Burke's notion of tradition was a barricade against the kind of critical questioning needed for authentic moral and social transformation. Burke left the status quo unchallenged with a notion of tradition as 'a set of epistemological defences which enable it to avoid being put in question.'⁵⁸ Authority within a tradition in good order sustains rather than subdues dialectical questioning. For Burke the mark of tradition was fixity and stability. Conversely, Newman regarded tradition as a positive force for historical development. For Newman, the supposed conflict between progressives and traditionalists fails to recognise how progress is impossible apart from tradition. MacIntyre is referring particularly to Newman's notion of development within the Christian theological tradition. In Newman's *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, tradition is not fixed but developing by means of dialectical testing.

⁵⁵ Stephen Holmes, 'MacIntyre: The Antiliberal Catechism', in *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 88.

⁵⁶ Peter McMylor, *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 159.

⁵⁷ *Whose Justice?*, pp. 217–219 and 228–230. MacIntyre states that Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* are representative of a Burkean preservation of English prejudice and an argument for the status quo. He states, 'Blackstone was, of course, the legal counterpart of Burke. In the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* Blackstone is praised as the latest in a line of succession from Coke. And, like Burke, what Blackstone provides is an account of the dominant English social structures according to which the justification of those structures is internal to them. The standards by which established practice is to be judged are, with minimal qualification, the standards already embodied in established practice.' *Whose Justice?*, p. 229. See also *After Virtue*, p. 221.

⁵⁸ MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative And Science', p. 461.

In his *Apologia*, Newman responded to Charles Kingsley's criticism of his move to Roman Catholicism with an autobiographical account of the *development* of his life. MacIntyre sees in Newman the kind of appreciation for development and dialectics that is absent in Burke. Furthermore, this acceptance of development by means of dialectical argument explains the whole development of the church's doctrine. This is particularly evident in the church's use of philosophical and theological resources in the fourth-century debate about the nature of God and the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁹ Arguments, rather than bald assertions, were needed to advance the doctrinal development that finally led to creedal agreement. Jaroslav Pelikan captures this distinction between a fixed and developing tradition well when he says, 'Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.'⁶⁰ A tradition in good order understands itself by its account of that historical continuity which runs through the continual development of that tradition.

In spite of MacIntyre's efforts to define tradition in relationship to development, Stephen Holmes argues that MacIntyre is finally trapped by his reverence for authority. Holmes claims that MacIntyre's 'authority-friendly and obedience-encouraging perspective,' blinds him to the benefits of conflicts in liberal societies. To come to this conclusion, Holmes must acknowledge then ignore MacIntyre's claim that moral authority is necessary to preserve us from 'the vexation of ephemeral and mercurial preferences.'⁶¹ Rather than taking seriously the importance of this function of tradition, Holmes sets out to disclose MacIntyre's *real* agenda: 'Incontrovertibility is what he [MacIntyre] seeks.'⁶²

Knight presents a more positive view of MacIntyre's understanding of tradition when he observes:

The most absurd consequence of MacIntyre's critics' misconstrual of his substantive social theory in terms of his metatheory must be the occasional claim that he is a political conservative... This is not a conservative conception of politics. On the contrary, it is a revolutionary conception.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 362.

⁶⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 252.

⁶¹ Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, p. 95.

⁶² Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, p. 95.

⁶³ Knight, *The MacIntyre Reader*, pp. 20—21.

In truth, MacIntyre's virtuous self is literally *unmanageable*. That is, the virtuous life, as MacIntyre understands it, is often times socially disruptive.⁶⁴ Knight states:

MacIntyre's politics may now, to an extent, be described in terms of resistance. The idea of a politics of resistance is familiar to many Nietzscheans. For them, it involves resistance to domination of one's will by others and asserting oneself in the *agon* that is society. For MacIntyre it involves something else. What is to be resisted is injustice.⁶⁵

Appreciation for moral authority is disruptive because it continually asks, 'To what *higher* authority, if any, may someone appeal against the verdict of whomsoever it is that locally has the power to impose authority?'⁶⁶ MacIntyre provides a historical narrative of this understanding of a socially subversive tradition in his consideration of the conflict between Frederick II with Pope Gregory IX over the limits of ecclesial and secular authority. In one sense, it matters very little to MacIntyre's argument whether, with Nietzsche, one sides with Frederick II, or with Aquinas, one sides with the Pope. MacIntyre's point is that we cannot launch and rationally defend any kind of criticism unless it be embedded in some authoritative account. Authority is essential for argumentation. To stress the dialectical function of authority, a central feature of authority is that it has been 'rationally justified as the best thus far.'⁶⁷ The conditional 'thus far' means that the authority in a tradition shapes that tradition without being insulated from further questions and challenges from within and without.

Holmes neglects the dialectical tension in MacIntyre's notion of authority when he claims that MacIntyre is in search of an authority that 'can provide an absolute guide, can rescue the individual from the chaos in his soul and the anxiety about difficult decision.' At bottom MacIntyre does not trust that human beings are capable of rationally ordering their lives together and so 'authority alone' is required to 'lift mankind's spiritual burden.'⁶⁸ Aiming at a notion of authority which is 'capable of settling all disputes and resolving all doubts' finally leads MacIntyre down a path from secular reason to religion which he understands to be an irrational and arbitrary authority. This openness to religion is taken as a sign that MacIntyre has

⁶⁴ Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Sophrosune: How a Virtue Can Become Socially Disruptive,' in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XIII* (1988), pp. 1–11 and *Natural Law As Subversive: The Case of Aquinas, Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 26* (Winter, 1996), pp. 62–83.

⁶⁵ Knight, *The MacIntyre Reader*, p. 23.

⁶⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Natural Law as Subversive', p. 61 (my emphasis).

⁶⁷ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 64.

⁶⁸ Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, p. 94.

despaired of his ability to justify rationally a particular account of ‘man’s true end’ or what makes a ‘good man.’⁶⁹ Hence in Holmes’ view, MacIntyre’s choice of religion places him in the same category as the liberals he criticises. He must commit himself to some tradition and some authority without rational justification. What matters is not rational argument but choice.

Holmes’ argument is anachronistic. His notion of ‘reason’ as a universal guide and his disparagement of the authority of tradition disregards MacIntyre’s account of the Enlightenment’s failure to reconcile its claims of freedom with the notion of a rational world. Because he does not recognise this crucial impasse, he cannot appreciate MacIntyre’s attempt to show how authority and argumentation coexist within a tradition. He misses MacIntyre’s *argument* that authority is necessary in order to identify those ends by which progress and decline are recognised. It is within this structure that dialectics is the essential method whereby a tradition progresses from disorder to order. In the following section, I attend to MacIntyre’s argument that a tradition in good order is able to hold authority and argument in dialectical tension.

2.2. The Deconstructive Function of Tradition

According to MacIntyre, a living tradition is ‘an historically extended, socially embodied argument...about the goods which constitute that tradition.’⁷⁰ The sign of a tradition in good order is a kind of co-operative, dialectical conversation that results in ‘the formulation, elaboration, rational justification, and criticism of accounts of practical rationality and justice’.⁷¹ Clearly, MacIntyre sees that the role of authority in a tradition in good order sustains rather than silences argument, by directing such arguments toward fruitful development. It is therefore puzzling that Holmes should attribute an unquestioned conservatism to MacIntyre’s conception of tradition in view of MacIntyre’s appreciation for the central importance of dialectical testing. Indeed, once we consider the nature and function of this testing, it becomes clear that MacIntyre recognises that Nietzsche’s notion of genealogy has a crucial, albeit provisional, function within an ordered tradition. MacIntyre’s commitment to historicism means that truth-claims are advocated by historical characters in historical

⁶⁹ Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, p. 102.

⁷⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 222.

contexts; no authoritative assertion can claim immunity from deconstruction.

Deconstruction is always possible because a tradition *fixes* philosophical theories within a history of practices and institutions. MacIntyre states:

Every such form of enquiry begins in and from some condition of pure historical contingency, from the beliefs, institutions, and practices of some particular community which constitute a given. Within such a community authority will have been conferred upon certain texts and certain voices. Bards, priests, prophets, kings, and, on occasion, fools and jesters will all be heard.⁷²

By the careful examination of these concrete embodiments of theory, one is able to examine and criticise the claims made within that tradition. MacIntyre's notion of a tradition roundly rejects any claim to epistemological immunity. It asserts that the vindication or falsification of truth-claims will be *de facto* and not *de jure*.⁷³

MacIntyre's claim that genealogy has an important function within his notion of tradition merits further consideration. MacIntyre notes that for Nietzsche:

[T]he task of the genealogist more generally was to write the history of those social and psychological formations in which the will to power is distorted into and concealed by the will to truth and the specific task of the genealogist of morality was to trace both socially and conceptually how rancor and resentment on the part of the inferior destroyed the aristocratic nobility of archaic heroes and substituted a priestly set of values in which a concern for purity and impurity provided a disguise for malice and hate.⁷⁴

The genealogist is able to chart the development of truth-claims because they are necessarily embodied in actions and institutions.⁷⁵ The dialectical and adversarial task of the genealogist is to displace a false history with a more accurate account of how a tradition has, by its own standards, failed to achieve the goods of that tradition. When a tradition identifies its canonical texts and its central tasks, it does not thereby escape

⁷¹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 350.

⁷² Alasdair MacIntyre, 'The Privatization of the Good: An Inaugural Lecture', *Review of Politics* 52 (1990), pp. 354–355.

⁷³ Paul J. Griffiths develops this distinction in a critical essay on Schubert Ogden's process theology. Griffiths argues that the *de jure* epistemological claim is to be rejected for two reasons. First, it is often and perhaps always self-refuting as it proposes epistemic tests that it cannot itself satisfy. Second, Griffiths states 'that the quest for epistemic principles is motivated, in large part, by a desire to fix belief about some matter independently of deciding its truth. This is why the epistemically desirable property specified by an epistemic principle should neither assume the truth of the claim to which it is applied nor be among that claim's truth conditions. The point of epistemic principles... is to make a *de jure* rather than a *de facto* decision possible', Paul J. Griffiths, 'How Epistemology Matters to Theology', *Journal of Religion* 79 (1999), p. 6.

⁷⁴ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 40.

⁷⁵ Maurice Cowling, writing in *The New Criterion*, states that MacIntyre's emphasis on the inseparability of theory from practice reflects the continued influence of Marx on his moral philosophy. Maurice Cowling, 'Alasdair MacIntyre, Religion and the University', *The New Criterion* 13 (Feb., 1994), p. 40.

criticism. Rather such identification of authority makes the deconstructive task, at least on the face of things, that much easier.

Consider a more difficult deconstruction in MacIntyre's account of liberalism. MacIntyre notes that, 'Nietzsche pilloried what he took to be the false claims to objectivity of those who had rejected the teleology of their predecessors and boasted of their own value-neutrality.'⁷⁶ The claims to objectivity and neutrality concealed the truth that these were the claims of advocates and not aloof observers. Liberalism failed to displace tradition with universal principles of reason because it could only advance its argument by recognising itself as a tradition. Once fixed as a tradition, the genealogist is able to write a subversive history which exposes the incoherence in liberalism.⁷⁷ MacIntyre's deconstruction joins the philosophical claims advanced within the liberal tradition to particular authoritative texts, persons, practices and institutions of that tradition. Even when advancing timeless truths one must always stake out these claims in a 'time-bound' manner.⁷⁸

To say that the notion of a tradition is inescapable is to say that ideas always have historically embodied consequences. MacIntyre states, 'There is no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing, evaluating, accepting, and rejecting reasoned argument apart from that which is provided by some particular tradition.'⁷⁹ The task of the rival genealogist is to show that the historical predicates of a moral or intellectual tradition are very different from its assertions. However, to focus only on deconstruction is to miss the point of MacIntyre's argument. When he claims that tradition is an inescapable reality, he is claiming that both falsification and vindication of truth-claims becomes possible. When our assertions withstand the possibility of 'rational defeat', they may be said to be 'rationally vindicated' thus far. For this reason, a tradition in good order will render itself 'maximally vulnerable to refutation from its own point of view.'⁸⁰ This takes place when a tradition identifies its canonical texts, its defining tenets and authoritative teachers.

MacIntyre is most persuasive in his advocacy of the genealogical task in his performance of this task in his Gifford Lectures. There he offers an imaginative

⁷⁶ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 40.

⁷⁷ *Whose Justice?*, p. 349.

⁷⁸ *Whose Justice?*, p. 9.

⁷⁹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 350.

account of the dialectical conflict between the three rival traditions that he dubs 'Tradition', 'Genealogy' and 'Encyclopaedia'. Calling into question the kind of scientific objectivity which the lectures seem to call for, MacIntyre makes his commitment to the Thomistic Christian tradition, and his intent to argue for its rational superiority over its modern and postmodern rivals clear from the start. To make good on this claim, he first tethers each tradition to a nineteenth-century text that he takes to be an authoritative voice within that tradition. MacIntyre's chosen text for 'Tradition' is Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*, the Enlightenment text is the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and the Genealogist's canonical authority is Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

Deconstruction of every philosophy is possible because there is no philosophical position that is not embodied in some tradition. The most tangible sign of a tradition is the book or books that are taken to be an authoritative account of the given position. Once each philosophical position is linked to a particular text, MacIntyre is able to demonstrate how these positions must be seen as philosophic rivals. Moreover, in making this linkage, MacIntyre, on the one hand, acts as a Nietzschean genealogist who denies encyclopaedists' claims to neutrality, objectivity and universality. On the other hand, MacIntyre opposes the genealogists' notion of truth claims which, according to Nietzsche, are nothing more than 'illusions which we have forgotten are illusions, worn-out metaphors now impotent to stir the senses, coins which have lost their faces and are considered now as metal rather than currency.'⁸¹ This practice of affixing authoritative texts to rival positions follows *naturally* from MacIntyre's notion of the rationality of tradition. It reflects the view that every tradition authorises certain voices, texts, or persons who are the public advocates of that tradition, even if these authorities are not explicitly acknowledged. A tradition that refuses to own up to its authorities is then forced to accept the genealogist's selection of its authoritative text. In this way, MacIntyre links philosophical positions with a particular history in order to render these positions vulnerable to refutation or, for that matter, vindication. No position should wish to claim immunity from dialectical argument because it is only in such testing that the authority of that position is established. Refutation and vindication come by one and the same dialectical method.

⁸⁰ MacIntyre, 'Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?' p. 78.

⁸¹ MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, p. 35, quoting Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense'. (No further bibliographical details are given.)

Three reasons support this assertion. First, rival moral traditions develop and work within particular contexts in which they have identified certain practical questions about morality and justice as problems to be solved. By identifying certain problems as disorders, a tradition either carries its enquiries forward or is stymied by the irresolvability of the problem.⁸² The resolution or failure to resolve problems are occasions for ‘the rational criticism and for further rational development’ of moral theories and concepts.⁸³ Second, rival theories often converge on the same practical problem, while proposing rival and incompatible solutions. Such an occasion affords the opportunity to judge one tradition’s solutions against those of others. Third, philosophical theories persist long after they are formally refuted.⁸⁴ However, once these theories are connected to historical traditions, their path to perishing or flourishing can be rationally charted.⁸⁵ When a tradition meets with a concrete historical problem, one of three courses will transpire. The tradition may resolve its problem with its present resources, it may be transformed through the discovery of outside resources, or it may perish. Once more, MacIntyre does not merely offer a theory of testing; rather, he places his discussion within a narrative. Let us further consider the function of argument in MacIntyre’s narrative account of Galileo.

2.3. The Positive Function of Argument

Arguments play important roles in MacIntyre’s moral philosophy. On the one hand, interminable arguments are a sign of modernity’s moral fragmentation. On the other hand, dialectical disagreements are the means by which progress is achieved within a moral tradition. This latter point is hardly self-evident, as arguments seem more divisive than constructive. Hence MacIntyre makes his case for the positive function of argument by explaining how Galileo’s conflict with the church was the means of positive development within this tradition. Accepting MacIntyre’s version means rejecting the account of Galileo found in textbooks and encyclopaedia articles. These mythic accounts view Galileo as a rational, enlightened scientist, who overcame a superstitious cosmology entrenched in a mindless tradition. For example,

⁸² *Whose Justice?*, pp. 326–327.

⁸³ *Whose Justice?*, p. 390.

⁸⁴ *Whose Justice?*, p. 335.

⁸⁵ For example, MacIntyre writes that Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* reflects the belief ‘that history can be instructive. It exhibits the downfall of Athens through the misdeeds of the Athenian democracy.’ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 130.

in a popular computer encyclopaedia, one article states that, ‘In the history of culture, Galileo stands as a symbol of the battle against authority for freedom of inquiry.’⁸⁶ The view that Galileo displaced medieval metaphysics and theology with the scientific method reflects two misconceptions of tradition. Galileo did not initiate a paradigm shift in displacing one tradition with another. Rather, he extended a tradition of scientific inquiry that had met with intractable problems. MacIntyre’s story of Galileo is about the Western theological tradition’s hard-fought discovery of new resources to overcome an intramural challenge from the emerging authority of science.

According to MacIntyre, the discoveries of Galileo did not spell defeat for the medieval scholastic tradition so much as they spurred the transformation of that tradition.⁸⁷

It was in one way a victory and not a defeat for the Aristotelian conception of enquiry when it proved vulnerable to Galileo’s dialectical arguments against it. And it is a mark of all established genuinely Aristotelian modes of enquiry that they too are open to defeat; that is, what had been taken to be adequate formulations of a set of necessary, apodictic judgements, functioning as first principles, may always turn out to be false, in the light afforded by the failure by its own Aristotelian standards of what had been hitherto taken to be a warranted body of theory. And lesser partial failures of this kind are landmarks in the history of every science.⁸⁸

MacIntyre explains that *within* every philosophical framework, questions arise that cause ‘a systematic breakdown of enquiry.’ What explains such a breakdown? Evidence that was once thought to support certain conclusions ‘turns out to have been equally susceptible of rival interpretations.’⁸⁹ Now faced with a ‘multiplicity of possible interpretations’, one moves beyond this impasse by imaginatively considering these rival interpretations.⁹⁰ The medieval tradition, which three centuries earlier was modified by the influx of Aristotelian ideas, would, in the sixteenth century, have its dependence on Aristotelian ideas challenged by new findings in scientific inquiry. Ironically, the foundation for the autonomy of the sciences, which so challenged the scholastic philosophers and theologians, was laid in the thirteenth-century struggle between Aquinas and Augustinian theology.

⁸⁶ ‘Galileo’, *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia*, CD-ROM. Microsoft Corporation, 1996.

⁸⁷ MacIntyre, ‘Epistemological Crises, Narrative And Science’, p. 460.

⁸⁸ *First Principles, Final Ends*, pp. 39–40.

⁸⁹ MacIntyre, ‘Epistemological Crises, Narrative And Science’, p. 453.

⁹⁰ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 120.

Galileo's discoveries initiated the revamping of medieval cosmology. It is important not to overlook the fact that his work was supported by the advocates of the cosmology he called into question. Such questions would not have been raised had Galileo not been a member of a tradition that recognised the importance of astronomy for philosophical and theological inquiry. The Christian theological tradition viewed the world as cosmos and not chaos. It was thus a reasonable expectation that rational sciences would not finally disagree with scripture. Rather science would finally cohere with and clarify theological truth-claims. This confidence was cast into confusion by Galileo's discovery that pitted theological authority against scientific authority. Furthermore, the crisis was complicated by the threats that these questions posed to the institutional power of the Church and to Aristotelian philosophers at the University at Pisa. The goods of inquiry directly challenge the goods of institutional security. In this context, it is regrettable, but not surprising, that these challenges were met by coercive threats.

Galileo is exemplary of the positive function of dialectical testing. As his work questioned the tradition's authority, it led to the development rather than the disintegration of the Western theological tradition. The heretic and inquisitor suggest two erroneous alternatives to positive, dialectical development. As the story of Galileo indicates, progress within a tradition is uneven and punctuated by errors. A certain ambiguity surrounds those characters and events that are on the frontiers of a tradition's development. At this point in a tradition's development, ambiguity requires restrained debate rather than clarity at any cost. The heretic rejects the authentic authority of a tradition in his effort to offer a too easy resolution to the ambiguity. The inquisitor attempts to sustain the tradition's authority by suppressing debate with dogmatic assertions backed by coercive power. That heretic and inquisitor are recurring types within society is a sign of the difficulty and utter necessity that a tradition sustain habits and practices of dialectical testing. It was, after all, Galileo's achievement that he disclosed the false authority of misapplied philosophy and theology by means of the authentic authority of scientific discovery.

However, it would be naïve to argue that dialectical method alone ensures the order of a tradition. In MacIntyre's account, shrill and interminable arguments characterise the modern disorder. A tradition in good order must then be capable of discriminating between fruitful and fruitless arguments. Put differently, a tradition in good order must be capable of rationally distinguishing between progress and decline.

In the following section, I consider MacIntyre's notion of progress as a crucial element in his argument for a rational morality. Simply put, a tradition in good rational order is able to account for its notion of progress while a tradition in disorder is rendered inarticulate.

3. Progress and Rationality

3.1. Progress and Rational Evaluation

Progress is the capstone of the previous discussions of rationality, teleology and tradition. That is, an intelligible account of progress depends upon a tradition's teleological account of how paradise was lost, its vision of paradise regained and the means by which one progresses from the former state to the latter. Progress is an essential component of morality. We cannot say why it is rational to act in one way rather than in another without referring to progress. This point was made by G.K. Chesterton who saw that modern doubt undermines any notion of progress.

Nobody has any business to use the word 'progress' unless he has a definite creed and a cast-iron code of morals... For progress by its very name indicates a direction; and the moment we are in the least doubtful about the direction, we become in the same degree doubtful about the progress. Never perhaps since the beginning of the world has there been an age that had less right to use the word 'progress' than we.⁹¹

For MacIntyre a creed expresses the teleological shape of rationality and is embodied in the practices and commitments of a tradition.

The notion of progress is a mirror reflection of deconstruction. The genealogist discloses the path from present truth-claims to their origin in the past. Progress is concerned to map out the path from present truth-claims to their future fulfilment. These claims, once made, are then subject to retrospective scrutiny by which they are either vindicated or falsified.⁹² MacIntyre argues that truth-claims, abstracted from their teleological framework, are deprived of 'the only context by reference to which they can be made fully intelligible and rationally defensible.'⁹³ Within the teleological structure, an assertion specifies 'what course of action will...*as a matter of fact* lead

⁹¹ G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 62.

⁹² *Whose Justice?*, p. 357.

⁹³ *First Principles, Final Ends*, pp. 60–61.

toward a man's *true* end... Moral sentences are thus used within this framework to make claims which are true or false.'⁹⁴

Progress is essential for the big questions of 'man's true end' as well as for questions concerned with practical action. Hence how one thinks about small-scale practical decisions is analogous to the way we think about the large-scale philosophical concerns. For this reason, the practical syllogism offers an insight into our moral reflection on the grand moral issues of identity, community and meaning.⁹⁵ It does this by showing how we would answer the simple question, 'Why did you so act?' To give an adequate answer to this question would mean to cite 'the relevant practical syllogism and the relevant piece of deliberation.'⁹⁶ When an agent asks 'What am I to do?', he or she must decide which course of action is better and which is worse. To speak of better and worse courses of action requires that we specify our standard of measure. The practical syllogism is a deductive argument that specifies the reasons why one has chosen one course over its alternatives.⁹⁷ It is a form of deliberation (*prohairesis*) that 'moves to a beginning, an *archê*, with a view to the construction of an argument which concludes with an end product.'⁹⁸ This form of deliberation identifies the ends which are the standard by which one gives hierarchical ranking to lesser and greater goods. In this way the syllogism identifies why it is rational to act in one way rather than another.

Unremarkably, the practical syllogism has a major and minor premise, and a conclusion. The major premise declares the good that is achieved by acting or lost by the failure to act. The minor premise takes into account one's particular identity and circumstances, and identifies the appropriate means to achieve the named good.⁹⁹ The conclusion is a rationally justifiable action. MacIntyre contends that this form of reasoning is essential to the way we think about practical action and our ultimate good.

Herein lies the modern problem of inarticulacy. Modernity is troubled by an epistemological scepticism about the possibility of naming ultimate goods. Hence modern moral deliberation proceeds without any kind of teleological account.

⁹⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 53 (my emphasis).

⁹⁵ *Whose Justice?*, p. 129.

⁹⁶ *Whose Justice?*, p. 131.

⁹⁷ *Whose Justice?*, p. 24.

⁹⁸ *Whose Justice?*, p. 132.

⁹⁹ *Whose Justice?*, pp. 131–132.

Because Descartes failed to secure an epistemological starting point in the doubts of the self, we have concluded that moral knowledge—if there is such knowledge—is unattainable. ‘A radical sceptic’, says MacIntyre, ‘is an epistemologist with entirely negative findings.’¹⁰⁰ This scepticism undermines our ability to speak authoritatively about ‘certain determinate, fixed and unalterable ends.’ Deprived of an account of ends, we cannot say why our actions and life are ‘well or badly directed’, or how we may progress in our actions and life.¹⁰¹ Without this account of progress, evaluative judgements are rationally indefensible.

For MacIntyre, the rational moral evaluation of one’s actions and life depends upon how we progress or fail to progress towards our true end(s). This is what MacIntyre calls the retrospective theory of falsification:

When from time to time, the plain person retrospectively examines what her or his life amounts to as a whole, often enough with a view to choice between alternative futures, characteristically what she or he is in effect asking is, ‘To what conception of my overall good have I so far *committed* myself?’¹⁰²

Rational moral evaluation depends upon shared commitment to some concrete account of the overall good. Modernity’s failure to own up to a creed reflects an inability to commit itself to certain ends and goods. Hence modernity is deprived of the language of progress and the evaluative judgements that depend on this progress.

Taking his cue from Plato, MacIntyre argues that the crafts offer a way to think through the relationship of evaluative judgements and commitment to certain ends. He begins by defining a craft, stating:

Every craft is informed by some conception of a finally perfected work which serves as the shared *telos* of that craft. And what are actually produced as the best judgements or actions or objects so far are judged so because they stand in some determinate relationship to that *telos*, which furnishes them with their final cause. So it is within forms of intellectual enquiry...which issue at any particular stage in their history in types of judgement and activity which are rationally justified as the best thus far.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *First Principles, Final Ends*, p. 12.

¹⁰¹ *First Principles, Final Ends*, p. 7.

¹⁰² MacIntyre, ‘Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy’, p. 8 (my emphasis).

¹⁰³ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 64. MacIntyre contrasts his notion of rational norms with the Marxist view that ‘an historical and sociological understanding of moral concepts and precepts as articulated within practices was incompatible with an appeal to objective standards of goodness, rightness and virtue, standards independent of the interests and attitudes of those engaged in such practices...But here once again there is a false antithesis. What the objectivity of moral and other evaluative standards amounts to is to be understood only from within the context of and in terms of the structure of certain types of historically developed practice, in which the initial interests of those engaged in such practices are transformed through their activities into an interest in conforming to the standards of excellence required by those practices, so that the goods internal to them may be achieved.’ ‘The Theses on

A craft is a co-operative practice that aims toward ‘goods internal to that form of activity.’ These goods ‘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.’¹⁰⁴ By looking at a craft, we come to understand how the teleological framework and the authority of a tradition are necessary for a craft and, by analogy, for the moral life. By considering the structure of such practices as those of a fishing boat, the string quartet or the crafting of furniture, we better understand how rational moral judgements are made and sustained and how these judgements advance the co-operative activity of the craft. The two main features of a craft are its capacity to make rational evaluative judgements, and its capacity to sustain a program of education that rationally initiates outsiders into the craft.

3.2. Evaluation and Education in the Craft Tradition

Evaluative judgements articulate how one progresses toward some good in a craft. These judgements are crucial because a craft intends to transform raw material into finished products. This transformation can go wrong in many different ways. Critical evaluations recognise that there are better and worse finished products, and better and worse ways to produce finished product.¹⁰⁵ Hence the evaluative judgements of a craft in good order are intelligible and defensible insofar as they preserve the excellence of that craft both in its means and ends.

A craft in good order must overcome a certain kind of deception. This deception is due to the gap between ‘what it really is good to do and what only seems good...but is not in fact so.’¹⁰⁶ What seems to be good may lead to the frustration of one’s end, or what may seem to be utter frustration may be necessary to achieve a craft’s end. To use a biblical illustration, those in a craft are continually confronted with the kind of temptation presented in Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish builder. While building on sand is seductive, the wise builder, in taking the long view, endures the temporary

Feuerbach: A Road Not Taken, in eds. Carol C. Gould, and Robert S. Cohen, *Artefacts, Representations and Social Practice* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), p. 289.

¹⁰⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁵ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 136.

¹⁰⁶ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 61.

frustration that comes with building on a firm foundation.¹⁰⁷ For MacIntyre, evaluative judgements are necessary in order to resist the lure of short-term effectiveness. These judgements express how one's commitment to long-term excellence is embodied.

This means that a craft for MacIntyre 'is never *only* to catch fish, or to produce beef or milk, or to build houses. It is to do so in a manner consonant with the excellencies of the craft, so that not only is there a good product, but the craftsman is perfected through and in her or his activity.'¹⁰⁸ The critical distinction is between a craft as an embodied commitment to excellence versus a craft understood as an activity which can be fully explained by the calculations of an external and quantifiable 'bottom line.' The tension between the goods of excellence and the desire for effectiveness is an enduring tension within every craft. Because a craft is a co-operative activity ordered to a standard of excellence, the education of the apprentice must aim both at the cultivation of skills and of character. A craft in good order not only transforms raw material into products, it also transforms 'raw' apprentices into finished masters. A craft is the *techne* or skill that transforms an *ergon* (work) towards its appropriate *telos*. Likewise, in a rational education, 'the apprentice learns what it is about him or herself that has to be transformed, that is, what vices need to be eradicated, what intellectual and moral virtues need to be cultivated.'¹⁰⁹ Education is the means of transformation. 'Education,' writes MacIntyre, 'is first of all an initiation into the practices within which dialectical and confessional interrogation and self-interrogation are institutionalized.'¹¹⁰

The assertion that education is the means of transformation is deceptively simple as it confronts us once more with the paradox of the *Meno*. That is, the apprentice is able to make progress only by means of a certain kind of education. However, to embark on this course of education requires that the apprentice *already* be committed to the moral and intellectual virtues upon which learning depends. I can only be virtuous if I am educated. However, I can only be educated if I already possess certain intellectual and moral virtues. In a craft, the transformation of

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 4:27ff.

¹⁰⁸ MacIntyre, 'A Partial Response To My Critics', in eds. John Horton & Susan Mendus, *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 284.

¹⁰⁹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 62.

¹¹⁰ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 201.

apprentices depends upon a commitment to goods and practices that they are not yet able to recognise as goods. The resolution of this paradox is found in the relationship of apprentice to master. The virtues that the apprentice does not possess, are possessed by the master. The master's commitment to the apprentice allows the apprentice to 'live off' the virtues of the master. Michael Polanyi describes how this relationship works, stating:

To learn by example is to submit to authority. You follow your master because you trust his manner of doing things even when you cannot analyse and account in detail for its effectiveness. By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known by the master himself. These hidden rules can be assimilated only by a person who surrenders himself to that extent uncritically to the imitation of another.¹¹¹

The apprentice learns through trust, and trust requires submission to the authority of the master. The introduction of such terms as trust and submission reflects just how 'post-critical' is the craft analogy. Hence it is necessary to further justify this craft analogy.

MacIntyre spells out the necessity of trust in his account of how one becomes a skilled reader within the Augustinian community. In the community of readers the relationship between apprentice and master is crucial. MacIntyre maintains that this relationship involves two things:

a teacher and an obedient trust that what the teacher, interpreting the text, declares to be good reasons for transforming oneself into a different kind of person – and thus a different kind of reader – will turn out to be genuinely good reasons in the light afforded by that understanding of the texts which becomes available only to the transformed self. The intending reader has to have inculcated into him or herself certain attitudes and dispositions, certain virtues, *before* he or she can know why these are to be accounted virtues...And this reordering requires obedient trust, not only in the authority of this particular teacher, but in that of the whole tradition of interpretative commentary into which that teacher had had earlier him or herself to be initiated through his or her reordering and conversion.¹¹²

The rationality of a craft depends on the ability to trust. To have trust at the centre of one's notion of rationality requires, notes Lesslie Newbigin, something like Martin Buber's distinction between the relationships of *I/Thou* versus *I/It*. Newbigin argues that when the 'I' is reduced to an 'it', relationships are conducted according to rational calculation and control. 'Good' is whatever is effective. Newbigin states, 'I analyze and dissect. I formulate hypotheses. I force the world to answer the

¹¹¹ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 53.

questions I put to it. I am sovereign.’¹¹³ Conversely, the rationality of the I–thou is a different sort that, though it is built on trust, does not require the abolition of reason. Newbigin states that trust involves ‘a rational person making rational judgements and drawing rational conclusions from data.’¹¹⁴ Reason does not aim at masterful autonomy but at a relationship of trust.

The appeal to trust, obedience and submission cannot, however, be divorced from dialectical testing. No authority is worthy of trust if it is also insulated from criticism. Trust is the result not the absence of criticism. It is not irrational dependence on authority; it is a rational dependence on that authority which is necessary for moral and intellectual progress. This relationship between trust and criticism becomes more clear as I turn to consider how Thomas Aquinas laid the foundation for *trusting* the authority of the Christian tradition by means of dialectical *testing* of this authority. Testing is the means by which one progresses in trusting.

3.3. Thomas Aquinas and the Dialectical Transformation of a Tradition

Aquinas’ achievement can only be understood in its historical context. The universities of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries confronted an intellectual challenge to the Augustinian acceptance of the authority of divine revelation. This crisis was initiated by the introduction of Aristotelian texts into the medieval university by Islamic and Jewish scholars. These texts and their interpretations challenged the Augustinian framework which was predicated on the necessity of divine revelation for knowledge.

Averroës’ and Maimonides’ understanding of the role of the philosopher challenged foundational Augustinian assumptions. The philosopher’s task was to reconcile philosophical truths with the authoritative assertions of his religious tradition.¹¹⁵ Philosophy was both subordinate to and distinct from theology in its methods of inquiry and willingness to challenge revealed authority. Theologians were entrusted with writing commentaries on sacred texts that were judged according to their correspondence with accepted authority and by standards of internal

¹¹² *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 82–83.

¹¹³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), p. 60.

¹¹⁴ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 61.

¹¹⁵ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 106.

consistency.¹¹⁶ By contrast, the philosopher was licensed to pursue speculative inquiry in the expectation that all truth-claims could be harmonised within the theological framework. This limited autonomy of philosophy, granted to the Islamic and Jewish philosophers, proved to be unacceptable to medieval Augustinians. As we will see, this was not because Augustinianism did not value philosophy or dialectical inquiry. It was rather that the new knowledge depended on a philosophical framework which threatened to displace the theological framework. Aquinas' achievement was to show how Aristotle could be read in a way that advanced rather than compromised the commitment to theology.

In view of the influence of neoplatonic philosophy on Augustinian theology, the suspicion of philosophy by the medieval Augustinians was ironic. Indeed, MacIntyre explains the conflict at the University of Paris not as a conflict of theology with philosophy. It was rather a clash between seemingly incommensurable and incompatible philosophies.¹¹⁷ Aristotelian philosophy confronted the Augustinian theologians with a critical choice. They could accept Aristotelian philosophy into the curriculum and thereby subject the curriculum to radical incoherence, or they could forcefully keep Aristotelian influence out of the university. According to MacIntyre, resorting to force would cause the Augustinians to deny certain of their central intellectual commitments. Within the Augustinian framework, rational vindication takes place on two fronts. As a tradition of inquiry, it must 'progress in the solution of its own problems', while rival traditions of inquiry must finally 'exhibit incoherence or resourcelessness.'¹¹⁸ Aristotelian philosophy seemed to turn the tables on the Augustinians by calling into question such doctrines as the eternity of matter, the corruption of the will and especially the possibility of knowledge apart from revelation. Aristotelianism successfully challenged Augustinian theological views without exhibiting the kind of incoherence which Augustinianism predicated to its rivals. As such, the Augustinians could not claim that they had rationally defeated Aristotelian philosophy. The alternative of including a philosophy in the curriculum that questioned key theological doctrines and advanced a seemingly incompatible epistemology would have introduced a radical incoherence into the curriculum. The

¹¹⁶ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 106.

¹¹⁷ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 107.

¹¹⁸ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 102.

depth of this division is evident in how each system addressed the paradox of the *Meno*.

The question at the heart of this paradox is how one gains the requisite knowledge and virtues which are necessary to progress in learning. To be virtuous one must be educated and yet to become educated one must already possess certain intellectual and moral virtues that one does not already possess. Aristotle's solution was to posit a natural human potentiality which resided in the intellect. The Augustinian solution depended upon the active intervention of God.¹¹⁹ Where Aristotle predicated to the human mind rational adequacy, radical blindness of the intellect and bondage of the will characterised Augustinian anthropology.¹²⁰ For Aristotle, truth depended solely on 'the relationship of the mind to its objects', while for Augustinians truth came by means of 'the relationship of finite objects to that truth which is God.'¹²¹ The central disagreement between philosophy and theology turned on how one understood the relationship between divine and human knowledge.

The Augustinian conception of knowledge was expressed in Hugh of St. Victor's belief that 'the whole perceptible world is indeed as if a book written by the finger of God.'¹²² Knowledge of God's world depended upon the proper reading of God's Word. Knowledge was not gained through a natural skill but was dependent on a pure heart and converted will. As such, when theology met with contradictory philosophical truths, the Augustinians did not see these conflicts as occasions for dialectical debate to convince the mind. Rather, they demanded authoritative preaching to convert the heart. Not unlike Plato's forceful exclusion of the dramatic poets from the Republic, the church's condemnations of Aristotelian philosophy in 1277 were a tacit admission that the Augustinians did not possess the conceptual resources to engage the claims of Aristotelian philosophy. For the Augustinians, fruitful arguments were not possible 'unless and until the word of the scriptural preacher is heard as authoritative.'¹²³ Rejecting the authority of scripture was an error

¹¹⁹ *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 109–110.

¹²⁰ MacIntyre states, 'The intellect and the desires do not naturally move towards that good which is at once the foundation for knowledge and that from which lesser goods flow. The will which directs them is initially perverse and needs a kind of redirection which will enable it to trust obediently in a teacher who will guide the mind towards the discovery both of its own resources and of what lies outside the mind, both in nature and in God.' *Three Rival Versions*, p. 84.

¹²¹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 110.

¹²² *Three Rival Versions*, p. 94. MacIntyre, quoting Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus* ii. (No further bibliographical details are given.)

¹²³ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 100.

rooted in the corruption of the will. As such, this kind of error required repentance, not argumentation.¹²⁴

Nonetheless, the Augustinian tradition valued the benefits of dialectical argument. In fact, MacIntyre notes the development of ‘three different and originally independent strands in the intellectual development of the Augustinian tradition.’¹²⁵ The first was Augustine’s formulation of *quaestiones*. By posing questions first to scripture, and later to doctrinal assertions, inquiry came to be understood ‘as consisting in the sequential posing of a series of related *quaestiones*.’¹²⁶ Dialectic is the second form of testing which reaches its high point in Boethius’ *De topicis differentiis*. Unlike demonstration, dialectical inquiry is exploratory. Beginning with agreed upon premises one attempts to advance these agreements toward more speculative conclusions. The essential characteristic of dialectics is its ‘incomplete and provisional character,’ and a concept of conclusions being ‘always open to further challenge.’¹²⁷ *Distinctiones* is the third form of argumentative inquiry. Here, the Augustinians practiced an analytical mode of reading, not only of secular texts but of scripture as well.

It seems that the Augustinians should have appreciated Aquinas’ project as they were well aware of the promises and danger in their own mode of inquiry. As MacIntyre states, ‘When the heterogeneity of the philosophical sources inherited from the ancient world and the multiplication of *questiones* and *distinctiones* are juxtaposed, the large possibilities of radical intellectual dissension even within the constraints imposed by an Augustinian framework become clear.’¹²⁸ The possibilities of fragmentation did not stop the Augustinians from recognising the positive function of dialectical testing. This is most clearly illustrated in the life of Peter Abelard. MacIntyre points to Bernard of Clairvaux’s confrontation with Abelard as a paradigm example of dialectical inquiry serving theological authority. Abelard’s career was, of course, dogged by accusations of heresy. It was therefore crucial to discern whether these accusations were authentic or due to envy and petty quarrelsomeness. The difficulty of working through these accusations was evident in the proceedings of the council of Soissons (1121), where Abelard, though not formally condemned, was

¹²⁴ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 111.

¹²⁵ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 88.

¹²⁶ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 88.

¹²⁷ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 89.

nevertheless required to publicly recite the Athanasian Creed and forced to burn his work on the Trinity.¹²⁹

Although Abelard was not found guilty of heresy, MacIntyre takes it as a sign of a tradition in good order that Abelard was yet condemned for the error of pride.¹³⁰ Though this kind of condemnation of one's thoughts and writings offends modern sensibilities, MacIntyre argues that it recognises the relationship of morality to intellectual error and how both may be corrected through this kind of dialectical confrontation. Abelard's failure was moral not intellectual. He was guilty of a kind of pride that, if left unchecked, would undermine the theological enterprise. Hence his vice required repentance. Abelard's condemnation reflected positively on the Augustinian tradition because it institutionally embodied the insight that the life of inquiry is moral and intellectual. Both intellectual skills *and* moral commitments must be tested.¹³¹ Dialectical testing was necessary because Abelard, as a professor in the Christian tradition, needed to be trusted. He was not only entrusted faithfully to profess the deposit of the tradition *before* his hearers. As professor of a tradition which values doctrinal development, he was charged to dwell on the frontiers of that development. For one as gifted as Abelard, trust and testing could not but conflict.

Because persons such as Abelard inhabit what MacIntyre calls 'boundary situations,' they cannot avoid incurring the suspicion of others.¹³² A developing tradition in good order requires critical suspicion in order to sustain that trust which I have argued is particularly crucial for the cultivation of intellectual apprentices. As evident in the life of Abelard, those who question a tradition are never themselves immune from being questioned. Such testing is necessary because both development and heresy dwell on the boundaries of a tradition. A tradition in good order must maintain the tension between trusting and testing accepted authority. In the end, Abelard, through these struggles, was able to articulate how Platonism could serve

¹²⁸ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 89.

¹²⁹ Frederick Copleston, S.J., *Medieval Philosophy*, Volume II of *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 148–150.

¹³⁰ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 91. MacIntyre's positive account of this moral judgement is reflected in the observation that within the Augustinian tradition, some people may be judged as morally unfit to read certain texts. He writes: 'The concept of having to be a certain sort of person, morally or theologically, in order to read a book aright—with the implication that perhaps if one is not that sort of person, then the book should be withheld from one—is alien to the assumption of liberal modernity that every rational adult should be free to and is able to read every book.' *Three Rival Versions*, p. 133.

¹³¹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 92.

¹³² *Three Rival Versions*, p. 114.

Christian theology.¹³³ Even considering the unfairness of some of the accusations, MacIntyre notes that Abelard, in submitting to Bernard's condemnation, 'did as much as anyone to clarify the relationship of dialectic to authority.'¹³⁴

Why then did the Augustinian tradition oppose the work of Aquinas with such intense theological and institutional resistance? MacIntyre's answer presents us with an unwieldy amount of historical and philosophical material. It is, therefore, imperative that I limit the discussion to MacIntyre's account of what Aquinas achieved and how he achieved it. What Aquinas achieved was to have defined the relationship of authorities to authority and thereby defined what I shall call the 'spheres of competency'.¹³⁵ As noted, the Aristotelian texts created problems for Augustinian theology. At the heart of the problem for the Augustinians was the inability to *see* how Augustinian theology could embrace Aristotelianism while maintaining their epistemological commitment to divine revelation. The commitment to divine illumination, notes MacIntyre, was the cause of 'imminent, even if unrecognized, epistemological crises.'¹³⁶ This crisis can be unpacked as follows. If the medieval university curriculum failed to include the Aristotelian corpus, it would have been a tacit admission that Augustinian theology was incapable of situating Aristotelian philosophy within its framework. It could not then subordinate this form of theology to the goals of theology. To do this would have led to the progressive irrelevance of theology in matters of science and philosophy. Alternatively, if Aristotle was included in the curriculum, students would have faced two incompatible epistemologies which would have produced 'incoherence in the structures of teaching and knowledge.'¹³⁷

Aquinas's achievement is to have offered a third way between irrelevance and incoherence. To begin with, Aquinas recognised that the nature of the conflict was over the relationship of the particular to the universal. For Augustine, the formal cause of the particulars was God's creating mind. For Aristotle, the human mind was competent to know the particulars without appealing to the mind of God. What mattered was correct observation and categorisation of the natural relationships

¹³³ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 89.

¹³⁴ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 89.

¹³⁵ Cf. MacIntyre, 'Natural Law as Subversive', p. 72.

¹³⁶ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 123.

¹³⁷ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 109.

between the particulars.¹³⁸ The fundamental question pertained to what unaided human reason could know. Augustinian theology was committed to the thesis that apart from revelation, no philosophy or rival theology could adequately vindicate its claims or flourish in the long run.¹³⁹ It presumed that any system of knowledge which conflicted with divine revelation must necessarily suffer from some fatal incoherence. However, Aristotelianism was a comprehensive system whose increasing influence seemed to defy this assertion. The success of Aristotelianism called the dependence of knowledge on the theological framework into question. This created an intellectual and institutional crisis for the Augustinian tradition.

As Aristotelian philosophy gained influence, theology was forced to purchase its authority either through isolation from the academic debate¹⁴⁰ or through institutional force.¹⁴¹ Two instances illustrate the inadequacy in these responses. First, Bonaventure's Eastertide lectures (1273) condemned the emerging Aristotelianism in the Paris faculty without offering 'arguments at the level of philosophy, even though the positions which he criticized were philosophical positions.' Where arguments were given, they were only 'arguments from his own Augustinian theological point of view.'¹⁴² Second, Steven Tempier's later condemnations of 1277 reflected the view that, 'rational debate with consistent Aristotelians was no longer considered possible...Hence the conflict between established Augustinians and rising Aristotelians within the University of Paris could not but have appeared to many...as in principle irresolvable.' This conclusion led to the attempt to resolve conflict by means of power. Once the possibility of rational progress breaks down, MacIntyre states that 'human relationships are perforce relationships of will and power.'¹⁴³

The willingness to resort to force was an admission that Augustinianism had failed by its own standard. Augustinian theology claimed to be an all-encompassing system of explanation, but failed to situate Aristotelian philosophy within this system. Aquinas rescued theology by showing how Aristotelian philosophy was simultaneously the source of the problem and the resource for overcoming this problem. This remedy depended on Aquinas developing a way to reconcile the two

¹³⁸ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 124.

¹³⁹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁰ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 156.

¹⁴¹ MacIntyre states that Aquinas was defeated by 'the power of the institutionalized curriculum.'
Three Rival Versions, p. 151.

¹⁴² *Three Rival Versions*, p. 112.

seemingly incompatible theories of knowledge as natural and revealed while avoiding Siger of Brabant's error of positing multiple truths.¹⁴⁴ Aquinas therefore sought to construct a *synthesis* of the two frameworks into a coherent account of the relationship between the secular and sacred, the temporal and the eternal, the natural and the supernatural that maintained each sphere's particular competency.¹⁴⁵ This required that Aquinas articulate a unifying framework whereby the natural world was understood to be on a continuum with the supernatural world.¹⁴⁶ Aquinas achieved his aim by arguing, says MacIntyre, that 'the sequences of final, formal, efficient, and material causality, always refers us back to a unified first cause from which flows all that is good and all that is true in what we encounter.'

The sequential relationship of causes to final cause means that the integrity of causes and cause must be maintained. Though the hierarchy of causes is obvious, the higher does not exist without the lower. In this hierarchical scheme, human knowledge may 'move initially from what is evident to any plain person's unclouded moral apprehension to what is evident only or at least much more clearly to the *sapientes*'.¹⁴⁷ This view is, of course, crucial for understanding how we move from human to divine knowledge. We ought not miss the important fact that this hierarchical understanding gives direction, if not divine sanction, to the faith in the moral and intellectual progress of persons by means of education. Moreover, Aquinas' hierarchical view necessarily distinguishes between the boundaries of the secular and sacred, between the body and soul, and between reality as unfolding in time versus reality at the fulfilment of time.¹⁴⁸ Aquinas defines the various spheres of reality and relates them in the hierarchical order without allowing the lower to be assimilated and absorbed by the higher. While remaining in the Augustinian teleological framework, Aquinas saw how the two epistemologies could be

¹⁴³ *Relativism, Power, And Philosophy*, p. 396.

¹⁴⁴ *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 112–113.

¹⁴⁵ MacIntyre's notion of a synthesis is open to misunderstanding as it suggests that Aquinas stood in a position of equipoise between the two rival traditions. This certainly could not be the case as Aquinas never participated in an Aristotelian community and practices in ways similar to his participation in the Christian community and practices. While Aquinas read Aristotle with noteworthy attentiveness and fairness, he still read him as a Christian philosopher with Christian commitments. Accepting this stipulation, the term synthesis seems to best describe Aquinas' use of Aristotle as a source for thinking through the problems that faced Augustinian theology.

¹⁴⁶ I am, of course, accepting H. Richard Niebuhr's account of Aquinas, in *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), pp. 128–137.

¹⁴⁷ *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 141–142.

¹⁴⁸ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law as Subversive', p. 67.

synthesised in a way that preserved the competency of each sphere and its importance for human knowing.

Accepting these spheres of competency committed Christendom to the ongoing project of reconciling two legitimate sources of knowledge. Where conflict arose between natural knowledge and supernatural revelation, the task of theological and philosophical inquiry would be to determine which sphere could rightfully claim epistemological privilege.¹⁴⁹ These conflicts could never be adjudicated in advance. Hence *institutional* means had to be provided to sustain protracted dialectical debate. The paradoxical problem was that these disagreements, which needed institutional support, also threatened these same institutions with the possibility of social and philosophical fragmentation. This threat to the institution finally defeated Aquinas at least in the short run.¹⁵⁰ Given the institutional threat of Aquinas' project, neither his defeat nor the subsequent condemnations of Thomistic philosophy ought be surprising. The surprise is that 'Aquinas was nonetheless repeatedly revived and invoked after that initial rehabilitation which led to his canonization.'¹⁵¹ The reason for this rehabilitation was that condemning Thomistic philosophy did not magically resolve the epistemological crisis. It rather set the medieval church on the way to increasing irrelevance. To avoid this fate, the church had to accept Aquinas' spheres of competency.

In the essay, 'Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas', MacIntyre shows how Aquinas was simultaneously subversive of and necessary for the survival of Christendom. MacIntyre notes the conflict of Thomistic philosophy with the theologically sanctioned social reforms of Louis IX (1214–1270). The conflict was over Louis' extensive reforms of common life which philosophically were attacks on the moral competency of plain persons. These reforms included the banishment of heresy, along with, 'the public sins of blasphemy, fornication, games of chance, and drunkenness.'¹⁵² Chess was forbidden, the manufacturing of dice became a criminal offence and taverns were restricted to travellers. MacIntyre notes: 'The king's project ...was a remarkably successful attempt, to develop royal control, both legally and

¹⁴⁹ Galileo's conflict with the church, as discussed above, is the paradigm example of this kind of debate.

¹⁵⁰ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 151.

¹⁵¹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 151.

¹⁵² MacIntyre, 'Natural Law as Subversive', p. 66.

administratively, over the whole life of the French people.’¹⁵³ Though successful, the reforms were judged to be overweening because they ignored the moral competency of plain persons, who, according to Aquinas’ ‘are the source of a ruler’s authority to make laws,’¹⁵⁴ and shifted their moral responsibility to the court’s lawyers, bureaucratic administrators and professional specialists.¹⁵⁵ The irony is, though Louis believed himself to be the pious servant of God’s revelation, he turns out to be usurper not unlike Frederick II who refused to acknowledge the limits of state power for the very different reason that secular rulers were not obligated to give ‘the church obedience in its own sphere.’¹⁵⁶

Another, radically different example of the importance of the spheres of competency has to do with Aquinas’ more positive appreciation of the body over against his Augustinian contemporaries. Aquinas’ synthesis was offensive to Augustinian sensibilities because it questioned the Augustinian understanding of the relationship between the soul and the body. Augustinian theology had found it difficult to give a positive account of the body, while Aquinas had little difficulty reconciling soul with body. MacIntyre states that for Aquinas

a human being is not a soul plus a body but a body which has a soul. Human experience is bodily experience, and the soul knows and knows about singulars only on the basis of that experience as mediated by imagination – itself a bodily phenomenon – and structured in terms of form by intellect. The human mind is thus not self-sufficient, on Aquinas’ view; it is rather... ‘radically incomplete’... incomplete without that encounter with the objects of sense from which it moves to the actuality of knowledge.¹⁵⁷

Aquinas did not view the soul as ‘only incidentally related to the body’ nor was the body ‘an embarrassment’.¹⁵⁸ The body had its own integrity and so played an indispensable role in human knowing. The functions of the mind simply could not be divorced from the reality of the body. Because body and soul were different though related, eternal truths could be known through corporeal experience.¹⁵⁹ By bridging the gulf between body and soul, theological truth-claims became capable of demonstration. The sciences could substantiate theological truth-claims and, correspondingly, theological truth-claims divorced from the sciences were

¹⁵³MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law as Subversive’, p. 69.

¹⁵⁴MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law as Subversive’, p. 69.

¹⁵⁵MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law as Subversive’, p. 69.

¹⁵⁶MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law as Subversive’, p. 72.

¹⁵⁷ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 153.

¹⁵⁸ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 153.

¹⁵⁹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 153.

epistemologically defective. By recognising how the spheres of competency could be integrated into an overall hierarchical system, it was possible to see how ‘the *movement towards* a finally perfected science’ is analogous to ‘the *movement of* creatures from and to God’.¹⁶⁰

The spheres of competency applied to the relationship of body to soul not only rescued Augustinian theology from certain epistemological frustration, it also rescued the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia* from ‘permanent dissatisfaction.’¹⁶¹ Aquinas cites Book One of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, first approving of Aristotle’s notion of appropriate human ends, then arguing that the ends of wealth, honour, pleasure, the virtues, and power, were ultimately deficient. Aristotle’s account of temporal happiness was not false; it simply did not go far enough. It failed to reconcile belief in a perfected happiness with the obvious imperfections of this life. Thus MacIntyre notes that Aquinas invokes Aristotle against Aristotle in demonstrating why the frustration of perfection in the natural world requires a supernatural account of ultimate happiness.¹⁶² Conversely, because the scientific study of the natural world had its own competency, Aristotle’s attentiveness to the natural world could be a ‘prologue’ to sacred theology, hence the conclusion that the natural world both illumined and needed the illumination of Christian theology.¹⁶³

Admittedly, my discussion of the spheres of competency in medieval politics, epistemology and views of the soul and body is incomplete. However the discussion shows how Aquinas used Aristotelian philosophy to criticise the misguided notion of theological authority in a way that advanced rather than undermined this authority. Having discussed *what* Aquinas achieved, it is crucial to consider *how* Aquinas’ inquiry brought about this theological progress. Mark Schwehn suggests that the central feature of MacIntyre’s *Three Rival Versions* is Aquinas’ critical and sympathetic reading of Aristotle. It is a mode of reading that ironically has its origin in Augustinian hermeneutics.¹⁶⁴ Consider again MacIntyre’s suggestive section on the Augustinian craft of reading where he identifies three features of Augustinian hermeneutics. First, the reader of scripture recognises a singular unity of the Bible that runs through the accounts of creation, fall, exodus, law, redemption, and the

¹⁶⁰ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 124 (my emphasis).

¹⁶¹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 138.

¹⁶² *Three Rival Versions*, p. 137.

¹⁶³ *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 123–124.

eschaton. These past and future events are not isolated episodes: they are a continuous narrative which casts an interpretative arc over the whole of human history. The second mode is when the reader of scripture understands himself to be an active participant in the biblical narrative. Augustine's *Confessions* are the paradigmatic example of rendering a life intelligible by placing it within the framework of scripture.¹⁶⁵ As Augustine recounts fragmented episodes of immorality or his study of Manichean philosophy, he sees them as constituting an uneven though coherent prologue which inexorably lead to his conversion.

The third mode, which is most important for present purposes, is the reading of secular texts within the framework of scripture. Peter Brown documents Augustine's practice of detaching secular texts from their contexts in order to make 'them available for Christian purposes, either in ways more generally of benefit to mankind or with special reference to specifically Christian ends.'¹⁶⁶ The second book of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* contains a chapter entitled, 'Whatever Has Been Rightly Said By The Heathen, We Must Appropriate To Our Uses.' Augustine's practice of reading was capable of discovering and condemning errors without failing to discern those truths that deserved to be praised, borrowed and imitated. Augustine admitted a natural capacity for created intellects to rightly discover and articulate truths that were not revealed in scripture.¹⁶⁷ Augustine saw these nontheological sources as real wealth to be plundered for the theological task.¹⁶⁸ Likewise, Aquinas instructed theologians to take from the pagan, Jewish or Islamic authors, as the 'unjust possessors' of all that is true and useful for Christian theology. If, as I suggested above, Aquinas' 'synthesis' was really the exercise of an Augustinian practice of reading, what explains the intensity of the condemnations? To answer this, I must return to the discussion of the nature of the disagreement between Aristotelianism and Augustinian theology.

Although Augustine read the pagan philosophers with a certain non-polemical interest, he also taught that 'all understanding requires illumination' (*De Civitate Dei*

¹⁶⁴ Mark R. Schwehn, 'Alasdair MacIntyre's University', p. 53.

¹⁶⁵ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 83.

¹⁶⁶ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 83. MacIntyre cites, Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 259–269.

¹⁶⁷ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 125.

¹⁶⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1958), Bk. 2, Ch. 40, p. 75.

x, 2).¹⁶⁹ The intellect in the state of nature was distorted by the fall, and in need of the kind of illumination offered only by grace, redemption and revelation. However, the success of Aristotelian inquiry seemed to contradict this assertion and so exposed ‘an apparent contradiction at the heart of the Augustinian account of knowledge.’¹⁷⁰ As Aristotelian philosophy disclosed this epistemological weakness, the Augustinians could not help but to be suspicious of Thomas’ careful reading of the Aristotelian corpus. As the 1277 condemnations suggest, Aquinas read with such care that he was thought to have betrayed Christian theology for paganism or Islam.

The suspicion bears positive witness to the success of Aquinas’ ability to read in a way that made other disparate voices authentic dialectical partners. MacIntyre observes that Aquinas’ aim was to read in such a way as to draw from others the ‘strongest arguments for and against each particular answer.’¹⁷¹ The suspicion that Aquinas had rendered the Christian dogmatic tradition vulnerable to counter-arguments was not off the mark. Aquinas’ critics could not see the relationship between progress and becoming ‘maximally vulnerable to refutation.’¹⁷² Dialectical vulnerability seemed rather to be the path of destruction. Perhaps one of Aquinas’ greatest achievements was in showing that the path to rational vindication must first accept the risk of suffering rational defeat.¹⁷³

3.4. Conclusion

Let us reconsider Kelvin Knight’s claim that ‘[t]he full significance of MacIntyre’s demolition job in *After Virtue* is only comprehensible in the light of his construction, in subsequent essays, of the premises of an alternative.’¹⁷⁴ In this chapter I have discussed the two pivotal features of MacIntyre’s constructive account of rationality, namely the teleological framework and the rationality of tradition. Furthermore I have addressed MacIntyre’s claim that a rightly ordered teleological framework and a tradition are capable of overcoming the problem of moral inarticulacy because we are now able to speak rationally of moral progress toward some *single* end.¹⁷⁵ This end or

¹⁶⁹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 100.

¹⁷⁰ *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 100–101.

¹⁷¹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 124.

¹⁷² MacIntyre, ‘Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?’ p. 78.

¹⁷³ MacIntyre, ‘Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?’ p. 78.

¹⁷⁴ Kelvin Knight, in the introduction to, ed. Kelvin Knight, *The MacIntyre Reader* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ *After Virtue*, p. 144.

telos makes it possible to rationally distinguish between better and worse ways of living and the difference between virtues and vices. This discussion of ends and rational choice leads us to niggling questions about the specifics of MacIntyre's account. Certainly MacIntyre's suggestively rich historical accounts and philosophical commentary lay out a compelling case for narrative and tradition as essential features of rationality. In spite of the density of his historical and philosophical narrative, we are never told how one rationally choose between the various competing and incompatible stories and histories which he discusses. There is a disquieting incompleteness in MacIntyre's work.

The theologian Oliver O'Donovan argues that what is still missing from MacIntyre's writings is an account of the 'unified good-for-man'. Without this single *telos*, we cannot rationally judge between the competing goods presented in competing stories. In the end MacIntyre leaves us, says O'Donovan, with a form of 'cultural relativism which cannot choose between alternative traditions... MacIntyre cannot break with the modernity which he repudiates.'¹⁷⁶ MacIntyre's account of rational choice based in narratives and traditions now looks suspiciously like Kierkegaard's radical choice; a notion of choice that MacIntyre roundly criticises. In the essay 'Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification', MacIntyre addresses the charge that he does not get beyond cultural relativism by considering the problem of perspectivism. He defines the perspectivist position as follows: 'if there is a multiplicity of rival traditions, each with its own characteristic modes of rational justification internal to it, then that very fact entails that no one tradition can offer those outside it good reasons for excluding the theses of its rivals.'¹⁷⁷ Moral norms may be rationally defended only 'within and from the standpoint of some system.'¹⁷⁸

The question is how one rationally chooses between competing and mutually excluding traditions.¹⁷⁹ This question pushes MacIntyre to articulate a 'nonperspectival' account of truth.¹⁸⁰ MacIntyre recognises the seriousness of the question as he admits that 'everything turns on whether or not the claims of one

¹⁷⁶ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 222.

¹⁷⁷ *Whose Justice?*, p. 352.

¹⁷⁸ MacIntyre, 'Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?' p. 72.

¹⁷⁹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 144.

¹⁸⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'How Can We Learn What *Veritatis Splendor* Has To Teach?', *The Thomist* 58 (1994), p. 188.

large-scale, theoretical standpoint can or cannot be vindicated against its rivals.’¹⁸¹ To see how this may be done MacIntyre considers the radical discrepancies between Confucian, Thomistic and utilitarian justifications of divorce.¹⁸² While the Confucian account of divorce admits such reasons as barrenness, jealousy, illness and gossip, these grounds would be unacceptable to a Thomist or a utilitarian. How then does a historically situated being decide which of these points of view is the ‘best’? It would appear that MacIntyre has posed a question he cannot answer because of his assertion that ‘there are indeed no standards or criteria of rational evaluation in any area...that are theory-independent and inquiry-independent, neutral between rival theoretical standpoints, whether philosophical, natural scientific, moral, or whatever, and available therefore to intelligent persons of any point of view.’¹⁸³

While MacIntyre’s critics charge MacIntyre with cultural relativism, he effectively argues that relativism is not possible because it is a self-refuting philosophical position. The argument is straight-forward: once one embraces a perspective one ceases to be a perspectivist. Said another way, MacIntyre argues that there are no real inhabitants of a culture who would say that their norms and conceptions of the human good have merely local significance and local authority. Anthropologists, historians and philosophers may at times be relativists, but those about whom they write never are.¹⁸⁴ Relativism, if it is possible at all, is possible only for those who observe others living and not for those who are engaged in matters of practical rationality. Relativism can be thought and theorised about; it cannot be lived because the brute facts of our bodily existence refute relativism.¹⁸⁵ That is, any time we think, speak or act, we are advancing or accepting concrete claims about reality. And because we are social beings, we express our conclusions and commitments in political ways. MacIntyre observes that ‘every political and social order embodies... and gives expression to some particular conception of the human good.’¹⁸⁶ Moreover, because perspectives are political, they are bound to clash with other perspectives, at

¹⁸¹ MacIntyre, ‘Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?’ p. 73.

¹⁸² Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification’, in ed. Luke Gormally, *Moral Truth Moral Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), pp. 2–3.

¹⁸³ MacIntyre, ‘Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?’ p. 78.

¹⁸⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good’, in ed. Kelvin Knight, *The MacIntyre Reader* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), p. 246.

¹⁸⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification’, p. 12.

¹⁸⁶ MacIntyre, ‘Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good’, p. 247.

which point, those within each perspective understand themselves to be advancing particular truth–claims which are superior to those of their rivals:

[I]f the claims made from the rival and contending points of view are not claims to *truth*, the adherents of the different standpoints in contention will not be able to understand the central claims of their own particular standpoint as logically incompatible with the claims of those rivals.¹⁸⁷

Actions are always expressions of beliefs.¹⁸⁸ The embodied beliefs of perspectivists refute perspectivism because their truth–claims do not ‘remain locally limited and constrained.’¹⁸⁹ Moral commitments always find political expression.¹⁹⁰ When, in the social and political world, perspectivists meet rival truth–claims, they must either give into the demands of their rivals or cease to claim that all perspectives are equal. Clearly, to act in one way rather than another is to say that there are ‘better’ and ‘worse’ ways to act. Although MacIntyre argues that cultural relativism is a philosophically self–defeating position, he does not finally provide an adequate account of how one rationally choose between competing traditions. This means that MacIntyre’s constructive moral philosophy suffers from a critical incompleteness that threatens his whole project. Insofar as MacIntyre has yet to make clear the criteria by which one might rationally choose between rival traditions or communities of virtue, we are left to guess where his moral philosophy is most faithfully embodied.

In the view of the theologian John Milbank, the incompleteness in MacIntyre’s work reflects ‘an air of non–commitment [which] hovers over MacIntyre’s work.’¹⁹¹ Taking this criticism from the realm of philosophy to practical rationality, Edward Oakes notices this non–commitment in MacIntyre’s refusal to address such divisive and important disputes as capital punishment, abortion, or just war. Oakes suggest that MacIntyre’s work still suffers from the kind of practical impoverishment for which he faults the Enlightenment.¹⁹² Maurice Cowling, in an essay putatively aimed

¹⁸⁷ MacIntyre, ‘Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification’, p. 13.

¹⁸⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 61.

¹⁸⁹ MacIntyre, ‘Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification’, p. 21.

¹⁹⁰ MacIntyre writes, ‘Aristotle’s insistence that the virtues find their place not just in the life of the individual, but in the life of the city and that the individual is indeed intelligible only as a *politikon zōon*.’ *After Virtue*, p. 150.

¹⁹¹ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 329.

¹⁹² Oakes, ‘The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre’, p. 24. A similar criticism is levelled by L. Gregory Jones in *Transformed Judgment*, pp. 59–61. See also L. Gregory Jones, ‘Alasdair MacIntyre on Narrative, Community, and the Moral Life’, *Modern Theology*, 4, 1987, No 1, pp. 52–69. Jones argues that, for all of MacIntyre’s emphasis on particularity and historicity, he remains ‘obscure’ because he fails to commit himself to a particular moral content.

at explaining MacIntyre's project, still finds it necessary to express the acerbic judgement that MacIntyre 'is scarcely less successful now than he was in the 1950s and 1960s in integrating virtue and practice...The challenge to integrate virtue and practice is both ambitious and laughable.'¹⁹³ These criticisms of MacIntyre's practical rationality are particularly troubling in view of MacIntyre's judgement that it is

a decisive refutation of a moral philosophy to show that moral agency on its own account of the matter could never be socially embodied; and it also follows that we have not yet fully understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be.¹⁹⁴

According to the philosopher Jeffery Stout, as MacIntyre only fills 'the role of Jeremiah to contemporary society', contrary to the Knight, MacIntyre offers no positive alternative to his predictions of destruction.¹⁹⁵ Insofar as this criticism is accurate, we must conclude that MacIntyre's attempt to 'advance and defend one conception of practical rationality rather than another,' is incomplete, and threatened by falsification.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, in the following chapter, I shall discuss further the nature and implications of this impasse in MacIntyre's thought.

¹⁹³ Maurice Cowling, 'Alasdair MacIntyre, Religion and the University', *The New Criterion* 13 (Feb., 1994), p. 32–41.

¹⁹⁴ *Whose Justice?*, p. 23.

¹⁹⁵ Stout, *Ethics After Babel*, p. xii.

¹⁹⁶ *Whose Justice?*, p. ix.

CHAPTER 3

TRAGEDY, RATIONALITY AND THEOLOGY

According to MacIntyre, an adequately rational morality allows one to say, ‘what makes it rational to act in one way rather than another and what makes it rational to advance and defend one conception of practical rationality rather than another.’¹ Rational moral reflection takes place with a teleological framework and beginning with the foundation of a particular historical tradition. To be rational is to be morally accountable, which means, in essence, to be able to justify one’s actions as the means of progressing toward the *telos* of one’s life. According to MacIntyre’s critics, the fundamental flaw in MacIntyre’s account of rationality is his inability to specify just the teleological good or goods as understood within a specific tradition the rational human being ought aim toward. MacIntyre does not clarify how one would rationally choose between competing teleological systems. This criticism is particularly damaging to MacIntyre’s constructive philosophy in view of his assertion that ‘everything turns on whether or not the claims of one large-scale, theoretical standpoint can or cannot be vindicated against its rivals’.² If it is not possible to rationally choose between rival moral systems, then MacIntyre offers no alternative to the moral disorder he has so effectively diagnosed.

MacIntyre’s constructive account of rationality is a pivotal concern for this thesis, and so, it is necessary to attend to the inadequacies of this account. I shall do this by discussing the problems that the tragic dilemma poses to MacIntyre’s understanding of moral rationality. The tragic dilemma confronts the agent with a choice between two incommensurate and incompatible goods while depriving the agent of a single rational standard by which he is able to distinguish between better and the worse alternative. The tragic situation confronts the agent with too many irreconcilable

¹ *Whose Justice?*, p. ix.

² MacIntyre, ‘Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?’ p. 73.

rationalities and so forces the agent to make a non-rational choice between these competing rationalities. As this choice between incompatible rationalities is closely related to the choice between incompatible traditions, how MacIntyre treats the former problem indicates much about how he treats the latter problem. I argue that MacIntyre's solution to the tragic dilemma takes him along a path that leads to theism.

This conclusion puts me in the position to consider the two-fold relationship of theology to MacIntyre's writings. After first discussing the path that MacIntyre takes to accepting the theological foundation of his account of rationality, I then turn to theological ethics and discuss how MacIntyre's work functions within a Christian ethical system. To develop this latter point, I consider the writings of Stanley Hauerwas, who, perhaps more than any other writer in Christian ethics, has applied MacIntyre's philosophy to Christian ethics.³ To get to this point I must now take up the challenge of tragedy to MacIntyre's notion of rationality.

1. From Tragedy to Theology

What is at stake if moral disagreements defy rational resolution? According to MacIntyre this means that our moral disagreements 'can only be resolved by means of nonrational persuasion.'⁴ MacIntyre's emotivist characters embody, in general terms, three common forms of nonrational persuasion. These are the short-term cost and benefit *calculation* of the rich aesthete, the subtle *manipulation* of the therapist and the *coercion* of the state and corporate bureaucrat. The promise of a rational morality is that differences may be resolved by a kind of conversation that delays or even displaces the need for nonrational means of persuasion. The tragic dilemma calls this promise into question by facing a moral agent with the necessity to make a choice for which there is no rational criterion to discern the better choice. As there is no single scheme of rational justification, the agent must simply choose between these rival gods or rival goods. If MacIntyre admits that this is the nature of the tragic choice, he is forced into a philosophical position very much like the liberalism he rejects.

³ Hauerwas' work merits much greater attention than I give it in this chapter. However this 'short shrift' is warranted because Hauerwas serves a transitional role. That is, in applying MacIntyre's work to a general Christian ethic, Hauerwas serves as a prolegomenon for applying MacIntyre's work in a distinctively Lutheran context.

⁴ *Whose Justice?*, p. 86.

The importance of this challenge to MacIntyre's notion of rationality is evident in his critical distinction between the goods of excellence and the goods of effectiveness – a distinction he develops in his discussion of the Greek *agon* or athletic contest.

MacIntyre states that the *agon*

is a formal rule-governed contest, and the rules are designed to allow each contestant a fair opportunity to exhibit his excellence in activity of some particular kind. Under the conditions of a fair rule-governed contest the contender who excels will also be the contender who wins and receives the prizes.⁵

When the *agon* is in good order there is no gap between playing by the rules and winning. Effectiveness in winning is the direct result of excellence in skill and compliance with the patterns of the game. The problem is that games are never so rationally ordered. The relationship between excellence and effectiveness becomes complicated by indeterminacy, so that one may achieve excellence while losing to the lucky or to cheats.

For this reason we must be able to judge the context as good no matter what its outcome. How the contest is played is more important than how it turns out. One may be effective and win, while denying or diminishing the goods internal to the game. Those who claim that there is no arguing with success may only maintain this view by blurring the distinction between effectiveness and excellence. The distinction between effectiveness and excellence means that moral deliberation takes into account means and results. For MacIntyre, the Greek rhetoricians exemplify the collapse of this distinction, as in the interest of rhetorical effectiveness, they disregarded the excellence of rationality and truthfulness.⁶

By the devices of rhetoric... individuals bring it about that one kind of action rather than another is performed. Since such rhetoric must... exclude from its scope any rational evaluation of ends or of rival conceptions of justice, it follows that the fundamental connection which a skilled rhetorician has to establish between himself and his audience has to be nonrational. He cannot offer his audience any rationally defensible account of the ends which, on his view, he and they ought, if they are rational, to pursue.⁷

The antecedent of action is not rational deliberation but the elicitation of sympathetic feelings. In the absence of arguments, the rhetorician calls forth appealing or appalling images. Effective rhetoric depends not on the rational appeal but rather on the intensity of dread or desire.

⁵ *Whose Justice?*, p. 27.

⁶ *Whose Justice?*, pp. 50ff.

⁷ *Whose Justice?*, p. 67.

The distinction between effectiveness and excellence explains Plato's rejection of sophists, rhetoricians, and the dramatic poets from his ideal *polis*. Advocates of effectiveness claim 'the goods of effectiveness are bound to prevail over those of excellence and the goods of excellence will be prized only insofar as those who prize the goods of effectiveness permit them to be.'⁸ Principles are only valued so long as they do not infringe on pragmatic goals. Sophists and tyrants join utilitarians, positivists, and pragmatists in their belief that normative moral standards are nothing but shrewdly disguised preferences.

Conversely, Plato offers a defence of human excellence that explains why it is both rational and beneficial (in the long run) to *always* subordinate the goods of effectiveness to those of excellence.⁹ Unless the city can be governed by a moral standard that is above the wants of citizens, it will be held hostage to the anarchic desires of the populace or the will of the powerful.¹⁰ To subject the standard of excellence to desire threatens the ultimately threatens the peace of the city with unresolved conflict that may turn into civil war.¹¹ Plato's suspicion of conflict is evident in the cautious way that he introduces dialectical argument into the educational curriculum. This caution is necessary to protect the young from exposure to effective arguments that 'refute many men and are refuted by many', that manipulate the young into 'profound disbelief of what they formerly believed.' When cynicism is the end result of an educational practice that makes truth out to be nothing more than opinions supported by effective rhetoric, the activity of philosophy becomes the object 'of slander among the rest of men.'¹²

According to MacIntyre, Thucydides' notion of justice exemplifies this kind of cynical appeal to effectiveness. Political order for Thucydides does not reflect the rational pattern of the cosmos but rather expresses the will of the powerful:¹³

[T]here is and can be only that justice which the strong find it in their own interest to uphold...When those with the power to do so think it is in their interest to overthrow the existing form of government within their own *polis*, they take to civil war. When members of the same political faction have the power and the desire to outbid rival leaders, they take to factional strife. It is unsurprising that Hobbes

⁸ *Whose Justice?*, pp. 74–75.

⁹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 69.

¹⁰ *Whose Justice?*, p. 74.

¹¹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 253.

¹² Plato, *The Republic* (539c). Quoted in Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 56–57. (Hereafter: *Theory and Practice of Virtue*.)

¹³ *Whose Justice?*, p. 13.

should have concluded from his reading of Thucydides that either justice has to be imposed by power or there will be no justice.¹⁴

When accepted standards of excellence are diminished, the manipulative and coercive measures of power fill the political void.¹⁵ Everything turns on whether or not a standard of excellence is able to gainsay the appeal of the goods of effectiveness. Tragedy is a critical concern for Plato because it calls into question the goods of excellence and threatens to place the *polis* under the standard of effectiveness.

The tragic choice between two incompatible goods presents a challenge to the belief in a rational order of excellence. Put bluntly, to be ‘damned if you do and damned if you don’t’ undermines the notion of a well-ordered moral cosmos, leaving excellence without a moral foundation. This leaves us with the conflicted world depicted in the Sophoclean tragedies. The *Oresteia* pits tribal values against urban values, while allegiance to the family in *Antigone* is opposed by allegiance to the state. The *Bacchae* pits the Appollonian reason against Dionysian passion, and the *Philoctetes*, the good of success against the good of moral virtue.¹⁶ If an agent is rational by one standard and irrational by another, what matters *finally* is not the rationality that guides one’s choices but that one choose one or the other version of rationality.

Fergus Kerr, in ‘Moral Theology after MacIntyre: Ethics, Tragedy and Thomism,’ considers why tragedy so profoundly challenges MacIntyre’s argument for rationality, observing:

By introducing moral dilemmas in the sense of rationally irresolvable conflicts of goods and goals, MacIntyre rejects the ancient thesis of the unity of the virtues and thereby subverts the Thomistic Aristotelianism which he envisages as the only way out of the liberal-individualist ethics of modernity.¹⁷

Kerr begins by recalling MacIntyre’s view of tragedy in *After Virtue* where he argues that it is possible for human agents to be truly confronted by ‘rival and contingently incompatible goods that make incompatible claims’.¹⁸ Because both claims are good and incompatible, MacIntyre’s position in *After Virtue* rejects the view of a harmonious cosmos where every good fits into a hierarchical order and every evil is

¹⁴ *Whose Justice?*, p. 65.

¹⁵ *Whose Justice?*, p. 84.

¹⁶ *Whose Justice?*, p. 99.

¹⁷ Kerr, ‘Moral Theology after MacIntyre’, p. 35–36.

¹⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 223.

due to human error or evil. MacIntyre explains his rejection of the unity of the virtues saying:

It has often been suggested... that *either* we can admit the existence of rival and contingently incompatible goods which make incompatible claims to our practical allegiance *or* we can believe in some determinate conception of *the* good life for man, but that these are mutually exclusive alternatives. No one can consistently hold both these views. What this contention is blind to is that there may be better or worse ways for individuals to live through the tragic confrontation of good with good. And that to know what the good life for man is may require knowing what are the better and what are the worse ways of living in and through such situations.¹⁹

MacIntyre's attempt to diminish the moral importance of the tragic dilemma fails. As Kerr rightly points out, MacIntyre's admission of incompatible goods forces him to accept a position that is similar to the pluralism which he rejects. Kerr cites Isaiah Berlin who argues that where we meet a variety of human goods, and recognise the truth that these goods cannot be reconciled in a single moral order, we must either accept pluralism or force the reconciliation by imposing a 'totalitarian straitjacket'.²⁰ MacIntyre's account of rationality is seriously challenged by the problem of tragedy. If tragedy is a real rather than perceived conflict, MacIntyre is forced to concede that the universe is at bottom morally pluralistic. The alternative view, which MacIntyre thought did not treat moral dilemmas seriously, is to say that tragedy is an apparent and always resolvable conflict. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre acknowledges that accepting the unity of the good forced him to change his mind about the nature of tragedy. Moving toward a position of moral realism, MacIntyre begins to argue that unless the universe is ordered to a single rational standard, morality ceases to be rational. As there cannot be contradictory truths, there can be no absolute conflict between incompatible goods.²¹

MacIntyre's resistance to the unity of the virtues because it leads him to a theistic position which would merely exchange the irrationality of pluralism for the irrationality of religious dogmatism.²² MacIntyre continued to resist theism by claiming that tragedy arises 'from the inadequacies of reason, not from the character of moral reality.'²³ That is to say, with adequate human reason (rather than divine illumination) moral conflicts could be resolved.²⁴ In spite of these protests against

¹⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 223–224.

²⁰ Kerr, 'Moral Theology after MacIntyre', pp. 37–38.

²¹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 142.

²² Cf. Kerr, 'Moral Theology after MacIntyre', pp. 40–41. (*After Virtue*, pp. 142–143).

²³ *Whose Justice?*, p. 142.

²⁴ Kerr, 'Moral Theology after MacIntyre', p. 43.

theism, Kerr recognises that MacIntyre's notion of rationality is closely related to theology:

Aristotle turns out to be not so blind after all. The moral philosopher now sees more deeply than the playwright. Without taking us through whatever arguments have led to this change of mind, MacIntyre now clearly believes that further reflection in moral philosophy will show that the Sophoclean moral dilemmas (conflicts of good with good) depend on some mistaken judgment or flaw in the protagonist's character, just as Aristotle said. It looks...as if MacIntyre's deepening commitment to Christian theology brought him to see...that no theological account of human life can tolerate the possibility of moral conflicts that owe nothing to the human agent's sinfulness.²⁵

In reflecting further on the relationship between rationality and tragedy, we come to see how MacIntyre's thinking follows along the path to theism.

1.1. Tragedy as an Epistemological Crisis

I shall argue that by introducing tragedy into the discussion of rationality, MacIntyre poses a philosophical problem that finally requires a theological solution. To arrive at this conclusion, I must introduce the related problem of, what MacIntyre calls, the 'epistemological crisis'. In the essay, 'Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science,' MacIntyre introduces the epistemological crisis with the following examples.²⁶ A man is made redundant at a time when he believes himself to be highly valued by his employers and colleagues. A woman falls out of love and wonders how she could have previously been so mistaken about the one-time object of her affections. In both examples, the rupture between what *seems* to be and what *is* shows how evidence, once thought to have pointed unambiguously in one direction, turns out to be 'susceptible to rival interpretations.'²⁷ Those caught in an epistemological crisis are deprived of the information they need to make rational practical decisions. The sure sign of an epistemological crisis is the inability to answer the question, 'What is going on here?'²⁸

In a brief but suggestive commentary on *Hamlet*, MacIntyre explains why this question is at the heart of epistemological crisis. MacIntyre first asserts that as Hamlet was unable to distinguish between what 'seems' to be and what 'is', he could not discern who he could and could not trust. Trust is the first casualty of Hamlet's

²⁵ Kerr, 'Moral Theology after MacIntyre', pp. 41–42.

²⁶ MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science', pp. 453–472.

²⁷ MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science', p. 453.

²⁸ MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science', p. 454.

epistemological crisis.²⁹ Thomas Fitzgerald explains this relationship between epistemological doubt and the failure of trust when he claims that ‘[a]serious shift has occurred in knowing and believing in the ways we see, take in, think about, and affirm the world.’ The more we are unsure about the nature of the world and the conditions under which we live, the more we must live with the chronic fear of being deceived. In being unable to know whom to trust, we must live with the suspicion that all appearances and promises really ‘conceal a drive for control beneath their *seeming* beneficence.’³⁰

Hamlet’s epistemological crisis results from his being confronted by a variety of interpretations and being unable to know story or storyteller is to be believed.

Hamlet arrives back from Wittenberg with too many schemata available for interpreting the events at Elsinore of which already he is a part. There is the revenge schema of the Norse sagas; there is the renaissance courtier’s schema; there is a Machiavellian schema about competition for power. But he not only has the problem of which schema to apply; he also has the other ordinary agents’ problem: whom now to believe? His mother? Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? His father’s ghost? Until he has adopted some schema he does not know what to treat as evidence; until he knows what to treat as evidence he cannot tell which schema to adopt. Trapped in this epistemological circularity the general form of his problem is: ‘what is going on here?’³¹

Hamlet’s crisis is analogous to the questions of interpretation that confront those who produce and perform the play. Central to both the character of Hamlet and the performance of the play is the need to answer such questions as ‘What is going on in *Hamlet*?’ or ‘How ought the narrative of these events to be constructed?’³² The play not only poses the question, but it offers an account of the unsavoury prospects when an epistemological crisis goes unresolved.

Unable to know what is going on, Hamlet’s life is pitched between paralysis and violence. The paralysis finds expression in Hamlet’s tortured contemplation of suicide where he observes how ‘enterprises of great pith and moment’, when subject to fruitless deliberation, ‘lose the name of action.’³³ The violence is variously embodied in Hamlet’s cruel treatment of Ophelia, the calculation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s deaths, the killing of Ophelia’s father, and Hamlet’s violent end. Finally, the failure to resolve the crisis means that the play’s end is not the fulfilment of the *telos* but merely the cessation of action. The question is whether such a crisis

²⁹ MacIntyre, ‘Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science’, pp. 453 & 458.

³⁰ Thomas Fitzgerald, ‘The Future of Belief’, *First Things* 63 (May, 1996), p. 24 (my emphasis).

³¹ MacIntyre, ‘Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science’, p. 454.

³² MacIntyre, ‘Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science’, p. 455.

had an alternative, rational resolution. MacIntyre argues that resolution would depend on the construction of a new narrative that enables the agent 'to understand both how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs and how he or she could have been so drastically misled by them.'³⁴ Hamlet's solution lies in his ability to narrate the episodic events of his father's murder and his mother's hasty remarriage into a coherent account.³⁵ Even then, it is not certain that resolving the epistemological crisis would have preserved Hamlet from insanity.

An adequate solution to an epistemological crisis must come by means of dialectical deliberation and not by obedience to revealed truth. Revealed truth is not rational truth because it 'always ends rather than resolves the conflict.'³⁶ Truly adequate resolutions 'must themselves in turn come to be put in question at any time...intelligibility and rationality may always themselves be put in question.' As revelation is either believed or disbelieved, it is not open to further dialectical testing. Revelation is thus synonymous with the kind of irrational dogmatism that claims 'that now we possess the truth or now we are fully rational.'³⁷ We cannot understand this resistance to revelation without considering MacIntyre's erstwhile rejection of Christianity. He claims that this rejection was not due to the success of sceptical objections to Christian truth-claims. Rather, both Christianity's dogmatism and modern scepticism presented themselves as rationally invulnerable to dialectical testing. They were forms of special knowledge which allowed them to claim a kind of immunity from testing. MacIntyre argues that Christianity's attempt to maintain a 'logical invulnerability' to scepticism finally renders its truth-claims empty.³⁸ Unfalsifiable truth-claims need not be defeated so much as they must be ignored.³⁹

³³ *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene i.

³⁴ MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science', p. 455. In later writings, MacIntyre replaces the language of construction with that of discovery, stating: 'This contemporary universe of discourse thus has no place within it for any conception of final ends, of ends to be discovered rather than decided upon or invented, and that is to say that it has no place for the type of telos or finis which provides the activity of a particular kind of being with a goal to which it must order its purposes or fail to achieve its own specific perfection in its activity.' *First Principles, Final Ends*, pp. 6–7 (my emphasis).

³⁵ MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science', p. 461.

³⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 143.

³⁷ MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science', p. 455.

³⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Is Understanding Religion Compatible With Believing?' in eds. Ann Loades and Loyal D. Rue, *Contemporary Classics in Philosophy of Religion* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1991), p. 572.

³⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur, *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 11.

Interestingly, MacIntyre's attempt to use this argument in an exchange with the Christian ethicist Paul Ramsey simply failed. MacIntyre argued that 'belief in the unconditional requirements of morality was originally rooted in a religious view of the world' evident in 'Sophocles as a religious writer, just as much as the author of Deuteronomy.' Sounding very modern, MacIntyre chided Ramsey for his implausible view that the 'ultimate warrant' of morality should be founded on 'what the Lord of heaven and earth is believed to have been doing and to be doing.'⁴⁰ MacIntyre does admit that the ability to say what is going on requires some kind of teleological framework though, in his mind, an adequate teleology did not depend on God's existence. This denial presented MacIntyre with a difficulty. In rejecting Ramsey's view that what is going on has everything to do with what God is doing and in rejecting a utilitarian conception of teleology, it remained an open question of what *telos* MacIntyre would say is an adequate *telos*.

MacIntyre alludes to this problem when he notes that at the time when Christianity 'came to look like arbitrariness'⁴¹ he became increasingly aware of a problem in his own philosophy.⁴² While asserting that religion could not be the foundation for a rational ethic, he could not see how he would 'provide the kind of warrant that ethics needs.'⁴³ The practical result of this impasse was that MacIntyre found it 'relatively easy' to say what he was against, but could not say 'what, if anything, [he] was for.'⁴⁴ As MacIntyre admits to being unable to say what *telos* a rational human being would choose, his developing notion of a teleological rationality is threatened and the epistemological crisis remains insoluble. The following section considers MacIntyre's return to the problem of the tragic dilemma in his consideration of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* where, in his failure to resolve the epistemological crisis, his understanding of rationality is nudged closer to theism.

1.2. Revelation as a Rational Resolution

The *Philoctetes* begins with the Athenian archer, Philoctetes, having been abandoned by his fellow Greeks on the barren island of Lemnos. Going on to Troy, the Athenians

⁴⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'A Rejoinder to a Rejoinder', in eds. H. Tristram Engelhardt and Daniel Callahan, *Knowledge, Value and Belief* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: The Hastings Center, 1977), p. 75.

⁴¹ MacIntyre, 'Nietzsche or Aristotle', p. 141.

⁴² MacIntyre, 'Nietzsche or Aristotle', p. 140.

⁴³ MacIntyre, 'A Rejoinder to a Rejoinder', p. 77.

⁴⁴ MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, p. xxiii.

continue to be frustrated in their military campaign until the seer, Helenus, declares that success depends upon the procurement of Philoctetes' magical bow and arrows. The duty to secure this magical bow falls to the young Neoptolemus. At this point, Neoptolemus is not given a simple duty; he is confronted by two incompatible though *necessary* demands. The bow must be obtained for the good of victory. However, there seems no alternative but to seize the bow through stealth and deceit. To be effective, Neoptolemus must forsake excellence.⁴⁵ Victory is incompatible with honour.

The dilemma is temporarily resolved when Odysseus convinces Neoptolemus to act in accord with the good of effectiveness (victory) over the good of excellence (honouring Philoctetes' rightful possession of the bow). Odysseus' speech appeals to the competitive virtues that aim at excelling and winning.⁴⁶ Along with this, Neoptolemus is reminded of his duty to honour and obey his superiors and of the practical threat of the charge of sedition. Finally, Odysseus appeals to the authority of the gods – Hermes, the god of ruses, Nike, the god of victory, and Athena the guardian of Athens – who sanction the use of unjust means to obtain the bow for good ends.

Persuaded by Odysseus, Neoptolemus successfully deceives Philoctetes and secures his weapons. The impact of Philoctetes' suffering upon Neoptolemus, along with the revelation that the bow was the reward from Neoptolemus' father, Hercules, for Philoctetes' archery skills, effects a change of mind (*metanoia*) in Neoptolemus. The lure of the effective good of victory fails to distract Neoptolemus from his commitment to the excellence of honour as he remains consistent with his declaration that 'he would prefer to lose, having acquitted himself finely, than to win, having been bad in so doing.'⁴⁷ Still, it is no small matter that to act honourably requires Neoptolemus to turn from the victory desired by his city and superiors. Now caught between these conflicting demands, Neoptolemus voices the depths of his epistemological crisis as he asks, 'What am I to do?'⁴⁸ The conflicting goods of victory and honour impale Neoptolemus on the horns of a dilemma. This leads to moral paralysis as Neoptolemus laments, 'I can't decide... All this weighs on me, I can't think.'⁴⁹ The standards of the *polis*, military practice, and justice are insufficient guides of his

⁴⁵ *Whose Justice?*, p. 60.

⁴⁶ *Whose Justice?*, pp. 24 & 60.

⁴⁷ *Whose Justice?*, p. 61.

⁴⁸ *Whose Justice?*, p. 62.

⁴⁹ Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, trans. Robert W. Corrigan (New York: Dell, 1970), pp. 206–207. (Hereafter: *Philoctetes*.)

actions. There is no *rational* resolution to this crisis as the *objective* appeals to tradition, social relationships, and insight fail to provide a hierarchical ranking of these competing claims.⁵⁰

Neoptolemus' moral perplexity and paralysis renders him vulnerable to arguments for effective action. Where there is no appeal to a rational moral order, no reasons can be given to forego the immediate good for the long-term good. Moreover, MacIntyre notes that in the *Iliad*, the nature of the universe is that 'nobody both wins and remains a winner. In the long run we are all going to be defeated, and the prospect of ignominious death or slavery awaits everyone.'⁵¹ In the case of Neoptolemus' perplexity and in the *Iliad*'s view of reality, no compelling reasons can be offered to forego the short-term advantage for the sake of a higher order of excellence. Where such despair of the standard of excellence obtains, the inescapable conclusion is that 'There is no appeal beyond the realities of power' and justice is 'entirely at the service of effectiveness.'⁵² This theme of effectiveness over excellence is a recurring theme in Sophocles. MacIntyre notes that in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Sophocles attacks the Periclean and Athenian *hubris* for its violent and 'impious confidence in the effectiveness of the skilful use of power.'⁵³ When Sophocles wrote the *Philoctetes* in 409 BCE, Athenian democracy was recovering from military defeat, revolution, and the rule of the oligarchs.⁵⁴ MacIntyre writes, 'It was thus opportune and urgently necessary to raise again the questions of what justice within a political community is, of what justice toward those external to the community is, and the relationship of both to the expedient and the advantageous.'⁵⁵ The *Philoctetes* considers the question of whether justice has universal purchase or whether it may be set aside in favour of the goods of victory.⁵⁶

Neoptolemus is confronted by two sets of *necessary* demands: the demands of duty (*deon*), based in the standard of excellence, and the demands of success, which make it necessary (*dei*) to set aside the demands of excellence. When confronted by

⁵⁰ *Whose Justice?*, pp. 63–64.

⁵¹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 66.

⁵² *Whose Justice?*, p. 66.

⁵³ *Whose Justice?*, p. 58. MacIntyre argues that in the absence of a single, objective moral standard, 'there is nothing to distinguish genuinely rational moral or evaluative disagreements from any other clash of conflicting desires, preferences, and wills.' Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Community, Law and the Idiom and Rhetoric Of Rights', *Listening* 26 (1991), p. 97.

⁵⁴ *Whose Justice?*, pp. 58–59.

⁵⁵ *Whose Justice?*, p. 59.

⁵⁶ *Whose Justice?*, p. 60.

personal desire⁵⁷ or the possibility of political power,⁵⁸ the standard of excellence is too easily dismissed. Odysseus' intent was to urge Neoptolemus to choose effective action over excellence. However, in concluding that he cannot achieve good results through deceitful means, Neoptolemus defies Odysseus' orders and returns the bow to Philoctetes, saying, 'But if a lie is the only way to succeed, let me fail, sir, and stay honest.' Odysseus responds, saying 'And at your age I was the same. Slow with words, quick with action. But now I have experience, and I realize that in life it is not action that counts. Words are what matter; words have the power.'⁵⁹ The moral importance of words is their power to persuade.⁶⁰

Plato took seriously the power of nonrational persuasion when he forcefully excluded the poets from his Republic. This forced exclusion was a tacit admission that, at least in the short term, Plato could not sustain rational arguments against the advocates of effectiveness. MacIntyre argues that Plato did not distrust the power of rational argument, but rather recognised that where sophists and tyrants gain power, they deny 'the kind of learning ...about the nature of the common good that can issue in socially transformative action.'⁶¹ This undermining of rational education would eventuate in long-term disaster, which is evident in the moral opprobrium now associated with the words 'sophistry' and 'tyranny'. Two examples of disaster resulting from rhetorical appeal are those of Alcibiades, who, as an Athenian general, persuaded the Athenians to embark on the Sicilian expedition that ended in catastrophe, and of the unjust Athenian verdict against Socrates.⁶²

Beyond these warnings against the appeal to short-term effectiveness, MacIntyre offers positive arguments for the goods of excellence. The standard of excellence, he states, expresses the 'order of the universe within which alone human justice finds point, purpose, and justification.'⁶³ Near the end of the play, as Odysseus' pragmatic argument nearly prevails, Hercules intervenes, declaring, 'Justice follows man through life and into death. Whether he lives or dies, justice remains, right is eternal, duty must be done.'⁶⁴ The divine revelation declares that,

⁵⁷ *Whose Justice?*, p. 74.

⁵⁸ *Whose Justice?*, p. 65.

⁵⁹ *Philoctetes*, pp. 179–180.

⁶⁰ *Whose Justice?*, p. 86.

⁶¹ MacIntyre, 'Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good', p. 251.

⁶² *Whose Justice?*, p. 67.

⁶³ *Whose Justice?*, p. 62.

⁶⁴ *Philoctetes*, p. 224.

against all appearances, the cosmos is indeed ordered to justice and not to power. Sophocles' solution of divine revelation is unacceptable to MacIntyre. MacIntyre cites Karl Reinhardt, who states that 'The plot requires, not an arbitrary disentangling by the intrusion of the supernatural, but the discovery of a standard for action which merely human resources have been unable to supply.'⁶⁵ For Sophocles, resolution requires revelation. This view is expressed in Neoptolemus' reflection on Philoctetes' suffering, as he says, 'I believe without question his sufferings have a meaning. There must be a purpose, an *end* we do not yet see, because only a higher power can see it.'⁶⁶ Philoctetes too must anchor his desire for justice in his belief 'that heaven cares.'⁶⁷ In the end, the happy reconciliation is expressed by Philoctetes who states, 'no regrets, no blame – send me where the great power of my destiny wills, where the resolve of my friends, and the all-conquering spirit of my master, Hercules, carry me. He has decided. Now it must be done.'⁶⁸

MacIntyre remains unconvinced by this happy theological dénouement. It is not a resolution but a divine intrusion: 'a response, but not an answer.' In this reconciliation

at the *ad hoc* bidding of Hercules: nothing is learned or could be learned within this framework about how more generally the rival claims of the justice of effectiveness and of the justice of desert are to be evaluated. That those claims can only be rightly evaluated within a theological framework is indeed part of what Sophocles says to his fellow citizens. And perhaps what he meant them – and us – to learn is that there is no way of addressing these claims generally, but we always have to wait upon the voice of some divine being.⁶⁹

The divine intervention is an *unnecessary* intrusion because philosophical inquiry is quite capable of resolving such tragic conflicts.⁷⁰ As proof of this assertion, MacIntyre offers four philosophical alternatives (Augustinianism, Aristotelianism, Thomism, and Humean philosophy) which are capable of sustaining rational judgements.⁷¹

MacIntyre's conclusion is problematic. If he has listed four discrete solutions to the epistemological crisis, he has not offered *a* rational framework to decide which is

⁶⁵ *Whose Justice?*, p. 62. MacIntyre, quoting Karl Reinhardt, *Sophocles*, trans. H. and D. Harvey (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 3rd ed., 1979).

⁶⁶ *Philoctetes*, p. 183 (my emphasis).

⁶⁷ *Philoctetes*, p. 210.

⁶⁸ *Philoctetes*, p. 224.

⁶⁹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 63.

⁷⁰ *Whose Justice?*, p. 63.

⁷¹ *Whose Justice?*, p. 401.

the best of these solutions. It now appears that MacIntyre confronts us with a decision which is tantamount to the Kierkegaardian radical choice which he roundly criticised. Rather than admitting this, MacIntyre warns that either ‘we have to begin speaking as protagonists of one contending party’ or we must ‘fall silent.’⁷² This warning is not a solution but an admission of defeat. However, it is not an ultimate defeat if we reconceive MacIntyre’s claim, and see that he does not offer four alternatives but two. That is, the solutions available to us are either Hume’s scepticism⁷³ or the teleological theism of MacIntyre’s Aristotle, Aquinas, and Augustinian synthesis. As my previous chapter already considered this synthesis, I need only consider MacIntyre’s argument against Hume’s tradition oriented though anti-theistic philosophy.

It is odd that MacIntyre should hold Hume up as a representative of sound philosophy when, in the essay on the ‘epistemological crisis’ MacIntyre cites Hume’s troubled meditation on doubt:

For I have already shown...that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life...The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence? I am confronted with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ’d with the deepest darkness and utterly depriv’d of the use of every member and faculty.⁷⁴

Hume’s advocacy of custom and tradition was not a solution to the problems of scepticism so much as they allowed him to ignore the force of this scepticism. However, if we take Hume’s scepticism more seriously than he took it himself, we are constrained to admit that the alternative to scepticism is grounding morality on a theological foundation.⁷⁵

MacIntyre’s chief concern is to answer how we come to view human life as purposeful once the teleological framework was discredited by the natural sciences. Whereas progress in the natural sciences required the exclusion of teleological

⁷² *Whose Justice?*, p. 401.

⁷³ The opposition of Hume’s sceptical atheism to the theism of MacIntyre’s synthesis does not deny their similar understanding of and appreciation for tradition as a source of social cohesion. Cf. Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine* (New York: Lipper/Viking, 1999), pp. 120–121.

⁷⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science’, p. 462, quoting David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* Bk. I, iv, vii, ed. L. A. Selby–Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 267–269.

purposes in explaining the mechanics of the natural world, it is a mistake to conclude that this exclusion applies equally to ethics. He notes that ‘the error of modern conceptions of the natural sciences lies not in the aspiration to completeness in respect of their various subject matters, but in the belief that the natural order can be wholly understood in terms that exclude teleological causation.’⁷⁶ Modern moral philosophy believed itself to have initiated a Copernican revolution where human rather than divine purpose was at the centre of any rational moral explanation. Diminishing the importance of divine purpose did not, however, elevate the importance of human purpose. It rather initiated sceptical doubts about the notion of life as purposeful in any sense.⁷⁷ MacIntyre claims that in

the dominant modern view of the natural sciences, applications of the concept of human purpose themselves now appear to be disturbing and superstitious intrusions into the non-teleological order of nature, of very much the same kind as applications of the concept of divine purpose – whether in claims about miracles or more generally about divine providence – appeared to Hume. It is a Thomistic contention that an adequate conception of nature as, among other things, a teleological order would provide a framework within which neither of these would appear anomalous.⁷⁸

The rejection of divine purpose turns out to undermine the notion of a human purpose. Apart from a theistic foundation, it becomes increasingly implausible to think of humanity as sharing in a common journey or story of progress toward a goal. Rather, because there are many journeys and stories, there are many goals and many moralities by which progress toward these goals is evaluated. Hence the notion of moral consensus must become increasingly implausible because consensus reflects agreement about how this or that story or journey is *our* story or *our* journey.

MacIntyre argues that the notion of human purpose and meaning is defensible only if

the universe itself is teleologically ordered, and the only type of teleologically ordered universe in which we have good reason to believe is a theistic universe. Hence the moral progress of the plain person towards her or his ultimate good is always a matter of more than morality. And the enacted narrative of that progress will only become fully intelligible when it is understood not only in terms of metaphysics but in an adequate theological light, when, that is, the particularities of that narrative are understood to embody what is said about sin and about grace in the *Ia-IIae* of the *Summa* as well as what is said about law and the virtues. The

⁷⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Faith, Scepticism and Personal Identity’, p. 99.

⁷⁶ MacIntyre, ‘Faith, Scepticism and Personal Identity’, p. 99.

⁷⁷ MacIntyre states that ‘once the notion of essential human purpose or function disappears from morality, it begins to appear implausible to treat moral judgments as factual statements.’ *After Virtue*, p. 59.

⁷⁸ MacIntyre, ‘Faith, Scepticism and Personal Identity’, p. 99.

moral progress of the plain person is always the beginnings of a pilgrim's progress.⁷⁹

MacIntyre no longer thinks that obedience to divine revelation is necessarily a slavish reverence for rules. Rather, divine commands that are rightly understood express what a fully rational human being would accept. Hence what God commands

is what we already knew or could have *known* for ourselves as required for our good. What God asks of us, both in the Old Law and in its reaffirmation by Jesus Christ, is what, if we were adequately rational, we would ask of ourselves. God's commands are to be and do what will restore us to our freedom and the Church's teaching concerning the divine commands has the same aim and content.⁸⁰

The move to theism is a natural progression rather than a radical interruption. Catholicism is not for MacIntyre a repudiation of his moral philosophy but its fulfilment. This is why he can say:

What I now believe philosophically I came to believe very largely before I reacknowledged the truth of Catholic Christianity. And I was only able to respond to the teachings of the Church because I had already learned from Aristotelianism both the nature of the mistakes involved in my earlier rejection of Christianity, and how to understand aright the relation of philosophical argument to theological inquiry. My philosophy, like that of many other Aristotelians, is theistic; but it is as secular in its content as any other.⁸¹

While MacIntyre claims to be a theistic 'secular' philosopher, he asserts that the secular realm has its own discrete competency while admitting that the separation of the secular from the sacred must result in philosophical and moral frustration.⁸²

MacIntyre enlists Nietzsche who writes as a reluctant witness to the connection between teleological purpose and theism when he states, 'I fear we are not getting rid of God, because we still believe in grammar.'⁸³ MacIntyre elaborates on this admission, stating:

What Nietzsche meant by belief in grammar was belief that the structure of language somehow mirrors and presupposes belief in an order of things, in virtue of which one mode of conceptualizing reality can be more adequate to that reality than another. To rid oneself of such a belief would be instead to treat purely linguistic meanings as a set of context-free structures, available for expressing an indefinitely large number of alternative conceptualizations, none more adequate than any other, because there is *no* underlying reality in relation to which adequacy could be measured. It was Nietzsche's insight that so long as reference to such a reality is still presupposed, belief in God is covertly present. And in so asserting Nietzsche simply inverted the Augustinian

⁷⁹ MacIntyre, 'Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy', p. 19.

⁸⁰ MacIntyre, 'How Can We Learn What *Veritatis Splendor* Has to Teach?', p. 177.

⁸¹ MacIntyre, 'Nietzsche or Aristotle', p. 152.

⁸² MacIntyre, 'How Can We Learn What *Veritatis Splendor* Has to Teach?', p. 194.

⁸³ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 98. MacIntyre, quoting Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*. (No further bibliographical details are given.)

standpoint: without God there is no genuine objectivity of interpretation or conceptualization.⁸⁴

Nietzsche's error was to think that God's death was a permanent feature of the modern world. Contrariwise, MacIntyre's alternative to Nietzsche is that, so long as philosophy continues to believe in a rational and purposeful universe, it will be drawn back to a teleological conception of morality and eventually to its theological foundation.

Consider the answers to an interview that attempts to draw MacIntyre out regarding the place of religion in his life:

Kinesis: So how would you depict your religious faith?

MacIntyre: I am Roman Catholic. Period.

Kinesis: In a traditional and orthodox sense?

MacIntyre: There is no other sense. I believe what I am taught to believe by God, through the Church. And when God speaks, there is nothing to do but obey or disobey.⁸⁵

While we may be satisfied with MacIntyre's conversion, there is something troubling about this conversation. MacIntyre *qua* converted philosopher has nothing more to say about obedience. Certainly the Christian ethicist would want to claim that there is much more that needs to be said if obedience is to be rendered intelligible to Christians and accountable to the world. Indeed, the Christian ethicist would want to say that MacIntyre's work has helped Christian ethics say much more about obedience and to say it much more persuasively. Hauerwas and Pinches explain that MacIntyre's rediscovery 'of the importance of Christian theology both intellectually and confessionally' follows coherently from his concern for 'traditioned inquiry' that sustains a coherent, rational discourse about the good life for humans.⁸⁶

MacIntyre's reticence in clarifying his position suggests that Christian ethics is 'after MacIntyre.' By this assertion I mean, MacIntyre's moral inquiry brought about a change of mind regarding the rationality of obedience to the divine word. If, however, the philosopher has nothing more to say about obedience – and certainly more needs to be said – then the task of saying more falls to the theological ethicist. In contending that the Christian ethical reflection is 'after MacIntyre', I mean that MacIntyre's critical account of the Enlightenment and his constructive understanding of moral rationality provide a foundation from which contemporary Christian ethics

⁸⁴ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 98.

⁸⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Kinesis Interview with Professor Alasdair MacIntyre', [Interviewed by Thomas D. Peterson], *Kinesis: Graduate Journal in Philosophy* 20 (1994), pp. 43–44.

can begin. This brings me to the second part of my consideration of the theological implications of MacIntyre philosophy where I turn to Stanley Hauerwas who has most clearly demonstrated the significance of MacIntyre's philosophy for Christian moral reflection

2. The Rationality of Christian Ethics

2.1. Why Christian Ethics Escapes the Epistemological Crisis

The Methodist theologian Stanley Hauerwas both draws from and extends MacIntyre's moral philosophy.⁸⁷ Hauerwas' dependence on MacIntyre's work is explicitly acknowledged in his praise of the impact of MacIntyre's writings. Hauerwas states that, 'No one perhaps has been more important to our work than Alasdair MacIntyre. He has taught us through his writings ways to think that we are only beginning to appreciate.'⁸⁸ According to Hauerwas, the success of MacIntyre's argument has cleared an intellectual space for 'a fruitful appreciation of the positive significance of the church with regard to both methodological and social ethical questions.'⁸⁹ I shall primarily focus on Hauerwas' development of MacIntyre's argument that Christian ethics need not suffer from modernity's moral inarticulacy because the church possesses the moral resources to escape modernity's epistemological crisis.

First a word about what Hauerwas' confrontational style of writing says about his view of the church for which he claims to be writing. In explaining his rhetorical strategy, Hauerwas cites a passage by Flannery O'Connor, in which she states:

When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use some more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not then you have to make your vision apparent by shock – to

⁸⁶ Hauerwas and Pinches, *Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 91.

⁸⁷ Brad J. Kallenberg, 'Positioning MacIntyre Within Christian Ethics', in eds. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg & Mark Thiessen Nation, *Virtues And Practices In The Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics After MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), p. 61.

⁸⁸ Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues*, p. ii.

⁸⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. xxiv–v. (Hereafter: *The Peaceable Kingdom*.)

the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind, you draw large and startling figures.⁹⁰

On the one hand, Hauerwas claims that the church possess the resources to overcome the modern epistemological crisis. On the other hand, as the O'Connor quotation reflects, Hauerwas' thinks that the church in North America suffers from the same disorders that afflict secular culture. Hauerwas therefore sees it as his task to point out in 'large and startling figures' the problems that would frustrate the realisation of this potential in the church.

According to Hauerwas, Christian ethics need not suffer from the modern epistemological crisis because it needs no epistemological justification. Hauerwas writes, 'I do not have an epistemology ... I can only say that ecclesiology is all I have.'⁹¹ Christian ethics begins with the practical problems and questions of the historical community of the church and not with the attempt to secure theoretical epistemological foundations.⁹² 'All we have is the church,' Hauerwas states. 'That such is the case is no deficiency since that is all we have ever had or could ever want.'⁹³ Hauerwas' ethics begin with the historical tradition, the ongoing practices and the canonical narrative of the ecclesial community. The task of Christian ethics is to spell out the implications of the Christian story for one's character and for our life together in the story-shaped community. 'The growth of character,' Hauerwas states, 'is a correlative of our being initiated into a determinative story.'⁹⁴ Hauerwas rejects the criticism that his is a romantic view of the church. He insists that the church is not a fiction but 'a body constituted by disciplines' which are founded on the confession that God has acted *in the world* through Jesus Christ.⁹⁵ As the incarnation is a historical reality, the church that claims to be the body of Christ must be anchored in the realities of history. As the founding story of the church is centred in the

⁹⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 9. Hauerwas quoting Flannery O'Connor. No further bibliographic details are given.

⁹¹ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Failure of Communication or A Case of Uncomprehending Feminism', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1997), p. 230.

⁹² Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom: How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), pp. 31–32.

⁹³ Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church As Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 33.

⁹⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Self As Story: Religion and Morality from the Agent's Perspective', *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 1 (1973), p. 71. See also William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 17–19.

incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, the church cannot be fully explained by its historical existence. It is a community that is also shaped by its hopeful look forward to a history that is yet to unfold.

This focus on the church as a story-centred, historical community is not intended, however, to evade epistemological questions. Richard Hays, in his consideration of Hauerwas' use of scripture, states that, 'Hauerwas insists that the epistemological issue is real and crucial', though it is understood in a way peculiar to the church.⁹⁶ Hauerwas spells out how he understands the church's concern for epistemology by first quoting St. Athanasius who writes:

For the searching and right understanding of the Scriptures there is need of a good life and pure soul, and for Christian virtue to guide the mind to grasp, so far as human nature can, the truth concerning God the Word. One cannot possibly understand the teaching of the saints unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life. Anyone who wants to look at sunlight naturally wipes his eye clean first, in order to make at any rate some approximation to the purity of that on which he looks; and a person wishing to see a city or country goes to the place in order to do so. Similarly, anyone who wishes to understand the mind of the sacred writers must first cleanse his own life, and approach the saints by copying their deeds.⁹⁷

Knowing is important in Hauerwas' moral theory. However, this knowing does not come through theory or speculation but depends on the disciplined cultivation of the intellectual and moral virtues. That is, knowing depends upon the moral and spiritual character of the one who aspires to know. It is a kind of knowledge that is not universally available to all persons. Rather, it requires that the ecclesial community is capable of the kind of moral and intellectual education by which one submits to the canonical authority of scripture and embodies its story in her life. Only then is the church 'capable of hearing the story of God we find in the Scripture and living in a manner that is faithful to that story.'⁹⁸

For Hauerwas then, the epistemological crisis is overcome not by theories of knowledge but by participation in the liturgy, hearing preaching, and the dialectical engagements of confession and casuistry. Moral inarticulacy does not signal the breakdown of a theory but of the kind of authentic moral authority that is necessary

⁹⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, 'What Could It Mean For the Church to be Christ's Body: A Question Without a Clear Answer', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 48 (1995), p. 13.

⁹⁶ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1996), p. 255.

⁹⁷ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, p. 36, quoting St. Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 96. (See also *Unleashing the Scriptures*, p. 37.)

⁹⁸ *A Community of Character*, p. 1.

for sustaining character. As stated, Hauerwas claims that the church need not suffer from this inarticulacy because it is capable of sustaining its moral authority. One such source of moral authority is the exemplary lives of the saints which are held up for imitation.⁹⁹ Because the church is able to point to such models of living, it does not face a crisis of not being able to say what to and what not to do. Rather, the problem for the church is in not knowing 'how we are to do it.' To overcome this crisis, the church does not require a theory of knowledge but must sustain its moral practices and cultivate its moral skill through 'watching and following.'¹⁰⁰ Knowing and understanding are not dependent on an epistemological theory nor come by direct divine revelation. Rather, the Christian life is cultivated and formed by the attentiveness to the Christian story.

Hauerwas claims that Christian ethics has a peculiar way of addressing the moral concerns of identity and meaning. Consider the close relationship between the way in which Hauerwas and MacIntyre frame these crucial issues. Concerning meaning, MacIntyre states that Hamlet's epistemological crisis was caused by his inability to answer the question, 'what is going on here?'¹⁰¹ Similarly, Hauerwas says that the first question of Christian ethics is not 'What should we do' but rather 'what is going on?'¹⁰² Regarding identity, MacIntyre states, 'I cannot answer the question, What ought I to do? until I have answered the question, Who am I?'¹⁰³ Similarly, Hauerwas states that 'the question "What ought I to be?" precedes the question "What ought I to do?"'¹⁰⁴ For both, it is only possible to speak of identity and meaning in relationship to others within the moral community.

According to Hauerwas, the individual is intelligible only as one who is in a vertical relationship with God and in a horizontal relationship with the neighbour. Against this view of the related self, the modern self's ideal is to be unencumbered by such communal commitments. Having no place for virtue, this version of freedom is responsible for creating victims. Autonomy destroys its worshippers because it separates the self from that community which is necessary for the cultivation of the

⁹⁹ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*, p. 37. Hauerwas writes, 'For the Christian seeks neither autonomy nor independence, but rather to be faithful to the way that manifests the conviction that we belong to another. Thus Christians learn to describe their lives as a gift rather than an achievement.' *A Community of Character*, p.130.

¹⁰⁰ *A Community of Character*, p. 131.

¹⁰¹ MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Narrative and Science', p. 454.

¹⁰² *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 102.

¹⁰³ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 187.

self's potential. Hamlet was 'unencumbered' by commitments and went mad. Neoptolemus was paralysed by his inability to discern where to place his allegiances. Against the ideal of the unencumbered self, Christian ethics aims at the creation and sustaining of a community of trust. The hope of such a communal life depends upon the moral authority of the canonical narrative shaping the moral community. As narrative and community are at the heart and centre of Hauerwas' ethic, let us consider each of these themes in turn.

2.2. Scripture as Narrative

Christian moral deliberation begins with stories and an authoritative history. Richard Hays states that Hauerwas' view of the Christian life as an unfolding narrative 'discourages any attempt to formulate a systematic ethic.'¹⁰⁵ Rather than attempting to identify an abstract theoretical moral foundation, Christian ethics begins with the canonical narrative of scripture and its traditions of interpretation and application. This starting point alters the way we understand how truth-claims are advanced within the church. Hauerwas writes:

The truthfulness of Christian convictions, therefore, is not dependent on being able to generate a theory of truth that a priori renders all other accounts false, or that promises to demonstrate that underlying the differences between people is a deeper and more profound common morality. Rather the truthfulness of Christian convictions resides in their power to form a people sufficient to acknowledge the divided character of the world.¹⁰⁶

Christian ethics is a practical response to the concrete disorder of a divided, fallen world. A central feature of this response is to give reasons why Christians think there is an alternative story to the story of this fallen and divided world. The first order of business for Christian ethics is to posit its alternative story of creation, redemption, and *eschaton*, then ask how this story shapes a Christian's conduct.

The canonical story is the teleological framework within which moral reasoning takes place. This story offers an authoritative account of the nature of our disorder, a vision of life rightly ordered, and the means by which we progress from disorder to order. The canonical story is that authoritative point of reference for question regarding a Christian's identity and the meaning of one's actions. Within the story, one's moral judgements work in analogous ways to literary judgements about the

¹⁰⁴ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁵ *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 258.

identity of characters and the meaning of events in the story. The canonical story speaks of plot, setting, characters, and relationships, so that one may say what *is* going on and what *ought* to be going on. Hauerwas claims that the scriptural narrative is able to answer epistemological questions in ways that theories have failed to do. Hauerwas accepts MacIntyre's view that the fundamental epistemological question is 'What is going on here?', and claims that the biblical story provides a sufficient, though not exhaustive, answer to this question.¹⁰⁷

Like MacIntyre, Hauerwas sees in narrative moral deliberation a way to avoid the pitfalls of abstraction. Yet, unlike MacIntyre, Hauerwas speaks specifically of the scripture as the canonical story and the church as the moral community. In Hauerwas' ecclesial ethic, there is an implicit critique of the abstraction that characterises and threatens to undermine MacIntyre's writings. In a sense, Hauerwas rescues MacIntyre's ethics from the threat of abstraction by giving his narrative theory a Christian content and placing it within the ecclesial context.¹⁰⁸ In a chapter entitled 'On Beginning in the Middle,' he refers to MacIntyre's insight that human action 'has a basically historical character.' Human actions and persons are intelligible in the same way that actions and persons within a story come to be known. The functions of plot, setting, genre and character are analogous to the way we think about moral selves and meaningful actions in life. That is to say, once characters and actions are abstracted from the story, they become unintelligible.¹⁰⁹ Hence there can be no Christian moral reflection that does not begin in the middle of that story of God's relationship to the creation and to his creatures. In Hauerwas' view, liberalism's unencumbered and autonomous self is not so free as it is fragmented because it is character without a story.¹¹⁰

Although Hauerwas' ethics accepts the authority of the scriptural story, it cannot be simply dismissed as an uncritical or 'deficient science.' He points to the theologies of Karl Barth and Aquinas, 'Scripture is the place from which one mounts arguments.' For Barth, it is 'the Word of God' and for Thomas, it is 'the propositional form of the principles to which sacred doctrine must attend and return in order to

¹⁰⁶ *A Community of Character*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁷ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 17–19.

¹⁰⁸ Kallenberg, 'Positioning MacIntyre Within Christian Ethics', p. 61.

¹⁰⁹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 62.

¹¹⁰ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 263.

exercise its scientific character.’¹¹¹ The term ‘science’ means, in this context, that knowledge of ‘the way things are.’¹¹² And within scripture, the way things are begins with a God who creates, redeems, and sustains his church. Hauerwas insists that the beliefs and practices of the church simply are unintelligible if the God of the Nicene Creed does not exist. Our human deficiencies of will and intellect mean that ‘the existence of a First Truth is not self-evident to us.’¹¹³ We do not know how things really are. We suffer from an epistemological crisis that impossibly confuses what seems to be with what is. Hence it was imperative ‘that the Creator himself come into the world in the flesh and be known through himself.’¹¹⁴ Scripture is the authoritative source of God’s self-revelation which initiates and sustains Christian moral inquiry.

This starting point presents a conflict for Hauerwas’ Christian ethics. How can a Christian ethic gain relevance in a world that accepts neither scripture nor the God of the Nicene Creed? One answer that Hauerwas vehemently rejects is *accommodationism* or the purchase of public influence with the abandonment of the church’s central truth-claims. Forsaking this alternative, Hauerwas has been wrongly excoriated for advocating sectarianism.¹¹⁵ For Hauerwas, MacIntyre’s rationality of tradition offers a third alternative between accommodation and sectarianism. If MacIntyre’s argument is correct, the notion of a tradition-independent rationality or ethic is a fiction. Hence as Hauerwas asserts, every ethic is a ‘qualified’ ethic. Summarising Hauerwas’ notion of a qualified ethic, Nancey Murphy writes:

Hauerwas has argued that Christians will get nowhere attempting to influence public debate on issues like abortion if they limit themselves to the language of secular society. Instead, they ought to make their arguments – in public – in the language of their own tradition. Hauerwas has been much criticized for this ‘sectarian’ move. However, MacIntyre’s analysis of the nature of moral reasoning makes it clear that Hauerwas’s strategy is in no way sectarian (or at least, no more

¹¹¹ Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Which God? Whose Morality?’, (unpublished, 1994), p. 5, n.13.

¹¹² Hauerwas, ‘Which God? Whose Morality?’, p. 6.

¹¹³ Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Murdochian Muddles: Can We Get Through Them If God Does Not Exist?’, *In Good Company: The Church As Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 163.

¹¹⁴ Hauerwas is quoting from Aquinas’ commentary on the Gospel of John. Hauerwas, ‘Which God? Whose Morality?’, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ James Gustafson call Hauerwas a ‘sectarian, fideistic, tribalist’. Cf. ‘The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University’, *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society* 40 (1985), pp. 83–94. However, the Lutheran theologian Robert Jenson does not think that Hauerwas deserves the sectarian appellation. If anything, Hauerwas’ ethic is an ‘Augustinianism with a vengeance.’ For example, Jenson notes that when Hauerwas considers what it means to the modern university that that we are creatures of a gracious God, it leads him to the conclusion that ‘God turns out to be the condition for the success of the university’s–any university’s– undertaking!’ Robert W. Jenson, ‘The Hauerwas Project’, *Modern Theology* 8 (1992), p. 287.

so than anyone else's). All moral reasoning, if it is to be cogent, must draw upon the resources of some tradition, without which one lacks the virtues necessary for having a moral outlook. Public discourse in terms of 'rights' is just as particular as Christian discourse; social contract theory places its own story of an original state and the development of society alongside that of Genesis. No rational argument has been advanced for why the Enlightenment traditions should be privileged over all others.¹¹⁶

The denial of the tradition-dependent starting point is what Bernard Williams calls the *midair* stance.¹¹⁷ This criticism of *midair* ethics is crucial to Hauerwas' assessment of what has gone wrong in moral theology. *Midair* ethics is the failed attempt to discover a philosophical 'high ground' whereby it is ensured that moral judgements will be true and just without regard to any particular point of view.¹¹⁸ The attractiveness of this view is that it promises the possibility of moral consensus apart from religious commitment. It assumes that if we can clearly identify and accept 'the categorical imperative, the ideal observer, universalizability, or...the original position,' rational moral agreement then becomes possible. The only possibility for such an agreement is if rational moral judgements are those which are true 'from anyone's point of view'.¹¹⁹ Only from the universal point of view can we hope that moral judgements will be preserved from the arbitrary, subjective and relative.

In many ways, Hauerwas' rejection of *midair* ethics approximates to MacIntyre's critique of Enlightenment ethics and need not be rehearsed. The one aspect of his critique that is crucial to Christian theology is what Hauerwas calls the modern 'fascination with rules.'¹²⁰ While rules may adequately articulate the theorems of Euclidean geometry, the fixed planetary orbits in the Copernican system or the laws of mass and motion in Newtonian physics, they do not have the same force and function in ethics. Rules in the natural sciences do not need to refer to personal beliefs or historical perspectives to be intelligible. Moral rules, as I noted, must have their place within the moral narrative. Hauerwas questions the importance of rules because they falsely offer

¹¹⁶ Nancey Murphy, 'Using MacIntyre's Method in Christian Ethics', in eds. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg & Mark Thiessen Nation, *Virtues And Practices In The Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics After MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), p. 44.

¹¹⁷ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 17.

¹¹⁸ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 17.

¹¹⁹ Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, 'From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics', in eds. H. Tristram Engelhardt and Daniel Callahan, *Knowledge, Value and Belief* (New York: The Hastings Center, 1977), p. 162.

¹²⁰ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 19.

the impersonal justification of our moral behavior. Rules give the appearance of ensuring the objectivity we otherwise find lacking in our individual decisions and judgments. Accordingly, moral reasoning attempts to justify any particular judgment by appeal to a more universal rule or principle to which any rational creature must adhere. Thus morality is thought to acquire the unbiased quality associated, mistakenly perhaps, with legal process and therefore to secure the objectivity necessary for moral agreement.¹²¹

Moral rules, if truly rational, would negotiate ‘safe agreements between autonomous individuals who have nothing in common.’ Where there is no common story or confession, it is not surprising to Hauerwas that lawyers rather than priests become the interpreters of the moral world.¹²² This modern fixation with rules is clearly evident in what is called ‘applied’ or ‘quandary’ ethics.

Applied ethics is the application of some established universal principle, such as love or justice, to particularly cases. The more difficult cases of applied ethics constitute quandary ethics. Hauerwas proposes the outrageous quandary:

[W]hat do you do about the fat person stuck in the mouth of the cave with the water rising on the inside threatening to drown the four companions left in the cave? Can you use the dynamite that has been conveniently found to blow the fat one out of the hole in order to save the four inside.¹²³

The aim of such an exercise is to discern the relevant principles to guide action in this tragic (or comic) situation. For Hauerwas, the interesting point is not solving the moral puzzle but with the inordinate attention in modern ethics given to thinking about ethical quandaries. One reason for the focus on quandaries is that these hard cases test the universal applicability of moral principles. A moral principle that can justify the killing of one innocent person to save several others may be used to justify the killing of the innocent in other cases. For example, consider some of the supposed universal maxims invoked in medical ethics: ‘competent persons have a right to determine their own fate,’ ‘the physician should respect the wishes of the patient,’ ‘relieve pain,’ ‘thou shalt not kill,’ ‘give no deadly poison, even if requested.’ The assumption is that these maxims are universal and so can be applied to all relevant cases. Hauerwas counters that such maxims are only intelligible within some historical and cultural settings in which they are accepted as authoritative. When

¹²¹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 19.

¹²² Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Abortion Theologically Understood’, in eds. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg & Mark Thiessen Nation, *Virtues And Practices In The Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics After MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), p. 227. Hauerwas also observes that in the history of Roman Catholic moral theology, the neglect of virtue lent itself to an overemphasis on the fulfilment of duties. This transformed the function of priests so that they increasingly ‘came to look more like lawyers than theologians.’ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 51.

removed from this context, the very rules that were to be the hedge against ethical caprice can be interpreted and applied in almost any arbitrary fashion.¹²⁴

Consider the fifth commandment's prohibition against killing. On the face of things, the prohibition seems to be an intelligible maxim needing no further reference to any tradition of interpretation or application. In fact, this command is fraught with ambiguity. Traditionally, the command is not interpreted as a prohibition against all killing, but rather of murder. The command reads, 'You should not murder.' This rendering is only slightly more clear in describing what kind of killing is proscribed. The rule, abstracted from a history of interpretation and application, does not tell us what acts ought to be categorised as murder. Hauerwas writes:

[T]he word 'murder' means neither 'wrongful homicide' nor 'killing of the innocent' but rather a homicide that is neither justified nor excused nor mitigated. It is therefore a philosophical mistake to ask what is wrong with murder. If we rightly understand the grammar of the word murder, we understand that the only issue is whether this or that killing is a case of murder.¹²⁵

To know when an action is murder depends upon 'the tradition in which one has been trained.'¹²⁶ There is not a single moral tradition that justifies 'murder'. There are however, many different ways that moral traditions have described and defined what murder is and when the rule against it applies.

Hauerwas' suspicion of rules leads him to raise doubts about the religious effort to ground a morality in the second table of the Decalogue. The command to honour authority, as well as the prohibitions against murder, adultery, stealing, slander and coveting, are not universal obligations. They are 'shorthand reminders' of the meaning of actions done by agents who have a particular historical identity.¹²⁷ As Hauerwas writes,

The Decalogue is part of the covenant of God with Israel. Divorced from that covenant it makes no sense. God does indeed command obedience, but our God is the God who 'brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage' (Deut. 5:6). Because of this action the demand 'You shall have no other god before me' can be made. So too, the commands not to kill, not to commit adultery, and not to steal necessarily make sense only within the particularity of the story of God's

¹²³ Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church As Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 170.

¹²⁴ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, pp. 171, 173–174.

¹²⁵ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, pp. 176–177.

¹²⁶ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, p. 176.

¹²⁷ Hauerwas, 'The Self As Story', p. 74.

dealing with Israel...For the Bible is fundamentally a story of a people's journey with their God.¹²⁸

The Decalogue is not a universal moral guide but an economical outline of a life in a purposeful relationship with God and others. As Michael Foster notes in *Mystery and Philosophy*, 'The Ten Commandments differ from moral laws as Kant conceived them in that (i) they are not given to all men, but to the chosen people, (ii) they are given *because* they are the chosen people, i.e. on the basis of the covenant relation.'¹²⁹ Were the point of scripture to guide moral decisions, it would need to be a much larger compendium of rules and principles. Because biblical ethics is less concerned 'about making decisions' and more concerned with the formation of a certain kind of character, it is not focused on rules but on describing reality.¹³⁰

Because ethics is first and foremost concerned with description of reality, stories rather than rules have pride of place in Christian ethics. Hauerwas thus works out the opposition between the Christian narrative and the Enlightenment's language of rights and universal principles in his various considerations of the highly charged controversy over abortion. Hauerwas argues that we do not conclude that abortion is wrong because it violates some basic principle such as 'life is sacred,' or 'it is wrong to take life directly.' His disagreement with this appeal to principle is not a rejection of the principle. Rather, he observes that the many appeals to the 'right to life' simply have not brought about fruitful progress in the abortion debate.¹³¹ The reason for this is that these universal rights are, in fact, cultural and judicial agreements. The principle of 'right to life' does not create moral agreement. It expresses perhaps, an agreement that has been achieved by other means. As Lesslie Newbigin points out, 'Asserting a right where there is no such basis would be like writing a check on a nonexistent bank.'¹³²

Hauerwas' most trenchant critique of rights language is in his discussions of the United States' Supreme Court decisions of *Roe v. Wade* and 'Casey.'¹³³ When the U.S. Supreme Court invoked the universal right to privacy in *Roe v. Wade*, it disregarded abortion legislation and local political agreements in all fifty states. Its

¹²⁸ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 23–24.

¹²⁹ Michael B. Foster, *Mystery and Philosophy* (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 72.

¹³⁰ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, p. 177.

¹³¹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 118.

¹³² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 27.

rationale for this dismissal of local political agreements and compromises was the *discovery* of the universal right of privacy in the U.S. Constitution. Hauerwas cites Federal Court of Appeals judge, John T. Noonan, who comments on Justice Blackmun's majority opinion:

To invalidate the state abortion statutes it was necessary for [Blackmun] not only to ignore the unborn child but to recognize a liberty *anterior* to the state in the carrier of the child. The invocation of liberty which was the very heart of his opinion was the invocation of a standard *superior* to enacted law. His radical use of 'higher law' was only disguised by his claim that something in the Constitution supplied the standard by which the state laws on abortion were invalid. The ultimate basis of his decision was nothing in the Constitution but rather his readings of the natural law liberties of an individual.¹³⁴

Noonan concludes that there is no legal 'basis' for *Roe v. Wade*. It is rather a groundless legal judgment based upon an implausible interpretation of an ill-defined principle that was then arbitrarily applied. It was an exercise of raw judicial power, thinly disguised by the moral and civic authority of the Supreme Court.

In *Casey*, the right to privacy first discovered in *Roe* was reaffirmed and intensified. This is evident in the majority opinion which states, 'At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.'¹³⁵ Liberty is not the fruit of truth; it is its creator. The self who creates this liberty is left alone to define its own existence apart from its relationship with God or others. This theory of personal liberty is finally 'divorced from any substantive commitments about what kind of people we are or should be.'¹³⁶ So divorced, the appeals to a *higher* law or the *heart* of liberty do not point to a substantive agreements but are made for their emotive effectiveness. As such, these appeals may be called on to justify almost anything, moral or immoral.¹³⁷

¹³³ The full title of this case is *Planned Parenthood Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Robert P. Casey*.

¹³⁴ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, p. 219, quoting John Noonan, *A Private Choice: Abortion in America in the Seventies* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), pp. 2–3.

¹³⁵ Hauerwas, 'Preaching As Though We Had Enemies', p. 48.

¹³⁶ *A Community of Character*, p. 220.

¹³⁷ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, p. 216 Hauerwas quotes MacIntyre who states, 'the central preoccupation of both ancient and medieval communities was characteristically: how may men together realize the true human good? The central preoccupation of modern men is and has been characteristically: how may we prevent men interfering with each other as each of us goes about our own concerns? The classical view begins with the community of the polis and with the individual viewed as having no moral identity apart from the communities of kinship and citizenship; the modern view begins with the concept of a collection of individuals and the problem of how out of and by individuals social institutions can be constructed.' Alasdair MacIntyre, 'How to Identify Ethical Principles.' *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*, I (Washington, D.C.: DHEW Publication No. (OS) 78–0013, 1978), article 10, pp. 9–10.

Hauerwas argues that an appeal to law requires a more elaborate description. Of course, asserting the priority of description over moral rules or principles is not in itself a solution. Hauerwas recognises that descriptions possess a double-edged power to either disguise or disclose reality. Justice Noonan offers this example of the power of description for disguising the reality of abortion, writing:

If all that has happened may fairly be described as ‘termination of a pregnancy’ with ‘fetal wastage’ the outcome, abortion may be accepted without break with the larger moral culture. If, however, such a description is a mask, if the life of an unborn child is being taken, it is difficult to reconcile the acceptance of abortion with the overarching prohibition against the taking of life.¹³⁸

The point is that how we *see* a moral concern largely depends upon what we *say* about it. This assertion disagrees with Iris Murdoch’s view that ‘we develop language in the context of looking.’ Hauerwas thinks it is closer to the truth to say ‘that we can only see what we have been trained to see through learning to say.’¹³⁹ Agreement on moral rules depends upon the power of our descriptions.

Moral descriptions overcome the problem of moral inarticulacy. Compelling reasons against abortion are founded on a certain description of ‘what human beings are and ... what human beings should do for one another.’¹⁴⁰ Under this description, Christian ethics cannot relegate abortion to conscience and choice.¹⁴¹ This would be to deny the truth that selves are always in relationship to God and others. Because the act of abortion denies the relatedness of the self, Hauerwas writes that

the first question is not, Is abortion right or wrong? or, Is this abortion right or wrong? Rather, the first question is, Why do Christians call abortion *abortion*? And with the first question goes a second, Why do Christians think that *abortion* is a morally problematic term? To call abortion by that name is already a moral achievement.¹⁴²

Abortion, rightly understood, is a word that is meant to express moral revulsion at an act of violence. It is a word that teaches us to reject the exclusion of a member of the human community from the community’s care and protection for the sake of convenience. Christian ethics’ opposition to abortion depends on its ability to describe reality in a certain way. This means that we must understand the human self

¹³⁸ *A Community of Character*, p. 218.

¹³⁹ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, p. 156. (Hauerwas credits Wittgenstein for this insight.)

¹⁴⁰ John Noonan, cited by Hauerwas in *A Community of Character*, p. 213.

¹⁴¹ *A Community of Character*, p. 218. Hauerwas refers to Francis Canavan, ‘The Dilemma of Liberal Pluralism’, *The Human Life Review* 5 (1979), p. 7.

¹⁴² Hauerwas, ‘Abortion Theologically Understood’, p. 228.

as a creature in relation with the Creator. In describing the other as a related creature, abortion becomes unthinkable because that life 'is not ours to take.'¹⁴³

When Christians abandon their discrete descriptive task, they commit themselves to failure. Hauerwas states:

It is my contention that Christian opposition to abortion on demand has failed because, by attempting to meet the moral challenge within the limits of public polity, we have failed to exhibit our deepest convictions that make our rejection of abortion intelligible. We have failed then in our first political task because we accepted uncritically an account of 'the moral question of abortion' determined by a politics foreign to the polity appropriate to Christian convictions. We have not understood, as Christians, how easily we have presumed that the presuppositions of our 'liberal' cultural ethos are 'Christian.' As a result, our temptation has been to blame the intractability of the abortion controversy on what appears to us as the moral blindness or immorality of pro-abortionists. We fail to see how much of the problem lies in the way we share with the pro-abortion advocates the moral presumptions of our culture.¹⁴⁴

It is incoherent to accept the culture's understanding of individualism and freedom while opposing the abortion policy which is built on these notions.¹⁴⁵ Apart from the Christian description of the reality of the self in relationship to God and others, opposition to abortion must appear to be irrational.

Hauerwas thinks it wise for Christians to accept Richard Rorty's argument that moral judgements have never been grounded in universal theories. According to Rorty, truth-claims that appeal to 'the nature of truth' must now be seen to be as unconvincing as claims that appeal to 'the nature of man' or 'the nature of God'.¹⁴⁶ If Rorty is correct, the desire for relevance that led the church to couch its morality in universal terms is now as irrelevant as its appeal to the will of God. Furthermore, had the church steadfastly grounded its moral appeal in the revelation of God, it would have been coherent even if it was thought to be wrong. The attempt to ground a Christian morality in universals has left Christian ethics looking incoherent and irrelevant. The alternative is to centre ethics in the Christian moral vision.

The Christian moral vision cannot be articulated by rules. Rules may, with certain clarity, prohibit abortion. However, to reduce Christian ethics to prohibitions would distort Christian ethics. It would reduce ethics to decisions to either obey or disobey. Such a focus on rules would miss one of the primary goals of Christian ethics which is to shape Christians to embody their moral commitments in acts of

¹⁴³ *A Community of Character*, pp. 222 & 225.

¹⁴⁴ *A Community of Character*, pp. 212–213.

¹⁴⁵ *A Community of Character*, pp. 160–161.

¹⁴⁶ Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, pp. 31–32 & 74–76.

mercy towards others.¹⁴⁷ The focus of Christian morality is not on prohibitions or decisions. The primary aim is to transform persons to be capable of freely sacrificing for others. How is it that people come to sacrifice freely for others? This comes by means of the Christian story where sacrifice is the norm of divine and human action.¹⁴⁸ Christian moral norms reflect what is described as normal in the Christian story. This is why Hauerwas states:

We cannot account for our moral life solely by the decisions we make; we also need the narrative that forms us to have one kind of character rather than another... As our stories, however, they will determine what kind of moral considerations – that is, what reasons – will count at all.¹⁴⁹

Narratives, rather than rules or decisions, are at the centre of the Christian moral vision. This does not only mean that Christian ethics is shaped by the scriptural story. It also means that Christians become morally accountable by telling stories. Hence an important aspect of moral training is cultivating the skill of description.

A corollary to Hauerwas' commitment to narrative is attention to the importance of description in the Christian understanding of the moral life. The moral power of description is considered by Hauerwas (along with David Burrell) in the essay 'Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*'.¹⁵⁰ In Speer's life, description was a powerful two-edged sword. It was the instrument by which Speer disguised the reality of what he was doing and who he was becoming. This gets at the heart of what Hauerwas means by the word sin. Sin, Hauerwas states, is a 'positive attempt to overreach our power as creatures... its fundamental form is self-deception.'¹⁵¹ Speer's self-deception was a kind of wilful epistemological crisis, in which he protected his fragile 'webs of illusion' by skilfully confusing and denying his true identity and the true meaning of his actions. The other edge of the sword is that Speer's autobiography, as an instrument of disclosing the truth, allowed Speer to

¹⁴⁷ Hauerwas applauds the Rev. Jerry Falwell's efforts to provide single, pregnant women with the resources to allow them to bring the unborn baby to full term. This kind of embodied ethic undermines the pervasive cynicism that the church is willing to make 'all sorts of ethical pronouncements but seems unwilling to sacrifice its own resources to back up those pronouncements.' Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 71.

¹⁴⁸ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 42 & 43.

¹⁴⁹ Hauerwas and Burrell, 'From System To Story', p. 166.

¹⁵⁰ Stanley Hauerwas and David B. Burrell, 'Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*', in *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), pp. 82–100.

¹⁵¹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 46.

find his way back from his self-deception.¹⁵² Hauerwas' intention is to show the powerful function of description in Speer's life in first disguising and then disclosing the truth.

It is important to see Speer as a different character from Hannah Arendt's depiction of Adolf Eichmann in *The Banality of Evil*. Speer's complicity with evil was more complex and demanded a more sophisticated narrative to sustain his self-deception. Hauerwas notes that if Speer had been 'a dedicated and committed Nazi... his actions would be intelligible.'¹⁵³ Because Speer does not fit this description, his seduction to evil is all the more interesting as a case study. Speer was rather a well-schooled intellectual and a humane and loving father. Clearly he was torn between his intellectual and moral loyalties and his inexplicable loyalty to Hitler in the role of 'Hitler's architect'. Although he was dedicated to many of Hitler's programs, Speer did not accept Hitler's other advisors and was 'repulsed at Hitler's crude propaganda.'¹⁵⁴ How then could he justify his own complicity in the inhuman treatment of other human beings? The question plagues Speer as he states:

What preys on my mind nowadays has little to do with the standards of Nuremberg nor the figures on lives I saved or might have saved for in either case I was moving within the system. What disturbs me more is that I failed to read the physiognomy of the regime mirrored in the faces of those prisoners – the regime whose existence I was so obsessively trying to prolong during those weeks and months. I did not see any moral ground outside the system where I should have taken my stand and sometimes I ask myself who this young man really was, this young man who has now become so alien to me, who walked through the workshops of the Linz steelworks or descended into the caverns of the Central Works twenty-five years ago.¹⁵⁵

The decisive moment in sustaining his self-deception came when Speer was warned by a friend to avoid Auschwitz. Speer recalls purposely refusing to ask for a further explanation, recognising that this description would have been impossible to reconcile with his political commitments. Reflecting on the meaning of his self-deception, Speer states:

For from that moment on, I was inescapably contaminated morally; from fear of discovering something which might have made me turn from my course. I had closed my eyes. This deliberate blindness outweighs whatever good I may have done or tried to do in the last period of the war. Those activities shrink to nothing in

¹⁵² Hauerwas and Burrell, 'Self-Deception and Autobiography', p. 82.

¹⁵³ Hauerwas and Burrell, 'Self-Deception and Autobiography', p. 90.

¹⁵⁴ Hauerwas and Burrell, 'Self-Deception and Autobiography', p. 90.

¹⁵⁵ Hauerwas and Burrell, 'Self-Deception and Autobiography', p. 90, quoting Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 480.

the face of it. Because I failed at that time, I still feel to this day responsible for Auschwitz in the wholly personal sense.¹⁵⁶

Speer's self-deception owed itself to his ability to avert his moral gaze from evil. He had been assimilated into a system that, in not admitting self-criticism, did not allow those within the system to 'step back' from themselves. This leads us to ask how self-deception might be overcome? The answer is that one must learn to see differently. One must somehow be introduced into the 'appropriate disciplines' that teach one to see by the light of an alternative story.¹⁵⁷ On the matter of moral sight, Hauerwas quotes David Harned:

Seeing is never simply a reaction to what passes before our eyes; it is a matter of how well the eye is trained and provisioned to discern the richness and the terror, beauty and banality of the worlds outside and within the self. Decisions are shaped by vision, and the ways that we see are a function of our 'character,' of the history and habits of the self, and ultimately of the stories that we have heard and with which we identify ourselves.¹⁵⁸

So long as Speer remained a functional 'character' within the uncritical Nazi story, he would neither need nor would he be able to construct a critical re-description of his actions. In the absence of an alternative story, self-deception would be exposed by the shattering of the Nazi story. The moral importance of Speer's life is not understood until we recognise the moral power of story and description.

Narrative and description are central features of the Christian moral vision. They provide that place of self-criticism needed for the moral life. However, Hauerwas cautions us not to think that narrative is sufficient in itself for moral life. Narratives and descriptions were instrumentally powerful in Speer's life because they were connected to the concrete moral culture of a political community. Narratives cannot be divorced from concrete communities. The biblical story addresses Christians as auditors of the story *and* as characters within the story. As auditors and actors, the Christian story can never be considered apart from the Christian's place in the ecclesial community. The narrative quality of Christian ethics means, for Hauerwas, that it is an ethic that is falsified if it is not embodied. Hence the church is every bit as important to Hauerwas' ethic as the *polis* was to Aristotle's ethic.¹⁵⁹ Let us now

¹⁵⁶ Hauerwas and Burrell, 'Self-Deception and Autobiography', p. 91, quoting Speer, p. 481.

¹⁵⁷ Hauerwas and Burrell, 'Self-Deception and Autobiography', pp. 95-96.

¹⁵⁸ Hauerwas and Burrell, 'Self-Deception and Autobiography', p. 83, quoting David Harned, *Faith and Virtue* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1973), pp. 29-30.

¹⁵⁹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 119.

consider Hauerwas' understanding of the church as a moral *polis* or community of character.

2.3. The Community of Character

If the church intends to embody the Christian story in concrete deeds and practices, it will need the moral resources to be a counter-cultural community.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the function of moral discipline in the church is to train persons to live together within the Christian community *and* to live in opposition to the culture. This means that church and culture will be in conflict over their respective definitions of the self. Opposing the view of the unencumbered self of individualism, the Christian self is defined by its vertical and horizontal relationships. The notion of moral discipline within the church is a corollary to this view of the self. Morality merely expresses how one embodies these vertical and horizontal relationships.

Because the Christian self is always a self in relationship, there is no authentic Christian life that is outside the church.¹⁶¹ This view is necessarily offensive to individualist sensibilities. The reason for this, as MacIntyre notes, is that

There is in the dominant moral culture of our particular time and place a widespread and influential conception of human beings as individuals who initially confront a range of possible objects of rational desire, a range of goods, among which each of them has to make her or his own choices, and which each individual has to rank (sic) order for her or himself, in accordance with her or his set of preferences.¹⁶²

The modern self's identity is not as one who is a related character in a story but as one who makes isolated and individual choices. As such, this self will define freedom as detachment 'from oppressive claims of tradition and community.'¹⁶³ A culture shaped by individualism cannot but resist the conception of the self as a disciple, as one who is defined by her commitment to a discipline. Such discipline is tantamount to self-mutilation. To this negative vision of discipline, the Christian moral vision responds: 'By cutting back our attachments and commitments, the self shrinks rather than grows. So an important gift the church gives us is a far richer range of options, commitments, duties, and troubles than we would have if left to our own devices.'¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, pp. 15–19.

¹⁶¹ Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', in *Christian Existence Today* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1988), p. 102.

¹⁶² MacIntyre, 'How Can We Learn What *Veritatis Splendor* Has To Teach?', p. 182.

¹⁶³ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁴ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p. 65.

The self enters into the commitments and community in order not to be left alone. To be left alone is in a sense to be 'free' of others. Yet, if the self cannot grow in the virtues apart from others in community, this freedom turns out to enslave the self to the vices of self-centeredness and ultimately to loneliness. Hauerwas' church is a counter-cultural community that stands foursquare against the distorting freedom of individualism. Put another way, the church intends to cultivate 'resident aliens': characters who are capable of simultaneously participating in culture while taking a critical stance against culture.

Hauerwas contends that a crucial challenge faces Christian ethics in the modern function of the Bible in North American churches. Simply put, until Christians learn to read the Bible correctly, there is little hope for an effective Christian ethics. Reading scripture wrongly has done untold damage to the church as a community of character. Reading scripture rightly holds out great promise as a means of restoring the church as a community of character. Hauerwas begins to define this task by referring to Kierkegaard's judgement that reading scripture is harmful to the life of the church. Hauerwas acclaims Kierkegaard a hero because, 'in fear and trembling, [he] had the courage to forbid people to read the Bible.'¹⁶⁵ This is a message with contemporary relevance. Hauerwas observes:

No task is more important than for the Church to take the Bible out of the hands of individual Christians in North America. Let us no longer give the Bible to all children when they enter the third grade or whenever their assumed rise to Christian maturity is marked, such as eighth-grade commencements. Let us rather tell them and their parents that they are possessed by habits far too corrupt for them to be encouraged to read the Bible on their own.¹⁶⁶

When scripture is read in an undisciplined manner, it is the source of self-deception. For Hauerwas, individualism has infected the ecclesial community and corrupted the disciplined reading of the Bible. Individualism has so distorted North American Christians that now the church as a community of character is reduced to a voluntary organisation of like-minded, friendly people.

The church exists in a buyer's or consumer's market, so any suggestion that in order to be a member of a church you must be transformed by opening your life to certain kinds of discipline is almost impossible to maintain... The called church has become

¹⁶⁵ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁶ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*, p. 15.

the voluntary church, whose primary characteristic is that the congregation is friendly.¹⁶⁷

In MacIntyre's terms, the church of Hauerwas' description has abandoned the internal goods embodied in its disciplined spiritual and moral practices for the external goods of organisational well-being and superficial harmony. This distortion of the church is reflected in and caused by the distorted reading of the Bible.

An individualist reading of scripture turns the Bible into either a dead book or a dangerous book.¹⁶⁸ The Bible becomes a dead book when the private self is the final arbiter of its interpretation and application. In this way, the Bible fails to function as that place to stand by which we are able to criticise our lives. Hauerwas insists that the 'hope of reclaiming the church as a disciplined body of disciples' requires that the church 'recover the discipline of the body that at least offers an alternative to the endemic individualism and rationalism of modernity.'¹⁶⁹ When the Bible is read wrongly, it becomes an echo of the self rather than a dialectical voice that challenges the self's deceptions. It is only a small step from the Bible as a dead echo of the self to the Bible as dangerous tool of self-deception. Having lost the moral authority to censure evil, the Bible may now be called on to sanction evil.

Individualism has a corrosive effect on the reading of scripture in the church. Aided by the view that the Bible enjoys a unique 'epistemic status'¹⁷⁰ that allows the individual an unambiguously clear understanding of the Bible, scriptural interpretation is abstracted from tradition and the community, and given over to the individual reader. When the individual is the final authority of biblical interpretation there is no need for education in the disciplined community and cultivation of the intellectual and moral virtues needed to sustain dialectical arguments to advance this tradition. When the church is no longer responsible for the interpretation of scripture or the cultivation of readers, its reason for being is called into question. In short, the church becomes superfluous. Hauerwas makes clear that it is not his intention to call into question the claim of scripture as being the revelation and record of God's saving intention for the world. His task is to call into question the view that any 'person of

¹⁶⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Discipleship as a Craft, Church as a Disciplined Community', in *The Christian Century* 108 (Oct. 1991), p. 881.

¹⁶⁸ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 98.

¹⁶⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Sanctified Body: Why Perfection Does Not Require a "Self"', (unpublished essay). p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 66.

common sense possesses the ability to understand the Scripture without further aid.’¹⁷¹ Were the meaning of scripture immediately apparent to all people of common sense, we would *naturally* be adequate to the task of reading scripture. However the fact that we speak of the synoptic problem or that we catechise children in the right reading of scripture are signs that we possess no such natural skill. Hence Hauerwas’ conclusion that

the New Testament is hardly self–interpreting. We have, after all, four Gospels, each with its own particular emphasis. These differences are not necessarily incompatible, but neither is their interrelation clear. They must be interpreted, and that requires not only careful historical research, but, even more, our willingness to be morally formed in a manner appropriate to the claims of those texts. Indeed, the diversity of Scripture is at the heart of the Christian life insofar as it requires that we be a community, a church, capable of allowing these differing texts be read amongst us with authority.¹⁷²

This view of scripture raises the problem of how the Bible claims to be authoritative in the church when it is subject to multiple interpretations and applications. How does the ambiguity of scripture square with the claim that scripture is authoritative? For Hauerwas, the authority of scripture relates to its function in forming Christian character. When Christians are rightly formed, they read scripture rightly. And Christians are rightly formed by means of reading scripture rightly. Confronted again by the paradox of the *Meno*, we discover that Hauerwas offers a similar resolution to MacIntyre’s. That is, in any craft or practice, one can only be transformed by means of membership in the disciplined community. This is why Hauerwas states that ‘The church is crucial for Christian epistemology. We would not know enough to be moral without the colony.’¹⁷³ We know scripture to be true because it fulfils its moral function in the community. It forms Christians by forming them to be right readers of the canonical text.

In his treatment of scripture as a source for ethics, Jeffery Siker notes that

Hauerwas’s hermeneutic, like his notion of biblical authority, points directly to the life and role of the Christian community as indispensable to how one goes about interpreting Scripture... For Hauerwas, church (Christian community) is inseparable from the process of interpretation and in fact is itself a living hermeneutic.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*, p. 31.

¹⁷² *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 70.

¹⁷³ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p. 94.

¹⁷⁴ Jeffrey S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth–Century Portraits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 117.

For better or worse, Hauerwas' church is in its sum and substance a moral community. It is not merely analogous to the *polis*; it replaces the *polis*. Hence everything depends upon the moral formation of Christians. Hauerwas' commitment to moral formation leads him to see the church as a dialectical community. The church is thus sustained by an 'extended argument over time about the significance of that story and how best to understand it.'¹⁷⁵ Dialectical practices are crucial because 'truth can only be known through struggle.'¹⁷⁶ Commitment to dialectical argument can only be sustained by a commitment to a community that deals with others in patience and trust rather than in 'coercion and falsehood.'¹⁷⁷ The authority of scripture depends upon the church being the kind of community that poses questions to and is questioned by the canonical authority. Within the church, the two practices designed to advance this dialectical conversation are individual confession and casuistry.

For Hauerwas, the church must institutionalise certain dialectical practices. This commitment to argument reflects MacIntyre's view that such dialectical practices are essential for sustaining accountability within a community and between rival communities. MacIntyre identifies the university lecture and the practice of auricular confession as model dialectical practices. Although the abuse of the confessional is well-documented, MacIntyre also recognises its positive potential for the noncoercive education of community members. Confession is noncoercive precisely because it offers an institutionally acceptable means for persons to undergo the kind of 'interrogations through which accountability is realized.'¹⁷⁸ Confession is an occasion whereby one's skills in seeing reality are tested by a proven 'master'. It is practice that allows the morally unskilled to become skilled in learning how to apply the teachings of the church to one's experience. Accepting this positive view of confession allows for the kind of confrontation of self-deception that, as I noted, was so absent in the case of Speer. For this reason, Hauerwas writes,

We must be trained to see ourselves as sinners, for it is not self-evident. Indeed, our sin is so fundamental that we must be taught to recognize it; we cannot perceive its radical nature so long as we remain formed by it. Sin is not some universal tendency of humankind to be inhumane or immoral, though sin may involve inhumanity and immorality. We are not sinful because we participate in some

¹⁷⁵ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 107.

¹⁷⁶ *A Community of Character*, p. 85.

¹⁷⁷ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 102–103.

¹⁷⁸ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 201.

general human condition, but because we deceive ourselves about the nature of reality and so would crucify the very one who calls us to God's kingdom.¹⁷⁹

Confession is personal though not 'private' in the modern understanding of the term. In this practice, the importance of the individual in community is acknowledged even as individualism is rejected. When confession is in good order, it is a communal practice for cultivating selves by non-coercive means. Interrogation is not the aim of confession. The model must be more like the conversations between master and apprentice. Hauerwas is keenly aware of how church practices become deformed when they become rules rather than practices. Thus, if confession is not to be misunderstood as a heteronomous moral imposition, it must be closely linked to baptism and the promise of reconciliation.

Confession cannot be the imposition of power over individual consciences nor can it promote a romantic notion of reconciliation. The question is how a practice that teaches Christians to 'learn to name their sins' relates to the satisfaction of our *natural* desire for peace and reconciliation.¹⁸⁰ Hauerwas responds by noting that confession allows one to 'place myself as a creature of a gracious God', albeit one whose natural tendency leans toward 'infidelity and rebellion.'¹⁸¹ Our desire for peace is subverted by our tendency to be unfaithful. Confession frees us from having to 'deny our past, or tell ourselves false stories, as now we can accept what we have been without the knowledge of our sin destroying us.'¹⁸² As a dialectical practice, confession aims to confront and criticise. Yet confession must do more: it must culminate in absolution. The absolution assures us that to be confronted by the truth does not destroy the self. Rather, it is an instrument of reconciling the self to the vertical and horizontal relationships that are essential for human flourishing.

Another dialectical practice that Hauerwas attempts to rescue for his Protestant readership is that of casuistry. Casuistry, like confession, has a history of abuse that tends to mask its positive function within the ecclesial community.¹⁸³ Hauerwas

¹⁷⁹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 30–31.

¹⁸⁰ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, p. 180.

¹⁸¹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 30–31.

¹⁸² *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 89.

¹⁸³ Albert R. Jonsen & Stephen Toulmin, in their positive account of casuistry, admit Pascal and the Jansenists' criticism that casuistry allowed for loopholes that resulted in moral permissiveness. These critics of casuistry saw that 'as the casuists pursued their analysis of the moral life into more and more detailed cases, they seemed to move further and further away from the clear light of those beliefs. Each series of cases began with a strong affirmation of Christian ideals; but as the cases became more complex, the loftiness and rigor of those ideals faded into the background... Casuistry, they said, dispenses "cheap grace" by showing Christians how to evade the imperative call of their Lord "to sell

intends to recover the practice of casuistry by showing this positive function in sustaining the life of the Christian community. This task requires that he show why casuistry is not synonymous with legalism. Hauerwas defines casuistry as follows:

What I mean by casuistry, then, is not just the attempt to adjudicate difficult cases of conscience within a system of moral principles, but is the process by which a tradition tests whether its practices are consistent (that is, truthful) or inconsistent in the light of its basic habits and convictions or whether these convictions require new practices and behavior.¹⁸⁴

Casuistry serves two positive benefits within the ecclesial community. First, it is a way in which the church remains attentive to the founding narrative of the Christian community. The church address particular acts, problems and decisions by remembering the story of salvation and arguing over its application in particular instances. Second, as casuistry sets aside regular occasions for disagreement within an institution, this practice acknowledges the positive function of disagreement for moral progress. Moreover, as these occasions allow for open disagreement about how a community is ordered, those within an institution will be less apt to resort to coercive or manipulative measures. Casuistry is essential to the Christian moral life because it is an important way that Christians eschew the modern notion of absolute autonomy and attempt to be faithful to ‘the conviction that we belong to another.’¹⁸⁵ This call to be faithful does not, however, exclude the indeterminacy that comes of Christian freedom and so requires that the body of Christ continually find ways to sustain its unity ‘from generation to generation.’¹⁸⁶ This unity is not achieved by articulating and asserting moral rules but by the continued remembrance of the story of God’s intervention and salvation and its application to the present life of the church. Casuistry can only be appreciated as a positive occasion of disagreement when this form of moral deliberation is centred in the act of remembering the canonical story that promises peace in times of conflict. With this promise, the church may be confident in its belief that openness to internal and external disagreement is essential for achieving reconciliation.

all and come follow Him.”’ *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 238.

¹⁸⁴ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 120.

¹⁸⁵ *A Community of Character*, p. 130.

¹⁸⁶ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 107.

Hauerwas' church, not unlike MacIntyre's university, is to be a place of restrained intramural conflict.¹⁸⁷ Although the general shape of the church's life is outlined in the story of salvation, there is much that remains to be 'hammered out'. In the early church, debates waged over a Christian's service in the military, to what extent Christians should co-operate with pagans, whether it was permissible to make civil vows, or how one ought act in times of persecution.¹⁸⁸ These questions had great potential for division and so the church had to be capable of having significant disagreement that would not result in schism.¹⁸⁹ This view of the church would no doubt surprise many who view conflict as incompatible with the well-ordered peace of the community. Contrary to this perception, Hauerwas' view is that the absence of dialectical conflict is responsible for disorder in the ecclesial community. Failing to render ourselves vulnerable to dialectical challenge means that we will not know the implications of our participation in the story of Jesus. It is in struggle that we discover the relevance of our commitments.

Openness to dialectical testing reflects a trust in the promise of reconciliation within and without the church. Because the church is committed to a story that promises transcendent peace, it is capable of risking temporal peace and temporary defeat as it remains 'open to challenge from sources outside the Christian community.'¹⁹⁰ The practice of casuistry within the church cultivates openness to testing and criticism from those outside the church. Having cultivated the skill of dialectical conversation within the church, Christians are readied to engage in dialectical conversation with the world, in the hope that they may learn from the world. Hauerwas' example of this residual benefit of outreach is how the church has learned more about its own commitment to non-violence because these non-violent traditions have questioned the church's own use of violence in the past. Through this kind of criticism, the church is compelled to reconsider the implications of its teachings and commitments.

The church's beliefs become intelligible through dialectical struggle. The commitment to those practices that test belief is utterly crucial for an institution that values its tradition. Whenever the church has failed to render itself vulnerable to

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University and the Lecture', *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 216–236.

¹⁸⁸ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, p. 179.

¹⁸⁹ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, p. 175.

testing, its common life becomes 'nothing more than the unreflective following of a tradition of conduct in which we have been brought up.'¹⁹¹ Once more, Hauerwas defines his emphasis on dialectical struggle by diminishing the emphasis on moral rules. The church cannot foster a view of obedience as unquestioned following of commands and customs. As MacIntyre's account of taboo rules suggests that unquestioned adherence easily leads to unquestioned disregard for rules. Although moral rules are indispensable for the life of any community, the morality of a community cannot be reduced to moral rules. Hauerwas argues that moral rules are only intelligible insofar as they are embedded in a shared understanding of the internal good of the community. Once these rules are connected to a shared commitment to the good of the community, they may now serve two functions.

According to MacIntyre:

The first would be a set of precepts enjoining the virtues, those dispositions without the exercise of which the good cannot be achieved, more particularly if the good is a form of life which includes as an essential part the exercise of the virtues. The second would be a set of precepts prohibiting those actions destructive of those human relationships which are necessary to a community in which and for which the good is to be achieved and for which the virtues are to be practiced. Both sets of precepts derive their point, purpose, and justification from the *telos*, but in two very different ways. To violate the second type of precept is to commit an act sufficiently intolerable to exclude oneself from that community in which alone one can hope to achieve the good. Thus the absolute prohibition of certain specifiable kinds of actions finds a necessary place within a certain type of teleological framework.¹⁹²

Moral rules are indispensable because they concisely define the commitments of the church community. However, the intelligibility of any rule depends upon understanding its relationship to the *telos* of the community. When the relationship between a prohibition and one's positive commitments is unclear, moral rules become unintelligible. That is, one cannot give rational reasons for obedience, nor are there good reasons to be offered against disobedience. Emphatically, it is only by means of dialectical testing that Christians come to appreciate how moral rules are signs of the positive participation in the good of the community of character.

¹⁹⁰ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 120.

¹⁹¹ Gilbert Meilaender, *Faith and Faithfulness: Basic Themes in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) p. 3, quoting Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962) p. 61.

¹⁹² Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 118–119, quoting Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Theology, Ethics, and the Ethics of Medicine and Health Care', *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 4 (1979), p. 437.

The teleological structure that renders moral rules intelligible presents us with a new difficulty of reconciling the notion of freedom with the view that there is a rational, objective, teleological shape to the Christian life. This brief inquiry into moral freedom should not be side-tracked by Hauerwas' frequent criticisms of the modern notion of freedom. When he argues that obedience is not tantamount to enslavement to rules or that the church must not be uncritical of its tradition and commitments, he is arguing for a certain kind of freedom in the Christian life. It is because freedom and self-determination are essential aspects of the Christian life that we need the dialectical practices to continually call our exercise of freedom into question. How then can freedom be reconciled with form?

Like MacIntyre, Hauerwas appeals to the craft analogy to show how freedom is not incompatible with a teleological form. Freedom is not merely a freedom *from* form, duties, commitments and the like. Freedom is a freedom *for* participation in a certain form of life. The apprentice aspires to participate in the craft as a master. In order to achieve this freedom, certain virtues and skills must be *cultivated*. The Christian version of freedom is similar. However, unlike a craft, participation in the Christian life is not always clear. Hence if one asks what is the form according to which Christians are cultivated, Hauerwas' answer is to point to the Christian *cultus*. As worship ritualises the Christian story, the shape of the liturgy is the clearest expression of the teleological shape of the Christian life, and so is an important way to think about the shape of Christian ethics. 'Because the Christian story is an enacted story,' Hauerwas writes, 'liturgy is probably a much more important resource than are doctrines or creeds for helping us to hear, tell, and live the story of God.'¹⁹³ In worship, the Christian is a hearer and doer of the story. To perform the liturgy is to articulate and enact the story of God's intervention and salvation in ritual action. By understanding worship as enactment or performance, Hauerwas draws an important connection with ethics. What is the moral life but the practical performance of one's role in the story of God's salvation? Because there is a close relationship between worship and morality, Hauerwas argues that the ritual enactment of the liturgy is a critical aid to Christian ethical reflection.

Worship is not an arbitrary assemblage of someone's private desires, likes or will. The liturgy is rather the ritual expression of the church's standard of excellence.

¹⁹³ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 26.

Worship ought not seek to be pragmatically effective. Because ‘good’ worship best expresses the trajectory of the Christian story, it also best expresses the moral shape of the Christian life. Hauerwas spells out the implications of the relationship between worship and ethics in his seminary course entitled ‘Teaching Christian Ethics as Worship’. The course is structured in the following way.

Worship and Life
Gathering and Greeting
Confession and Sin: Race, Class, Gender
Scripture and Proclamation: Virtues and the Ministry
Baptism: Marriage, Sex, and the Family
Offering, Sacrifice, and Eucharist: Economic Justice, War, and Peace
Sending Forth¹⁹⁴

Describing the relationship of ethics to worship, Hauerwas writes:

any account of truthfulness as well as the rationality of theological convictions cannot be considered apart from worship. Through worship, we not only come to know God, but we are changed by our knowledge of God, morally and also rationally. Once theology is liturgically shaped, we may hope to recover theology as a tradition–determined craft in contradiction to the ahistorical accounts of truth and rationality so characteristic of modernity.¹⁹⁵

Christian ethics, like Christian worship, begins in the name of the triune God. By asserting this, Hauerwas not only rejects *midair* ethics, but also an ethic that begins ‘from below’ in search of general anthropological insights. In an act of self–evaluation, Hauerwas recognises that in aiming at intelligibility, he had not sufficiently attended to his own insistence on the *theological* starting point of Christian ethics:

In spite of everything I was trying to do to sustain the integrity of Christian speech, despite my repeated attempts to reclaim the Christian qualifier for how we think about the character of the Christian life, when all is said and done I may have done nothing more than reproduced Durkheim, albeit with an ecclesiological twist.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ The course is discussed in the essay, ‘Teaching Christian Ethics as Worship’, in *In Good Company*, pp. 153–168. Meilaender criticises the linkage of worship with ethics because it confuses the proper work of the church with the proper work of academic theology. Meilaender does not think it is the task of the academic to teach students to ‘live the life of praise more faithfully.’ He states that such a course ‘sounds fine until we begin to consider that his calling is precisely to teach his students to think more clearly and precisely about Christian theology and ethics. In noting this we need not suppose that thought should be divorced from practice, as if a “mere” academic exercise were what we had in mind. But Jesus did command us to learn to love God also with the mind – that too is part, if only part, of a life of praise.’ ‘Keeping Company’, review of Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), *First Things* 66 (Oct., 1996), p. 52.

¹⁹⁵ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, p. 156.

¹⁹⁶ Hauerwas, ‘Which God? Whose Morality?’, pp. 1–2.

The attempt to render Christian belief intelligible by linking it with ‘insights’ into universal human experience is a failed apologetic strategy.¹⁹⁷ Such moral insights, once divorced from the worship of God, are ‘empty.’¹⁹⁸ The apologetic strategy fails because it presumes that there is a moral kernel that is intelligible apart from the attendant theological claims.¹⁹⁹ Apologetics ignores the importance of the Christian community when it views the self as a rational individual who is *naturally* adequate to comprehend Christian truth–claims. Hauerwas counters this view by insisting that Christian worship and ethics are practices that make sense only if the Christian is defined by his or her vertical and horizontal relationships.²⁰⁰

Two aspects of Hauerwas’ assertion reveal why his ethic is centred in the ecclesial community. The first has to do with the Christian life as a practice. Hauerwas argues that participation in any practice does not come *naturally*; it requires the cultivation of the right kinds of habits and disciplines. Reflecting MacIntyre’s account of the apprentice’s dependence on the master, Hauerwas says that the Christian life ‘requires that one be in contact with those ethical aristocrats who are good at living the Christian faith.’²⁰¹ Elsewhere he states ‘To learn to be “moral” therefore *necessarily* requires a guide.’²⁰² Participation in the moral and liturgical life presumes that one is horizontally related to a moral, worshipping community.

As this ecclesial community begins its activity by invoking the name of the triune God, it defines the self’s dependence in terms of the vertical relationship with God. This vertical dependence is a corollary to the doctrines of creation *ex nihilo* and the incarnation. The cosmos is a creation and not an emanation. Therefore there is no necessary harmony between deity, creature, and creation. As a creation, made out of nothing, the cosmos is utterly contingent upon the gracious initiative of God.²⁰³ This accent on dependency is reflected in Hauerwas’ assertion that Aquinas’ so–called proofs for God’s existence are unintelligible apart from the incarnation. Hauerwas

¹⁹⁷ Hauerwas, ‘Which God? Whose Morality?’, pp. 6–7.

¹⁹⁸ Hauerwas, ‘Murdochian Muddles’, p. 158.

¹⁹⁹ *A Community of Character*, p. 89.

²⁰⁰ Hauerwas, ‘Which God? Whose Morality?’, p. 2, n. 5.

²⁰¹ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p. 102.

²⁰² *A Community of Character*, p. 270, n.8.

²⁰³ Hauerwas, ‘Murdochian Muddles’, p. 163–4. Hauerwas also cites David Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 9, who writes, ‘It is the freedom of divinity to act, in creating and in revealing, which constitutes the nub of the notion of creator which both Maimonides and Aquinas consider to be the deliverance of the scriptures. And if that freedom means primarily that the act of creating is a spontaneous and gracious one, then the God who so creates is fulfilling no natural need and has nothing to gain thereby!’

first notes that Aquinas aimed at demonstration, and that any demonstration must be appropriate to its object. This means the only appropriate demonstration of God's existence could be Jesus Christ as God incarnate.²⁰⁴ Citing Aquinas' commentary on St. John's Gospel, Hauerwas writes that as 'creatures were not sufficient to lead to a knowledge of the Creator...it was necessary that the Creator himself come into the world in the flesh, and be known through himself.'²⁰⁵ Because 'creatures were not sufficient', the incarnate Creator also established the church to continue with this ministry.

Once we recognise that Hauerwas' is an ecclesial ethic, we must soon ask what church best embodies his view of the church. I suggest that this question accents a weakness in Hauerwas' work. At the beginning of this section I conjectured that Hauerwas rescues MacIntyre's ethics from falsifying abstraction by giving MacIntyre's tradition and teleology a Christian content and by applying his work to the ecclesial context. For as important as this move is, Richard Hays still thinks that Hauerwas' writings suffer from a certain abstraction. It turns out that Hauerwas' ecclesial community is as difficult to find as MacIntyre's Benedictine community. Hays notes that Hauerwas' advocacy of an ecclesial ethic is fraught with ambiguity. The reason for this is Hauerwas' admission that, being a Methodist 'of doubtful theological background' with strong affections for the Roman Catholic and Anabaptist traditions, he is best described as a 'high-church Mennonite'.²⁰⁶ Treating this designation with more seriousness than does Hauerwas, it is a clue to a serious problem of which Hauerwas himself is at least partly aware when he says:

Perhaps the reason I stress so strongly the significance of the church for social ethics is that I am currently not disciplined by, nor do I feel the ambiguity of, any concrete church. Such a position could be deeply irresponsible, as it invites intellectual dishonesty....I find I must think and write not only for the church that does exist but for the church that should exist if we were courageous and faithful.'²⁰⁷

Even with this explanation about the church to which Hauerwas writes, there remains a troubling ambiguity in his view of the church that causes at least two problems that I will mention but not discuss in detail. First, Hauerwas seems not to take seriously the profound divisions within the Christian church. Hence he never discusses the practical problem of discerning the marks of the 'true' church. Those who would take

²⁰⁴ Hauerwas, 'Which God? Whose Morality?', p. 4.

²⁰⁵ Hauerwas, 'Which God? Whose Morality?', p. 6.

²⁰⁶ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, pp. 264–265.

him seriously need to know which church best embodies Hauerwas' vision. Since the church as a community of character is essential to Hauerwas' ethics, it is desirable that he should distinguish the authentic from the failed moral communities. Second, if, as Hauerwas claims, scripture can only be read in a concrete community, and as there is no community committed to the high-church Mennonite position with which he identifies himself, Hauerwas 'himself should be incapable of interpreting Scripture rightly.'²⁰⁸

Answering these criticisms seems urgent if, as Hauerwas claims, 'the intelligibility and truthfulness of Christian convictions reside in their practical force.' Quite apart from the problems of Hauerwas' radical pragmatism, the intelligibility and truthfulness of Hauerwas' ethics depends upon his ability to identify a concrete church. Hays states that 'Hauerwas' hermeneutical position comes unraveled in the midst of the pragmatic task that he deems essential for the intelligibility of Christian ethics. The New Testament falls mute, muzzled by the unfaithful church.'²⁰⁹ These criticisms ought not diminish the positive contribution of Hauerwas in appropriating MacIntyre's work for Christian ethics. Hays acknowledges this in stating that Hauerwas' work 'bears eloquent witness to the power of the New Testament stories for forming the church.'²¹⁰ Rather, these criticisms direct us to the next step in the argument.

Thus far I have argued that MacIntyre provides a correct account of our moral problem in that emotivism has left us morally inarticulate. MacIntyre's positive response is to offer an important though finally insufficient account of moral rationality that is centred in the moral community and the canonical narrative. Hauerwas' importance is that he has applied these positive and negative arguments to his understanding of Christian ethics, so that we are able to see the church as a moral *polis* and the Bible as its moral narrative. However, both MacIntyre and Hauerwas suffer from the same problem of abstraction. What MacIntyre and Hauerwas have done is to put me in a position to move from abstraction and apply their writings to the problem of ethics for North American Lutheranism. I will do this in two steps. In the following chapter, I consider the work of the Lutheran theologian Gilbert

²⁰⁷ *A Community of Character*, p. 6.

²⁰⁸ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 265.

²⁰⁹ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 265.

²¹⁰ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 266.

Meilaender, as a rebuttal to MacIntyre's claim that 'rational' and 'Lutheran' are incompatible terms. After this, in the final chapter, I shall argue that, in the light of MacIntyre's critical account of emotivism and moral inarticulacy, a Lutheran ethic is necessary, and that it is necessary for Lutheran ethics to attend to MacIntyre's constructive account of the teleological framework of moral rationality.

CHAPTER 4

SIMULTANEITIES IN GILBERT MEILAENDER'S ETHICS

In the previous chapter I considered Stanley Hauerwas' appropriation of MacIntyre's moral philosophy for his ecclesial ethics. Two important conclusions emerged from that discussion. First, Hauerwas demonstrates a certain unproblematic ease in applying MacIntyre's work on character, community and narrative to the ecclesial context. Second, by understanding the church as MacIntyre's community of virtue and the story of scripture as that overarching teleological narrative, Hauerwas rescues MacIntyre's work from falsifying abstractness. In this chapter, I shall, at once, build on Hauerwas' appropriation of MacIntyre's ethic for Christian ethics while also arguing that a certain distance must be kept between a Lutheran ethic and Hauerwas' understanding of Christian ethics.¹ Consider further this second point.

Hauerwas demonstrates the importance of both MacIntyre's critical and constructive writings for Christian ethics. However, in accepting MacIntyre as a source for Christian ethics, Lutheranism is confronted with a two-fold problematic. Simply put, the problem is, if MacIntyre's understanding of our present moral crisis is accurate, a rational Lutheran ethic seems to be utterly *necessary*. The problem is that MacIntyre seems to argue that such a rational ethic is not *possible* for the Lutheran theological tradition. This problematic of the *possibility* and *necessity* of a Lutheran ethic is addressed in this and the following chapters. In treating the possibility of a rational Lutheran ethic, the first section of this chapter briefly considers MacIntyre's reasons for calling the possibility of a rational Reformation ethic into question. I conclude that MacIntyre is finally wrong in his dismissal of a rational Reformation ethic, though he is not fully wrong in pointing out certain problems within Reformation ethics. Accordingly, I shall argue that a rational Lutheran ethic is theoretically possible while acknowledging that the Lutheran theological tradition's

struggle with two forms of irrationality – antinomianism and dogmatism – is the sign of a certain disorder within the Lutheran tradition.

In this chapter I shall argue that Lutheranism is a theological tradition which is capable of overcoming these errors. I do this in the second section of this chapter by attending to the ethics of the Lutheran theologian Gilbert Meilaender. Meilaender has not only shown how rational ethical reflection is compatible with Lutheran theological commitments but has done so in a way that resolves the MacIntyrean problematic, namely that Meilaender's ethics is directed toward and applicable to an existing church rather than being the ethic of an ahistorical community. However before I make this case for a positive Lutheran ethic, it is necessary to consider and respond to MacIntyre's more general criticism of Reformation ethics.

1. From Reformation to Emotivism?

MacIntyre's criticism of Reformation ethics is more a sweeping judgement than a developed argument. Nevertheless, his criticisms effectively call into question the claim that Reformation theology has the moral resources to overcome modern moral inarticulacy.² How MacIntyre comes to his conclusions may be outlined as follows. The modern world is confronted by a choice between Nietzsche and Aristotle/Aquinas. To reject the latter alternative is to accept the former. There is no third way.³ Because Luther's ethics 'could not be further away from Aristotle',⁴ Lutheranism, by default, suffers the errors of Nietzschean irrationality. Similarly, MacIntyre points out how Luther's calling Aristotle 'The buffoon who mislead the Church', and his *Ethics*, 'the worst of all books', cuts this theological tradition off from the Thomistic moral resources that make rational moral reflection possible.⁵

MacIntyre further explains that it is 'not just that Aquinas' Christian Aristotelianism and Luther's Christian fideism are based on alternative and competing metaphysical schemes, it is also the case that they are providing an analysis of and

¹ In his criticism of Meilaender's Lutheran two-fold understanding of the Christian life and the Lutheran emphasis on justification, Hauerwas articulates why the distance between his and Lutheran ethics must be maintained. Cf. *Character And The Christian Life*, p. xxix.

² MacIntyre's only systematic treatment of Luther is found in his *A Short History of Ethics*, published in 1966. In subsequent works, though the references to Luther are sparse, they are always critical and written to have aphoristic force.

³ *After Virtue*, p. 118.

⁴ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 122.

⁵ *After Virtue*, p. 165.

insight into different moral vocabularies.’⁶ The ethics of Aquinas and Luther are radically incommensurate. Luther’s intention is to make sense of ‘the experience of an individual who is alone before God.’⁷ This focus leads Luther to treat the experience of death, rather than the experience of living, as the defining feature of human existence. Ethics aims at dying well rather than living well. In death, the self is stripped ‘of all social attributes,’ and is naked and alone before God. What matters is God’s ahistorical judgement of the whole self, and not human action. By contrast, Thomistic/Aristotelian ethics emphasises the historical and communal life rather than the individual at the point of death. This difference, combined with the Lutheran distrust of reason, warrants MacIntyre’s doubts about the possibility of a rational Lutheran ethic.

Richard Mouw, arguing from the Calvinist perspective, considers MacIntyre’s rejection of Protestant ethics to be based on a misreading of history.⁸ The source of this error is the influence of Jacques Maritain’s *Three Reformers: Luther – Descartes – Rousseau*⁹ on MacIntyre’s perception of Protestant ethics. In summary, Maritain argues that Luther is in a category with Descartes and Rousseau in being responsible for a definition of the modern disordered self. Simply put, Maritain sees Luther as one of the key sources of emotivism.

The Lutheran Reformation, Maritain wrote, brought about ‘the Advent of the Self.’ Luther’s ‘swollen consciousness of the self’ led him to celebrate the ‘individual will, cut off from the universal body of Christ... [standing] solitary and naked before God and Christ in order to ensure its justification and salvation by its trust.’¹⁰

This view of the self is reflected in, inter alia, Kant’s ‘shrivelled up’ autonomous self, and the Nietzschean attempt ‘to jump beyond good and evil.’¹¹ Beginning with Luther, the emergence of the emotivist self runs through two Lutherans, Kant and Kierkegaard, then reaches its nadir in the erstwhile Lutheran, Nietzsche. The inescapable conclusion is that Protestantism ‘is part of the problem; it does not figure into MacIntyre’s solution.’¹²

⁶ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 125.

⁷ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 125.

⁸ Richard Mouw, *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 57.

⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther – Descartes – Rousseau* (New York: Scribner, 1955).

¹⁰ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 56, quoting Maritain, *Three Reformers*, pp. 18 & 35.

¹¹ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 57.

¹² Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 58.

According to MacIntyre, The Reformation fostered three conceptual errors of secular ethics. These errors are that moral rules are unconditional in their demands and lack any rational justification, the moral agent is sovereign over his or her choices, and secular authority and power are can be justified apart from any appeal to the sacred.¹³ These concepts correspond to the Reformation teaching that where God commands reason becomes unnecessary, that moral agents are best understood as autonomous, ‘unroled’ selves before God, and that this autonomy is further extended to the secular economic and political realm. In this view, Luther’s only success is that he cleared the way for the emergence of the Enlightenment with all its errors by cutting off the branch of tradition upon which the Western world was sitting. The testimony of Luther’s ‘success’ is the unhindered expansion of secularism and the corresponding marginalisation of theology.¹⁴

MacIntyre criticises Reformation theology for its failure to support moral assertions with rational justification. This leads MacIntyre to assert that as Reformed ethics, which implicates Lutheran ethics, seems to advocate a form of moral irrationality, it must be seen as a predecessor to emotivism. Mouw counters that MacIntyre’s conclusion can only be sustained by being inattentive to the actual theory and practice of the Reformers. In one sense MacIntyre is correct to notice that within Reformed theology commands are to be obeyed and not argued. This is not a leap to the irrational but an attempt to take seriously the implications of an anthropology that views the self as a sinner who is incapable of or radically hampered from hearing and acting upon God’s commands. It is not that rational justification of these commands is not possible. It is rather that sinners, not unlike MacIntyre’s depiction of the excluded sophists and poets in Plato’s view, are, to an important degree, unwilling to consider such rational arguments. Furthermore, for sinners, any residual knowledge of God’s commands has an accusatory function so that the self *qua* sinner shrinks

¹³ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 126–127. Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 63.

¹⁴ The historian Robert Nisbet expresses a view similar to MacIntyre’s he asserts, ‘The line from the Lutheran revolt to later, secular—political revolutions...is clear, continuous, and vital.’ For Nisbet, Luther’s preoccupation with ‘individual faith and conscience,’ his onslaught against the Church’s authority and his theological assertion of equality of status in Christ betrayed him as a ‘nihilistic’ revolutionary. Robert Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers: Community and Conflict in Western Thought* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1982), p. 112. Mouw responds to these charges by conceding that ‘[I]t might be possible to argue that while the Reformers did not mean to set the secular authorities free to pursue their own devices, they nonetheless made it easier for other thinkers simply to absolve civil rulers and economic agents from a sense of responsibility to anyone but themselves.’ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, pp. 65–66.

from the commands which it barely understands.¹⁵ To say that the fallen self will not recognise good reasons for morality is not the same as saying there are no good reasons in support of morality. It is merely to acknowledge that the reasons the sinful self would count as good are opposed to God and the reasons that support the will of God seem to oppose to the fallen self. In MacIntyre's terms, Reformation theology understands God and human beings as coming from radically incommensurate perspectives.

The question is whether or not God's commands must always seem irrational to sinners. According to MacIntyre's critique, given the Reformation's anthropology, obedience cannot be rationally vindicated by appealing to natural reason or desire. Therefore the demand for obedience must always seem to be 'criterionless' and 'arbitrary'.¹⁶ These commands are Occamist in that 'they have no further rationale or justification than that they are the injunctions of God.'¹⁷ According to Mouw, MacIntyre is wrong in his conclusion that appealing to God's command is arbitrary. The mistake is that MacIntyre does not take seriously how sin has created an epistemological gap so that the rationality of these divine commands is not *fully* apprehended by sinners. Whereas MacIntyre concludes that reason, for Reformation thinkers, is rejected, Mouw argues that within Reformation theology reason is only suspected. Which description of the Reformation is correct depends on whether Mouw is able to fit God's commands into MacIntyre's three-part teleological scheme.

The Reformation's doctrine of sin may be viewed as a systematic consideration of that 'untutored', 'discrepant and discordant' state which, MacIntyre argues, is the disorder that initiates ethical reflection. The problem is that the Reformation notion of sin predicates an ignorance and impotence to the self that seems to undermine the other two aspects of the teleological scheme. Luther's view of the fallen self as ignorant means that this self is unable to know and desire 'human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*.'¹⁸ Luther's view of the fallen self as impotent means that this self does not have the *means* to act in such a way as to make moral progress. This self depends solely on the *means* of grace. For Luther, good works are unnecessary *for* salvation because, as MacIntyre notes, 'none of our works are in any

¹⁵ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 60.

¹⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 39.

¹⁷ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 59, quoting MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 121.

¹⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 53.

way good. They are all the product of sinful desire.’ Works are unnecessary because our transformation depends not on our deeds but on the ‘hope for grace that we may be justified and forgiven’.¹⁹ In the end, ‘what matters is not the action done or left undone, but the faith which moved the agent.’²⁰

For MacIntyre, Luther’s error is that he ‘dismissed all pagan teaching as the devil’s work and sought to find in the Bible an all-sufficient guide.’²¹ Luther seems to have little need for rational argumentation or, for that matter, moral education. Philosophy was unnecessary because moral rules required ‘no further rationale or justification than that they are the injunctions of God.’²² The moral life was reducible to obedience to ‘the arbitrary fiats of a cosmic despot.’²³ While moral behaviour is part of the Christian life, it does not in any way depend upon ethical reflection for intelligibility or accountability. Good reasons are reasons grasped by faith. The one thing needful is the conversion of the soul and not the transformation of actions. The moral self needs a preacher, not a philosopher; a point of conversion, not a continued practice; faith and not reason. What matters is inner faith and not external actions or arguments. MacIntyre sees this move to the inner self as the bridge between Protestant theology and emotivism.

For Protestants, morality is mainly concerned with the inner will of the individual rather than concrete actions within a tradition and community. What matters is the will to act and not the action itself.²⁴ In its discordant fallen state, human will is incapable of being transformed by rational reasons or by habituated action. It must be *moved* by inner faith and not reasoned with. Given this view, it is difficult to know how one would distinguish between the reasons that faith gives and the reasons that emotivism gives. Both see actions as the result of the self’s inner motivation which

¹⁹ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 123.

²⁰ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 122. Similarly, Hauerwas argues that the Reformation’s focus on justification is too centred in the individual (Cf. *In Good Company*, p.62). Meilaender counters with the assertion that Hauerwas is wrong in his view that ‘the association of the Reformation with presumptions of justification by faith through grace as a center of the Gospel was a profound mistake,’ and that the Reformation’s formulation of theological issues around the alternatives of grace and law is ‘distinctly a side issue.’ Rather than a side issue, Meilaender asserts that grace must remain central to any Christian account of the transformation of the self. ‘Keeping Company’, *First Things* 66 (Oct., 1996), pp. 54 and 56.

²¹ *After Virtue*, p. 167.

²² *A Short History of Ethics*, pp. 121–122.

²³ *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 123.

²⁴ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 63.

exercises moral sovereignty in its moral choices.²⁵ Mouw states that in MacIntyre's account, 'it is but a short step from "Here I stand...God helping me" of the Reformation to the unqualified "Here I stand" of the emotivist self'.²⁶

MacIntyre does not see how these two declarations are utterly incompatible. The former theological declaration cannot possibly be the predecessor of the latter denial of theology's central truth. Mouw writes that MacIntyre's account ignores 'the importance of the divine gaze.'

Once the individual self is seen as standing inescapably before the face of God, the apparent similarities between Reformation thought and the conceptions of modernity seem quite superficial. Is Nietzsche Luther-without-God? In a sense, perhaps, yes. But one strains for analogies: Is a corpse nothing but a human without a heartbeat?²⁷

MacIntyre fails to understand the Reformation's fallen self, and the theological suspicion of the reasoning powers of this self. The 'I' of the Reformation can only be said to stand alone, unencumbered and isolated, if the existence of God is irrelevant. Said another way, the self of the Reformation is unintelligible unless it is first defined in vertical relationship to God whose commands orient the self toward God *and* toward others in horizontal roles of responsibility. Calvin's view is that one who 'exempts himself from all judgements and wishes to rule in such a tyrannical fashion that he regards his own whim as law...is utterly abhorrent not only to a sense of piety but also of humanity.'²⁸ This view is hardly compatible with Nietzsche's self who is the author of 'new tables of what is good'.²⁹

The Kierkegaard scholar C. Stephen Evans makes a similar criticism of MacIntyre's misreading of Kierkegaard's 'radical choice' presented in *Either/Or*. MacIntyre argues that Kierkegaard provides no objective way to decide between the aesthetic and ethical modes of life. Rather, one's view of life begins with an irrational, radical choice. Evans counters that Kierkegaard

does not wish to show that Christianity is reasonable or that it is no more unreasonable than any other commitment. Rather he wants to show that Christianity is most definitely unreasonable, when analyzed from the perspective of a person who lacks faith or 'the condition'... The really decisive epistemological point being made by Climacus concerns what I should term the perspectival nature

²⁵ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 63. See also *A Short History of Ethics*, pp. 126–127.

²⁶ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 66.

²⁷ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 74.

²⁸ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 74. Cf. Calvin's *Institutes*, II, II, 10

²⁹ *After Virtue* p. 114.

of human reason. Human reason is not a neutral arbiter of religious truth, but always expresses the character of the reasoner.³⁰

Whereas MacIntyre sees Kierkegaard as the predecessor to emotivism, Evans argues that Kierkegaard anticipates MacIntyre's view of the rationality of tradition.

Similarly, Mouw argues that rather than Protestant theology paving the way to secularism, it resisted this move by calling into question the medieval understanding of natural law.

On this version of the story, the Reformers saw the dangers of this unwarranted optimism about the capabilities of unregenerate reason. They sensed the coming onslaught against revelation from those who would attempt to grant complete autonomy to the natural mind... The Reformers sensed that the medieval church had prepared the way for a cultural capitulation to secularism by granting legitimacy to natural reason, functioning apart from the acceptance of divine revelation. So they sought to join the issue at the most crucial point: the choice must be made between reason operating independently of revealed truth and reason captivated and transformed by divine grace.³¹

Reason, for the Reformers, could never be understood as sufficient once abstracted from the Christian tradition and revelation.³²

MacIntyre's account of the path from the Reformation to emotivism is defective as it does not sufficiently take into account the importance of the Fall for Reformation theology. Mouw seems to argue that, within Protestant theology, reason can be trusted only if it is first treated with suspicion. This Protestant suspicion of reason appears to MacIntyre to lead to Nietzschean irrationality because he fails to appreciate the tension in the Protestant account of reason. Because reason is capable of good and evil, a rational understanding of reason and rationality must be *simultaneously* able to trust reason and to treat it with suspicion. MacIntyre's error is that he does not see that this simultaneity is at the heart and centre of any Reformation ethic. This notion of simultaneity is central to understanding Gilbert Meilaender's Lutheran ethic, to which we now turn.

2. Simultaneities and Furious Opposites

My intent is not to treat the whole corpus of Meilaender's writings, but to spell out the rationality of a Lutheran ethic in terms of certain defining simultaneities in

³⁰ C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 176–178.

³¹ Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 67.

³² Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, p. 69.

Meilaender's work.³³ Meilaender, perhaps more than any other contemporary Lutheran theologian, has considered the 'tensed' relationship between Lutheran ethics and theology which requires that we learn to think in terms of simultaneities. In a dense passage, Meilaender defines the function of ethics in a fallen world with divided selves, where a gulf now exists between an action's aim and its result:

No amount of ethical reflection can heal this rift in our nature. From that predicament we will have to look for a deliverance greater than ethics can offer. Here and now, however, in our broken world, we do better to take the aim of an act as our guiding light in describing and evaluating the act – and then evaluate the motive in light of this aim. This is better because moral reflection is not primarily a tool for fixing guilt and responsibility (in which case motive would come to the fore). It is, first and foremost, one of the ways in which we train ourselves and others to see the world rightly.³⁴

Given the divided self in a broken world, ethics can do no more than serve a modest role in the theological task. To say that the task of ethics is modest does not mean that it is somehow irrational or that it is part of the path to emotivism. It is rather an attempt to define a more realistic role for ethical reflection in a divided, fragmented world where motive is divided from results and where our best intended actions have unintended consequences. It is not good news that matters turn out differently than agents intended. However, within a Lutheran theology, there are good reasons why the point of Lutheran ethics ought not be to affix blame (or praise), but to learn to see the world rightly. But, in order to maintain this distance between the self and action, Lutheran theology maintains a distance between what I do and who I am. The question is whether it can preserve this distinction between the self and its actions without falling into the error of moral inarticulacy. That is the crucial task of maintaining the tension of simultaneity.

Simultaneities grow out of the division between the body and soul, the view of the self as *simul justus et peccator* (simultaneously righteous and sinner), and a view of the Christian self and the Christian life as somehow finished and somehow incomplete. We see the world rightly only when we see it by these defining tensions. MacIntyre rightly raises the question of whether or not such theological commitments

³³ The limits of this thesis require that I neglect what I take to be Meilaender's most important work on friendship and the preferential loves. See, for example, *Friendship: A Study In Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 'When Harry and Sally Read the Nicomachean Ethics: Friendship between Men and Women', in ed. Leroy Butler, *The Changing Face of Friendship* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp.183–196.

³⁴ Gilbert Meilaender, *The Limits of Love* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State Press, 1987), p. 92. (Hereafter: *The Limits of Love*.)

are capable of the kind of rational morality that is able to sustain the ecclesial community in these times of moral catastrophe. In order to see how Meilaender's ethic responds to MacIntyre's challenge, it is important to consider how Meilaender confronts certain MacIntyrean problems.

According to Meilaender, MacIntyre's philosophy is not incompatible with Meilaender's theology. For example, he expresses appreciation for MacIntyre's critique of the Enlightenment and his positive turn towards an ethic of virtue. However, it is important to note the ways that Meilaender qualifies his acceptance of this critique. In the following passage, Meilaender seems to agree fully with MacIntyre's analysis of our moral fragmentation as he writes:

[F]or MacIntyre we are not caught in some awkwardly intermediate stage. The barbarians are already in control! Ours is a world in which the moral life has no agreed-upon basis or structure. We imagine that we must find moral standards which can meet with universal acceptance even while we tend (in our subjectivist hearts) to believe that moral arguments can never be settled. We call loudly for a more meaningful public life to sustain our individual pursuits, but what we really care about – and will sacrifice for – are private goals and purposes. Ours is, in short, a badly fragmented society.³⁵

Whereas MacIntyre calls for immediate and radical action, Meilaender is less sure that the present transitional stage necessarily points toward further decline. While MacIntyre's analysis has certain purchase within academia, Meilaender states that it misses the 'partial bits of evidence for a resurgent ability of Christians to shape the moral life of our society.'³⁶

Meilaender relativises MacIntyre's assessment of modernity by referring to the moral fragmentation that characterised economic life in eleventh and twelfth century Europe. Citing historian Francis Oakley, Meilaender points to a time in Europe when the church was incapable of curbing the practice of usury or of ensuring just wages and prices.³⁷ In spite of this apparent social fragmentation, there emerged the medieval university and the order of medieval society. And this should stand as a caution to those who presume to chart the decline and fall of any culture. Meilaender also suggests that such caution is warranted today, especially when we consider the surprising emergence of Christendom after the fall of Rome in the ensuing 'dark ages'.

³⁵ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p.7.

³⁶ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 8.

³⁷ *Faith and Faithfulness*, pp. 8–9. Cf. Francis Oakley, *The Medieval Experience* (New York: Scribner, 1974), pp. 97f.

Perhaps we are now in a position to ‘trump’ Alasdair MacIntyre’s suggestion that we await a new St. Benedict. It may be that, especially in this time and place, we await a new St. Augustine! If this raises the stakes to a still more imposing level, it may nevertheless be a useful way to think about what Christian ethics needs at the present time. For we need more than a way to carve out a distinctively Christian life amidst the ruins of a surrounding civilization; we need also some way to maintain contact with all that is good in that civilization, to understand that if it is often vicious (in the technical, moral sense), its vice is, at least sometimes, ‘splendid.’³⁸

Rather than withdrawal into MacIntyre’s communities of virtue, Meilaender advocates continued contact between the church and the post-Christian culture. The virtue of hope which characterise St. Augustine’s approach to the dying world of his time is markedly absent from MacIntyre’s account of our present moral situation. Augustine refused to give into resignation by vigilantly seeking ‘to make sense of his world, to find in it what meaning he could, to praise it wherever possible – but not to let the Christian life be definitively shaped by it.’³⁹ To abandon hope would be to abandon the mission of the church to the world, either by retreating from the world or by an acquiescent accommodation to the world.⁴⁰ Though Augustine lived at a time when the ‘the moral and intellectual foundations’ of his world ‘appeared to have been shattered, he clung doggedly to a faith that...the secular effort of mankind had not been wholly in vain; and he was determined not to resign himself, like so many of his contemporaries, to the cult of futility.’⁴¹

The church must always seek common cause with the culture but must not seek to forge a commonwealth with the world. Whatever peace the church makes with culture is always provisional and uneasy.⁴² Forgetting the nature of this peace, the church is tempted to resolve the tension by withdrawing from or accommodating culture. The alternative is for the church to see the world rightly and so to affirm the good that remains even in those vices that reflect a certain kind of splendour. Augustine’s approach to the world is missing in MacIntyre’s writings, being particularly evident in his rejection of the possibility that aspects of individualism, capitalism and liberalism may offer partial solutions to current moral problems.⁴³

³⁸ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 32.

³⁹ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 33

⁴⁰ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 7.

⁴¹ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 33. Meilaender quoting Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 318.

⁴² *The Limits of Love*, pp. 131–132.

⁴³ See, for example, Michael Novak’s positive reading of Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, in *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), pp. 106–

MacIntyre thus makes the mistake of prematurely resolving a necessary tension by advocating a form of sectarian withdrawal.

While Meilaender is obviously not dependent on MacIntyre's work, he readily admits that Christian ethics has benefited from MacIntyre's notion of the rationality of a tradition. This account has made it easier for Christian ethicists to admit that their work is finally intelligible and plausible from within the Christian tradition. Meilaender makes this claim when he notes that ethics 'is and ought to be a theological discipline'.⁴⁴ Consider his the introduction to his *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*:

I write as a Christian for other Christians who want to think about these issues. Anyone is, of course, welcome to 'listen in' and consider what the world looks like from this angle of *vision*, but the discussion is not aimed at 'anyone.' It is aimed at those who name as Lord the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – and who believe that this Lord lived as one of us in Jesus of Nazareth. The two testaments of Christian Scripture bear witness to this God and authoritatively (even if often ambivalently) shape the *vision* of Christians when they turn to the contemporary concerns of bioethics. It is obvious, of course, as a matter of empirical fact, that not all Christians agree with the judgements I make in this book. But when I attempt here to write Christian ethics, I do not mean that I have taken a survey of the opinions of Christians or written a history of their views. Rather, I have tried to say what we Christians ought to say in order to be faithful to the truth that has claimed us in Jesus.⁴⁵

Meilaender recognises that the authority of his arguments regarding what ought and ought not to be done in the field of bioethics rests in the Christian tradition. These arguments, however, need not be unintelligible to outsiders even as he expects that, in reflecting on his recent visits to the National Bioethics Advisory Commission, his arguments may not be persuasive. The twofold importance of Christian ethical reflection is that it is, on the one hand, one of the important ways that Christian commitments are rendered intelligible to those within the tradition, while, on the other hand, offers ways for Christians to engage those outside the tradition in dialectical conversation.

While Meilaender's work has benefited in a general way from the impact of MacIntyre's writings, unlike Hauerwas' ethics, MacIntyre's work cannot be

143. Also Richard John Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist* (New York: Doubleday, 1992). Also Stephen Holmes offers a political critique of MacIntyre's antiliberalism in, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. xi–xv & 88–120.

⁴⁴ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), pp. x–xi (my emphasis).

superimposed upon Meilaender's ethics. Simply put, it cannot because grace is a central accent in Meilaender's ethics. Consider how this understanding of grace is evident in Meilaender's critique of recent moves that disparage individualism for the sake of community.

[T]he Christian community does not sustain itself or its way of life. The community does not play the decisive role in shaping the life of its children – a truth which receives eloquent witness when it hands those children as infants over to God in baptism with the prayer that their hearts may be created anew and that from such a heart the virtues of faith, hope, and love may flow.⁴⁶

The sacramental practices of the church are opposed to any idolisation of human activity whether under the name of individualism or community. An ecclesial community that initiates its members through the sacramental act of baptism reminds itself that the identity and meaning of the baptised do not fully or finally depend upon the practices of that community. Community is perhaps more, but never less, than a gift which has been graciously bestowed.

A central problem for a grace centred ethic is how to take human action seriously, but not too seriously. The task of Christian ethics is to think about what it means to act in a way that is faithful to God's prior acts. Because the Lutheran understanding of grace does not treat human action as of first importance, Christian ethics will exhibit a certain nonchalance about the ultimate significance of human action. This nonchalance is reflected in the reply of Paul Ramsey (Meilaender's 'doctor father') to MacIntyre's claim that Christianity is insufficiently rational. Before launching his reply to MacIntyre's assertion, Ramsey states that as a theological ethicist he would 'approach grappling with MacIntyre's essay with a certain *divine nonchalance* about the outcome.'⁴⁷ He then points out that the reason for the influence of theology on medical ethics in the past was not that the church aimed to give a universally compelling bioethics. It was rather that this influence grew out of the need of Christians to think about medical issues in relationship to their faith commitments.

In later writings, MacIntyre himself offers a good description of Ramsey's point.

It is therefore unsurprising that distinctively philosophical questions about morality are often enough nowadays explicitly posed by ordinary plain persons who have discovered that they need to learn, if they aspire to be rational, how to argue their way through these apparently problematic situations.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Paul Ramsey, 'Kant's Moral Theology or A Religious Ethics?' in eds. H. Tristram Engelhardt and Daniel Callahan, *Knowledge, Value and Belief* (Hastings, NY: The Hastings Center, 1977), p. 45.

⁴⁸ MacIntyre, 'Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?', p. 67.

Ramsey argues that the influence of Christian thinking on medical issues had its origin in the questions of plain Christians who sought guidance in reconciling these issues with their faith. It did not reflect any intention by the church to exercise influence on those outside the church. Any outside influence was a collateral benefit that accrued to the church as it sought merely to remain faithful. Ramsey countered MacIntyre's expectation that Christian ethics would become increasingly irrelevant by asserting that, so long as there were Christians concerned with medical ethics, there would be a rational Christian ethic. Ramsey presumed the rationality of a tradition long before MacIntyre gave the phenomenon a name.

Meilaender reflects the same kind of theological nonchalance in his unwillingness to enter into what now appears to be the mostly fruitless debate over the question of incommensurability. His argument is uncomplicated. Presuming that language is at the heart of culture, the fact that languages can be translated with greater or lesser degree of accuracy, means that differences between cultures or traditions may also be bridged with various degrees of success:

No doubt the richness and texture of a way of life cannot be understood fully or transmitted successfully through appeal only to such common moral concerns, even as it may be true that no language can be translated without loss. But there is at least some common moral ground available to people in quite different social circumstances, just as translation of languages *is* possible, and this common ground cannot simply be absorbed by Christian vision. It retains a certain independence. For there is more to being human than can be accounted for by our immersion in any way of life, and our experience is not fully circumscribed by the language we speak.⁴⁹

Because the complexity of experience does not put human language about this experience beyond translation, we may admit that incommensurability is real without concluding that it is radical. Hence, the theologian like the linguist is committed to finding common ground with those outside of the Christian tradition. On the one hand then, theology will see that the doctrine of sin means that something like incommensurability characterises all human relationships, while, on the other hand, the doctrines of creation (nature) and redemption (grace) provide a theoretical foundation in support of this effort.

Characteristically, Meilaender defines his ethical position by holding conflicting realities in tension. This manner of thinking through ethical questions is evident in his account of the relationship of Christian theology to politics. Modern

⁴⁹ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p.12.

politics is characterised by two conflicting views of the state represented by Isaiah Berlin's liberalism and Michael Walzer's communitarianism. Liberal theory's emphasis on individualism sees the state as a night-watchman whose primary task is to 'establish boundaries that control conflicts of interests among citizens.' According to Michael Oakeshott, this view sees politics as 'a second-rate form of activity...at once corrupting to the soul and fatiguing to the mind, the activity either of those who cannot live without the illusion of affairs or those so fearful of being ruled by others that they will pay away their lives to prevent it.'⁵⁰ Politics is a necessary evil. Walzer argues that the state must be instrumental in turning persons from 'competitors' to 'colleagues and comrades'.⁵¹ Walzer's collective state depends on a certain amount of 'repression and self-discipline', which is justified as necessary if the state is to supply an intimate home for its citizens.⁵²

By maintaining the tension between the doctrines of creation and redemption on the one hand, and the doctrine of sin on the other, Meilaender sees a third way between individualism and communitarianism. Creation and redemption mean that commonality between persons is real and co-operative endeavours are possible. Taking into account the reality of sin, one can neither accept Berlin's view that what we most need is the freedom to be left alone nor Walzer's view that the state should be entrusted with the necessary power to sponsor the co-operative activities that virtue requires. Neither states nor individuals have the moral resources to overcome sin. Both are subject to their own forms of corruption. On the one hand, Berlin fails to see that 'we need cooperative endeavor to flourish as human beings'.⁵³ Walzer's trust in the fraternal state's ability to make a home for its citizens, on the other hand, is an ersatz intimacy that too readily depends on force and coercion to overcome the real divisions between persons.⁵⁴

The ideal politics lies somewhere between the views of Walzer and Berlin. To be moral, one can neither be coerced by state control nor separated from the

⁵⁰ *The Limits of Love*, pp. 134–135. Michael Oakeshott, in the Introduction to Hobbes's *Leviathan* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), p. lxiv.

⁵¹ *The Limits of Love*, p. 134. Michael Walzer, *Radical Principles: Reflections on an Unreconstructed Democrat* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 294.

⁵² *The Limits of Love*, p. 138.

⁵³ *The Limits of Love*, p. 136.

⁵⁴ *The Limits of Love*, p. 138. Meilaender's criticism of Walzer's political community reflects the Augustinian argument that peace with Rome was to be pursued out of a pragmatic recognition of common interest rather than necessitated by a moral commitment to the common weal. *The Limits of Love*, pp. 131–132.

commitments of true community. For this reason, Meilaender argues that the traditional family is the kind of mediating institution that functions between the free individual and the fraternal state. The *polis* therefore must be rightly related to the *oikos* (home). In Chalcedonian language, the *oikos* must never be confused with nor separated from the *polis*. The political (*pace* Walzer) ought not to attempt to displace or marginalise the family. Neither can the family be disassociated from the political because it depends upon the political to protect the social space in which the family flourishes. In recognising the tension between Walzer and Berlin's state, Meilaender seeks a third alternative that simultaneously address the concerns of the individual and community. In focusing on the institution of the family, Meilaender diminishes the importance of centralised political power by showing how the political goods of community and individual self-reliance are advanced in this non-political institution.

Meilaender's attentiveness to tension reflects a theological method that recognises the critical importance of *seeing* matters from more than one angle of vision. Consider how he presents the views of death and dying in E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, Felix Salten's *Bambi*, and C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*. Meilaender observes that White's spider interprets death as serving an Aristotelian purpose while Salten's deer accepts death with a sense of Stoic detachment from the world. In contrast to both of these views, the children in Lewis' story are given a more complex account of their deaths than either an Aristotelian or Stoic view admits. Meilaender states:

What *The Last Battle* offers is a story that legitimizes and invites our attachment to this world, accepts even the pain such attachment may bring, and does not pretend that the death which ends all such attachment is not dreadful. It pictures for us creatures whose hearts are quite rightly tied to particular places and persons, who are finite and who must reckon with the passing of time, but creatures who also are made to desire something more.⁵⁵

Although the Aristotelian and Stoic conceptions of death are attractive, they cannot capture the Christian truth of the creature's *dual* membership as one who is in but not of the world. As selves who are body and soul, we experience attachment to the particulars of finite existence while *simultaneously* being creatures whose ultimate aim is to transcend the finite limits of creation. An adequate account of death requires a dichotomous interpretation of one's life in and beyond this world. This means that

⁵⁵ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 158.

‘We can never therefore say *only one thing* about our aging and dying.’⁵⁶ It must be both end and beginning, a kind of death that is a birth.

Meilaender’s methodological focus on the simultaneities of human experience resists the temptation to be clear about human identity by means of distorting reductions:

It is always possible to try to reduce our nature to either its material or its spiritual dimension, but such reductionisms cannot capture the complexity that is a human person. We are embodied persons and personalized bodies – and to understand human nature in this way is the task of Christian thought.⁵⁷

It is important here to consider the possibility that Meilaender’s simultaneities lead to moral inarticulacy. Meilaender recognises that the Lutheran tradition does in fact suffer from a kind of troubling inarticulacy which is most clearly evident in the difficulty Lutheran theology has in reconciling normative rules and Christian freedom. It is a problem that too often leads to the erroneous conclusion that ‘Christian freedom is allergic to norms that bind in every time and place.’ When an ethic wilfully fails to articulate moral norms, notes Meilaender, it is doomed to the insignificant role of an ‘echo’ of whatever ‘academic culture teaches us to say about morality.’⁵⁸

Given Meilaender’s recognition of the Lutheran problem of moral inarticulacy, it is necessary to demonstrate how he escapes inarticulacy and still remains Lutheran. Rather than making a theoretical defence of this method, Meilaender refers to the historical examples of dichotomous reflection on the nature of the Trinity and the person of Christ, which have resulted not in inarticulacy but, creedal affirmations.⁵⁹ Right thinking about the Trinity and Christology resists simplification. One cannot say only one thing about the person of Jesus Christ and remain orthodox. Failing to hold certain simultaneities together in tension in our descriptions of the person of Christ results not in clarity but heresy. To call certain views heretical is not to say that they are without any truth but that a choice has been made as to what truth is accented and what truth is neglected. Heresy results from the abstraction of a single item from a complex, and offering this clear and plausible fragment as the whole truth. While the heretic seems to *see* more clearly than his orthodox counterparts, his

⁵⁶ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 159 (my emphasis).

⁵⁷ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 41.

⁵⁸ Gilbert Meilaender, Review of eds. Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), in *Dialog* 38 (Spring, 1999), p. 136.

⁵⁹ *Faith and Faithfulness*, pp. 45–47.

clarity of vision owes itself to the reduction of the full reality of the Godhead or of the person of Christ. The simplifications are distortions that eventually impoverish theological reflection.

Moreover, Meilaender has little patience for muddled theological thinking that too readily accepts paradox and ambiguity as a substitute for intellectual rigour. In his review of Oliver O'Donovan's, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering The Roots Of Political Theology*, Meilaender shows why simultaneities are capable of sustaining a rational account of progress. He does this in his consideration of O'Donovan's unusual phrase, 'the doctrine of the two'.⁶⁰ The doctrine of the two attempts to capture the essence of the simultaneous citizenship that Christians claim in the earthly and heavenly societies. As the church recognised how certain political tensions were introduced into the world by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, it needed a way to be in but not of the world. In the patristic period, the tension between church and state was understood as the 'struggle between two societies'; in the medieval period as 'a vision of a single society with two foci of authority'; and by Luther as 'a distinction between an inner self and its external roles in society.' Meilaender, summarising O'Donovan's argument, states:

The core of the idea of Christendom is that each of the two authorities—which we can here call simply the Church and the state—is to render service to the other 'predicated on the difference and the balance of their roles.' The state serves the Church by making possible its mission; the Church serves the state by instructing it in what it means to be a 'humble state.'⁶¹

The doctrine of the two is the theoretical foundation for limiting state power. This complex doctrine did not confuse Christians about their dual membership; rather it offered a way to affirm simultaneously the benefits of the secular state without abandoning the duty to judge and so limit the state.

Christians were taught to appreciate the state's task of sustaining a social peace that proved beneficial for the Church's mission, while simultaneously keeping a watchful eye for the exercise of state power aimed at subverting this mission. This complexity allowed the church to trust that the state could do some things well so long as the state's will to power was held in check. Trust in the state required that the

⁶⁰ Oliver, O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering The Roots Of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶¹ Gilbert Meilaender, 'Recovering Christendom', review of Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), *First Things* 77 (Nov., 1997), p. 39.

church maintain a healthy suspicion of the state. Hence the church needed a conceptual way to say more than one thing about its relationship to the state but not at the cost of saying nothing of importance about this relationship. The doctrine of the two means that Christians may neither withdraw from society to the sectarian margins nor can they pledge undivided fealty to the state.

This conceptual complexity has been crucial in how the church views the state's use of coercive force. The church recognises that the use of force may be a tragic necessity. To admit this, however, is dangerous because it increases the potential for the abuse of state power. Hence it has been imperative that Christian ethics makes a distinction between the force that is necessary to maintain order against violence and that coercion which is the tool of oppressive regimes. The doctrine of the two circumscribed state power in a way that allowed the church to encourage the state to discharge its God-given duties while simultaneously reminding the state that its duty to use force was God-given and so limited.

For Meilaender, a theological method that purposefully gets stalled in paradox undermines the pedagogical aim to move from vagueness to clarity. Meilaender sees that the Lutheran simultaneities achieve a clarity of moral vision in a way that is similar to how Chesterton views the function of paradox.⁶²

'He that will lose his life, the same shall save it,' is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. It is a piece of everyday advice... A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. No philosopher, I fancy, has ever expressed this romantic riddle with adequate lucidity... But Christianity has done more: it has marked the limits of it in the awful graves of the suicide and the hero, showing the distance between him who dies for the sake of living and him who dies for the sake of dying... And now I began to find that this *duplex* passion was the Christian key to ethics everywhere... Here, again in short, Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious.⁶³

⁶² It is ironic that we should appeal to the writings of a prolific apologist for Roman Catholicism to describe an ethic that we are claiming is somehow discretely Lutheran. The reference suggests that the differences between Lutheran and Roman Catholic ethics, though real, does not go all the way down. This point is taken up in Meilaender's consideration of the papal encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*. Cf. Gilbert Meilaender, 'Grace, Justification through Faith, and Sin', in eds. Reinhard Hütter and Theodor Dieter, *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage Pope John Paul II's Moral Encyclicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 60–83.

⁶³ G.K. Chesterton, 'The Paradoxes of Christianity', in *Orthodoxy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 297–298 (my emphasis).

The combining of furious opposites does not lead to the muddle of moral inarticulacy. It is a habit of thinking that is crucial for an adequate ethical reflection that must differentiate between the moral worth of actions which are similar in appearance and result. The virtue of sacrifice must be distinguished from the vice of suicide. Paradox is a way of seeing matters from more than one point of view. This does not result in seeing less clearly, but rather gives to moral reflection the equivalence of the depth perception that comes of seeing an object with two eyes.

By maintaining furious opposites in moral reflection, moral vision is deepened rather than obscured. The focus on simultaneities, exemplified in Meilaender's work, is a central characteristic of a rational Lutheran ethic. I shall argue this point by first considering how Meilaender's body/soul duality shapes his understanding of certain bioethical issues and then considering the moral implications of his anthropology which views the self as simultaneously righteous and sinner.

3. The Self as Body and Soul

We do not know how to act unless we know who we are. For Meilaender, the human person is positively defined by its status '*before God ... beside each other... [and] over the co-creation.*'⁶⁴ Defined negatively, the fallen self is suspicious of God, alienated from others, and has an existence which is marked by the pains of labour and labour pains.⁶⁵ Human beings must always and simultaneously be described as fearfully and wonderfully made on the one hand, and deeply flawed and fallen on the other. There can be no moral account that considers our present state or our potentiality except as dichotomous beings who are body and soul, created though fallen, whose life is lived before God and before others. Though fallen, we are creatures who are yet capable of hearing God's divine address of judgment and grace and so may rightly hope to live in *harmony* with God, in *community* with others and in attentive *responsibility* towards the natural world. We are also always capable of rejecting these defining characteristics of our vertical and horizontal relationships.

This understanding of the self is starkly contrasted with the self in ancient paganism. Meilaender writes that the Genesis account moved 'away from the mother-goddess, from a religious attitude which could not clearly distinguish between

⁶⁴ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 35.

⁶⁵ Genesis 3:8-19.

God, humanity, and the natural world, and which experienced union of human and divine through the cycles of nature or the fecund powers of generation.’⁶⁶ Defining human nature as a three-fold relationship was a way of preserving the unity and the diversity between God, human selves, and the natural world. The error of pagan unity was its inability to account for the differentiation between creation and creator or between the higher and lower creatures. Mary Midgley points out that the Genesis account places the human race at the centre of creation by defining human beings as necessarily in relationship to divine aims and order. As such, creation is designed for human purposes but *not merely* for human purposes. Midgley writes, ‘Non-human beings count in this picture as having their own special value. Redwoods and pythons, frogs, moles and albatrosses are not failed humans or early try-outs for humans or tools put there to advance human development.’⁶⁷ An adequate account of the self is never only about the self. The self is defined by a potentially harmonious relationship with a distinctly *other* God, *other* humans and *other* natural world.

The conception of the self as defined by the dichotomous tension between the material and spiritual is central to Meilaender’s writings in bioethical issues. He makes clear that it is his intent to spell out what it means that human creatures are simultaneously dust and spirit.⁶⁸ Because the human self is an embodied spirit and an inspirited body, we must use Chalcedonian language in order ‘to manage both perspectives *simultaneously*, distinguishing the two without separating them, holding them together without merging them.’⁶⁹ The difficulty of holding these furious opposites together is evident in recent bioethical confusion over the definition and scope of personhood.

Meilaender notes a recent transformation of the conception of the ‘person’ within bioethics and in culture. Formerly, a person was synonymous with a human being – the living offspring of human parents. Two crucial characteristics emerged from this definition: a person was not property and was therefore accorded the protection of society.⁷⁰ Meilaender’s inclusive definition of personhood is the minority view in

⁶⁶ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 37.

⁶⁷ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 39. Meilaender quoting Mary Midgley, *Evolution as Religion* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 69.

⁶⁸ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 41.

⁶⁹ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 159 (my emphasis).

⁷⁰ The distinction between persons and property is increasingly clouded in a number of different areas. Divorce courts are now asked to decide the ‘ownership’ of donated gametes which were intended for future use in artificial insemination. Presently, United States law withholds the designation of

bioethics. For example, H. Tristram Engelhardt argues that personhood is a status accorded not to those who have biological life but to those who are self-conscious and capable of rational and free choice.⁷¹ Personhood is not synonymous with biological existence but with a quality of existence measured by mental capabilities and control.⁷² Expressing these new and narrowing definitions of personhood, albeit in a less nuanced way, Mary Anne Warren claims that we may still admit that the foetus is of human stock while also asserting that it has ‘no more right to life than a newborn guppy.’⁷³ Warren’s views indicate a shift in our culture’s conception of personhood. It is important to spell out the reason for these changes in our perception of human identity and the potential implications of such a shift.

In a chapter aptly entitled ‘How Bioethics Lost the Body: Personhood’, Meilaender argues that at the heart of the changing view of the self is a flawed understanding of the human body. The increasing unwillingness to accord the status of personhood to *every* embodied human being, regardless of his or her mental functioning, is a sign of a failed understanding of the ‘moral significance of our bodies’.⁷⁴ The claim is ironic: *Bioethics* has ‘lost touch with the natural history of bodily life.’⁷⁵ This ‘strange upshot’ reflects the moral incoherence that runs through current bioethical reflection. The incoherence is first evidenced in a shift in our moral language. Meilaender is troubled by what he sees as a callous use of ‘quality control’ language in describing both the unborn and the elderly. Interestingly, he does not argue that quality control language is too materialistic but that it fails to take seriously the natural material history of the body. If we take seriously that whole history of the body, we recognise how dependency characterises both the beginning and end of this

personhood from foetuses. Others advocate a position that could strip certain handicapped neonates and elderly of their personhood status. The question such a social policy raises is, ‘If not persons, then who or what are these beings?’ The most obvious answer is that their legal status is that of property. This argument over the distinction between person and property is, in many significant ways, analogous to the *Dred Scott Decision* of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1858. Scott, who was enslaved after having enjoyed a time of freedom, pleaded that a citizen of a free territory could not be subjected again to slavery. In responding to this assertion, the Supreme Court majority’s decision was not nearly as important as the *obiter dicta* of Chief Justice Taney. Taney asserted that, as Scott had formerly been a slave, his status was that of chattel. Now stripped of the status of person, Scott had no legal claim to the rights of citizenship.

⁷¹ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 42.

⁷² Gilbert Meilaender, *Body, Soul, and Bioethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 44.

⁷³ *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, p. 32. Meilaender quoting Mary Ann Warren, ‘On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion’, *The Monist* 57 (1973). (Pagination not given.)

⁷⁴ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 37.

⁷⁵ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 50.

history. Yet, when we speak of the quality of one's life, we presume that quality equals autonomy while dependence equals a deficit of quality. Against this trend, Meilaender argues that quality control language is indicative of the modern failure to hold together the furious opposites of body and soul and neglecting the material reality of persons who are embodied spirits.

Christian theology has sustained an ongoing, dialectical argument about the significance of the body.⁷⁶ This is evident in the speculative theology that came out of the early church fathers' consideration of the Neoplatonic rejections of the body over against the doctrines of creation and the resurrection. That theological speculation provides a rich resource for thinking about the relationship of the body to personal identity. St. Augustine's view, that the human being is *terra animata* (animated earth) is contrasted by Meilaender with Origen's Platonism, which understood the 'real' body to be a changeless form (*eidos*). The changing, historically contingent body was, for Origen, nothing but a poor copy of the eternal form. Against Origen's view, Aquinas argued that the soul does not rise to a disembodied state. Rather, the resurrection is a celestial completion of the terrestrial history. Christ's resurrection is a harbinger of the hope of a radical transformation of the body that preserves it from corruption and deformity. Although this transformation is radical, it does not constitute a radical discontinuity in the self's identity. The self is never defined solely as a historical being or by an event outside of history. Analogous to the gospel's narration of Christ's life, death, and resurrection as a single story, the resurrection of the Christian is the culmination of a single, though complex, biography. Although the resurrection transforms the body, this transformation does not nullify or detract from the importance of our terrestrial life, even when the body is subjected to corruption, disease, and dependency. These are episodes in the natural history of embodied souls. Denying this history distorts human identity.⁷⁷

The modern tendency to drive a wedge between the unborn, failing or diseased body and the status of personhood is a denial of the natural history of the body. It is a dangerous cleaving of human identity from biological life so that a living human body is not synonymous with a person who is protected under the law. Personhood is an

⁷⁶ Cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Throughout her book Bynum shows how the exceptionally tedious theological debates about the place of the body relate to the most important questions concerning the definition of the self.

achieved status, gained by those who function at a certain (and undetermined) level of control. This functional view of the self was forcefully articulated already in Joseph Fletcher's 1972 publication 'Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man.'⁷⁸ Two years after this publication, Meilaender points out, Fletcher stated that the primary indicator of personhood was cortical function. Without cortical function, Fletcher writes, 'the *person* is non-existent... to be dead "humanly" speaking is to be ex-cerebral, no matter how long the body remains alive.'⁷⁹

Modern notions of personhood are sustained by divorcing 'the person from the life of the body.'⁸⁰ It is ironic how an age that is often depicted as materialistic and mechanistic so readily divorces body from soul and denies the natural trajectory of the body. The close relationship between autonomy and independence on the one hand, and quality of life on the other, can only be sustained by ignoring the dependency which characterises our entrance into and exit from this world. Meilaender states: 'How wrong we would be to suppose that ours is a materialistic age when everything we hold central to our person is separated from the animated earth that is the body.'⁸¹ How do we speak of an autonomous, unencumbered self whose history begins as a zygote and potentially may end in an irreversible coma? To be human is to spend a significant share of one's life in bodily dependence on others. We view our bodily dependence as a curse, notes Leon Kass, when we begin to believe that we 'deserve to be gods.'⁸²

The denial of the natural history of the body is a denial of the narrative quality of human existence. Once personhood is divorced from its bodily history, we tend to evaluate the body by how it fulfils some or another function. Meilaender states:

To point to some moment in this history as the moment in which we are most truly ourselves, the vantage point from which the rest of our life is to be judged – a moment at which, presumably, we have personhood, and not just another of the many moments in which we are persons – is to suppose that we can somehow extricate ourselves from the body's natural history, can see ourselves whole. It is

⁷⁷ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 42.

⁷⁸ Joseph Fletcher, publication 'Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man', *The Hastings Center Report* 4 (Dec., 1974), pp. 4–7. *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 44.

⁷⁹ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 44.

⁸⁰ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 46.

⁸¹ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 50.

⁸² *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 57. Meilaender quoting Leon Kass, *Towards a More Natural Science* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), p. 293.

even, perhaps, to suppose that in such a moment we are rather like God, no longer having our personal presence in the body.⁸³

Christian theology defines the self in relationships to God and others. This relational view of identity shapes the way Christians think about the relative goodness of autonomy and the relative badness of suffering.⁸⁴ Simply put, the relational self is never divorced from others even when it is dependent on others. In this view of life such states as being better or worse, richer or poorer, sick and healthy, are not sufficient reasons for breaking those relationships which define who one is. The Christian story shapes the way Christians judge autonomy as well as suffering. In this story, suffering is simultaneously an evil to be overcome and an occasion for much good. Within this story, the suffering that reduces us to dependency is the occasion for participation in the giving and receiving of mercy. The current understanding of autonomy and suffering is wrong because it fails to recognise the good in that sacrificial love which Christians claim is central to the meaning of life's story.⁸⁵

In the story of mercy, dependency plays an important role: hence to speak and act as if the dependent person has no role to play and so is better off dead, is a denial of the Christian story. Because mercy is given and received, it requires agents and patients. Reducing the self's identity to its performance capabilities not only denies the reality of the fact that as bodies we oscillate between dependence and independence, but also puts an idolatrous value on human performance and devalues human suffering. Bluntly put, this denial of the good of dependence is a lie. As Meilaender states, 'We are dependent beings, and to think otherwise – to make independence our project, however sincerely – is to live a lie, to fly in the face of reality.'⁸⁶ Human identity can never be measured by human performance, even when we function at our peak.⁸⁷ To accept the lie of the functional self is to abandon the only rational case against Fletcher's increasingly plausible view that 'Apart from cortical functioning, "the *person* is non-existent."⁸⁸

⁸³ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 49.

⁸⁴ *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, p. 58.

⁸⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr makes this point in contrasting the tragic and Christian understanding of suffering. He writes, 'Christianity is a religion which transcends tragedy. Tears, with death, are swallowed up in victory. The cross is not tragic but the resolution of tragedy. Here suffering is carried into the very life of God and overcome. It becomes the basis of salvation.' *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History*, pp. 155–156.

⁸⁶ *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, p. 59.

⁸⁷ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 42.

⁸⁸ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 44.

The irony of the functional definition of identity is that it finally undermines the very autonomy it intended to preserve. Autonomy is the right of persons. This means that the loss of personhood results in the loss of autonomy. For the sake of autonomy, we slacken the connection between personhood and the natural history of the body. This, in turn, undermines the very notion of personhood upon which the claims of autonomy depend. This ironic connection needs to be spelled out further. Prompted by advances in body–sustaining technologies, the main bioethical concern has been to give patients control of the medical treatment they receive at the end of their lives. To gain this control, patients needed a language by which they could assert ‘their independence over against the medical establishment. They needed to be able to have ways of refusing treatment as protection against ‘overly zealous...medical caregivers.’⁸⁹ The language of patient autonomy was designed to give the patient control over his or her dying.⁹⁰

However the effort to preserve patient autonomy was undermined by an emerging functional definition of personhood within the medical community. Once personhood was no longer synonymous with a living body, personhood had to be discerned according to one’s capabilities. Furthermore, because many persons lose their person–defining mental functions some time before their biological life ends, it is imperative to determine the point at which bodies cease to be persons.⁹¹ The similarity between recalling the status of personhood at the end of life and the bestowing the status of personhood at the beginning of life should not be missed. Both ascriptions require a clear articulation of those criteria by which we decide who is protected by this status of personhood. Given the moral inarticulacy that characterises the present milieu, one may doubt that we are capable of articulating and defending any such criteria.

The question of personhood is urgent and practical. This is especially clear in view of the growing importance of the notions of ‘futile’ and ‘useless’ medical care. This notion of futility is not easily defined and so requires an analogy. Meilaender’s analogy is to drawing water with a leaky sieve. The action is futile because it does

⁸⁹ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 45.

⁹⁰ The popularity of living wills is a sign of how valued autonomy and control in dying have become. Meilaender notes that ‘within a month after the Supreme Court’s *Cruzan* decision, one hundred thousand people contacted the Society for the Right to Die, seeking information about living wills’, *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 55–56.

⁹¹ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 45.

not and cannot achieve its goal no matter how many times the action is performed.⁹² To recognise an action as futile requires that we know the *telos* of that action. Unless we know that the point of our action is to fill the bucket, we do not know that the leaky sieve ensures the futility of this action. In order to judge medical care to be futile we must know what the point of that care is. Within the Christian story, futility is not judged merely by the effect of the action on the autonomous patient (which is itself an ironic locution). The act of care-giving is never futile even if it does not forestall death. The standard by which Christians judge the worth of an act is not by the achieved and measurable ends but by the active participation in the story of mercy. Care is therefore never futile even when it is costly or eventuates in death. Care cannot therefore depend upon determining the personhood of the patient by calculating costs and benefits or by an arbitrary 'quality of life' measurement. Care is not given as a calculation. It rather is an embodied commitment to the needy because they are in need. Commitments of this sort neither require nor admit any further justification for care. As this angle of vision is pushed to the margins, a critical task of Christian ethics will be to rightly discern the personhood of those who are dependent and near death.

Meilaender considers two categories of persons who are most at risk: the comatose patient and the patient in a persistent vegetative state (PVS).⁹³ To understand how we care for such persons, Meilaender makes the distinction between the quantitative versus qualitative standards of assessment. In the case of the comatose patient, the judgement that medical treatment is futile is quantitative as it judges that no *amount* of medical care is capable of significantly delaying physical death.⁹⁴ This quantitative judgement is decisively contrasted with the qualitative judgements that lead to the withdrawal of care from PVS patients.

Meilaender considers the case of Karen Ann Quinlan who had been in a persistent vegetative state for ten years. When medical care was withdrawn, the reasons cited were not that Quinlan's biological functions had failed but that no

⁹² *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 45. Meilaender cites Lawrence J. Schneiderman, Nancy S. Jecker, and Albert R. Jonsen, 'Medical Futility: Its Meaning and Ethical Implications', *Annals of Internal Medicine* 113 (June 15, 1990), p. 950.

⁹³ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 46.

⁹⁴ Meilaender, *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 47. Meilaender states 'the cough, gag, and swallowing reflexes of the comatose are impaired, he or she is susceptible to respiratory infections and has a life span usually limited to "weeks or months."' Meilaender cites Ronald E. Cranford, 'The Persistent

amount of medical care could restore her to an ill-defined *quality* of life. There is a cold, impersonal quality that characterises the language used to describe PVS patients. Meilaender notes this linguistic turn in recent discussions of ‘futility’ in medical care. For example, one recent definition of futility states, ‘the patient has no right to be sustained in a state in which he or she has no purpose other than mere vegetative survival; the physician has no obligation to offer this option or services to achieve it.’⁹⁵ The conversation that was once concerned with the care of the dying is turning more toward determining who among the dying have the right to be care for. In a strange twist of logical consistency, the discussion that was initiated by concern for the rights of patients to refuse medical treatment has been transformed into a concern for the rights of the medical establishment to refuse treatment to patients.⁹⁶ This change owes itself to the reduction of persons to their functional capacities and indicates how radically at odds is the modern medical ethos with the story of Christian mercy. In Meilaender’s view, current bioethical practices train us to de-personalise suffering in a way that makes it easier to wash our hands of caring for the suffering.

This decline of bioethics reflects an epistemological crisis. Our culture is increasingly incapable of discerning human identity. Our definition of persons is becoming increasingly narrow. While Meilaender does not imagine that Christian ethics will be able to stem this tide in the general culture, it is important that the church continue to train Christians to view personhood in radically expansive terms. Much depends upon the church’s ability to resist modern trends that wish to use a quality control test to discern who qualifies for membership in the human community. Meilaender offers an alternative view, stating:

To be a member of our community, with a claim for care equal to yours or mine, however, an individual need not possess these capacities. To ‘qualify’ for membership he need only be begotten of human parents. Those who never had or who have now lost certain distinctive human capacities should not be described as non-persons; rather, they are simply the weakest and least advantaged *members* of the human community. Like us, such a person is someone who has a history. Each of our personal histories begins with very limited capacities and may end in the same way. Personhood is not a thing we possess only at some moments in that history; we are persons throughout it.⁹⁷

Vegetative State: The Medical Reality (Getting the Facts Straight), *Hastings Center Report* 18 (Feb./March, 1988), p. 28.

⁹⁵ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 53. Meilaender quoting Schneiderman, Jecker and Jonsen, ‘Medical Futility’, p.952.

⁹⁶ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 52.

⁹⁷ *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, p. 33.

The leading edge of this narrowing definition of personhood is ‘quality control’ language. This kind of language is not only used in the evaluation of PVS patients, but also common in discussions of reproductive technology. Debates over abortion are also debates about ‘the meaning and moral importance of personhood.’⁹⁸

The larger issue in the abortion debate is how we shall now understand personhood.⁹⁹ This is particularly evident in Meilaender’s consideration of Judith Jarvis Thomson’s argument in favour of abortion, ‘The Unconscious Violinist’, where she claims to recognise the personhood of the foetus while arguing for an abridgement of the rights of the foetus. Consider Meilaender’s summary of this somewhat influential parable.

There is a famous violinist suffering from a fatal ailment, and you alone have the right type of blood to help him. One night the Society of Music Lovers kidnaps you and plugs the violinist’s circulatory system into yours. In this way the violinist can (for the amount of time needed to save his life) live off your system. Your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from his system as well as from yours. You wake up in the morning and find yourself in bed with the unconscious violinist, his system plugged into yours. And the question is whether it would be morally wrong for you or anyone else to unplug you, when such action would certainly mean the death of the violinist.¹⁰⁰

While we are told that the foetus is granted the full status of person, the parable subtly nudges us to view the foetus’ dependence on the mother as that of a parasite. Let us, for argument sake, accept Thomson’s claim that her parable treats the foetus as person. When she then re-conceives the relationship of pregnancy from the most intimate biological bond between two persons to the relationship of a parasite to its host, we cannot but conclude that Thomson is moving us toward a radical transformation of personhood. Once the language of parasites has taken hold, expelling the foetus *qua* person/parasite has no more moral weight than any other medical procedure aimed at restoring health to the patient.¹⁰¹ It is no advance in the abortion argument to have gained the status of personhood for the foetus while permitting this kind of treatment of persons.

⁹⁸ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 75.

⁹⁹ Meilaender notes that abortion is defended either on the basis of ‘personhood arguments’ or ‘bodily support’ arguments. The first justifies abortion up until the foetus has become a person with rights. The second argument claims that irrespective of foetal rights, a woman can never be compelled to carry a pregnancy to term. Cf. *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 73. For present purposes, we limit our discussion to the personhood argument.

¹⁰⁰ *The Limits of Love*, p. 50. Cf. Judith Jarvis Thomson, ‘A Defense of Abortion’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1971), pp. 47–66.

¹⁰¹ *The Limits of Love*, p. 56.

Frederica Mathewes–Green discussion of Eileen McDonagh’s, *Breaking the Abortion Deadlock: From Choice to Consent*, we see how McDonagh takes Thomson’s argument one step beyond.¹⁰² McDonagh also accepts the personhood of the foetus as human while arguing that abortion may still be justified by seeing the foetus as an unwelcome intruder.¹⁰³ Once more, we are to imagine that a captor has, without consent, invaded a body that is now held hostage.

For months on end, he wreaks havoc with your circulation and respiration, saps your strength, causes nausea, vomiting and internal swelling. And all the while, you are helpless to resist, or so it seems. Actually, you have the power to defend yourself, to repel this intruder with deadly force. But how? Simply, get an abortion.¹⁰⁴

How then can the use of force or even the death of the innocent be justified?

McDonagh argues that the use of force takes seriously the personhood of the foetus as it makes the foetus responsible for its actions. The foetus is emphatically not ‘a helpless newborn baby.’ It is an intruder who ‘takes the bodies and liberties of others to meet its physical needs.’¹⁰⁵

The question arises as to whether the conception is really against the will of the woman if sexual intercourse was voluntary. McDonagh responds by asking whether a female jogger, running alone through a public park, is entitled to use lethal force in order to protect herself from a would–be attacker. Is she still entitled to use lethal force even when it was her unwise decision to run alone at night that put her in harm’s way? What matters, says McDonagh, is not how the jogger came to be a potential victim, but whether she is *legally* entitled to use lethal force to protect herself from unlawful intrusion. The argument and comparison are legally sound but morally questionable. The right is clearly in conflict with the good. McDonagh does not deny the human identity of either thugs or foetuses. Rather, she merely argues that an essential feature of human personhood is to take responsibility for one’s actions. If the foetus as a responsible person is guilty of violating the body of another, it may be repelled with lethal force. The success of McDonagh’s project to preserve abortion and personhood demands that the foetus be made into a criminal.

¹⁰² Eileen McDonagh, *Breaking the Abortion Deadlock: From Choice to Consent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁰³ Frederica Mathewes–Green, ‘Abortion as Self–Defense: The Latest Spin’, *The Human Life Review* 13 (Fall, 1997), pp. 85–91.

¹⁰⁴ Mathewes–Green, ‘Abortion as Self–Defense’, p. 90.

¹⁰⁵ Mathewes–Green, ‘Abortion as Self–Defense’, p. 90.

As McDonagh's is dismissive of the natural biological bond of mother to foetus in making the mother an enemy of the unborn, her 'solution', argues Mathewes-Green, 'defies human experience and sparkles with cruelty'.¹⁰⁶ This callousness toward another dependent person is a troubling trend, Meilaender notes, in the way we understand all dependent relationships.¹⁰⁷ According to Leon Kass, this trend is evident in and advanced by the language we use to describe procreation:

Ancient Israel, impressed with the phenomenon of transmission of life from the father to son, used a word we translate as 'begetting' or 'siring.' The Greeks, impressed with the springing forth of new life in the cyclical processes of generation and decay, called it *genesis*, from the root meaning 'to come into being.'... The premodern Christian English-speaking world, impressed with the world as given by a Creator, used the term 'pro-creation.' We, impressed with the machine and the gross national product (our own work of creation), employ a metaphor of the factory, 're-production.'¹⁰⁸

While 'procreation' attempts to capture a mystery of divine and human co-operation, 'reproduction' conjures up images of human mastery and promethian freedom to reshape the world according to human will.¹⁰⁹

Meilaender further discusses the distinction between procreation and reproduction in his critique of John Robertson's *Children of Choice*.¹¹⁰ Robertson rightly presumes that 'reproductive experience' is a matter that touches the heart of human identity and meaning. However, Meilaender argues, Robertson's commitment to autonomous choice finally results in an incoherent account of identity and meaning. Autonomy is essential to that freedom which allows one to exercise 'quality control' over the foetus. It is the means by which parents are protected says Robertson, 'against the risk of handicapped children.' Parents must either be given the power to control the outcome of a pregnancy or, Robertson avers, couples will not 'start or continue a pregnancy.'¹¹¹ Identity and meaning are defined in terms of the control that parents exercise over their offspring. Because Robertson is cognisant of the dangers of such control of a human being over another, he attempts to apply external limits on reproductive autonomy. The problem is, Meilaender argues, that once Robertson reduced meaning and identity to the private expression of the human will, there

¹⁰⁶ Mathewes-Green, 'Abortion as Self-Defense', p. 90.

¹⁰⁷ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁸ *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, p. 11. Kass, *Towards a More Natural Science*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹ *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, p. 12.

¹¹⁰ John A. Robertson, *Children of Choice: Freedom and the New Reproductive Technologies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹¹¹ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 71.

remains no moral foundation for such limits. Such limits are unaccountable and arbitrary.¹¹²

Taking his cue from O'Donovan, Meilaender criticises the view that ties identity and meaning to choice and control by introducing the distinction between begetting and making. His argument is that while both result in the birth of a child, begetting is not the same act as making.¹¹³ There is a difference, as Aristotle argues, between *praxis* (doing) and *poesis* (making).¹¹⁴ Were our moral focus narrowed to only consider the finished product, making a child would be indistinguishable from begetting a child. However, acts are not merely judged by their effects or consequences. Acts must be defined and judged in themselves.¹¹⁵ To do this, Meilaender considers the relationship of lovemaking to marriage.¹¹⁶ In linking the passion of lovemaking with the birth of children it becomes clear that procreation is not merely a cool, deliberate act of the rational will. This would not adequately attend to the passion of love-making and its desire for communal relationship. Within the bond of marriage, children are the fruit of physical passion and the meeting of two bodies. 'Rather than being an exercise in self-definition or self-replication,' Meilaender writes, 'procreation, as the fruition of coitus, should teach us that the act of love is not simply a personal project undertaken for our own fulfillment.'¹¹⁷ Reproduction is an expression of the human will. Procreation is embedded in both the passion of love-making and in the 'for better or worse' commitment of lovers. It is an act that comes closest to the union of body and soul. Passion and commitment take us beyond the reaches of human will and are best expressed in the language of gift and mystery.

Christians act to embody their commitment to the Christian moral vision rather than to the dictates of pragmatic calculation. Hence the aim of Meilaender's bioethical writings is to explain why it is crucial that the church be capable of eschewing medical techniques 'even if they would achieve results that might be, on the whole, desirable.'¹¹⁸ Given the lures of health and the control of the body that come with technological advances, the notion of resisting these advances for the sake

¹¹² *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 67.

¹¹³ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 77.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 6.2–5.

¹¹⁵ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 78.

¹¹⁶ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 77.

¹¹⁷ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 79.

of a moral vision is quixotic. In MacIntyre's terms, Meilaender's advocacy of the goods of excellence will always seem ineffective and unattractive when compared to the goods of effectiveness. This vision of excellence finally depends upon holding both body and soul together in a duplex tension. Whatever may be said in favour of such a vision, it hardly seems to offer sufficient reasons to decline the opportunity to be more intelligent or healthier. But then such a vision is only plausible if, as in the Christian story, it is rational to conclude that it is too high a price to pay to gain the whole bodily world at the expense of one's soul. If moral commitment must be reduced to terms of calculation, the worth of the soul is of *incalculably* greater worth than the goods of the body. This conclusion is not a rejection of the body. It is rather reflects an anthropology of selves who 'are embodied persons and personalized bodies' and a recognition that 'to understand human nature in this way is the task of Christian thought.'¹¹⁹

Meilaender's bioethical writings make clear just how crucial are questions of anthropology and human nature to the way we see these issues and conduct our lives. The same is true of Meilaender's consideration of the simultaneities that define and shape human identity. In the following section we turn to consider Meilaender's account of the theologically defined self who is simultaneously righteous and a sinner (*simul justus et peccator*) and whose life must be defined as simultaneously an unfolding journey of becoming and as a living out of the fixed identity imputed by the verdict of justification.

4. Saints and Sinners – Journey and Dialogue

The identity of the self in Lutheran theology is two-sided. Meilaender writes, 'If the human being is a strangely two-sided creature, a finite embodied person who is, nonetheless, made to rest in the eternal God, we should expect that there may be many occasions when we are perplexed about our moral responsibilities.'¹²⁰ This perplexity is at the heart of the Lutheran difficulty with articulating the importance of human action and ethical reflection. Consider the tensed relationship between Luther's theology of *sola gratia* and the Aristotelian notion that one becomes good by the

¹¹⁸ *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*, p. 83.

¹¹⁹ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 41.

habituation of good deeds. It is not that Luther rejects the importance of good habits and moral works. It is rather that such human activity is not the first thing that needs to be said about the human self and its actions. Because the self defined before God (*coram deo*) is of greater importance, Lutheran theology is first concerned to speak to the questions of the status of the self rather than its actions. So what human beings need first and foremost is not moral reflection ‘but a word that touches, transforms, and liberates the heart.’¹²¹

The first question of theology concerns the status of the self. One may assert this without making the mistake of saying it is all that needs to be said about the self. The open question is whether Lutheranism, given its commitment to this understanding of grace, is capable of saying anything beyond the absolution. Is it possible to sustain a coherent moral discourse? Were Lutherans to view the self solely in terms of its status before God, Lutheran moral discourse would only articulate the clear, decisive verdict of grace that overturns the judgment of condemnation. That is to say, once Lutheranism speaks of the self’s status before God, there is little more to say about the self’s behaviour before men. This means that an ethical emphasis on the slow moral progress toward the *telos* of a human life would only distract us from the verdict of grace that changes the status of the condemned sinner. Of the many problems this view creates for moral reflection perhaps the most damaging is how dangerously close it comes to abstracting the soul from bodily experience and thus failing to hold the two together in the tension of simultaneity.

In our quotidian experience, the neglect of the simultaneous understanding of the self leads to incoherences. The confident claim that one is the object of God’s unequivocal, all-sufficient grace does not, after all, preclude worrying about where one’s children ‘go to school, about their playmates and peers, about the ways they use their free time, about the television shows they watch.’¹²² Certainly Lutheran theology’s emphasis on the all-sufficiency of grace does not mean that there is no need for moral reflection on the many aspects of our historical existence where we purposefully set out to shape moral character. We must be able to hold both human and divine agency in dialectical tension, or admit that this all-sufficient grace is strangely irrelevant to the particulars of historical existence.

¹²⁰ *The Limits of Love*, p. 32.

¹²¹ *The Limits of Love*, p. 33.

¹²² *The Limits of Love*, p. 35.

The problem is that God's eternal verdict and human experience are not easily reconciled. This problematic does not mean that God's decisive verdict renders our moral concerns irrelevant. Such a conclusion is 'foolhardy.'¹²³ Parents do not reduce the discipline of their children to reminding them of God's verdict on their lives. They rather take concrete steps to shape their children's behaviour, as they attend to their habits, make sure of the quality of their education, and direct their friendships. The gospel does not grant a kind of diplomatic immunity from the exigencies of history. Luther's harsh rejection of Aristotle aside, we cannot rationally deal with practical questions without becoming Aristotelians in how we think about what we will do.¹²⁴ Meilaender's accounts of the self as saint and sinner, and of the Christian life as journey and dialogue, offer hopeful ways of reconciling the Lutheran emphasis on God's gracious activity with a virtue ethic that emphasises human action.

Luther's account of human identity emphasises *being* rather than *doing*. Personal identity is less a matter of performance and much more a matter of status. Good deeds are done *because* the identity of the self is 'good' and not to make the self 'good'. The ruling analogy is that a good tree cannot but produce good fruit. Hence good deeds *reflect* good identity; they do not *achieve* good identity. As such, the Lutheran emphasis on grace must meet profound conflict with MacIntyre's understanding of morality. The disagreement is not over the descriptions of moral disorder, nor is it over the teleological vision. The most profound disagreement is over the *means* by which disordered human beings move toward their proper end. To put a finer point on this disagreement over means, the question is whether human beings move towards this *telos* or are moved by a radical and immediate verdict. Under this description of grace, there is no room for a self being transformed by means of the habituation of good actions. The means of grace therefore must exclude ethics as a means of transformation. Human action is inconsequential in view of divine action.¹²⁵

Meilaender argues against this stark juxtaposition of the two views by first noting the language of the Psalms which simultaneously speak of human and divine righteousness. If we ask how sinners come to be welcomed into God's presence,

¹²³ *The Limits of Love*, p. 36.

¹²⁴ 'Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues and Goods', p. 4.

¹²⁵ Admittedly, this discussion of how one becomes 'good' is irrelevant in a moral milieu where there seems to be little agreement on the content of the good.

Meilaender notes at least two different responses in the Psalms: goodness is a human achievement, and goodness is an imputed righteousness. For example, Psalm 26:3 predicates a goodness to the self because, 'I have walked in my integrity' while Psalm 65:4 states, 'Blessed is he whom thou dost choose and bring near, to dwell in thy courts.' This ambiguity in the Psalms is contrasted with Luther's account of Romans 5:6, where St. Paul asserts that the confidence to stand in the judgment is due to Christ's having died for the ungodly. Meilaender is not attempting to play off the Old Testament against the New. Rather, he argues that we must 'come to terms with two seemingly different understandings of human righteousness.'¹²⁶ To this end Meilaender considers one of Luther's polemical writings, 'Against Latomus'.¹²⁷

In 1521, Luther responded to the condemnation of his views by the theologians from Louvain. In his response, Luther develops the anthropological insight that the Christian self is *simul justus et peccator*. How one understands this phrase depends largely upon the various ways that the *et* functions in Luther's account. In the first sense, *et* means that the self is 'entirely saint and entirely sinner – and both at the same time.'¹²⁸ The self is entirely 'in Christ', and so is entirely pleasing to God. The self outside of Christ is entirely sinful. There is no ambiguous transitional stage between being 'in Christ' or being outside of Christ. Judgement is clear and distinct when we speak of status rather than behaviour. This theological assertion may be morally confusing. In this scheme, it is possible for Luther to argue that good deeds outside of Christ only *seem* good. Reality before God leads us to a different judgment of human deeds. From the God's-eye view human deeds that promise but do not achieve the good of eternal life are not *finally* judged as good but as futile. The promise of morality is finally deceptive, a deception that is evident in the human hypocrisy and despair that attends those most concerned with morality. Similar, though much more problematic, is the corollary that the evil deeds of the Christian are not counted as sin because they are the deeds of a righteous self. Justification then undermines the notion of a rational moral judgement.

Luther's theology of grace seems to produce an incoherent moral theology. Meilaender offers an alternative conclusion when he notes that Luther's view reflects

¹²⁶ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, pp. 103–104.

¹²⁷ Martin Luther, 'Against Latomus', in ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and trans. George Lindbeck, *Luthers Works* 32 (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1958) pp. 133–260.

¹²⁸ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 106.

a vigilant concern ‘not to isolate the deed from the person, to evaluate not individual slices of behavior but the total self.’¹²⁹ In this sense, human identity is determined by being and not doing. Identity is a fixed status and so does not admit the language of transformation or performance. Said another way, because righteousness is locative and one is or is not ‘in Christ’, there can be no ambiguity about the status of the self. Hence the historical self whose life is an unfolding narrative of moral development seems to have no place in Lutheran theology. Identity is rather determined by an ahistorical verdict which alters the status of the self at a mathematical point. This verdict is analogous to the proclamation of amnesty granted to Vietnam era resisters. While the proclamation changed their legal status, it effected no change in character, nor was it predicated on some change in behaviour. The verdict changed the status of persons from criminals to citizens.

Luther’s moral theology never strays far from the changed status of the self, *coram deo*. However, this concern for the status of the self did not hinder him from passing many moral judgements on individual and political behaviour. These judgements reflect a very different understanding of the *et* in the *simul justus et peccator*.

Whereas action in the former sense is distanced and separated from identity, now action is very much a part of the way that the true self is known and shaped. Now the self is understood as being partly saint and partly sinner. We are no longer dealing with the unified, harmonious self of the decisive verdict but a self who is characterised by a divisive quarrel or civil war. Under this description, the Christian life must employ the language of slow transformation and deformation – of progress and its opposite. The struggle between saint and sinner is now focused less on *being* and more on *doing*. This distinction becomes clearer when we consider the nature of sin.

When we consider the sins of pride and sloth, we will better see how and why the Christian’s life must be understood as a moral struggle. Pride, Meilaender argues, intends to live as if there were no limits to one’s will that should not be challenged and transcended. It neglects human dependency and vulnerability as it refuses to accept the critical importance of human bonds. Pride rather concludes ‘that the inner meaning of history is simply the process of human self-determination.’¹³⁰ It is

¹²⁹ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, pp. 106–107.

¹³⁰ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 60.

expressed in Augustine's description of Satan who 'refused to be subject to his creator and in his arrogance supposed that he wielded power as his own private possession and rejoiced in that power.'¹³¹ The mark of pride is competitive restlessness. There is no room for contentment or gratitude because 'pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next.'¹³²

Pride resists or rejects moral limits. This view reflects the Kantian notion of the self who is the final judge of those moral maxims that are counted as universal law. Meilaender states that this view

has encouraged us to think that our glory lies in being free and autonomous, obeying no law except that which we legislate for ourselves in accordance with the universal requirements of reason – has encouraged us, in short, to develop a moral theory for beings who are all freedom and no finitude. Not without reason did Iris Murdoch write that 'Kant's man had already received a glorious incarnation nearly a century earlier in the work of Milton: his proper name is Lucifer.'¹³³

The fundamental error of pride is a view of the self as isolated from God and others. It is a self that must be capable of its own moral transformation apart from communion with God or community with others.

Pride is not the only way that sinners cut themselves off from others. Sloth takes a different route to the same end. Pride seeks freedom from all limits while sloth seeks inordinate security in many limits. Pride is restless and competitive while sloth desires safety from a fearful, fallen world. For pride, the possibilities of human transformation know no limits. For sloth, any transformation threatens fearful change. The self is fragmented by this oscillation between pride and sloth. The sinner boldly rebels against God's command by rushing to action in pulling the fruit from the tree, then cowers in shame and blame when called on to account for this action. Sin steals the forbidden fruit from God then willingly shares it with the other. In the end, though pride and sloth are embodied in very different actions, they come to the same end of loneliness and boredom. It cannot be otherwise because pride and sloth oppose love and trust.¹³⁴ Pride cannot love or trust those whom it intends to master; sloth cannot love or trust those whom it suspects as having intentions of mastery.

¹³¹ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 60. Meilaender quoting Augustine, *The City of God*, XI, 13.

¹³² *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 62. Meilaender quotes C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 95.

¹³³ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 93. Meilaender quotes Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York, Schocken Books, 1971), p. 80.

¹³⁴ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 61.

In pride we seek to make everything and everyone else subject to our will – a world in which the swollen ego is secure because alone. In sloth, the self is equally alone, unable to delight in anything outside itself. ‘The solitary self to which pride is devoted in its final stages is that one in the same time the bored self.’¹³⁵

The doctrine of the self as *simul justus et peccator* commits Lutheran theology to a complex understanding of moral reflection and evaluation. ‘To say that we are sinners,’ Meilaender states, ‘does not, then, mean that we love nothing outside ourselves, nor does it mean that we fail entirely in love for God. It means that our loves are poor and divided, “a mingled yarn, good and ill together.”’¹³⁶ The disordered self as *peccator* is characterised by an interminable quarrel. The ordered self as *justus* names the self as integrated. Lutheran theology wishes to speak of realities that are somehow real now and somehow yet to be attained in the future. This ‘now and not yet’ description of the divided self means that we can never just say one thing about human identity or moral agency.

Lutheran moral theology must find a coherent way to speak of the self as simultaneously divided and united. Meilaender points us to Luther who was able to speak of the self in both senses, even within the same context. Luther states:

You will therefore judge yourselves one way in accordance with the severity of God’s judgment, and another in accordance with the kindness of his mercy. Do not separate these two perspectives in this life. According to one, all your works are polluted and unclean on account of that part of you which is God’s adversary; according to the other, you are genuinely pure and righteous.¹³⁷

Luther can speak of ‘that part’ which is in opposition to God, without denying that God judges whole persons and not isolated deeds. He is able to say that in baptism the power of sin is fully removed, even if he must also admit that the *substance* of sin remains. ‘Day by day’, Luther states, ‘the substance is removed so that it may be utterly destroyed.’¹³⁸ In using the phrase, ‘day by day’, Meilaender points out, Luther speaks of the gradual development and progress in the moral life. This requires a changing of metaphors from the judicial to the medical. Whereas a verdict is passed on the whole person, once and for all, the medical metaphor captures the idea of grace as an infused gift with progressive healing. Luther writes, ‘Everything is forgiven through grace, but as yet not everything is healed through the gift...To be sure, for

¹³⁵ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 61. Meilaender quoting William F. May, *A Catalogue of Sins* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), p. 201.

¹³⁶ *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 63. Meilaender quoting Shakespeare, *All’s Well That End’s Well*.

¹³⁷ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 108. Meilaender quoting Luther, ‘Against Latomus’, p. 213.

¹³⁸ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 109.

grace there is no sin, because the whole person pleases; yet for the gift there is sin, which it purges away and overcomes.’¹³⁹

A Lutheran ethic must clearly identify those spheres of moral discourse where the self is characterised by the unity of a clear and decisive verdict and where it is appropriate to speak of the divided self who requires moral transformation. The defining problem for Lutheran ethics is to discern when it is appropriate to speak of being and when to speak of becoming. This problem means that the moral life must be understood in terms of the two paradigmatic metaphors of life as journey and life as dialogue. The second metaphor of dialogue requires further explanation.

Meilaender uses the term dialogue rather than the more familiar term ‘verdict’ because the Christian lives between two verdicts: the law and the gospel. Each of these verdicts makes a totalising claim about the self who is object of its judgement. The law *always* accuses (*lex semper accusat*); the gospel bestows *unconditional* pardon. Each of these verdicts treats the self as an indivisible whole. Human identity is not established or known through the self’s deeds but by either the judgement of God’s law or that of the gospel. In the end, the self is rendered an utter unity in the judgement of salvation or damnation. While the decisive verdict is central to Lutheran theology, it is not all that needs to be said. The verdict treats the self as fully passive. Yet there are times when Christians are addressed as agents. This distinction leads to the conclusion that, in certain situations, it will be important to divorce actions from identity. At these times, the ruling metaphor is that of the verdict. In other circumstances, when it is necessary to join actions to identity, the ruling metaphor must be life as journey. Let us consider further this journey metaphor.

Historical selves are on a journey that is a moral quest. The self is a pilgrim who progresses (or fails to progress) along an uneven path toward the *telos* which is union with God. Under the dialogue description, one is either *in* or *outside of* Christ. This metaphor admits no language of nearness or farness from God, for a verdict is decisive rather than a matter of degrees. However, under the description of the journey metaphor, the self may be said to be quantitatively distant from God. We must be able to speak of the self as once disordered and now moving toward its appropriate *telos*. If, as it appears, Luther has little difficulty in speaking of human

¹³⁹ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, pp. 111–112.

identity in both ways, Meilaender asks, ‘Why then all the shouting?’¹⁴⁰ What explains the conflict between Latomus and Luther? The answer concerns the relative weight each system gives to the dialogue versus journey metaphors. Latomus judged that Luther’s division between self and action was dismissive of the importance of moral virtue and habits and so imperilled the moral task within Christian theology. If God’s verdict is rendered irrespective of what one does, and if this verdict is determinative of one’s eternal fate, human action is reduced to ultimate insignificance.

Luther’s response was that that inordinate focus on good works ironically subverts the moral life. To focus on human behaviour leads to either the vices of hypocrisy or those of despair. Luther’s account of these unintended consequences unfolds as follows. Once we fail to see ourselves as God sees us, that is ‘in Christ’, grace has been cheapened. The historical experience of one who is continually uncertain of her status before God is ‘coldness in love, slackness in praise, and lukewarmness in gratitude.’¹⁴¹ Hypocrisy or despair imperils the moral life because each vice too closely associates moral achievement with human identity. The hypocrite wrongly imagines that good deeds make a good person, while the despairing wrongly conclude that bad deeds signify an irredeemable self. For Luther, the divine verdict does not render human action irrelevant so much as it relativises the importance of moral achievement and its absence. It is not that actions mean nothing; rather, Luther argues, actions have less significance than Latomus would admit. Luther must somehow say that action is significant without admitting that human agency is ultimate.

Luther is threatened by incoherence, for it is not at all clear when he addresses the self as helpless or as being morally responsible. In the hands of the manipulative, this seemingly arbitrary and shifting standard may become a useful tool for controlling others. Hence more must be said about how one knows what form of address is appropriate. Meilaender notes that Luther simultaneously stressed the absolute need for the divine verdict of forgiveness, while also calling for improvements in the moral habits and education of the young.¹⁴² We need not charge Luther with incoherence so much as perhaps to suggest that he is a crypto–Thomist. In order for Luther to address moral concerns, he must become guilty of a felicitous

¹⁴⁰ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 112.

¹⁴¹ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 113. Meilaender quoting Luther, ‘Against Latomus’, p. 240.

¹⁴² *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 119.

inconsistency and smuggle in the moral philosophy that he explicitly renounces. While Meilaender's position is closer to this second explanation, he does not think that the charge of incoherence should be dismissed out of hand. For this reason, Meilaender seriously considers Gerald Strauss' critique of Luther in the work, *Luther's House of Learning*.¹⁴³

Strauss argues that the Lutheran educational project failed precisely because the theology of grace could not be reconciled with an educational project that aimed to cultivate Christian character:¹⁴⁴ 'Torn between their trust in the molding power of education and their admission that the alteration of men's nature was a task beyond human strength, [the Lutheran reformers] strove for success in their endeavors while conceding the likelihood of defeat.'¹⁴⁵ According to Strauss, Lutheranism failed to reconcile its doctrine of grace, which accented the insufficiency of human effort, with its acceptance of the importance of 'habits long continued'.¹⁴⁶ The doctrine of grace replaces the need for moral transformation while human agency is swallowed up by God's will. Strauss argues that these doctrinal commitments cannot theoretically coexist with an educational project that is inescapably dedicated to the rational transformation of the self by means of disciplined practice. Education requires the cultivation of virtues. Yet the theological first principles of Lutheranism left no theoretical space for the cultivation of these virtues, which doomed Lutheran education to failure.

The fundamental Lutheran problem was to reconcile God's agency with human responsibility.¹⁴⁷ Luther attempted to justify education by arguing that it gave the Holy Spirit occasion to transform selves because education impressed God's word on the hearts of students. The explanation fails because it does not reconcile the *call* to commit strenuous effort to moral formation with the *claim* that such formation was ultimately impotent or, perhaps, harmful for one's salvation. The incoherence

¹⁴³ Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

¹⁴⁴ My concern here is with the philosophical implications rather than the historical accuracy of Strauss' thesis. It is not at all clear that the Reformation's educational program actually failed in the way that Strauss describes. Critiques of Strauss' historical methodology and conclusions include James M. Kittelson, 'Success and Failures in the German Reformation: The Report from Strasbourg', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 73 (1982), pp. 153–175, and Scott H. Hendrix, 'Luther's Impact on the Sixteenth Century', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985), pp. 3–14.

¹⁴⁵ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 124. Meilaender quoting Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, p. 300.

¹⁴⁶ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 123.

¹⁴⁷ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 118.

ensured that moral education would only receive a half-hearted commitment.

Strauss' analysis echoes Latomus' view that Lutheranism, in its pure form, gives no serious place to the 'small disciplined steps by which virtue struggles to root out vice from the Christian life.'¹⁴⁸

Strauss does demonstrate that the dialogue metaphor is not all there is to be said about the Christian life. In MacIntyre's understanding, the sign of an irrational moral theory is its inability to sustain an educational project that effectively initiates others into the life of the community. However, Strauss and MacIntyre resolve the tension by focusing too much on human morality and agency. The point is that grace and human responsibility must be held in tension. Any attempt to bring early closure to the tension is to deny either the realities of historical existence or the reality of God's verdict. Meilaender writes:

To think that we could overcome the tensions would be to forget that theologians remain pilgrims. They may (and must) affirm the truth about reality revealed in Christ: that even the will of God that calls for our sanctification is a gracious will. They may (and must) affirm the truth of our experience within simple history: that, while we can believe even the demanding God to be unequivocally gracious, we cannot fully experience him as such. The desire for absolute conceptual consistency within the whole theological task – the desire to surmount the tension between these two pictures – must therefore be labeled as Gnostic. It is an attempt to leap beyond the boundaries of the Christian story and out of history before God brings that story to its close.¹⁴⁹

Furious opposites are not quandaries to be resolved but mysteries that are essential to seeing the world rightly and shaping a life in conformity with this vision. To deny either the truth of grace or the truth of human responsibility is to fail to see the world from both angles of vision. It is to see the moral world with one eye closed. This 'one eye shut' theology loses that moral depth perception that comes with recognising the narrative quality of Christian existence. To deny that we experience the story as a journey is to deny the reality of our 'piecemeal', fragmented experience. To deny that there is an outside, authorial perspective, that is capable of judging human selves and history as a whole, reduces theology to anthropology. We are caught between a kind of docetic denial of our historical natures and a radical historicist denial of the relevance of divine judgement and mercy. To deny either the historical or the eternal perspective is to deny the Christian story. It is to deny that the Christian life is about faith *and* faithfulness; about *believing* the great acts of God as

¹⁴⁸ *Theory and Practice of Virtue*, p. 112.

¹⁴⁹ *The Limits of Love*, p. 146, n. 3.

rehearsed in the creeds and *becoming* disciples by the disciplined practices of the moral life.

The tension between the metaphors of dialogue and journey is a permanent fixture of Lutheran ethics. To resolve it is to distort by simplification. This tension positively shapes Lutheran ethics and perceptions. Because this tension must remain unresolved, Lutheranism is committed to sustaining a certain kind of moral debate that Luther initiated in his argument with Latomus. It is a debate that Meilaender continues in his critical and appreciative reading of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*.¹⁵⁰ Meilaender's epigraph, citing Hans Urs von Balthasar's *The Theology of Karl Barth*, captures the importance of this debate. Balthasar states:

Theology is ecclesial, or it is nothing at all. And if each Church remains faithful to Revelation, 'thinking its doctrines through to the end,' both sides might come to agreement at some specific spot. Says Barth: 'Let the Roman Catholic Church think through its doctrine on nature and grace, and the teaching on justification that was developed by Trent.' And to him we say: 'Let reformation theology think through its teaching on the visible church, on obedience and law, and also its dialectic about homo simul peccator et justus. Then life will begin to flow through the Church's limbs. Questions will be posed, and the possibility of an answer will be real once again.'¹⁵¹

Meilaender's disagreement with *Veritatis Splendor* is very different from the disagreements among Roman Catholic theologians over natural law, the freedom of the conscience, and the notion of intrinsically evil acts. His task is to raise the Reformation questions about the relationship of personal identity to one's actions.¹⁵² Meilaender rejects what he considers the encyclical's 'tight bond between faith and morality' because it leads to the dangerous conclusion that 'the fundamental choice for God cannot coexist with a deliberate choice to do what one knows to be gravely wrong.'¹⁵³ The disagreement is not with the encyclical's view that, 'Particular actions can shape the fundamental orientation of the soul, and that orientation is itself expressed in particular actions.'¹⁵⁴ This view is consonant with the Reformation's understanding that 'works can shape the person and the person is manifested in the works.'¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth* (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books and Media, 1993).

¹⁵¹ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 60.

¹⁵² Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 61.

¹⁵³ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 70.

¹⁵⁴ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 70.

¹⁵⁵ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 70.

The problem revolves around the encyclical's assertion that there are acts that are so evil that they cannot coexist with saving faith. There are deliberate acts that one who has chosen God will not do.¹⁵⁶ Meilaender's disagreement with the notion of intrinsically evil acts is qualified. That is, he agrees with the Pope when, in rejecting the argument of proportionalists and pragmatists, he asserts that acts may be judged as evil in advance of knowing their consequences. His disagreement is with regard to the meaning of these acts. In asking whether saving faith can coexist with an intrinsically evil act Meilaender notes that the encyclical

simply leaves no room for a Reformation understanding of faith as that *fiducia* which, clinging to Christ, makes us right with God even in our sin... there is no room for a divided self who chooses what is evil yet clings to God.¹⁵⁷

The distinction between evil acts and evil practices must be maintained. As the Roman Catholic theologian Josef Fuchs argues, 'specific, individual moral acts as such are not the acceptance or rejection of grace.'¹⁵⁸ When the Pope speaks of 'a' choice or 'a' particular act separating the self from God, he establishes an unbreakable connection between human identity and moral performance. This leaves no room for the conception of the self as simultaneously justified and sinner. Meilaender concludes that the encyclical is in error to argue that 'the evil of any act so overcomes the division of the self that there is no longer any *simul*, no longer a "disobedient" one who still claims to the promise that in Jesus God is for us.'¹⁵⁹

The complexity of the question concerning the effect of an evil act on one's relationship with God is evident in Luther's reflections on King David's acts of adultery, murder, and blasphemy. In the *Smalcald Articles* Luther viewed David's identity and action as united, placing him wholly under condemnation. David's actions resulted in the loss of saving faith because he had no right to claim with Augustine that '[I]t was I who willed it, and it was I who was unwilling. It was the same "I" throughout. But neither my will nor my unwillingness was *whole* and *entire*.'¹⁶⁰ However, in his Galatians commentary (c.1535), Luther explains David's failure not as a faith-destroying act but as a 'great horrible lapse'. David's sin is the

¹⁵⁶ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 72.

¹⁵⁷ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 73.

¹⁵⁸ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 71, quoting Josef Fuchs, 'Basic Freedom and Morality', in eds. Ronald P. Hamel and Kenneth R. Himes, *Introduction to Christian Ethics: A Reader* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1989), p. 196.

¹⁵⁹ Justification Through Faith, pp. 73–74.

result of weakness, not intention. It is an isolated act rather than a persisting practice.¹⁶¹ Seen in this way, Luther now argues that David's identity is determined by forgiveness rather than by his sinful act(s). This distinction is lost when the encyclical claims that man's acts are responsible for man's moral perfection. Person and performance are so closely united that there is an all or nothing relationship between action and belief. The fundamental choice for God must always be evident in every action.¹⁶² On the contrary, Meilaender claims that it is theoretically possible to journey 'away from God while, at the same time, through faith taking shelter in Jesus as One who has acted on my behalf.'¹⁶³

Here Meilaender seems to be flirting with antinomianism as he attempts to define and limit ethics within the doctrine of forgiveness. Taking the whole corpus of Meilaender's writings into consideration, it can be stated categorically that his work is hardly threatened by antinomianism. However, the fact that Meilaender, at times, sounds as if he is, reflects a certain ambiguity that Lutheran theology must remain committed to and committed to working through. This is because, as Reinhold Niebuhr observed, 'Forgiveness as a form of love which is beyond good and evil, is bound to be offensive to pure moralists.'¹⁶⁴ This morally offensive emphasis on forgiveness is necessary because the pastoral care of souls is central to Lutheran ethics. This pastoral practice, especially in confession and absolution, requires that the pastor maintain a distance between the self's identity and its actions. Meilaender writes:

We are situating ourselves to practice that most difficult of theological arts – the distinction of law and gospel – in the care of souls... no general rule can be given here, for the art of theological judgment is needed. We should not, I repeat, attempt to spin an ethic out of the distinction between law and gospel, but neither should we imagine that the care of souls can be satisfactorily carried out unless and until we have loosened the tight fit that John Paul has established between judgments of the work and of the person.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 77, quoting St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. 10, Ch. 11 (my emphasis).

¹⁶¹ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 76. Luther states, 'Anyone who yields to his flesh and persists in smugly gratifying its desires should know that he does not belong to Christ.' *Lectures on Galatians–1535*, in ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther's Works* 27 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 80–81.

¹⁶² Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 69.

¹⁶³ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', pp. 69–70.

¹⁶⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, *Human Destiny* (New York: Scribner, 1943), p. 143.

¹⁶⁵ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 78.

The care of souls requires that pastors be simultaneously capable of ethical reflection and of transcending ethical judgments with the word of forgiveness. While this distinction between law and gospel is an insufficient basis for a systematic ethic, the distinction ought not be rendered irrelevant for Christian moral reflection. Meilaender's ethics stand somewhere between the relative unimportance that ethics has played in Lutheran theological reflection and the exaggerated importance of ethics in the Roman Catholic and other ecclesial traditions. As I have been arguing, the Christian life is certainly a journey, but not only a journey. It must also leave room for the verdict of grace. To do this Meilaender must keep the metaphors of journey and dialogue in furious opposition in a way that is lacking in *Veritatis Splendor*.

A Lutheran ethic, then, requires a rich enough conceptual vocabulary to assert simultaneously that the declared righteous are righteous indeed though, perhaps, corrupt in deeds. Meilaender must disagree with the encyclical's assertion that grave misdeeds render the self incapable of hearing God's word of promise. Meilaender states, 'We must strive to retain the capacity to make both judgments – of the deed and the person – as best we can, in accord with the word of God, given us in Jesus and the Scriptures.'¹⁶⁶ The challenge of a Lutheran ethic, which intends to maintain the simultaneity of the self as righteous and sinner, is to take morality seriously, but not ultimately so. Pride of place goes to forgiveness. The looming question is whether this distinction between the identity and action finally makes for an incoherent ethic that unravels in moral inarticulacy. Meilaender obviously does not think so because it is possible to articulate the relationship between ethical judgements and the reality of forgiveness.

In *Veritatis Splendor* the ruling metaphor is the Christian life as journey. This is clear in the encyclical's exposition of the wealthy young ruler who came to Jesus asking him to explain what good he should seek. This question about the good is taken to express the desire to make incremental moral progress toward the *telos* who is God. The means of progress toward the good is attentive obedience to what is right. Meilaender takes care not to have us draw the wrong conclusion that the Pope's emphasis on obedience is a rejection of the doctrine of grace. Indeed, the journey is begun as a response to God's gracious invitation and it is sustained as grace gives one

¹⁶⁶ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 80.

the power to keep the law by which one find one's way back to God.¹⁶⁷ Grace is important in *Veritatis Splendor*. The problem is that its 'precise role' is unclear.¹⁶⁸

The ambiguity arises because it is not clear how fellowship with God is a present reality and how it is a future achievement. When understood as an achievement, fellowship depends on meeting certain conditions: the commandments, which are 'the way and condition of salvation', must be kept.¹⁶⁹ In this case, obedience is the cause (rather than a sign) of fellowship with God. Grace must be understood as a demanding invitation to fulfil what seems to be humanly impossible.¹⁷⁰ This point is made by Jesus when he meets the man's claim to have fulfilled the law's demands by requiring that he give up his wealth.

This impossible demand scandalised the disciples. They themselves are not at all certain of the role of grace in the Christian life. They do not know 'whether grace empowers the journey back to God from start to finish, or whether it only builds upon our own attempts to keep the commandments.'¹⁷¹ Putting aside any suggestion of semi-Pelagianism, Meilaender argues that the emphasis on meeting certain conditions effectively diminishes the importance of the dialogue.¹⁷² This transforms grace into an ancillary instrument of that obedience which is the real means of moral progress and salvation.¹⁷³ Grace remains impotent unless and until it is joined to human co-operation.

Such a description of the role of grace is not so much wrong as it is insufficient. This point is made in Meilaender's consideration of Karl Barth's interpretation of the story of the rich young man.¹⁷⁴ For Barth, the human disorder is not that sinners are quantitatively distanced from God. Indeed, this would be a kind of denial of the relevance of the incarnation where God has come near to humanity. The incarnation is a sign of God's presence on earth and the divine intention to close the distance between God and sinful human beings. Because Jesus is present, the young man is *already* within the sphere of Christ's grace. The critical distinction is whether he

¹⁶⁷ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 63.

¹⁶⁸ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 63.

¹⁶⁹ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 64.

¹⁷⁰ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 63.

¹⁷¹ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 65.

¹⁷² Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 64.

¹⁷³ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 65.

¹⁷⁴ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 65 cites Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Part 2, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), pp. 613–630.

responds to this presence in the obedience of faith or in the disobedience of unbelief. Barth states that the rich man has ‘all possessions except one—the fulness of Jesus. And this is what condemns him.’¹⁷⁵ The critical problem is not that we are distant from God but that we cannot yet receive his fullness.

The key to Barth’s exposition is not the reaction of the rich man to Jesus’ demands but the astonished reaction of the disciples. The disciples were the obedient. They had left everything to follow Jesus; yet they found the demands of Jesus upon the wealthy man to be impossible. Even in their obedience, the disciples understood how near they stood to ‘the edge of the abyss of disobedience.’¹⁷⁶ The disciples are again made aware of how great and impossible is that first step of obedience. How could they have done what they now conclude is an impossible task for the rich young ruler? Barth states:

[T]he impossible became possible to them. To them? No, it was never possible to them. It was still possible only to God. But in the knowledge that what is possible only to God has become possible *for* them, in this confidence, in this humility or boldness – we can now say simply in *faith* – they became obedient. They accepted it as true that Jesus was obedient for them...they believed, i.e., they were pleased to have His ability attributed to them, to have their own inability covered over by his ability...they undertook to live in the shade and shelter of his ability.... If they do not lack the one thing that is needful for the fulfillment of the divine command, it is certainly not because they themselves possess it and achieve it. It is only because it is there for them in Jesus. It is only because they are pleased to accept it by faith in him.¹⁷⁷

Barth’s christology diverges from the encyclical’s emphasis on the imitation of Jesus. For Barth, Jesus is the saviour in whom one finds shade and shelter. The disciples’ astonishment reflects how, even in their obedience, they have not experienced growth or progress in their Christian life. The step they once took, now ‘has to be taken again and again in all its difficulty.’¹⁷⁸ For Barth, the life of the disciple is not first and foremost concerned with the incremental moral steps that move from alienation to fellowship with God. Rather, the aim of the Christian life is to live in the *full* presence of Christ, made possible by his fulfilment of the demands of the law.

For Barth, either Christian ethics begins with fullness rather than deficiency, or it ceases to be of comfort to the troubled conscience. An ethic that begins in lack fills the disciple with fear of its impossible demands. When Jesus tells the rich young man

¹⁷⁵ Meilaender, ‘Justification Through Faith’, p. 65, quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, p. 623.

¹⁷⁶ Meilaender, ‘Justification Through Faith’, p. 66, quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, p. 624.

¹⁷⁷ Meilaender, ‘Justification Through Faith’, p. 67, quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, p. 626.

¹⁷⁸ Meilaender, ‘Justification Through Faith’, p. 66, quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, p. 624.

to sell everything, the disciples stand with the rich man in astonished disbelief at Jesus' inordinate demands. They again become aware of the impossibility of meeting Jesus' demands. Opposing this interpretation, *Veritatis Splendor* sees Jesus as inviting the rich ruler to continue his journey toward God by means of radical obedience. Barth stresses the dependence of the disciple on God's grace so that the journey can only begin because Christ has bridged the unbridgeable abyss.

For Barth, the problem is not that we cannot complete the journey, but that we cannot meet the demands for commencing the journey. To complete the journey, the disciples do not need a teacher or model for imitation: they need a Saviour to be obedient *for* them.¹⁷⁹ Meilaender states that 'At such moments – which means, potentially, at any and every moment – they need to hear a promise they can trust, an invitation not to moral struggle but to take shade and shelter in the cover of Jesus' ability.'¹⁸⁰ The gospel as promise relativises rather than rejects the importance of the journey metaphor. How then do we sustain a teleological notion of the Christian life and its attendant vocabulary of progress? A Lutheran ethic must maintain the two centres of the gospel: its *power* and its *pardon*. When speaking of progress in the journey of faithfulness, one employs the language of power. When speaking of one's relationship to God in faith, one employs the language of pardon. If Meilaender is correct about this two-fold centre of Lutheran ethics, to be authentically Lutheran and consistent with the rationality of its tradition, Lutheranism must become more Thomistic. MacIntyre is at least partially correct, then, when he notes:

Take away or reject the Aristotelianism in the Thomist account, but leave the despair of moral achievement and the gratuitousness of grace, and what is foreshadowed is Luther. What an adequately corrected Aristotelianism provides for Aquinas, which is notably absent in Luther and in his ideological heirs, is an opportunity for showing how the understanding of prudence, justice, temperateness, and courage in the light afforded by charity, hope, and faith, and more especially charity, which is the form of all the virtues, furnishes a richly detailed account of the moral life.¹⁸¹

The notion of grace as pardon abstracted from grace as power renders deprives Lutheran theology of the kind of conceptual depth needed to articulate the place of morality within the Christian life. In a word, abstracting pardon from empowerment leaves Lutheranism morally inarticulate.

¹⁷⁹ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 69.

¹⁸⁰ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 68.

¹⁸¹ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 141.

Meilaender's work demonstrates how Lutheranism may be more Thomistic without abandoning its central commitment to justification by grace through faith. Even though a Lutheran ethic cannot decisively say that a 'particular deed makes the *simul* of faith impossible', this does not mean that moral actions are insignificant or that certain practices may not destroy faith.¹⁸² Rather, Meilaender wishes to say that the Christian moral vision can never fully see beyond the epistemological problem caused by sin, nor can it forget how the cross manifests a righteousness that is real even when it is, for a time, hidden. Certainly these notions of sin and righteousness problematise the Lutheran's ability to pass moral judgement. But as Lutheran moral reflection is primarily concerned with vision rather than blame, patience in passing moral judgements will be seen as a necessary virtue in our moral formation.

Meilaender offers a noteworthy insight into this approach to ethics in his brief consideration of the biblical story of Elisha and Naaman. Naaman, a commander in the Syrian army, upon being healed by Elisha, committed himself to refrain from offering sacrifices to any god but the Lord. However this commitment created a moral quandary that forced Naaman to (apparently) back-pedal in his journey toward God. Naaman says to Elisha, 'But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also – when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this.' Elisha responds by absolving Naaman with the benediction, 'Go in peace.'¹⁸³ The prophet Elisha's advice to Naaman is an exemplary model of moral reflection in the service of soul-craft. Elisha's relaxing of ethical demands illustrates a care for souls that takes seriously the simultaneity of Naaman's identity as saint and sinner. It may also illustrate, in the judgement of *Veritatis Splendor*, how one damages the '*harmony between faith and life*.'¹⁸⁴ While the Pope's warning rightly acknowledges the risk involved in setting aside ethical demands, Meilaender asserts that 'the Lutheran, at least, should be willing to run some risks' in maintaining this tension between ethics and soul-craft. That this tension may be abused or confused is a risk worth taking in order to preserve the right to declare the absolution 'Go in peace.' For the Lutheran theologian, moral inarticulacy is not the worst thing that can happen. What is far more damaging is the

¹⁸² Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 82.

¹⁸³ 2 Kings 5: 18–19.

¹⁸⁴ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 62, quoting John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth*, # 26.

inability or unwillingness 'to *speak* the gospel to anyone whose self is deeply divided and who seeks God's promise of grace.'¹⁸⁵

Meilaender's emphasis on grace speaks to a pastoral concern raised by Fergus Kerr in his criticism of MacIntyre. Kerr argues that MacIntyre's view of tragedy as having its cause in human sin, error or ignorance leads to an inordinate ethical focus on affixing blame.¹⁸⁶ The problem is that there are tragic situations, such as with the fireman who experiences guilt because he was able to rescue only some of the people from a burning building, where blame must not be allowed to enter into the picture. Kerr states that this fireman

should not blame himself for the deaths of those left behind, whose lives he could have saved only if he had not rescued some of those whom he did. But, as everyone knows, this kind of guilt is often felt. That is one reason why counselling is offered to rescuers and suchlike in the aftermath of disasters. Whatever their personal religious beliefs, those who are called upon to offer counsel in such cases are surely doing their best to take the appearance of a 'moral' dimension out of what were in fact simply practical problems.¹⁸⁷

Though Meilaender and Kerr do not agree on many theological issues, on the problem of guilt and moral demands their views come together. Kerr's example shows why ethical reflection must be capable of something more than moral judgement. While Kerr tends to see the answer in abandoning the notion of the unity of the virtues, Meilaender maintains the unity of virtues while arguing that tragedy is a sign that this broken world cannot finally be fixed except by God's gracious intervention. The first task of ethics is not, therefore, to assign culpability but to be an aid to that kind of accountability that sees and says how we may live virtuously in a broken world.

Once the task of ethics is laid out in this way, hope is recognised as the central virtue. As such moral reflection, in Meilaender's view, is to teach us how to see the world *in spe* rather than *in re*.¹⁸⁸ Consider how hope shapes Meilaender's understanding of suffering at the end of life when he argues that the aim of Christian compassion is not to eliminate suffering, and certainly not to eliminate sufferers, but to 'maximize love and care'.¹⁸⁹ Once we lose hope in God's gracious intervention, we are vulnerable to the promethean temptation to alleviate suffering by any means,

¹⁸⁵ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 81 (my emphasis).

¹⁸⁶ Kerr, 'Moral Theology after MacIntyre', p. 39.

¹⁸⁷ Kerr, 'Moral Theology after MacIntyre', p. 44.

¹⁸⁸ Meilaender, 'Justification Through Faith', p. 81.

¹⁸⁹ *The Limits of Love*, p. 90.

including evil means.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, when all these measures fail, which eventually they must, the complete abandonment of hope is manifest in the conclusion that, at some point, suffering warrants the active elimination of the sufferer. The alternative is the hopeful recognition that our suffering, and our ethical reflection on this suffering, points us to a deliverance which is greater than that which can be achieved by means of any human performance.¹⁹¹ The aim of Lutheran ethical reflection, very simply put, is to think systematically about the significance of those human actions which have the power to *shape* the soul even as they lack the power to *save* it.

The success of Lutheran moral reflection, centred as it is in simultaneity, is *not* measured by its ability to yield crisp, clean moral judgements. Rather, Meilaender takes his cue from Augustine who saw moral reflection as an aid to making ‘sense of his world, to find in it what meaning he could, [and] to praise it wherever possible.’¹⁹² As for Augustine, and so also for contemporary Christians in a morally ambiguous time, this task requires that ethical reflection be shaped by the virtue of hope. Augustine’s theological vision allowed him to assert *in spe* that the secular efforts of mankind were not wholly in vain, even if they were, *in re*, coming to an *end*. This hope was centred in the belief that the story of Rome’s fall was not the whole story, but an episode in the greater story of God’s salvation. In this story, the Christian lives in the ‘constant swaying to and fro’ between two realities represented as two cities. This simultaneity allowed Augustine to consider truthfully the awful unfolding events of his time without finally succumbing to the cult of futility.¹⁹³

In response to MacIntyre’s claim that Lutheranism lacks the conceptual depth to offer a ‘richly detailed account of the moral life’,¹⁹⁴ I have argued that Meilaender’s ethic gainsays this charge while demonstrating the importance of the Lutheran understanding of justification for ethical reflection. In view of what I take to be the success of Meilaender’s ethic, I must now clarify my own view of MacIntyre’s importance. While I reject MacIntyre’s judgment that Lutheranism is, as a matter of philosophical necessity, incapable of sustaining a rational ethic, I do not think that, as a historical judgement of Lutheranism in practice, he is far wide of the mark. If the

¹⁹⁰ *The Limits of Love*, p. 91.

¹⁹¹ *The Limits of Love*, p. 92.

¹⁹² *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 33. Meilaender quoting Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 318.

¹⁹³ *Faith and Faithfulness*, pp. 33–34.

¹⁹⁴ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 141.

presence of the bureaucratic and therapeutic are signs of moral disorder, there are few modern American church bodies that escape indictment. In addition, the abiding presence of antinomianism within the Lutheran theological tradition further substantiates the judgement that Lutheranism suffers from its own discrete form of moral inarticulacy, a disorder that MacIntyre has rightly diagnosed. The remaining question is how Lutheranism might apply MacIntyre's critical and constructive moral philosophy to overcome this moral inarticulacy. I shall consider this question in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

LUTHERAN ETHICS AFTER MACINTYRE

1. Introduction

Meilaender's account of the Lutheran simultaneities answers MacIntyre's doubts about the possibility of a rational Lutheran ethic. Meilaender does this by demonstrating how these simultaneities are necessary to reconcile the notion of moral rationality with the radical implications of forgiveness and Christian freedom. I am now in position to move from the possibility of Lutheran ethics to a consideration of the necessity of Lutheran ethics. To a significant degree, the necessity of a Lutheran ethic is a particular expression of a more general conclusion regarding the necessity of ecclesial ethics. Brad Kallenberg, perhaps too abruptly though not inaccurately, speaks to this issue when he avers that Christian ethics has become necessary because secular ethics is unable to answer the 'why be moral' question: 'Utility is out. Kant is mistaken. Social contract is irrelevant. Reasons to be moral must be *Christian* reasons. Morality amounts to living the gospel faithfully.'¹ According to Kallenberg, Christian ethics is necessary because the church is perhaps the only institution capable of sustaining the kinds of counter-cultural communities and practices which can make a significant impact on the moral landscape of American culture.

To say that there is a cultural moral vacuum does not ensure that the church will be able to adequately fill this vacuum. Although the moral resources are present, Lutheran churches must contend with certain intramural and extramural moral disorders. According to the Lutheran theologian, Robert Benne, we must examine Lutheran ethics 'with some urgency because... Lutheranism as a living tradition is at risk.'² Particularly, Lutheranism is at risk because of its inability to transmit the

¹ Brad Kallenberg, 'Positioning MacIntyre within Christian Ethics', p. 61.

² Robert Benne, 'Lutheran Ethics: Perennial Themes and Contemporary Challenges', in eds. Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), p. 11.

tradition to new generations.³ The problem of inadequate moral formation is compounded by ambivalence about the place of moral formation in the theological task. As such, MacIntyre's critical and constructive moral philosophy is a necessary resource for Lutherans in thinking through our internal moral and intellectual disorders and in addressing the moral decline in culture. Benne argues that fulfilling this task depends on the church's ability to sustain the practices of moral formation. My argument unfolds in three parts.

First, in order to consider the moral challenges facing the church in postmodern times, I shall consider an essay by the late Yale law professor Arthur Leff, which is entitled, 'Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law.'⁴ Leff sets the stage for my discussion of the necessity of a Lutheran ethic by spelling out the troubling implications of Nietzschean philosophy in American culture. Second, I shall discuss an essay by the Lutheran theologian Reinhard Hütter, which maintains that once freedom is understood to have a positive shape, we can see how teleological *form* and moral *formation* are necessary elements of freedom.⁵ Third, I shall reflect on the consequences of grounding moral formation in the reading of scripture. In the first part of this section I discuss Richard Hays' recent book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation*, where he defines four tasks related to the use of scripture for moral formation. This account provides a theoretical framework for my reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan which aims to demonstrate how moral reflection in scripture depends on the imaginative transformation of auditors into narrative characters, and how this form of moral reflection is critical to the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel. We turn again to consider how the threat of nihilism necessitates a Lutheran ethic.

2. Nihilism and the Necessity of Lutheran Ethics

³ Benne, 'Lutheran Ethics', p. 12.

⁴ Arthur Allen Leff, 'Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law', *Duke Law Journal* 6 (1979), pp. 1229–1249.

⁵ Reinhard Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics: Christian Freedom and God's Commands', in eds. Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), pp. 31–54.

The contemporary church faces ethical challenges that would have been unimaginable to the Lutheran Reformers.⁶ One is struck by the radical difference between present ethical concerns and the past debates between Lutherans and Roman Catholics over natural law, the natural capability of fallen reason to comprehend reality, and the epistemological impact of sin. Then, the debate was waged over how much of the objective world, the universal law, or the will of God could be discovered apart from revelation. Now, as postmodernism presumes that objectivity, God, and universal laws are human inventions, contemporary ethical reflection has no room ‘for any conception of final ends, of ends to be discovered rather than decided upon or invented.’⁷

In the essay, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law,’ Arthur Leff spells out the moral and legal implications of this postmodern rejection of modern foundationalism and premodern theism.⁸ Phillip Johnson, a professor of law, avers that Leff’s essay, though virtually unknown outside the legal world, is one of the best descriptions of the postmodernist impasse.⁹ Leff argues that if morality is not divinely sanctioned, it lacks any moral or legal grounding. While Leff understands how this view might lead to a more brutish and violent world, he cannot see any plausible alternative.

I want to believe – and so do you – in a complete, transcendent, and immanent set of propositions about right and wrong, findable rules that authoritatively and unambiguously direct us how to live righteously. I also want to believe – and so do you – in no such thing, but rather that we are wholly free, not only to choose for ourselves what we ought to do, but to decide for ourselves, individually and as a species, what we ought to be. What we want, Heaven help us, is simultaneously to be perfectly ruled and perfectly free, that is, at the same time to discover the right and the good and to create it.¹⁰

Modernity is ambivalent about this rejection of objective moral standards. We want freedom. We also fear others’ freedom. This irresoluteness is reflected in Senator Joseph Biden’s interview of Clarence Thomas during Thomas’ Supreme Court confirmation hearing. Biden, concerned to nail down Thomas’ somewhat elusive understanding of natural law, tried to tease out his commitments by drawing a

⁶ For an assessment of the disturbing uniqueness of the present moral situation in the United States, from a Christian point of view, see Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), pp. 15–29. A similarly alarming assessment from the secular point of view is the late Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

⁷ *First Principles, Final Ends*, pp. 6–7.

⁸ Arthur Allen Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, *Duke Law Journal* 6 (1979), pp. 1229–1249.

⁹ Phillip E. Johnson, ‘Nihilism and the End of Law’, *First Things* 31 (March, 1993), pp. 19–25.

¹⁰ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1129.

distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ natural law. Summarising Biden’s distinction, Johnson states:

[G]ood natural law does not dictate a moral code to be imposed upon individuals; instead, it protects the right of individuals to make moral decisions free from dictation by either legislators or judges. Finally, good natural law is not a static set of ‘timeless truths’ but rather an evolving body of ideals that changes to permit government to adjust to new social challenges and new economic circumstances. In short, good natural law doesn’t prevent us from doing anything we really want to do.¹¹

Biden wishes to maintain a notion of natural law, which would be the foundation for inalienable rights, while refusing to grant objective moral authority to this natural law. Said another way, Biden wants a conventional foundation for inalienable rights, rather than a foundation of ‘timeless truths’, which would be open to the evolution of moral ideals. Though, according to Leff’s argument, this view is nonsense, it is the kind of nonsense that has certain purchase with the legal profession, and far reaching implications for those who do not have the money and influence to oversee the ‘evolution’ of moral ideals. When inalienable rights are merely the constructions of free human beings, the pressing question is which humans shall do the constructing?

Leff’s personal ambivalence about the freedom from objective moral law is also reflected in lawyers’ efforts to maintain metaphysical language even when they have rejected the notion of transcendent norms. This has led to a new species of emotivist legal writing that seeks to disguise the loss of the transcendent moral authority with the use of an empty metaphysical language.¹² While the loss of objectivity has its dark possibilities, it also produces ‘an exhilarated vertigo’. The rejection of transcendent moral limits is accompanied by ‘a simultaneous combination of an exultant “We’re free of God” and a despairing “Oh God, we’re free!”’¹³ We desire to be free of normative obligations. We simultaneously fear that lawlessness may be a less than promising prospect, especially if nihilism should become our *permanent* condition. Whatever else may be said about our present moral situation, Leff is certain that there cannot be a return to moral objectivity. Why is this? Human beings do not accept the authority of moral judgements unless they are convinced that these judgements are finally ‘immune from further criticism’; that they are ‘not created by

¹¹ Johnson, ‘Nihilism and the End of Law’, p. 19.

¹² Leff humorously characterises this trend as, ‘Anything you can do I can do meta.’ He attributes the phrase to Leon Lipson. Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1230.

¹³ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1233.

the finder' and that they cannot be 'changed...or even challenged.'¹⁴ We are willing to restrain the will to power when we are convinced that the moral law applies to everyone, that everyone plays by the same rules, and that everyone is under the same moral authority. Once we believe that moral judgements are 'mine', not in the sense that I own up to them but that I am their originator, they lack this kind of moral authority. The failure of moral authority is evident in the inability of our moral judgements to pass the test which Leff colloquially calls the 'grand sez who?' The plain language in pubs and schoolyards is a sign of moral disorder and that, being unable to rationally *resolve* differences, we turn to non-rational means to *end* these differences.

This modern dilemma is contrasted with other times when human beings accepted moral authority. For example, Leff notes that the command, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery', though not particularly well-liked or self-evidently good, was once accepted as morally authoritative. The command was authoritative only because it was thought to express the will of an authoritative Evaluator. The authority of the command did not depend on its intelligibility. Rather, the command's moral authority was evident in that unwilling agents would still conclude, 'I ought not because He said I ought not, and why He said that is none of my business.'¹⁵ While this kind of prohibition offends our Kantian sensibilities, it was still considered a sufficient reason to act against the internal proclivities of concupiscence. It was a command that expressed a morality that was 'God-based' and 'supernaturally constituted'. In this system, adultery was forbidden because it offends God's will and so is 'naturally' bad.¹⁶

Leff explores the relationship between the 'natural' and the will of God by introducing into the discussion the linguistic function of the 'performative'. A performative is 'a statement that does not describe facts or conform to them but instead constitutes them, creates them, "performs" them.'¹⁷ To say, 'I am taking a walk' is a report. It describes what is taking place. To say 'I swear' or 'I do' reports nothing. These statements, rather, are performatives that reconstitute relationships. They are speech that changes the relationship of those involved in the saying and

¹⁴ Leff, 'Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law', p. 1230.

¹⁵ Leff, 'Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law', p. 1231.

¹⁶ Leff, 'Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law', p. 1231.

¹⁷ Leff, 'Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law', p. 1231.

hearing of the performative. We are assured that in jurisprudence, the performative is neither arcane nor magical. When we say 'I promise', in a very real way we initiate a new reality. Vows, contracts, and promises change the way people view and act toward one another. What happens, Leff wonders, when a performative is uttered by an 'omniscient, omnipotent, and infinitely good being' who has a relationship with all of reality? Reality itself is defined. The natural is spoken into being. When God says 'Let there be light', the word makes light a reality in a dark world. There is no gap between the natural reality of light and the judgement, 'it is good.' The natural and judgements about the natural are both the result of God's performative speech.¹⁸ God's speech, 'let there be' creates the natural 'is' from which we derive moral 'oughts'.

These moral judgements depend upon the existence of a transcendent, creating and speaking Being. However, Nietzsche's influence renders such discussions of a natural moral law superfluous. God is dead and the moral and legal consequence of this

death of God turns out not to have been just *His* funeral; it also seems to have effected the total elimination of any coherent, or even more-than-momentarily convincing, ethical or legal system dependent upon finally authoritative extrasystemic premises.¹⁹

The natural dies in the wake of the death of the supernatural. According to Judge Richard Posner, this means that any attempt to establish the natural foundation of law must fail.

Even the term 'natural law' is an anachronism. The majority of educated Americans believe that nature is the amoral scene of Darwinian struggle. Occasional attempts are made to derive social norms from nature so conceived, but they are not likely to succeed. It is true that a variety of widely accepted norms, including the keeping of certain promises, the abhorrence of unjustified killing of human beings, and perhaps even the sanctity of property rights, promote the adaptation of the human species to its environment. But so does genocide.²⁰

Apart from the divine, we cannot determine which aspects of our natural experience are normative. Who determines whether or not nature sanctions genocide, private property, or keeping marriage vows? After Nietzsche, the fundamental moral problem is to decide, 'who *ought* to have God's validating power.' The problem is that there are no objective criteria by which we may validate one moral or legal

¹⁸ Leff, 'Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law', p. 1232.

¹⁹ Leff, 'Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law', p. 1232.

²⁰ Johnson, 'Nihilism and the End of Law', pp. 20–21. (No bibliographical details are given.)

system based in human experience ‘without thereby necessarily validating *every* legal system.’²¹ This failure to validate any moral and legal system means that each individual is ‘his *own* ultimate evaluative authority.’²² The death of God means the apotheosis of each human being. We have all become, says Leff, moral *godlets*.

Although the *godlet* has become the foundational moral unit, Leff also argues that ethical solipsism is unacceptable. Now we must determine which *godlet* or community of *godlets* determines normative morality. One precedent is found in the pantheon of ancient Babylon, where conflict between gods is resolved by the ‘big Gods’ eating the little ones.²³ This ‘whoever–wins–is–God’ option is neither plausible nor palatable.²⁴ Leff wonders if there is any alternative as he states:

If monad *A* believes *X*, and monad *B* believes *Y*, it is central to the system that there is *no* criterion for choosing between *X* and *Y*. The moment one suggests a criterion, then individual men have ceased to be the measure of all things, and something else – and that necessarily means someone else – has been promoted to the (formally impossible) position of evaluator–in–chief.²⁵

And, as MacIntyre reminds us, once choices are no longer subject to rational moral criteria, ‘There is no appeal beyond the realities of power.’²⁶ Leff further unpacks the implications of this reduction of morality to power.

The reason that the ‘grand sez who’ renders us inarticulate is that our moral and legal assertions are not based on ‘*an unchallenged evaluative system*.’²⁷ Leff then points out just how loquacious this inarticulacy can be:

We can *say* that a valid legal system must have some minimum process for rational determination and operation. We can *say* that the majority cannot consistently disadvantage any minority. We can *say* that whatever else the majority can do, it cannot systematically prevent a minority from seeking to become a majority. We can *say* all sorts of things, but what we cannot say is why one *say* is better than any other, unless we state some standard by which it definably is. To put it as bluntly as possible, if we go to find what law ought to govern us, and if what we find is not an authoritative Holy Writ, but just ourselves, just people, making that law, how can we be governed by what we have found?²⁸

The human mind is quite capable of constructing a variety of ethical and legal systems that support imperatives, duties, and moral commands. Some examples include Robert Nozick’s foundation of individual rights, or Richard Posner’s fundamental

²¹ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1234.

²² Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1235.

²³ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1235.

²⁴ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1235.

²⁵ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1237.

²⁶ *Whose Justice?*, p. 66.

²⁷ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1240.

axiom that ‘no person may dominate any other’, or John Rawls’ imaginary original position.²⁹ It is not that we have become incapable of making declarative judgements. Some *declare* that reality is the neo-Marxist faith in ‘the blessed future when there will be only one class’.³⁰ Others *declare* that the will ‘of the people’ established by the Constitution or the latest poll creates inalienable rights.³¹ The problem remains that these declarations have no any moral authority to withstand the ‘sez who?’ of its rivals.

By what authority, we might ask, are rights asserted and duties commanded?

Phillip Johnson recognises the problem this question presents as he writes:

If we give X a right to do as she wants, and she wants to get an abortion, we must soon face the question of protecting her from Y, who wants to protect the rights of the unborn children. If majority opinion in the legislature favors some restrictions upon abortion, and there is no specific language in the Constitution on the subject, then ‘pro-choice’ forces have to invoke something very much like a natural law duty to get their way. ‘Thou shalt not interfere with a woman’s right to choose abortion; indeed, thou must help to pay for abortion through tax money; more than that, thou shalt not legislate that the woman contemplating abortion must be fully informed about the potential adoptive parents who desperately want to provide a loving home for her unborn child.’ Sez who?³²

No moral or nonmoral assertion can be rationally defended. As Leff surveys the catastrophic political events of this past century, he expresses a sense of urgency about our moral inarticulacy:

All I can say is this: it looks as if we are all we have. Given what we know about ourselves, and each other, this is an extraordinarily unappetizing prospect; looking around the world, it appears that if all men are brothers, the ruling model is Cain and Abel. Neither reason, nor love, nor even terror seems to have worked to make us ‘good,’ and worse than that, there is no reason why anything should. Only if ethics were something unspeakable by us could law be unnatural, and therefore unchallengeable. As things stand now, everything is up for grabs.

Nevertheless:

Napalming babies is bad.

Starving the poor is wicked.

Buying and selling each other is depraved.

Those who stood up and died resisting Hitler, Stalin, Amin, and Pol Pot – and General Custer too – have earned salvation.

Those who acquiesced deserved to be damned.

There is in the world such a thing as evil.

[All together now:] Sez who?

God help us.³³

²⁸ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1247.

²⁹ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, pp. 1242–1243.

³⁰ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1242.

³¹ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1247.

³² Johnson, ‘Nihilism and the End of Law’, p. 21.

³³ Leff, ‘Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law’, p. 1249.

Johnson is not put off by the rhetorical force of Leff's conclusion. While recognising Leff's 'brilliant skeptical analysis,' Johnson wonders why he considers no alternative to nihilism.³⁴ Why not, for instance, argue that the refusal to jettison metaphysical language and his own stirring condemnation of cruelty and complicity are linguistic signs of moral objectivity. Johnson states, 'If we know that totalitarian mass murder is evil, and that those who acquiesced in it deserve damnation, then we know something about the absolute evaluator as well.'³⁵ As Leff sees no premodern alternative to nihilism, he cannot entertain the possibility that the present nihilism may be transitional stage which leads back to the restoration of premodern notions of rationality. This possibility is considered by the Lutheran theologian, Robert Jenson, in his essay, 'How the World Lost its Story'. The essay's title reflects Jenson's view that postmodernity names a reality where the story of modernity is 'dying around us,' and there is no story to take its place. Hence postmodernism is 'an historical reality defined purely by negations.'³⁶ According to Jenson, Nietzsche has special insight into our situation in recognising that 'the nihilism in which Western civilization ends was to be at once a collapse into decadence and the fulfillment of an absolute freedom. There would at once appear the hollow 'last man' and the glorious 'superman.' The 'last man' is plainly on the scene, but superman is so far missing.'³⁷

The reality of nihilism as a transitional stage, Jenson argues, must shape the Christian church's understanding of its mission to world. The church must come to see that postmodernism is not a time without stories, but a time in which many stories contend to become the successor of the Enlightenment story and the dominant account of reality. The mission of the postmodern church is to enter this narrative *agon* and offer its peculiar account of reality. The church's task is to make 'dramatic sense' of the world.³⁸ Dramatic sense means that there is an external world 'out there' that exists apart from texts and readers. World events have a 'sequential dramatic coherence' quite apart from the observing, reading or hearing subject. This view of reality, having its origin in Jewish and Christian theology, is contrasted with the late modern world-view expressed in, inter alia, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Sartre's *Nausea*, or the music of John Cage. These works reflect two characteristics of the

³⁴ Johnson, 'Nihilism and the End of Law', p. 22.

³⁵ Johnson, 'Nihilism and the End of Law', p. 22.

³⁶ Robert Jenson, 'How the World Lost Its Story', *First Things* 36 (Oct., 1993), pp. 19–24.

³⁷ Jenson, 'How the World Lost Its Story', p. 19.

postmodern world. First, an accurate postmodernist account of life must be a collection of ultimately meaningless and episodic events and characters.³⁹ Second, any account of the world that has the coherence of a story is, by definition, inaccurate and inauthentic. It claims to be a story about the external world when, in fact, it is an account of the subjective perception of the author. Where premodern and postmodern world-views agree is that ‘If God does not invent the world’s story, then it has none, then the world has no narrative that is its own. If there is no God...there is no narratable world.’⁴⁰

How then is the church to carry out its mission to a world devoid of God and meaning? Jenson answers, ‘If the church does not *find* her hearers antecedently inhabiting a narratable world, then the church must herself *be* that world.’⁴¹ The church responds to inarticulacy by pointing to the narratable world in word and acts. The story is both told and enacted in the church’s liturgical and moral life. That the world is going somewhere rather than nowhere is reflected in the alternative calendar of the church year which discovers the trajectory of history in remembering the events of the life of Christ, and in the Eucharist which makes us participants in that life.⁴² In sharp contrast to the pessimism expressed by MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, Jenson thinks that nihilism may be a *felix culpa*, offering the church a new opportunity to present its story.⁴³ Seizing this opportunity, however, depends upon the church’s ability to adequately respond to the Dionysian counter-narrative. Nietzsche presents the opposition in this way:

Dionysus *versus* the ‘Crucified’: here you have the contrast. It is *not* a difference in regard to the martyrdom – but the latter has a different meaning. Life itself, Life’s eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, caused anguish, destruction, and the will to annihilation. In the other case, the suffering of the ‘Christ as the Innocent One’ stands as an objection against Life, it is a formula for its condemnation.... the problem concerns the meaning of suffering, whether a Christian or a tragic meaning be given to it.⁴⁴

³⁸ Jenson, ‘How the World Lost Its Story’, p. 20.

³⁹ Jenson, ‘How the World Lost Its Story’, pp. 20–21.

⁴⁰ Jenson, ‘How the World Lost Its Story’, p. 21.

⁴¹ Jenson, ‘How the World Lost Its Story’, p. 22.

⁴² Jenson, ‘How the World Lost Its Story’, pp. 22–23.

⁴³ For an extended consideration of Christianity as a force for the transvaluation of values see Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* (New York: Scribner, 1965), pp. 197ff.

⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of All Values*, Vol. 2, No. 1052, trans. Anthony M. Ludouici (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 421.

The question remains whether the world's story after nihilism will be expressed in the Eucharistic or the Dionysian celebration?

The church's ability to gainsay the Dionysian rival is closely related to the worship and moral life of the church. Jenson notes:

[T]he church's assemblies must again become occasions of *seeing*. We are told by Scripture that in the Kingdom this world's dimness of sight will be replaced by... 'beatific vision.' It is a right biblical insight that God first of all *speaks* and that our community with him and each other is first of all that we *hear* him and speak to him...in this age, the church must be a place where beatific vision is anticipated and trained.⁴⁵

In sharp contrast to a world that increasingly sees life as 'one damned event after another', the church's cultus is a response to MacIntyre's fundamental moral question, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'⁴⁶ When the church proclaims that its story makes dramatic sense of the world, it commits itself to being a place that trains others to anticipate and participate in this story. This participation is both liturgical and moral. The claim that participation in this story is liturgical *and* moral presents Lutheran ethics with its defining problematic that was partially defined in Leff's essay. In his view, as human beings wish to be 'simultaneously... perfectly ruled and perfectly free', and as these positions are mutually excluding, we must either choose form or freedom.⁴⁷ Contrary to this, Jenson argues that the church's story, which imposes a narrative form on human experience, is not only compatible with freedom, it is a story in which freedom is a central theme. In recognising the crucial importance of the question of form and freedom for Lutheran ethics, I shall now discuss Reinhard Hütter's argument that Lutheran ethics is capable of holding together the 'furious opposites' of form and freedom only by understanding these terms within a teleological framework.

3. Commands, Freedom and the Teleological Shape of Lutheran Ethics

A defining characteristic of Lutheranism is its argument over the relative importance or unimportance of good works. On the one hand, this debate may be a sign of a tradition in good order for, as MacIntyre states, 'A living tradition is an

⁴⁵ Jenson, 'How the World Lost Its Story', p. 24.

⁴⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 216.

⁴⁷ Leff, 'Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law', p. 1129.

historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.’⁴⁸ Vital traditions ‘embody continuities of conflict.’⁴⁹ On the other hand, this debate may be a sign of a tradition in disorder, a tradition whose debates prove to be interminable because they are rationally unresolvable. Hütter’s essay is an important contribution to the argument about good works for its insight into various aspects and influences of this debate and for the progress the essay makes toward defining the nature of a Lutheran ethic.

For Hütter, the troubling questions for Lutheran ethics are centred in how we reconcile the law as morally normative with the freedom of the gospel. However, Hütter argues, because Lutheranism suffers from a conceptual impoverishment which reduces freedom to the notion of ‘freedom from’, it cannot reconcile morality with the gospel. This impoverishment is the source of two very different problems. The first problem relates to the tendency in Protestant theology to define itself by its opposition to the Roman Catholic understanding of justification, which transforms ‘the doctrine of justification by faith alone...into the formal principle of Protestantism.’⁵⁰ Hütter wishes to maintain that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the central doctrine of the church, which ought to mean that it is ‘the very floor on which we stand’, rather than what it has become, namely ‘a ceiling that has to cover everything.’⁵¹ When every aspect of the theological task must directly relate to the article of justification, Lutheran ethics runs into difficulty by defining freedom as a ‘freedom from’. This view of freedom tends to suspect that a teleological ethical reflection and notions of moral formation threatens to undermine the Christian’s freedom *from* forms and laws.⁵²

The second reason why Lutherans tend to define freedom negatively as a ‘freedom from’ is the influence of the Kantian view of the self as autonomous.⁵³ Once freedom is understood to be synonymous with *autarky*, God’s law must be viewed as a heteronomous imposition from which agents must be liberated.⁵⁴ This view effectively shrinks the gospel down to the message that

⁴⁸ After *Virtue*, p. 222.

⁴⁹ After *Virtue*, p. 222.

⁵⁰ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 33. Hütter refers to Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961).

⁵¹ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 33.

⁵² Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 34.

⁵³ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 32.

we are radically and unavoidably accepted by God. The 'life of faith' that brings forth good works and is directed toward the neighbor's service is now inscribed into the logic of 'motivation' and 'effect.'⁵⁵

Moral reflection is now confined to the question of motive and what most matters is the disposition of the heart and the individual's conscience. This view of the gospel internalises and personalises ethics so that any thought of moral education, formation, communal obligation, and an authoritative narrative are viewed as external threats to the freedom of this gospel. The problem is that once morality is so internalised, it is on the same path that emotivism takes to moral inarticulacy. The threat is that Lutheran theology will undermine its moral foundation and so be unable to *rationaly* condemn evil or commend a positive moral vision.

In calling this focus on motive into question, I do not wish to suggest that the Lutheran concern to guard Christian freedom from legalism is misplaced. I shall rather argue that the unintended consequence of this reduction renders Lutheranism vulnerable to a theoretical and practical antinomianism which, in turn, gives occasion for a reactionary legalism to take hold.⁵⁶ The insidious problem with antinomianism is not that it consistently rejects any positive moral content but that this content is supplied either by someone's 'unexamined desires' or by 'personal political preferences'.⁵⁷ The problem is that, as MacIntyre's account of tradition makes clear, there are no historical communities that are ever free of moral content. Moral content will either reflect the explicit commitments of a tradition or the moral content will reflect unexamined and unaccountable preferences. Once ethics is sufficiently internalised and reduced to personal motive, the ecclesial community has no rational means to call into question the unexamined moral content, be it antinomian or legalistic. As the reduction of ethics to motive affects the Lutheran congregation in ways similar to the effect of emotivism in culture, it is not surprising that debates within these congregations are increasingly shrill.

Hütter's discussion of the Kantian influence on the Lutheran understanding of forensic justification strengthens my connection between the ethics of motive and emotivism. According to Hütter, Lutheranism's moral disorder originates in the strange mixture of theology and philosophy that defined freedom solely as the

⁵⁵ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 34.

⁵⁶ Paul Althaus offers a more developed discussion of this problem in, *The Divine Command: A New Perspective on Law and Gospel*, trans. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1966).

⁵⁷ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 36.

‘freedom from’ limits. This view transforms God’s law into the ‘archenemy of human freedom (*libertas*)’. The mixture of this erroneous understanding of forensic justification and Kantian autonomy rendered Lutheran theology inarticulate and unaccountable in providing a positive account of the shape of the Christian life. When justification is mixed with Kantian autonomy, freedom must be defined as ‘essentially without *gestalt*.’ There can be no positive teleological account of the Christian life because it would be nothing more than a ‘sophisticated form of works–righteousness’ that also contradicts ‘the self–legislative nature of human freedom.’⁵⁸ As such, there is no room for a morality that sees freedom defined as ‘practicing God’s commandments as a way of life.’⁵⁹

According to Benne, the crucial test of Lutheranism is whether its notion of ‘ecstatic’ motivation finally makes it impossible for the church, as a living tradition, to form the moral lives of its members.⁶⁰ The problem is that because Lutherans are ‘dazzled...by the wonder and profundity of God’s justifying grace in Christ,’ they ‘are tempted to think that the only really interesting ethical question is the motivational one.’⁶¹ However, the reduction of ethics to motive is to condemn it to moral inarticulacy. That is, we can never say to another that perhaps their motive is wrong and certainly the expression of this motive is wrong. Better stated, we can *say* just about anything, we just have no authority to say it openly. This means, according to MacIntyre, that Lutheran communities, once rendered incapable of moral order, will be ordered by coercive or manipulative means. The argument leads us to the paradoxical conclusion that preserving Christian freedom requires that we relegate moral order to the realm of the manipulative. This leads us to ask what has gone wrong?

Hütter locates the fundamental Lutheran error in ‘freedom from’ understanding which has its origin in three misreadings of Luther’s view of freedom:

A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
A Christian is perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.⁶²

⁵⁸ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 35.

⁵⁹ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 33.

⁶⁰ Benne, ‘Lutheran Ethics’, p. 28. Also see Martha Ellen Stortz, ‘Practicing Christians: Prayer as Formation’, in eds. Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), pp. 55–73.

⁶¹ Benne, ‘Lutheran Ethics’, p. 27.

⁶² Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, p. 344.

Hütter argues that to read Luther rightly is to see a positive relationship between freedom and moral responsibility. This positive relationship is undermined in three ways: 1) The antinomian error abstracts the first proposition from the second so that freedom is unhinged from the limits of responsibility. As such normative divine commands are viewed as incompatible with the antinomian version of freedom. 2) The dogmatic/legalistic error abstracts the second proposition from the first so that obedience is no longer the embodied free expression of the gospel and more a rigid conformity to a clear, categorical, and heteronomous command. 3) The third misreading dichotomises the inner, non-corporeal, spiritual life from the 'outer' political and economic life.⁶³ This error places an unbridgeable gulf between the spiritual kingdom of the gospel and the earthly kingdom of law so that the application of God's commands to the Christian's life is rejected as confusing the two kingdoms.

Each of these misreadings of freedom effectively renders God's law irrelevant for the Christian life. This leads to the ironic conclusion that the same doctrine that predicates utter dependence of sinners on God's action is also the license for independence from God. God's justification, Hütter observes, justifies living as if God does not exist:

What has happened? Instead of Luther's 'happy exchange' between the person's sin and Christ's righteousness, during the last two hundred years there has been quite an 'unhappy exchange' between God and the self-sufficient subject. God is no longer the defining horizon of the human good, the end of all things, and present in our conscience. The eschatological horizon of a life with God, God's utter proximity, the utter closeness of God's commandments, slowly but increasingly have turned into a mode of life according to the methodological procedure of modern science: *etsi Deus non daretur*, as if God did not exist. Thus the thinking and judging individual subject has become the central focus in theories of ethics and in the practical ways people go about their lives.⁶⁴

Hütter's sources for the amelioration of these conceptual errors are Barth's theology and recent papal encyclicals. For Barth, as the mortally wounded self who is utterly dependent on Christ, *autarky* cannot be synonymous with Christian freedom. Persons trapped in the sinful condition do not need to be left alone: they need the intervention of the God who alone is free.⁶⁵ Freedom depends on God's intervention and rescue. Freedom is defined, first and foremost, as a positive restoration of the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship to others. Furthermore,

⁶³ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 41.

⁶⁴ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 37.

⁶⁵ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 39.

understood as a relationship with a ‘thou’ rather than an ‘it’, freedom cannot be reduced to the static mathematical point of justification. As noted earlier, this justification is the foundation of Lutheran theology, not the ceiling. When freedom is understood relationally, Hütter notes that it is not surprising that ‘God’s commandments reemerge as a theme in close connection with Christian freedom.’⁶⁶

Hütter also recognises certain correctives in the papal encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*.

The importance of this encyclical for Protestantism in general and Lutheranism in particular is that it could awaken our ethical reflections from their theological and conceptual slumber caused by the canonization of Enlightenment convictions in the center of our moral matrix.⁶⁷

Once more, Lutheranism has conceived of the self as ‘shriveled down’ to a ‘punctual’ mathematical point. The Thomistic view of the self is one who is developing along the ‘way’.⁶⁸ The moral self is on a journey that moves from disorder to the realisation of its potentiality. Understood in this way, it is not at all problematic to speak of a life that is enabled by virtue and encumbered by vice.

Clearly, Hütter’s moral vision is very much like Meilaender’s view of the Christian life as a journey. For Meilaender, the journey metaphor teaches us not to settle on a moral theory that neglects moral experience, but one that does not

forget that theologians remain pilgrims. They may (and must) affirm the truth about reality revealed in Christ: that even the will of God that calls for our sanctification is a gracious will. They may (and must) affirm the truth of our experience within simple history: that, while we can believe even the demanding God to be unequivocally gracious, we cannot fully experience him as such. The desire for absolute conceptual consistency within the whole theological task – the desire to surmount the tension between these two pictures – must therefore be labeled as Gnostic. It is an attempt to leap beyond the boundaries of the Christian story and out of history before God brings that story to its close.⁶⁹

Moral *formation* is an unintelligible term without a positive *form*. In Luther’s theology, this form is defined by the *telos* of a life directed toward God and toward the created good. Given the positive shape of the Christian life, freedom is understood as the movement of the human toward that good who is God. Moreover, as there are better and worse ways to use our freedom in the journey toward God, we

⁶⁶ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 39.

⁶⁷ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 32.

⁶⁸ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 39.

⁶⁹ *The Limits of Love*, p. 146, n. 3.

need the law as ‘an *external* principle of action that gives shape and form to this freedom by directing it toward both God and created goods.’⁷⁰

Luther finds no incompatibility between freedom and a positive form of life as he observes:

We should think of the works of a Christian who is justified and saved by faith because of the pure and free mercy of God, just as we would think of the works which Adam and Eve did in Paradise, and all their children would have done if they had not sinned... The works of a believer are like this. Through his faith he has been restored to Paradise and created anew, has no need of works that he may become righteous; but that he may not be idle and may provide for and keep his body, he must do such works freely only to please God.⁷¹

Salvation is the partial but real restoration of prelapsarian reality. The reality of salvation admits a notion of freedom as the positive form of life that is ‘proper to that state of being.’⁷² In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther argues that the Christian life is centred in reverence to the Creator and delight in the creation:

And so when Adam had been created in such a way that he was, as it were, intoxicated with rejoicing toward God and was delighted also with all the other creatures, there is now created a new tree for the distinguishing of good and evil, so that Adam might have a definite way to express his worship and reverence toward God. After everything had been entrusted to him to make use of it according to this will, whether he wished to do so for necessity or for pleasure, God finally demands from Adam that at this tree of the knowledge of good and evil he demonstrate his reverence and obedience toward God and that he maintain this practice, as it were, of worshipping God by not eating anything from it.⁷³

Prelapsarian peace with God is embodied in the forms of worship and obedience. Obedience is not incompatible with intoxicating delight. There is a seamless connection between reverence and revelry. Both are modes of free participation in a reality that is made known through positive and prohibitive commands. ‘Do not eat of the fruit’ and ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ are commands that demarcate reality from its opposite. After the fall, these commands take on an alien function of accusing us of our inordinate love of the unreal. However, this alien function does not preclude the possibility that after the fall, the commands that once *called* reality into existence, may now *recall* us to the real that has been ‘submerged and forgotten under the

⁷⁰ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 32 (my emphasis).

⁷¹ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 42, quoting Luther, ‘The Freedom of the Christian’, in ed. Harold J. Grimm and trans. W.A. Lambert, *Luther’s Works* Vol. 31 (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 360.

⁷² Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 42.

⁷³ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 42, quoting Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1–5*, in ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther’s Works* Vol. 1 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 1.

conditions of sin.’⁷⁴ The commands do not merely condemn. They remain mnemonic signs of a paradise lost.

How then do we explain our post-lapsarian condition? David Yeago admits that sin has wrought a radical change. However, it is crucial to note that the change is not in the commands but in the one to whom these commands are directed. Everything depends upon the identity of the one to whom these commands are directed.

The commandment is not given to Adam so that he might *become* a lover of God by keeping it; Adam already *is* a lover of God, ‘drunk with joy towards God,’ by virtue of his creation in the image of God, by the grace of original righteousness. The commandment is given, rather, in order to allow Adam’s love for God to take form in a historically concrete way of life...in the *cultus Dei*, the concrete social practice of worship...that one who understands the law spiritually remembers that all God’s commandments presuppose a subject deified by grace, a human being who is drunk with joy toward God and rejoices in all God’s creatures. This is, after all, precisely what Jesus teaches: the law and the prophets hang on the double commandment of love, the commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.⁷⁵

Justification means that the object of God’s commands is the deified self in Christ. This self is no longer turned in on itself. It is turned toward God in reverence and toward the neighbour in love. This turning cannot but take a positive form in human action. The command to love God and the neighbour is a sign of a self that is free from being turned in on itself, and so, is capable of hearing the commands of God as a ‘living and spiritual flame.’ These commands are ‘not teaching but living, not word but reality, not sign but fulfillment.’⁷⁶ It is not law but *torah*.⁷⁷ The once curved in and now converted self is capable of delighting in the word and worship of God. For Luther, the new reality is expressed when the Psalter joins worship with expressions of delight in God’s commands:

For Luther a decisive outcome of the eschatological fulfillment of faith in Christ is the *dilectio legis*, the delight in the law, ‘where the law is not anymore law’ (WA 50, 565, 18f). For this reason Ps. 119 with its rich and mixed use of ‘law,’

⁷⁴ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 50.

⁷⁵ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 43, quoting David Yeago, ‘Martin Luther on Grace, Law, and Moral Life: Prolegomena to an Ecumenical Discussion of *Veritatis Splendor*’, *The Thomist* 62 (1998), p. 180.

⁷⁶ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 44.

⁷⁷ Discussing the third or ‘pedagogical’ use of the law, Hütter states that ‘it is crucial to distinguish between “law” on the one hand and “commandment,” “mandate,” “torah” on the other hand. Due to the condition of sin, “law” in both its first and second use has an enforcing, restraining, and convicting character. This is not inherent in God’s law but is the result of the radical human estrangement from God. As the *gestalt* of the way of life with God – the embodiment of genuine humane freedom – the enforcing, restraining, and convicting elements are lost.’ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 182 n. 16.

'commandment' 'mandate,' and 'torah' remained for Luther the center of the Psalter.⁷⁸

Hütter still must attempt to reconcile his positive view of God's command with the accusing function of the law (*lex semper accusat*). The law's capacity to accuse is not proper to the law. It is due to the abnormality of the subject's separation from God. So long as there is alienation from God, there is accusation by the law. Again, so long as the identity of the Christian is *simul justus et peccator*, the law must always exercise the accusing function. Yeago states:

What happens after sin comes on the scene is simply that this subject presupposed by the commandment is no longer there; the commandment no longer finds an Adam living an 'entirely divine life,' 'drunk with joy towards God,' but rather an Adam who has withdrawn from God, who believes the devil's lies about God and therefore flees and avoids God. It is precisely the anomaly of this situation that causes the commandment to become, in Luther's terms, 'a different law' (*alia lex*).⁷⁹

The tension of the *simul* must be maintained. We must be able to assert that the law *always* accuses while recognising that the law does not *only* accuse.⁸⁰ The law always accuses because the struggle between the spirit and the flesh will not be resolved until the Eschaton. Because the law does not only accuse, we may take delight in its positive function.

The law functions positively in outlining the *form* of the free life and in directing the *formation* of the self towards ever increasing participation in the free life. As the subject of the divine command is a divided self, the positive function of the command is easily stated and terribly difficult to practice. The law that demands the impossible reformation of the sinful self also directs and forms us in the image of Jesus, the 'joy of man's desiring.' It is this latter positive function of the law which has been overshadowed by the accusing function of the law. This is most evident in the laity's assumption that after the baptism of children, communion or marriage, one does not expect to be treated as an initiate or apprentice in a positive form of life. The assumption is that the efficacy and completeness of sacramental grace means that no further formation need follow from the sacrament. The efficacy of the sacrament of God's presence is a license to be left alone. To be left alone is not liberation, but it is to be bereft of the necessary resources for moral and spiritual progress.

⁷⁸ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 186, n. 44.

⁷⁹ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 43.

⁸⁰ Hütter mentions the importance of maintaining a distinction between the positive function of commands over against the condemning function of law. Private Conversation, December 3, 1998.

Hütter's alternative is to develop the relationship of discipline to the positive shape of a life ordered to freedom. His strategy is to situate the passions within the Christian life as Luther did in describing the Christian life as a kind of intoxication with God. However, not every desire leads to God. Hence we must be capable of distinguishing between these desires whose end is God and those which merely imitate the divine. *Cupiditas* is a capable mimic of *caritas*. For this reason, we need the commands of God to discern what seems good from what is truly good. These commands direct desire away from enslaving passion toward passionate participation in Christian freedom.⁸¹ Hütter notes that Augustine clearly understood that for desires to be rescued as goods, they had to be redirected back toward God.⁸² Though deified desires are not good, the desires of the deified are potentially very good. This means that desires must not become idols or they will lead to demonic frustration.⁸³ However, like Eve, our desire to eat of the forbidden fruit blinds us to seeing the command of God as a safeguard of our freedom and a guide into ever-increasing participation in freedom.

Hütter examines covetousness as a desire that finally subverts our freedom because it leads to frustration rather than flourishing. The frustration of covetousness is variously expressed as the futile attempt to purchase the whole world at the cost of one's soul, placing eternal hope in goods that are too easily spoiled by moth, thieves or rust, or imagining that one is capable of serving two masters. Knowledge of this frustration does not, of course, arrest human covetousness. Covetousness is easy to denounce in others and difficult to detect in oneself. We face an epistemological difficulty in distinguishing between desires that merely seem to participate in the good of freedom from those that truly participate in this good. In order to participate in this life, we must be trained to distinguish rightly ordered from disordered passions *and* we must be capable of appreciating the good of rightly-ordered passions. This

Below, I consider a work by Paul Althaus where he attempts, with limited success, to make this distinction.

⁸¹ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 47.

⁸² Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 47.

⁸³ Luther's definition of a god distinguishes true faith from idolatry. He writes that 'A god is that to which we look for all good in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe Him with our whole heart. As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.' Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), p. 365.

requires an appropriate discipline. Hütter defines this discipline according to the analogy of *askesis*.

Without desire we would cease to be human; without God as desire's ultimate end, we become inhumane. Therefore Christian freedom has to be understood as true *askesis* or chastity; to let all our desires be ordered by and fulfilled in the communion with God that begins in grasping Christ in faith. Instead of being governed by the unsatiability of our desires seeking fulfillment in finite goods, we become free to desire our ultimate good. In communion with God we receive the finite goods of creation that we also desire.⁸⁴

Askesis is essential to freedom because it is the means by which unruly desire is ruled and directed. Said another way, if we hope to live in a right relationship to the created goods, we must be capable of *not* coveting. Hence the Christian needs to *know* why one need not covet. Luther states:

For if the heart looks for divine favor and relies upon it, how is it possible that a man should be greedy and worry? He must be sure beyond a doubt that God cares for him; therefore he does not cling to money; he uses it also with cheerful liberality for the benefit of his neighbor, and knows well that he will have enough, however much he may give away. For his God, whom he trusts, will not lie to him nor forsake him, as it is written, Psalm xxxvii: 'I have been young, and now am old; never have I seen a believing man, who trusts God, that is a righteous man, forsaken, or his child begging bread.' Therefore the Apostle calls no other sin idolatry except covetousness, because this sin shows most plainly that it does not trust God for anything, expects more good from its money than from God; and, as has been said, it is by such confidence that God is truly honored or dishonored.⁸⁵

Covetousness is prohibited so that one may enjoy a life free from worry. The corollary of being free from worry is that we are now free *for* generosity toward others. The command does not ensure that gratitude toward God will be concretely embodied in generosity to others, nor does it specify how this gratitude and generosity shall be concretely embodied. There are large areas of freedom yet to be discerned. The work of the command, Hütter states, is to provide 'inward "training" in God's commandments, starting from the Decalogue and moving toward the Sermon on the Mount, in order to shape the way a person's intentionality gives *gestalt* to Christian freedom.'⁸⁶

Askesis is the disciplined participation in the life of gratitude and generosity whose causal antecedent is forensic justification. How then does moral discipline become a threat to forensic justification? The need for the language of discipline

⁸⁴ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 47.

⁸⁵ Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, in ed. James Atkinson and trans. W.A. Lambert, *Luther's Works* Vol. 44 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 108.

⁸⁶ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 50.

readily admits the language of human agency. We are to discipline inordinate desire and to live the life of worship and witness. Forensic justification, contrariwise, is based in divine agency and human passivity. By sustaining this tension between divine and human action, Lutheran ethics becomes capable of appreciating the good in good works without neglecting the very real dangers of these works. Luther states:

For the greatest of all questions has been raised, the question of Good Works; in which is practised immeasurably more trickery and deception than in anything else, and in which the simpleminded man is so easily misled that our Lord Christ has commanded us to watch carefully for the sheep's clothings under which the wolves hide themselves. Neither silver, gold, precious stones, nor any rare thing has such manifold alloys and flaws as have good works, which ought to have a single simple goodness, and without it are mere color, show and deceit.⁸⁷

Good works are easily put to bad uses. Good works have great potential for abuse. For this reason, John Webster argues that Luther attempted to articulate a discretely Christian grammar of 'doing'. This means that theological ethics must be

characterized by a distinct manner of thought and speech which occupies its own independent grounds and operates by its own procedures, which is generated by the divine utterance, which is responsible to the church as a world of meaning and to the texts which authoritatively define and describe that world of meaning, and which is not necessarily embraced by or even contiguous with other ways of speaking or habits of thought.⁸⁸

Webster cites a passage from the 1535 Galatians lectures where Luther states that a theological account of *doing* in faith is 'another sphere and a new realm... one that is different from moral doing.'⁸⁹ Luther was suspicious of morality; he was not, however, suspicious of God's commands. He states that 'we have to learn to recognise good works from the commandments of God, and not from the appearance, size, or number of the works themselves, nor from the opinion of men or human law or custom.'⁹⁰

We avoid the abuses of morality by recognising that the accent of the grammar of 'doing' falls first and foremost on God's 'doings'. In the analogy of grammar, human agency is an *enclitic* – a part of speech that has no intelligibility apart from its grammatical antecedent.⁹¹ Human action means nothing abstracted from divine action. Webster notes this referential dependence in Luther's understanding of conscience:

⁸⁷ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, p. 21.

⁸⁸ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, p. 157.

⁸⁹ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, p. 157, quoting Luther, *Lectures on Galatians – 1535*, p. 262.

⁹⁰ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, p. 158, quoting Luther, 'Treatise on Good Works', p. 294.

⁹¹ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, p. 164, citing Wilfried Joest, *Ontologie der Person bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967), pp. 233–274.

As with questions of spiritual predication, so with the matter of conscience: the magnetic centre of the moral world is not the self but God, and faith becomes correspondingly elevated as the orientation of the self to that centre... '[I]t is faith which confers on the conscience the ability correctly to judge, as God judges, persons before actions and actions in the light of persons. Or, perhaps more accurately, faith is the power of the conscience to accept God's judgements about the person rather than those which the conscience arrives at naturally, or by inference from actions.'⁹²

Luther's focus on divine agency deconstructs morality; it does not deny or reject morality. John Milbank considers this aspect of Luther's theology when he asks the question, 'Can morality be Christian?' His answer includes an insightful summary of Luther's understanding of human action as he writes:

For all that Luther fails to see that faith is from the outset received and enacted charity or a *habitus*, he nonetheless and in a remarkable fashion shows how every good work is itself nothing but faith or confidence. The confident man, believing in plenitude does not steal, and does not need to tell lies to protect himself... The Christian good man is simply for Luther an artist of being, trusting the perfect maker of all things. Essentially his message is that of Augustine: without worship there can be no other virtue (*Civitas Dei* xix, 4,21) for worship gives everything back up to God, hangs on to nothing and so disallows any finite accumulation which will always engender conflict. Confident worship also knows that in offering it receives back, so here the temporal world is not denied, but its temporality is restored as gift and thereby rendered eternal. Only the vision and hope of heaven makes us socially and politically just on earth and how is it, one wonders, that we have ever come to think otherwise?⁹³

Human works are not to be the frightful, grasping response to scarcity but the embodied participation in the plenitude of grace. This is why participation in this reality is so often summarised as expressions of gratitude toward God and generosity toward others. The good, whether given or received, is always a gift and so, ought never be represented as an achievement or calculated as earned merit. To those who would wrongly conclude that such a notion of gift renders action unimportant, Luther whimsically notes, 'But some say: "Yes, rely upon that, take no thought, and see whether a roasted chicken will fly into your mouth!" I do not say that a man shall not labor and seek a living; but he shall not worry, not be greedy, not despair, thinking that he will not have enough.'⁹⁴

Luther does not provide a theory of human action. His concern is to rather cultivate a habit of seeing human action in the light of grace. The reality of grace means that our understanding of the good in human action will be ambiguous. It is

⁹² Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, p. 166, citing M.G. Baylor, *Action and Person. Conscience in Late Scholasticism and the Young Luther* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), p. 228.

⁹³ John Milbank, 'Can Morality Be Christian?' *Studies in Christian Ethics* 8 (1995), pp. 58–59.

not that human action is rendered unimportant. It is that grace makes it impossible to calculate the importance of human action. This inability to calculate the good of good works is essential if we are to sustain rightly the tension between God's work and human good works. Meilaender notes how Lewis Hyde's exploration of the sense of interdependence manifested in certain tribal gift exchanges captures this tension:

Gift exchanges – in which the gift is received and given again, though not returned to the original giver – illustrate 'circular' rather than simply 'reciprocal' giving. '[W]hen the gift moves in a circle no one ever receives it from the same person he gives it to... it is as if the gift goes around a corner before it comes back. I have to give blindly.' In doing this I may seem insufficiently attentive to my own fulfillment... But in the providence of God 'the gift... moves toward the empty place... Our generosity may leave us empty, but our emptiness then pulls gently at the whole until the thing in motion returns to fill us again.'⁹⁵

Seeing the reality of grace comes only by participation in the mystery of sacrifice and generosity. We cannot *know* grace if we refuse to act towards God and towards others as if this grace is real. Meilaender further explains the relationship of the active life lived to grace in stating:

However often life may present us with the necessity of choosing between our own good and that of another, we should not deny that the self's good comes from attention to others and may rightly be sought there. For this is how God cares for us. 'The courtesy of the Emperor has absolutely decreed that no man can paddle his own canoe and every man can paddle his fellows...' Thus, in practice it may be almost impossible to specify where joy in someone else's good begins and desire for our own good stops... This is, in fact the very rhythm of the divine life, a rhythm we are called to learn, a rhythm God has enacted also in our history: 'He saved others; himself he cannot save.'⁹⁶

We come to see the reality of grace by participation in the reality of grace. 'The wise man,' Dietrich Bonhoeffer states, 'is the one who sees reality as it is, and who sees into the depths of things. That is why only that man is wise who sees reality in God.'⁹⁷ Training the sight does not mean looking 'somewhere out beyond reality in the realm of ideas. It lies in the midst of history.'⁹⁸ Historical beings are body and soul, whose training in seeing reality comes by the formation of thoughts, words and deeds. This is what it means to be historical.

⁹⁴ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, p. 108.

⁹⁵ Meilaender, *Faith and Faithfulness*, pp. 56–57, quoting Lewis Hyde, 'Some Food We Could Not Eat: Gift Exchange and the Imagination', *The Kenyon Review* 1 (Fall, 1979), pp. 45 & 53.

⁹⁶ Meilaender, *Faith and Faithfulness*, p. 57, quoting C.S. Lewis, *Arthurian Torso* (London: Oxford, 1948), p. 123.

⁹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 68.

⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 69.

Milbank asks ‘how is it... that we have ever come to think otherwise?’ We think otherwise because we are confused about the grammar of doing. Turned in on ourselves, and away from God and the neighbour, the self cannot see rightly when it is the subject or the object of action. This confusion is most evident not in vice, but in the ethical theories which focus on self-preservation or self-achievement as the highest human good. Inordinate attention to human works (both vicious and virtuous) displaces the centrality of faith in the agency of God. Hütter notes that Luther’s ethic of freedom ‘points us toward a “decentered self” that understands itself as essentially gifted and its freedom as inherently relational. This decentered self is shaped by a way of life whose end is “good works” and whose shape is explicit in God’s commandments.’⁹⁹ Luther states:

A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in His love.¹⁰⁰

The decentred self, is now ‘free from’ being turned in on itself, and is free to understand rightly the grammar of doing right.

The fundamental focus of the grammar of doing is on the indicative rather than the imperative. Ethics is first and foremost concerned with descriptions of what is vertically and horizontally real, and so, it must be capable of articulating categorically true statements about the will of God and what I owe to my neighbour. Hütter states that the first question of Christian ethics is not ‘What ought I now to do?’ but ‘What does the world really look like?’ Description of the world is ‘everything’. ‘In describing a “situation”’, Hütter writes, ‘the morally decisive choices and moves are already made.’¹⁰¹ The commands describe reality before they demand particular action. They are truthful signs of the meaning of a God- and grace-centred reality. The accent on the indicative is embodied in an ethic that is focused

first and foremost on God’s future for and with us, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the everlasting enjoyment of the triune God. Second, it hinges on God’s past for and with us, the creation of the contingent world we know, God’s election of Israel, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, God incarnate in human flesh. Third, Christian life hinges on God’s presence with and for us, in God’s word proclaimed, in baptism and Holy Communion, in the ongoing presence of Israel and in the tangible body of Christ, the church, and in God’s ongoing and sustaining care for God’s creation and all of God’s creatures, human

⁹⁹ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, p. 371.

¹⁰¹ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 46.

and nonhuman. Three times God, and each time irreplaceably constitutive of the Christian life.¹⁰²

What place does the imperative play in this grammar of doing? The commands are signs of a life of freedom that invite the participation of one who is ‘graciously addressed by God’s commandments.’¹⁰³ These commands do indeed circumscribe ‘essential moral notions like dishonoring one’s indebtedness, unjust killing (that is, murdering), stealing, lying, coveting what is not one’s own, and most fundamentally, failing to acknowledge the very source of our being as creatures.’¹⁰⁴ They identify evil acts in order to keep these acts from swelling into destructive practices. The commands are ‘short-hand reminders’ of the shape, form and beauty of the Christian life. They define the trajectory under which the Christian, as an ‘artist of being,’ is able continually to ‘re(dis)cover’ his or her freedom.¹⁰⁵ Freedom *from* the accusation of the law admits a positive appreciation and praise *for* the law. Hence Luther did not think it inconsistent to advise his students to read, meditate, and scrutinise Psalm 119 in order to learn how one may praise God for his commands.

If a Lutheran ethic is to respond to the crisis of moral inarticulacy, it must be capable of reconciling freedom and moral formation. One of the defining debates of Lutheran moral theology is to steer a path between the Scylla of freedom as antinomian license and the Charybdis of legalism and dogmatism. The ongoing task for Lutheran theology is to articulate a third way between the antinomian and dogmatic disorders. In the following section I argue that the success of this task depends upon the right use of scripture in moral formation.¹⁰⁶

4. Scripture and Moral Formation

Is Lutheranism a cause of or cure for moral inarticulacy? The answer depends upon whether the Lutheran understanding of the gospel is compatible with the practices of moral formation. According to David Yeago, this question forces Lutheranism to reconsider its construal of the relationships of law to gospel as an

¹⁰² Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 37.

¹⁰³ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 53.

¹⁰⁴ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 50.

¹⁰⁵ Hütter, ‘The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics’, p. 51.

¹⁰⁶ For a thoughtful, though inconclusive discussion by the Lutheran essayists in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* regarding the function of scripture in Lutheran ethics see, ‘The Role of Scripture in Lutheran Ethics’, in eds. Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), pp. 161–168.

unmitigated antagonism. In the attempt to escape the law's cruel demands, Lutheran theology has made it difficult to find a place for moral reflection and formation within the theological task. Yeago outlines the theological problem in this way:

[T]he law oppresses because it proposes a determinate ordering of our existence and calls for a specified response, and it follows that the gospel liberates because it delivers from determinate order and specific response. The law/gospel distinction thus conceived, at whose heart is an antagonism, or at least an irresolvable tension, of form and freedom, of order and authenticity. Form and order impose despair or promote self-righteousness; salvation is liberation from form and order and the law's cruel demand for them...If the law/gospel distinction is a final antithesis, then *any* commandment, *any* call for one ordering of life rather than another, will by definition be the law from which the gospel frees us.¹⁰⁷

Under this description, the gospel promotes a theoretical and practical antinomianism that finally must reject practices of moral formation.

Paul Althaus takes up the challenge of the law's opposition to the gospel by arguing for a distinction between God's law and God's command. In defining this distinction, he argues that the grammatical mood appropriate to the law is the imperative while the indicative is appropriate to the notion of command. Ethics descends, then, from the indicative rather than the imperative. This distinction allows Althaus to speak of obedience as compatible with freedom because obedience is defined as the embodiment of the Christian's desire to participate in the new reality of the gospel. Obedience remains *necessary* though 'this necessity is thereby characterized as a necessity of the "is," not of "ought."' ¹⁰⁸ Insofar as we live in the ideal realm of the indicative, the moral life does not require threats and fear. Rather, the Christian simply needs to know or be reminded of what is.

Althaus' claim that the imperative has no place within a Lutheran ethic while admitting commands is problematic as he does not explain how commands cease to have imperatival force. What he does argue is, imperatives are unnecessary because the indicative leads the Christian to act 'in such and such a manner; he can do no other.'¹⁰⁹ However, as Christians remain simultaneously righteous and sinners, they often fail to do or desire that which is consistent with the indicatives in scripture's story. By considering an analogous circumstance, it will be evident why the indicative ought not carry the whole linguistic weight of our moral reflection.

¹⁰⁷ David S. Yeago, 'Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology: Reflections on the Costs of a Construal', *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (1993), pp. 41–42.

¹⁰⁸ Althaus, *The Divine Command*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁹ Althaus, *The Divine Command*, p. 38.

Christian parents do not confront grave theological difficulties when addressing their baptised children with imperatives. In fact, the relationship of parent to child makes it *imperative* that they address their children with imperatives. It would seem foolish, if not scandalous, to suggest that a parent ought not do so. If the imperative does not undermine the gospel in the community of the family, why should we conclude that it necessarily subverts freedom in the ecclesial community?

I raise this concern about the imperative not in to order solve the problem but to note that this weakness is not fatal to Althaus' argument. His distinction between command and law rightly calls into question the dependence of ethics upon imperatives. It also accents the importance of the freedom of the gospel as a crucial theme for Lutheran moral reflection. While the accent on the freedom of the gospel creates a certain tension within Lutheran ethics, Althaus also points out how this version of the moral life rings true to the fragmented character of human experience:

The gospel is simultaneously and unalterably command; faith is immediately and unavoidably deed, behavior. Does this assertion lead us back under the law again? No! For under the gospel it is not the case that the Lord God demands works that are pure and whole and, if we cannot achieve them...proceeds to damn us. Rather, we live – with our partial, fragmentary, sin – stained actions – under God's protection and forgiveness, for the sake of Christ. Under the law, everything must be whole and unstained. Under the gospel, God freely reckons our meager obedience and works as whole and pure on account of Jesus Christ and our abiding in him. What he asks of us is not integrity and totality of the new life, but our readiness for it; he wants our action, paltry and fragmentary as it may be, as a sign that we are really serious, that we really want to live by and in his love. Thus the very same deed of a Christian that requires God's forgiveness on account of its fragmentary and sinful character is at the same time a work of an enactment of faith, and, as such, life in salvation.¹¹⁰

The logic of the gospel limits the importance of morality; it does not eliminate it from the theological task. Althaus' downplaying of integrity and totality (except as a future hope) is not a rejection of ethics; it acknowledges the historical reality of the uneven and fragmentary character of our moral experience. We need neither hide this failure of integrity nor allow it to drive us to despair for the moral life is finally the free participation in Christ's cruciform life.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Althaus, *The Divine Command*, p. 31.

¹¹¹ As Bonhoeffer contrasts biblical ethics with the ethics of Kant, he criticises Kant for his fanatical search for ethical purity and universality which is the 'quest for the superman, the endeavour to outgrow the man within the man, the pursuit of the heroic, the cult of the demigod.' For Kant, formation is more concerned with the use of power in the 'forming of a world by means of plans and programmes.' Contrariwise, Christian ethics understands formation to be 'concerned only with the one form which has overcome the world, the form of Jesus Christ. Formation can only come for this form.' Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, pp. 80–81.

The Lutheran suspicion of ethics is ironic once the question of moral formation is seen in the broader discussion of form and freedom. Yeago observes that even as Lutheran theology tends toward antinomianism, it sustains passionate debates over issues in dogmatic theology. If dogmatic form limits and shapes belief without being accused of undermining the gospel's freedom, then moral form should also be able to limit and shape behaviour without incurring the accusation of undermining this freedom:

A dogma is, after all, a rule; it is precisely a call for a particular ordering of thought and language, for a determinate reflective response to the love of God... Within a horizon structured by the absolute antithesis of law and gospel, of form and freedom, dogma must be suspect simply as such, as a form of that oppression and bondage from which the gospel liberates us.¹¹²

Where there is a form there must also be practices of conformation. Even the notion of the freedom of the gospel cannot but be articulated in dogmatic forms to which belief is to conform. Presumably, then, this conformation of belief does not undermine the very dogma of Christian freedom being articulated in dogmatics. If conforming belief does not subvert the freedom of the gospel, then neither should conforming behaviour.

Supporting this assertion can be done in rather short compass by pointing out the moral forms and conformation already functioning in the church. MacIntyre asserts that moral form is already present in a community because of the nature of grammar, the implications of narrative, and the in a community's according of canonical status to a text. First, consider the form of grammar. I noted above that MacIntyre refers to Nietzsche's insight into the relationship of grammar to belief in God: 'I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar.'¹¹³ MacIntyre comments on this passage, noting:

What Nietzsche meant by belief in grammar was belief that the structure of language somehow mirrors and presupposes belief in an order of things, in virtue of which one mode of conceptualizing reality can be more adequate to that reality than another.¹¹⁴

Accepting that there is a right and wrong way of linguistically conceptualising reality is a step on a slippery slope that leads to the notion of a meaningful universe and the existence of God. Language is loaded. For Nietzsche at least, to use language is to be

¹¹² Yeago, 'Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology', p. 43.

¹¹³ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 98.

¹¹⁴ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 98.

committed to a meaningful universe. The structure of language reflects the form of the universe and presumes that beings who live in this universe must conform to this form.

Second, if narrative theory is as MacIntyre says it is, the Lutheran commitment to *sola Scriptura* is necessarily a moral commitment. The Bible is a unified story that runs through the events of creation, fall, exodus, redemption, and the Eschaton. This form imposes a meaning on the raw material of human experience so that Christians can claim to make narrative sense of the world. The popular novelist, Madeleine L'Engle, although writing about the genre of fantasy, notes how such stories function at the moral level:

the moral level is what the story has to say. It is *impossible* for the writer of fantasy to say nothing...the impulse behind the writing of fantasy is usually an attempt on the part of the writer to express something, a particular personal concern.¹¹⁵

If it is impossible for a fantasy story to say nothing at the moral level, the same may be said of the story of what God is doing in the world. It is thus a distortion of scripture when Lutheran hermeneutics and homiletics neglect the moral sense of this story.

Third, the corollary of a community's recognition of a canonical text is that it commits itself to the formation of readers. Writing about education in general, MacIntyre states:

An educated community can exist only where there is some large degree of shared background beliefs and attitudes, informed by the widespread reading of a common body of texts, texts which are accorded a canonical status within that community.¹¹⁶

In MacIntyre's account of Augustinian moral inquiry, the formation of readers is both intellectual and moral. In order to read texts rightly, one needs to become 'a different kind of person – and thus a different kind of reader.' The formation of readers *requires* certain practices, authorities and teachers who reorder and transform the self by the inculcation of 'certain attitudes and dispositions, certain virtues.'¹¹⁷ Well-formed readers are capable of reading texts accurately and imaginatively so that they could know with accuracy what is going on and may imaginatively participate in the life of the text. MacIntyre states that

¹¹⁵ Madeleine L'Engle, Forward to Paul F. Ford, *Companion to Narnia: A Complete Guide to the Enchanting World of C.S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia* (San Francisco: Harper, 1980), pp. xii–xiii (my emphasis).

¹¹⁶ MacIntyre, 'The Idea of an Educated Public', p. 19.

¹¹⁷ *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 82–83.

the reader in his or her own life enacts and reenacts that of which he or she reads in Scripture; the enacted narrative of a single life is made intelligible within the framework of the dramatic history of which Scripture speaks. So the reading of texts is part of the history of which the same texts speak. The reader thus discovers him or herself inside the scriptures.¹¹⁸

Learning to read involves informing the intellect and forming the character. Moral formation is not merely analogous to how we teach reading. In teaching reading, we are *already* participating in a formative moral practice. Since Lutheran communities already practice the formation of readers, it is essential that Lutherans pay critical attention to the moral function of scripture.

In *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Richard Hays presents a systematic consideration of the moral function of scripture. The primary focus of scripture, as the title of Hays' book indicates, is the shaping of moral vision. Unlike overly critical studies of scripture, Hays presumes that Christian ethics begins with the canonical authority of scripture. Christian ethics does not require a formal apologetic for scripture, but rather begins with the claim that the New Testament authorises a concrete shape of the Christian's and the church's life.¹¹⁹ Hence scripture is not one among many sources or classics.¹²⁰ Rather, 'the Bible's perspective is privileged' over experience, reason or tradition and therefore is the final authority that establishes the norms of the Christian life.¹²¹ Hays states that 'the canonical Scriptures constitute the *norma normans* for the church's life, whereas other sources of moral reflection (church tradition, philosophical reasoning, scientific investigation, or religious experience) are authoritative *qua norma normata*.¹²² The Bible is not a norm however, because it is a repository of 'timeless truths' or a system of 'preordained propositions.'¹²³ Rather, the Bible's claim is that it declares that the story of God's action in creation, the incarnation of Jesus, and the eschatological dénouement is a truthful account of what is going on in the world.

¹¹⁸ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 83.

¹¹⁹ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 10.

¹²⁰ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, pp. 296–297.

¹²¹ This section, entitled, 'How Shall We Use the Texts?' (pp. 291–312), follows upon a critical discussion of the use of scripture in the theologies of Barth, Yoder, Hauerwas, Schussler-Fiorenza and Reinhold Niebuhr. This section attempts to distil these various approaches to scripture in order to show how each author uses scripture to advance 'normative proposals about the most faithful and fruitful approaches to shaping a Christian ethic in response to the New Testament's witness.' *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 291.

¹²² Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 12.

¹²³ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 300.

In Hays' Methodist hermeneutical tradition, reading scripture for its moral vision is unproblematic. The same cannot be said of Lutheran hermeneutics. Alister McGrath explains that this problem goes back to the hermeneutical problems that arose with medieval theology's fourfold interpretative scheme known as the *Quadrigena*, which included the *literal*, *allegorical*, *tropological* or moral, and the *anagogical* sense.¹²⁴ McGrath points out in his discussion that Luther criticised this scheme because the literal sense was being overshadowed by the other three senses which Thomas combined into the spiritual sense.¹²⁵ McGrath is careful to point out that this criticism did not lead to the conclusion that the literal meaning of scripture must exclude the other modes of interpretation. Luther writes, 'In the Scriptures no allegory, tropology, or anagogy is valid unless that same truth is explicitly stated literally somewhere else. Otherwise, Scripture would become a laughing matter.' To reduce everything to the literal would be a way of killing scripture. McGrath notes that in Luther's reading of the Old Testament, he made the distinction between the "killing letter" (*littera occidens*) or the 'crudely literal or historical reading of the Old Testament – and "the life-giving spirit" (*spiritus vivificans*)...which is sensitive to its spiritual nuances and prophetic overtones.' The literal meaning has precedence. Yet this must not turn into a letter that kills the life-giving spiritual interpretation.

Accepting a place for the moral function of scripture, Hays identifies four discrete though overlapping tasks that make up the moral reading of scripture. These are 1) the *descriptive* task, which aims at reading the 'individual witnesses closely'. 2) the *synthetic* task, which aims at finding the common elements in the discrete witnesses. 3) the *hermeneutical* task, which aims at bringing the text 'to bear upon our own situation'. 4) the *pragmatic* task, which spells out how the truth of scripture

¹²⁴ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) pp. 207–208, quoting Martin Luther. (No further bibliographical details are given.)

¹²⁵ For Aquinas, the spiritual interpretation included the allegorical, moral and anagogical. After recognising the objection that the multiple senses of scripture 'produce confusion and deception and destroy all force of argument', he defines each division by their function stating, 'Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it... Therefore, so far as the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law, there is the allegorical sense; so far as the things done in Christ, or so far as the things which signify Christ, are types of what we ought to do, there is the moral sense. But so far as they signify what relates to eternal glory, there is the anagogical sense.' 'Whether in Holy Scripture a word may have several senses?' Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Question 1, Article 10, trans. New Advent Inc. (1996) Online. Internet. Available. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/100110.htm>.

is to be embodied in the church's moral practices.¹²⁶ Given the limits of this chapter, I shall only give a cursory account of each of these tasks.

The descriptive task in reading scripture is fundamentally exegetical. Here the reader of scripture must be disciplined so as not to be too eager to harmonise scripture or extract from texts only that which is immediately relevant for teaching.¹²⁷ The descriptive task aims to read biblical texts for their distinctive themes and discrete patterns of reasoning. For example, Paul's ethic is concerned to articulate life in fellowship with Christ's suffering. The Gospel of Mark describes the meaning of taking up Christ's cross; Matthew, the meaning of the Christ's kingdom; Luke, the power of the Spirit; and John, love as caring for others and (especially in Revelation) resisting evil.

Description is necessary because the commands of scripture are tersely stated conclusions that come at the end of a 'developmental history of the moral teaching traditions within the canon'. Commands are unintelligible until they are connected to the 'thick descriptions' of the New Testament communities' moral practices and ethos.¹²⁸ The descriptive task is particularly critical for an ethic that claims its imperatives are derived from indicatives. This mirrors Hütter's observations that once an adequate description of a situation is stated, 'the morally decisive choices and moves are already made.'¹²⁹

To attribute such moral weight to the descriptive task requires the decisive rejection of the '*no ought from is*' argument. To rob description of its moral force, argues MacIntyre, reflects an impoverished moral culture which has lost 'the notion of essential human purpose or function.'¹³⁰ The alternative is to reclaim the ability to speak of the essential function of 'man' in ways similar to speaking of the essential function of a clock or a farmer so that it becomes possible to say what a morally good or bad man is in ways analogous to our judgements of good and bad clocks or farmers. The claim of the descriptive operation is that, because the church is capable

¹²⁶ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 462.

¹²⁷ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 3.

¹²⁸ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Hütter, 'The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics', p. 46.

¹³⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 59. See also L. Gregory Jones, 'Learning to Describe', in *Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 20–72.

of saying *what is*, it is able to say *what ought to be*, and what path moves from the present circumstances ‘toward a man’s true end.’¹³¹

The synthetic task looks for ‘some coherence’ and harmony among the discrete New Testament witnesses. Hays admits that it remains an open question among scholars whether it is ‘possible to describe a unity of ethical perspective within the diversity of the canon.’ He contrasts his position with Wayne Meeks’ view that the ideological diversity of the New Testament means that it is irreducible to any single coherent scheme. Hays argues that Meeks’ thesis, if it is correct, requires that ethicists give up speaking of a normative New Testament ethic, and come to recognise that the task of ethics is only to describe ‘the ethos and practices of the individual communities represented by the New Testament documents.’¹³² While Hays is critical of Meeks, he also recognises that those who have attempted to reduce the Bible to, for example, the principle of love or political liberation have relied upon ‘exegetical distortion of the texts’ and ‘forced harmonization of the New Testament’s diverse perspectives.’¹³³ The alternative to facile continuity and radical diversity is found in the three focal images of community, cross, and new creation.¹³⁴ Consider a brief description of these *foci*.

‘*The church*,’ says Hays, ‘*is a countercultural community of discipleship, and this community is the primary addressee of God’s imperatives.*’¹³⁵ As scripture speaks to those who are members of Christ’s body the church, it speaks to persons already in relationship with God and others in the sacramental community. This conformity resists the world by ordering its life together by means of the renewal of the mind rather than by coercive or manipulative means.¹³⁶

¹³¹ *After Virtue*, p. 53.

¹³² Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 4. Hays refers to Wayne Meeks, ‘A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment’, *Harvard Theological Review* 97 (1986), pp. 176–186.

¹³³ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 190.

¹³⁴ Hays supports his assertion with a reference to David Kelsey, who states that ‘at the root of a theological position there is an imaginative act in which the theologian tries to catch up in a single metaphorical judgment the full complexity of God’s presence in, through, and over-against the activities comprising the church’s common life and which, in turn, both provides the *discrimen* against which the theology criticizes the church’s current form of speech and life, and determines the peculiar “shape” of the “position.”’ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 194, quoting David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1975), p. 163.

¹³⁵ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 196. Cf. Romans 12:1–2.

¹³⁶ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 196.

The second image of the cross has less to do with a particular theory of atonement and more to do with the example of self-giving love.¹³⁷ The cross is an icon of the kind of disciplined life which is to be imitated. ‘To be Jesus’ disciple,’ Hays states, ‘is to obey his call to bear the cross, thus to be like him.’¹³⁸ At first blush, an ethic of the cross has little in common with the ethics of *eudaimonia*. Yet this is not a necessary opposition because the cross is also a participation in the *koinonia* of Christ’s suffering (Phil. 3:10). And as the writer of Hebrews states, a sacrifice that is freely offered is not incompatible with joy.¹³⁹ In view of this free and joyful sacrifice, the paradigmatic embodiment of the cruciform community is Paul’s patriarchal conception of marriage. Marriage in the New Testament is to be a concrete manifestation of the counter-cultural community. As such, headship cannot be synonymous with domination or violence. It is rather a community of sacrifice that stands as sign against those who sustain communal peace by means of scapegoats and false sacrifice.¹⁴⁰ Hence where Scriptural passages cluster around the image of the cross, they aim to cultivate the sacrificial form of life that makes one fit to enjoy the bonds of marriage and the ecclesial community.

Eschatology, Hays’ third focus, is the way that theology thinks about the teleological end of Christian ethics. According to Hays, this end must not be understood as mere potentiality but as a proleptic hope which the church *now* actively participates in:

Thus, the New Testament’s eschatology creates a critical framework that pronounces judgment upon our complacency as well as upon our presumptuous despair. As often as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the Lord’s *death...until he comes*. Within the anomalous hope-filled interval, all the New Testament writers work out their understandings of God’s will for the community.¹⁴¹

Hope claims to know somehow the outcome of history without claiming to know how and when this happy dénouement is to take place. The ‘now and not yet’ character of the new creation is the foundation of the church’s aim to be a community that is simultaneously sacrificial *and* hopeful – marked by death and the promise of life. The

¹³⁷ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 197.

¹³⁸ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 197.

¹³⁹ Hays states, ‘The prevailing vision of the moral life in Hebrews...is characterized not so much by love as by patient endurance, holding fast the confession, following the example of Jesus’ suffering obedience (Heb. 5:7–10, 12:1–2). *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 201.

¹⁴⁰ For an excellent consideration of the moral and theological problems of sacrifice see J. Bottum, ‘Girard Among the Girardians’, *First Things* 61 (March, 1996), pp. 42–45.

¹⁴¹ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 198.

themes of community, cross and the Eschaton draw together the diverse New Testament witnesses making possible the synthetic task.

The third task of reading scripture is the hermeneutical, where the reader applies particular texts to the present situation. Hays argues that the hermeneutical task must attend to the four different ways that the New Testament addresses moral issues. There are rules, principles, paradigms and a symbolic world. Although these categories are not altogether clear, (for example, one cannot be sure where rules end and principles begin), the discussion of the relationship of paradigms to principles and rules is enlightening. Paradigms are imaginative stories where narrative characters model praiseworthy or blameworthy conduct. The parable of the Good Samaritan offers paradigmatic examples of good and bad ways to respond to the question, ‘who is my neighbour?’ The parable shifts moral reflection from moral rules and principles to identification with the perspectives of the narrative characters. Once the auditor is confronted with the question of who the neighbour is, the parable imaginatively moves the auditor from aloof inquirer to a character within the story.¹⁴²

The introduction of imagination would seem to undermine Hays’ claim that scripture serves as the moral norm of the church. Imagination seems to accept the contemporary notion that reduces the meaning of a text to the particular reader’s response. Hays’ notion of imagination fundamentally rejects this kind of intellectual solipsism. Imagination is how we come to see that, in the reading of scripture within the ecclesial community, we are actually carrying on, what Hauerwas calls a ‘conversation with one another and God...across generations,¹⁴³ and participating in what Chesterton somewhere calls ‘the democracy of the dead.’ The function of imagination is to set the Christian and the community ‘*within the world articulated by the texts.*’¹⁴⁴ This focus on imagination fits well with how Barth understood his theological task as placing ‘himself and his readers in “the strange new world within the Bible.”’¹⁴⁵ Once readers of scripture discover themselves within the world of the

¹⁴² Hays cites a lecture in which Oliver O’Donovan remarked that ‘interpreters who think that they can determine the proper ethical application of the Bible solely through more sophisticated exegesis are like people who believe that they can fly if only they flap their arms hard enough.’ *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 210, quoting Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁴ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 237, quoting Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), pp. 28–50. (Hays’ pagination.)

Bible, they are moved from being only hearers of the word to being participants in the world of the Bible.

The fourth, pragmatic, task aims ‘to produce persons and communities whose character is commensurate with Jesus Christ and thereby pleasing to God.’¹⁴⁶ This definition of the pragmatic task invites agreement and criticism. On the one hand, I take it to be a positive turn in ethics from the isolated self to the self in community and as an inheritor of a tradition. As such, I agree with Hays that the ethical task is to form persons and communities ‘whose character is commensurate with Jesus Christ.’ On the other hand, that this formation makes one ‘pleasing to God’ is problematic. Lutheran ethics does not address persons who are potentially at peace with God, and whose ‘lived obedience’ somehow establishes this peace. In his criticism of this aspect of Hays’ project, Meilaender warns against turning Jesus into a moral exemplar, because it fails to see that Jesus’ role as saviour is unique and different from the call to imitate his pattern of life.¹⁴⁷ Hays comes close to advocating the dangerous view that righteousness is authentic only when it is obvious. Using Meilaender’s distinction, introduced in the last chapter, Hays’ pragmatic task aims at a righteousness that is *in re* rather than *in spe*. There seems to be little possibility of a righteousness that remains hidden beneath the scandal of the cross or a moral integrity that simultaneously righteous and sinful beings may hope for but never, in this life, attain.¹⁴⁸ The problem is that the pragmatic mode collapses the distance between the Christian’s identity and actions. In MacIntyre’s terms, it makes the goods of excellence subservient to the goods of effectiveness, which tends to displace the ethics of character, which depends upon a commitment to the good, with an ethic of calculation which is committed to good results. While I think that Hays’ understanding of the pragmatic task is potentially dangerous, these criticisms should not be read as a wholesale rejection of the pragmatic mode. Indeed, the Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten points out that Lutheranism’s failure to attend to the

¹⁴⁶ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁷ Gilbert Meilaender, ‘The Moral Vision of the New Testament’, review of Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, *First Things* 78 (Dec., 1997), pp. 61–64.

¹⁴⁸ Hays is certainly aware of the distance that Lutheranism puts between one’s actions and one’s identity. However he concludes that the notion of the *simul justus et peccator* leads us to ‘underestimate the transformative power of God’s grace and obscure a major emphasis in Paul’s moral vision.’ *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 44.

pragmatic task has left a moral vacuum in the life of Lutherans which is too readily filled by rival understandings of morality.¹⁴⁹

Though this discussion of Hays' four modes of reading scripture at the moral level is admittedly incomplete, it serves as a theoretical framework for the performance of a reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan. As might be anticipated from previous discussions, my reading of the parable operates primarily within the descriptive task. My intent is to show how the parable, which is initiated by the pragmatic question regarding the limits of one's love to the neighbour, moves the inquirer from being a hearer of the story to a participant in the story.

5. Teaching Goodness

To those not familiar with the Lutheran problematic, my struggle to offer a Lutheran moral interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan must seem strange indeed. One anticipates the response: 'Of course the parable is a moral tale, how could it be read otherwise?' In response to this view, I shall argue that the parable is not, first and foremost, a moral tale, and for this reason it is most useful for Christian moral reflection. Defending this view requires that I take a rather circuitous hermeneutical path through the twists and turns in the story of the Good Samaritan.

In a passing reference to the parable, Meilaender asserts that Christian ethicists ought to begin their inquiry at the lawyer's side, also seeking to press Jesus to be clear about the limits of one's moral obligation in loving the neighbour. Merely pointing out that Jesus never *directly* answers the lawyer's questions ought not to lead us to conclude that Jesus rejects ethical inquiry. Yet no less a light than Karl Barth seems to support such a dismissive attitude when he writes 'When the serpent promised Adam and Eve that they would become as God, what he had in mind... was the establishment of ethics.'¹⁵⁰ Ethics is the instrument by which sinners stake out their autarky especially from God, but also from the neighbour. It is the way we 'studiously' avoid

¹⁴⁹ Carl Braaten states that when we do not think through the moral implications of our theological commitments, the functional morality of the Christian will reflect some form of 'occasionalism, actualism, and situationism.' Carl Braaten, 'Natural Law in Theology and Ethics', in eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *The Two Cities of God: The Church's Responsibility for the Earthly City* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 55.

¹⁵⁰ Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1993), p. 7, quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II Part 2, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 448.

any kind of 'commitment to the good' be it directed vertically or horizontally.¹⁵¹ The role of ethics is to justify self-will while 'cloaking' selfishness in 'religious language.'¹⁵² The aim of ethics is to domesticate God's call and elevate man's self-protecting judgement. Nigel Biggar summarises Barth's criticism of ethics as he writes:

[S]o far as God's will is identified in an ethical system with a particular 'basic view', with a fundamental idea or principle, it is brought under human control. This is because such a principle will invariably be general and will therefore require specification in particular cases, with the result that through interpretation and application it will in practice be surrendered to private human judgement. In such a casuistic system Barth reckons that, at best, the human will is obliged by the general principle; but at worst we pour 'the dictates and pronouncements of our own self-will into the empty container of a formal moral concept...justifying our own will in the concrete situation.'¹⁵³

Barth's criticism of ethics deconstructs the *real* agenda behind the lawyer's inquiry. Ethics is one of the ways the self attempts to protect itself from others. Even so, Meilaender asserts that we cannot press our ethical inquiry until we take our place 'at the lawyer's side.' Ethics *begins* with the practical need to get Jesus to articulate the limits of our moral obligations.¹⁵⁴ Ethics *begins* by asking, 'Who is my neighbour?' *and* 'What do I owe him?' If Christian ethics has practical application, we must spell out the meaning and limits of one's moral duty.¹⁵⁵ Ethical reflection *begins* with the realisation that one cannot do everything *and* one ought not do nothing. Between everything and nothing historically situated and limited beings must deliberate and determine what they will and will not do.

This is where Christian ethics *begins*. It is not its *end*. Though the parable was initiated by a question which disguised the lawyer's fear of sacrifice, it ends with the command to 'go and do likewise.' The question is how we move from such an unpromising start to the conclusion where it now becomes plausible for the lawyer to accept the invitation to imitate the Samaritan's goodness? This transformation is effected by the moral function of the parable. That is, the parable removed the lawyer

¹⁵¹ Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits*, pp. 10–14. Of course, Barth does not merely raise doubts about the importance and effectiveness of ethics. Like Luther, he grants that ethics has a modest though necessary role in the theological task.

¹⁵² Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, pp. 236–237.

¹⁵³ Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits*, p. 9, quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, pp. 664–665.

¹⁵⁴ *The Limits of Love*, p. 33.

¹⁵⁵ McDonald states that the parable of the Good Samaritan, according to Jeremias, 'emphasised the historical realism of the debate about the limits of duty in relation to one's neighbour.' J.I.H. McDonald, 'The View From the Ditch – and Other Angles: Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996), p. 26.

from his legal paradigm and placed him within the paradigmatic narrative, giving him a perspective from which he could fruitfully follow through his moral inquiry. In this view, the parable is not a rejection of the lawyer's ethical inquiry, but a radical redirection of this inquiry. By making the lawyer a participant in the story, he came to see that there is no authentic generosity toward others that does not first spring from gratitude toward God.

According to recent scholarship, parables were a favourite instrument for altering points of view, because they have an imagination-facilitating function that subversively transforms auditors of the story into actors in the story. J.I.H. McDonald argues that the success of a parable in overcoming the 'resistance, rationalisation and self-deception' of the auditor is due to its ability to lift the auditor out of his or her 'real' universe into the imaginative universe of the story.¹⁵⁶ McDonald notes that parables 'are not illustrations, nor does their significance lie in some kind of intellectual distillation from the images they contain.' They are stories that are thrown alongside of (*parabole*) historical events and characters in such a way as to change the way in which these things are perceived. Moral perspectives are transformed once one accepts the indicatives of the story by entering into the logic of the story. This logic of the indicative follows a path to certain and surprising imperatives and condemnations.¹⁵⁷ The paradigm example of laying down 'the logic of the story' is Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb spoken to King David.¹⁵⁸

The *natural* flow from the indicative to the imperative depends upon the development of setting, character and plot. This development is successful when the gap between the *is* and the *ought* is narrowed and finally bridged. Nathan's successful subversion of David's self-deception depended on somehow getting the king to involve himself in the pathos of the parable. The brilliance of this strategy is that Nathan never moves beyond the indicative description of the indulgence of the wealthy man and the death of the pampered lamb. 'Tell the truth,' a poem by Emily Dickenson wisely advises, but 'tell it slant.' Nathan embodies this advice as he appears to be reporting an actual occurrence in the kingdom. However, the logic of the story slowly develops a discursive web that snares David by seducing him to react

¹⁵⁶ McDonald, 'The View From the Ditch', p. 23.

¹⁵⁷ McDonald, 'The View From the Ditch', p. 23.

¹⁵⁸ McDonald, 'The View From the Ditch', pp. 22-23, 36.

‘with furious outrage at a rich man’s contemptible crime against a poor one.’¹⁵⁹ his own condemnation.

David was not mistaken in presuming that the logic of the story required a moral judgement though he failed to see that it was he who was in the dock. This denial of reality was the latest instance of a string of denials. Though he was king, David remained safely in his palace rather than lead Israel into battle, (2 Sam. 11:1). His adultery denied his role as husband and denied Bathsheba her role as wife. Finally, David’s ruthless repayment of death for Uriah’s faithful service indicated the depth of his moral callousness as well as the hypocrisy of his condemnation of the rich poacher. Though this account treats David’s transformation as an unlikely occurrence, it nevertheless took place as the parable allowed David a vantage point from which to experience the full weight of the gravity of his actions.¹⁶⁰ Now able to judge his actions rightly, he willingly submits to the condemnation, ‘You are the man!’

The parable of the Good Samaritan functions in a similar way. The lawyer, like David, was incapable of right moral judgment until he had a right understanding of his identity. In the state of self-deception, his ethics aimed to limit his moral liabilities. In viewing goodness as a liability, he was incapable of rightly hearing the command to imitate the Samaritan and become a willing participant in this form of goodness. The lawyer needed to be transformed. He had to be moved from his fearful calculation and fixation on his liability to an ethic centred in the plenitude of grace. This transformation depended upon the lawyer being offered several *realistic* possibilities for dealing with the fearful scarcity and insecurity of life on the way.

The parable divides the human race into victims and non-victims, and then articulates three possible modes of participation in the non-victim class. The first possibility, represented by the thieves, is to avoid becoming victims by being the victimisers. Power is the glue of the community. Those who prey together stay together. We ought to take our lead from Augustine who did not treat lightly the unity among thieves. Garry Wills records that Augustine thought that ‘Even robber bands, if they function at all, have perverted good things at the basis of their power to

¹⁵⁹ David Gelernter, ‘David, Done Right’, review of Robert Atler, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Norton, 1999), *National Review* 51 (Sept., 1999), p. 60.

¹⁶⁰ David McCracken, *The Scandal of the Gospels: Jesus, Story, and Offense* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 137.

do bad—not only their God derived existence, but sufficient concord to act as a group, to share common risks and rewards, to endure on the basis of cooperation.’¹⁶¹

Moreover, Augustine saw in this co-operation an insight into the operations of unjust governments. Viewing Roman history as a catalogue of aggressive conquests he asks, ‘and what are governments but brigandage on a grand scale?’¹⁶² Clearly the robbers offer a plausible social structure for contending with the insecurity of life on the way.

The ‘clerics’ offer a more respectable response to this insecurity. Their answer to violence was a thinly-veiled indifference that, we are told, would not have surprised those who heard the story. These clerics, it seems, were known to be clever in their ability to escape moral obligation by playing one duty over against another duty. By *law* the clerics were forbidden to touch a corpse before the performance of their religious duties. On their way to discharge their official functions, they were now bound by *law* not to attend to the fallen victim. Luther, in sizing up the behaviour of the professionally religious, notes that this event

certainly must have happened on a Sabbath day, when they were going to worship and wanted a good excuse for letting the wounded man lie. They doubtless said: Ah, God preserve me from touching this man today; I must not make myself unclean now and I must not miss the service, and so on.¹⁶³

The clerics do more than embody an alternative response to insecurity. With their introduction, the story moves to its moral dénouement. Jeremias states, ‘According to the triadic form of popular stories...the audience would now have expected a third character, namely, after the priest and the Levite, an Israelite layman...What was fully unexpected and disconcerting was that the third character who fulfilled the duty of love, was a Samaritan.’¹⁶⁴

According to John Dominic Crossan, hermeneutical errors abound in the facile reading of the parable as a morality play. The Samaritan is not an example of charity or neighbourliness, a ‘damning indictment of social, racial, and religious superiority’, nor a call for radical involvement.¹⁶⁵ Crossan states that the point of the parable ‘is not that one should help the neighbor in need. In such an intention the naming of the

¹⁶¹ Wills, *Saint Augustine*, p. 117.

¹⁶² Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). p. 99, quoting Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk.19: Ch.14.

¹⁶³ Martin Luther, ‘Sermon at the Dedication of Torgau Castle’, in ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein, *Luther’s Works* 51 (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg, 1959), p. 340.

¹⁶⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke (New York: Scribner, 1963), p. 204.

¹⁶⁵ John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 57.

helper as a Samaritan before a Jewish audience would be unnecessary, distracting, and, in the final analysis, inimical and counterproductive.’¹⁶⁶ The aim of the parable is to call all moral judgements into question:

‘The whole thrust of the story demands that one say what cannot be said, what is a contradiction in terms: Good + Samaritan... the story demands that the hearer respond by saying the contradictory, the impossible, the unspeakable... But when good (clerics) and bad (Samaritan) become, respectively, bad and good, a world is being challenged and we are faced with polar reversal.’¹⁶⁷

Crossan effectively argues that the point of the parable is not to make of the Samaritan a moral example. However, once Crossan explains the parable in terms of irony, subversions and reversals, it is no longer useful for any kind of moral reflection. His conclusion that the parable breaks ‘abruptly into human consciousness’ and demands ‘the overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgements, and established conclusions’, subverts all moral judgements and lands us back into the slough of postmodern inarticulacy. We must consider an alternative interpretation.

Such an alternative is put forward by Richard Hays who argues that the parable creates a

‘dissonance of thought in order to restructure meaning relationships’... The world we know—or thought we knew—is reconfigured when we ‘read’ it in counterpoint with the New Testament. The hermeneutical task is to relocate our contemporary experience on the map of the New Testament’s story of Jesus. By telling a story that overturns our conventional ways of seeing the world, the New Testament provides the images and categories in light of which the life of our community... is reinterpreted.’¹⁶⁸

Unlike Crossan, Hays sees the parable subverting conventional morality in order to initiate us into the alternative morality of the Christian story. Subversion is the prologue to conversion. It is what we need in order to hear the command to ‘go and do likewise’ as a joyous corollary of the gospel. The intent of the parable is to first call into question conventional moral ideas in order to instruct us in the nature of the gospel and invite us to participate in that reality. This is done by the entrance of the Samaritan which was to the hearers of the time, as Jeremias notes, ‘disconcerting in the extreme.’¹⁶⁹ This character does not clarify the moral vision or lead to decisive

¹⁶⁶ Crossan, *In Parables*, p. 64.

¹⁶⁷ Crossan, *In Parables*, p. 64.

¹⁶⁸ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 302, quoting Steven J. Kraftchick’s, ‘A Necessary Detour: Paul’s Metaphorical Understanding of the Philippian Hymn’, *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 15 (1993), p. 15.

¹⁶⁹ Jeremias, *The Parables Of Jesus*, pp. 141 & 204. See also McDonald, ‘The View From the Ditch’, p. 26.

action so much as he confounds the hearers and entangles them in a story that excites their prejudices and incites their incredulity. The character of the Samaritan brings us to consider two closely related hermeneutical conclusions. The first, as McDonald points out, is that ‘ultimately, the parable is not simply about the Good Samaritan but the story of Jesus.’¹⁷⁰ The parable is not first and foremost about the imitation of Jesus but about the identity of Jesus. Jesus is the despised one who cares for the fallen victim.

The second follows from this in that, as Jesus occupies the role of Samaritan, the only vacant role in the story is that of victim. According to Andrew McKinnen,

the governing strategy of the story is to put the hearer in the place of the victim, to interpret the law from the place of the victim, to interpret the law as the perspective of the victim...the victim constitutes the perspective from which the tale is told, or rather from which it is to be heard and from which accordingly that law takes on meaning and reference.¹⁷¹

The intent of the parable is to situate the lawyer as victim and to observe the person and mission of Jesus from that perspective.¹⁷² Now situated as victim, he is able to ask what it means to be a neighbour to others. From the victim’s perspective, the fundamental question regarding neighbourliness is no longer concerned with limiting one’s liabilities against the claims and needs of others. The key question from the victim’s perspective is whether there is any reason to believe that he can count on others to care for him. As victim, he either lives by mercy or he does not live at all. Once situated as victim, the lawyer is in a position to appreciate the importance of mercy in a way that he could not see until he was the recipient of mercy. Once the lawyer is situated as victim, his question, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ may be answered.¹⁷³ As victim, his concern is not to protect his wealth from the demands of moral obligation. Indeed, as victim, the theologically loaded question ‘What must I *do* to inherit eternal life?’ is almost humorous. Victims can do nothing. Likewise victims need not worry about nailing down their moral obligations to God and to the neighbour because they own *nothing* and therefore owe *nothing*. Theirs is a truly nihilistic plight. Once reduced to nothing, the chief moral concern of the victim is not to limit the demands of others but to find a reason to believe that his poverty and

¹⁷⁰ McDonald, ‘The View From the Ditch’, p. 37.

¹⁷¹ Andrew McKenna, ‘Biblical Structuralism: Testing the Victimary Hypothesis’, *Helios* 17 (1990), p. 83.

¹⁷² McDonald, ‘The View From the Ditch’, p. 27 refers to Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 30.

¹⁷³ McDonald, ‘The View From the Ditch’, p. 36.

passivity will not be the end of the story. The victim needs reasons to believe that it is rational to describe his plight as ‘blessed’.

We must question the idea that the blessedness of poverty could be a rational judgement. The more plausible view is that in the context of violence and indifference, mercy is an unrealistic solution. The salvation of the victim depends on an unbelievable character acting in unbelievable ways. Jack T. Sanders argues that the ahistorical Samaritan poses a real problem for the story and so the command to imitate the Samaritan is an impossible ethic. The Samaritan, he notes, acts

as no man ever behaved! Not only does he stop to render aid, but he provides ambulance service; not only does he provide ambulance service, but he remains at the hospital overnight as attending physician and a nurse; not only does he offer special medical care, but he tenders up his Blue Cross card...as a guarantee of payment for all further hospital bills for the injured man, *however extensive they may be*. And then he rides off into the west.¹⁷⁴

The Samaritan offered aid because he had unlimited resources and leisure. His is the ethic of lottery winners and other fairy tale characters who promise to do good to all with their unlimited resources. Sanders suggests that we take seriously the view that imitating the Samaritan would leave us to ‘starve to death or end up derelicts.’¹⁷⁵ If this parable indeed has no purchase on reality, waiting for the Good Samaritan is tantamount to waiting for Godot.

The parable’s aim is to first allow us to see the reality initiated in the incarnation of Jesus. In this light, that the Samaritan responds in an unrealistic fashion to the unquestionably real condition of the victim is not surprising. It is precisely because the Samaritan is not subject to human limitations that he is able to reverse the robbers’ actions. They a) strip, b) beat down, and c) leave the man for dead while the Samaritan a) clothes and washes, b) binds and lifts up, then c) leaves the man in the care of the inn-keeper in order to be restored to life.¹⁷⁶ We do not question the reality of predatory evil nor do we hesitate to condemn, at least in others, moral indifference to and acquiescence in this evil. Our problem is that a solution based in calculation and power is more believable than a solution that depends on something so unpredictable as mercy. The inescapable point is that the truthfulness of the story fully depends upon whether the incarnation is trustworthy. Once the lawyer’s moral focus

¹⁷⁴ McDonald, ‘The View From The Ditch’, p. 31, quoting Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics In The New Testament: Change And Development* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 7–8.

¹⁷⁵ McDonald, ‘The View From the Ditch’, p. 32.

was diverted from his moral obligations, he became capable of seeing that in this world ‘everything gained and everything claimed follows upon something given, and comes after something gratuitous and unearned.’¹⁷⁷ Jesus’ command to imitate the ahistorical Samaritan’s impossible charity was not to be heard as obligation but as an invitation to participate in a form of life grounded on the *unrealistic* reality of mercy – a reality which the lawyer had caught a glimpse of in the parable. In the narrative construction of the parable, it was rational for that victim to depend upon the gratuitous mercy of a sworn enemy. The question for Christians and for Christian ethics is whether or not we are living within that kind of story.

Two things need to be stressed concerning the ahistorical quality of the Samaritan and a realistic Christian ethic. The first is to underscore my earlier assertion that the Samaritan’s goodness points us towards the christological identity of the Samaritan. Within the logic of the incarnation, the entrance of Christ is not as a *deus ex machina* interruption of the story. It *is* the story. To recognise this parable as the story of Jesus means that ethics is not at the centre or point of the story. It is, as Luke presents it, an after–thought. It is an invitation to participate in this conspiracy of mercy initiated by the incarnation. The primary accent of the parable is not on this human participation but on the mercy that is central to the story of the incarnation. This means that the parable cannot be reduced to a morality tale or to a moral maxim. The point is driven home in a sermon on love by the nineteenth–century Scottish novelist and theologian George McDonald who states:

The love that is more than law, and renders its breach impossible, lives in the endless story, coming out in active kindness, of *neighbourhood*; yea, in tenderness and loving–kindness–the Samaritan–heart akin to the Jew–heart, the Samaritan hands neighbours to the Jewish wounds.¹⁷⁸

The lawyer reminds us that it is possible to recite the two great commands to love God and love the neighbour without understanding that story which renders these commands intelligible. Unless and until he entered into the endless story of mercy, ethics would only be about fulfilling obligation.

¹⁷⁶ Daniel Patte, ‘An Analysis of Narrative Structure and the Good Samaritan’, *Semeia: An Experimental Journal For Biblical Criticism* 2 (1974), pp. 18–19.

¹⁷⁷ Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Mentor–Omega, 1963), p. 33.

¹⁷⁸ George McDonald, ‘Love Thy Neighbour’, in ed. Charles Erlandson, *George McDonald: The Best from All His Works* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988), p. 178.

My second observation is that we must attend to Hays' pragmatic test. For all its problems, we still must ask whether the goodness of the Samaritan is capable of embodiment in the real world. We may, of course, assert that the story of grace is true. However, it is an empty assertion if grace fails to become embodied in the practices of the church. The pragmatic test is dangerous but no less necessary. Hence the challenge must be answered with anecdotal evidence of concrete goodness rendered intelligible by appeal to this parable. The late author and philosophy professor Philip Hallie's *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed* recounts the extraordinary actions of very ordinary persons.¹⁷⁹ Although Hallie was not a Christian, his study of the Huguenot community of Le Chambon's rescue of over three thousand refugees of Hitler's anti-Jewish purges concluded that his data on the actions of the rescuers could only be explained by the religious reasons given by the rescuers.¹⁸⁰ Hallie reports his historical findings while probing for the reasons why this community should have acted with heroic mercy when so many others failed to act.

The difficulty of articulating what happened and why it happened is expressed in Hallie's response to a very critical letter by one of his readers:

There is only one important thing to say about the Holocaust. It was merely a geological-type almost inanimate event (physical event). No one was responsible. No one started it. No one could stop it. [L]e Chambon wasn't even in the war. Nothing happened west of National Route 7 in southern France.¹⁸¹

Hallie summarises the remainder of the letter which stated that 'only vast forces like great armies "make history," make and break human institutions. The story of a few nonviolent eccentrics who did nothing to stop Hitler's armed forces mattered only to a few mushy-minded moralists like me.'

Hallie was tempted to respond to the letter with the words:

Vast institutional cruelties exist because people like you believe that flesh-and-blood individuals can do nothing that counts. Well, *something happened* west of National Route 7 in southern France. Real people with their own proper names saved real human beings in that village. And these precious few people count.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Phillip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon And How Goodness Happened There* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1979).

¹⁸⁰ In an essay on Nazi era rescuers, Richard John Neuhaus takes issue with one study that concludes, 'At best religiosity was only weakly related to rescue'. Cf. Samuel P. and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1988). Neuhaus states, 'this is an astonishing statement that is at odds with the findings of the study itself' which, as he points out, emphasises how the rescuers' values were largely forged in religious contexts. *America Against Itself* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1992), pp. 113-114.

¹⁸¹ Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*, p. xiv.

¹⁸² Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*, p. xv.

In the end he concluded ‘that there was an abyss between the writer of that letter and me, an abyss that no words could bridge.’ Hallie did not send the letter. Rather, he sent a postcard of Le Chambon with the message: ‘Thanks for your point of view. Still, something really happened here.’¹⁸³

The writer of the letter was of course correct in saying that in the story of the movements of power, ‘nothing happened’ in Le Chambon–sur–Lignon. However the story of power was not the rescuers’ story. Drawing upon the memory of persecution in their Huguenot history and the Christian scriptures, they had come to recognise that the practices of mercy were an effective resistance against the inhuman exercise of power. Unsurprisingly, the parable of the Good Samaritan was a paradigmatic story that sanctioned this dangerous resistance of mercy.¹⁸⁴ Hallie notes how this story made sense of their ‘extraordinary obligation’ to practice ‘active, dangerous love’ toward the victims of Hitler’s anti–semitic policies that came to them for help. What is even more extraordinary were the references to the Good Samaritan to explain why the rescuers did not consider their response to the crisis to be extraordinary. The parable, rather than the historical circumstances of evil and acquiescence, established the moral norms of this community. When called on to give an account of why they acted so differently from others in France and Germany, these people were dismissive of any suggestion that they were exceptional. In the logic of the story of Good Samaritan, mercy was the only adequate response to a force that had created so many victims. Neuhaus recognises the same response of rescuers who responded to questions about their participation by saying, ‘We did not start. It started. We had no choice.’¹⁸⁵

Hallie expresses a kind of frustration in getting at the causes of heroic action stating:

To understand the story of Le Chambon is not merely a matter of understanding historical and moral facts. A fact is plain, even obvious, once you simply face it. It is part of the quotidian world, and when you know it, you simply know it; you are not mystified by it. But the story of Le Chambon has more than everyday factuality in it. It has something supernatural in it...the story of all those rescues had a feeling of mystery about it.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*, p. xv.

¹⁸⁴ Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*, p. 110.

¹⁸⁵ Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 170.

¹⁸⁶ Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*, p. xix.

Then, in a final chapter aptly entitled, ‘The Ethics of Life and Death: How Goodness Happened Here,’ Hallie makes a final attempt to explain the reasons for the rescuers’ actions. He notes that an ethic of negative prohibitions that forbids inflicting harm to others does not finally explain why some should courageously show positive mercy to others. To explain the village of Le Chambon, he would need to point to an ethic that goes beyond mere ‘restraint upon the destructive drives of human beings.’ Hallie continues:

Like the negative commandments, it has taken various forms, but these forms all revolve around the injunction to help those who are in mortal danger. The positive laws say, in effect: ‘Do something to prevent betrayal, hatred, and murder... And Jesus explains the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself with the story...of the Good Samaritan who helped a man left half–dead by thieves.’¹⁸⁷

Hallie, for all his philosophical sophistication, finally accepts the explanation of those who participated in the rescue: they were imitating the goodness of the Samaritan. Explaining this outpouring of mercy, Hallie concludes that what matters most in ethics is not codes but character: ‘In short,’ he states, ‘ethics is only a matter of *character*.’¹⁸⁸ Once we come to this conclusion, we then see that

Narrative, plot, and character, especially when the characters involved in the action are surrounded and pervaded by a world intimately involved in their deeds and passions, can help us understand ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in large, clear, and concrete terms. And narrative can show us the many gray areas between good and evil, as well as the many differences of opinion about what kind of persons or action *is* good and evil...Rich regions of human history as revealed in narrative illuminate ethics as much as ethics illuminates those regions.¹⁸⁹

This observation about the importance of character brings me back to the origin of this thesis. It is an awkward position to be in, having spent so many words attempting to describe and remedy the problem of moral inarticulacy, then arriving at the unspectacular conclusion that Christian ethics begins and ends with the belief in the canonical story of God’s love for us and through us to the neighbour. The lawyer, like Lutherans, knew the moral rules and wanted to argue about their limits and applicability. Jesus avoided the argument by advancing moral inquiry and formation through vision–shaping parable. The parable was the appropriate response because the

¹⁸⁷ Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*, p. 282.

¹⁸⁸ Hallie comes to this conclusion by noting that, ‘By upbringing, by the word of God, by clearheaded thinking, by some means or other, each of us learns certain moral rules that help us to control our passions, to keep them in check, the way a well–governed people is kept in order. Ethics is inwardly experienced self–control. When the moral law within you rules your passions, you are good. When your inward government is in chaos, in anarchy, you are bad.’ *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*, pp. 277–278.

issue of character is at the centre of our ethical debates. The lawyer needed to somehow get the *feel* of what it was like to be a character in this unfolding story. Once he began to see past the obligatory imperatives by taking up his place within the story, he was then granted that perspective from which he could freely consider the invitation to become a free participant in this story. From this perspective it becomes clear why Meilaender maintains that ethics is not ‘primarily a tool for fixing guilt and responsibility’, but is ‘first and foremost, one of the ways in which we train ourselves and others to see the world rightly’¹⁹⁰ Ethical reflection, like the *enactment* of the liturgy, the *celebration* of the Eucharist, and *memorialising* the life of Christ in the church year, helps Christians attend to the meaning of the church’s story and how it is best embodied in the lives of those who see themselves as freely participating in this story.

¹⁸⁹ Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*, p. 280.

¹⁹⁰ Meilaender, *The Limits of Love*, p. 92.

CONCLUSION

Periodically, throughout the writing of this thesis, my parents would ask, ‘What is it exactly that you are writing about?’ As both were firmly located in the Lutheran tradition, they wanted to know why and how MacIntyre’s work was important for the church. Given the depth and complexity of MacIntyre’s writings, it may seem strange to say that this simple question is itself MacIntyrean. The moral philosopher, MacIntyre writes, ‘has to recognize that any true account of the human good is incomplete and inadequate, unless and until it enables us to understand how particular plain persons, including her or himself, are able to move toward their particular goods.’¹ This conclusion is an attempt to give a simple answer, though not as simple as I would like, to the question of how MacIntyre’s writings are good for the church. An adequate answer to this question needs to show how MacIntyre’s critical and constructive writings aid the church’s task to be simultaneously a refuge *from* and a mission *to* the postmodern world.

MacIntyre’s critical philosophical and historical narrative clarifies the postmodern context and cultural conditions under which the church’s task must be pursued. In MacIntyre’s diagnosis, the moral disorder of emotivism is manifested in the symptoms of a ‘self-assertive shrillness’ and ‘indignant self-righteousness’ in our moral disagreements.² Because our culture is deprived of rational ways to carry on moral debate, the public and private spheres are increasingly described as ‘culture wars’, or, as MacIntyre says it, ‘civil war carried on by other means.’³ MacIntyre’s conclusion in *After Virtue* is that our society is beyond repair so that the only rational response to our moral situation is to withdraw into communities of virtue. While I have argued that this summons is inadequate, it is not completely off base. Drawing on MacIntyre’s work, Stanley Hauerwas effectively demonstrates why the Christian church must function as a refuge from the postmodern moral disorder and how the

¹ MacIntyre, ‘Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy’, p. 3.

² *After Virtue*, p. 71.

³ *After Virtue*, p. 253.

church's moral, educational and liturgical practices are valuable resources for shaping a community of character. For Hauerwas though, it remains an open question as to whether the church has the character to be this kind of community.

While Hauerwas explains how the church functions as a refuge, it is unclear how MacIntyre's work is an aid to the church's mission to the postmodern. This mission is concisely articulated in Peter's directive to 'Always be prepared to make a defence (*apologian*) to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you yet do it with gentleness and respect.'⁴ Against the background of MacIntyre's account of the emerging irrationality of emotivism and the incommensurability between rival traditions⁵ this passage's call for a rational and civil exchange between the Christian and the world seems quixotic. However, in support of Peter's directive, Edward Oakes concludes his essay on MacIntyre's work with the outrageously optimistic claim that MacIntyre has made the distance between rival traditions 'a little less abysmal, a little less intimidating', and he has brought 'the possibility of a serious encounter between emotivists, rationalists, and Aristotelian Thomists a little bit closer.'⁶ As these observations come at the end of the essay, Oakes leaves us to wonder just how MacIntyre's work brings rivals 'a little bit closer', especially when MacIntyre himself seems to arrive at the opposite conclusion. In an addendum to this essay, Oakes elaborates on this question stating:

On the one hand, Scotland's most influential moral philosopher since David Hume will insist that any moral discourse is inherently ideological and that, accordingly, a rapprochement between moral systems will perforce take place under the Aristotelian test. On the other hand, MacIntyre will also insist that the Aristotelian/Thomistic synthesis is but one tradition among many with no more claim to an adjudicating overview than any other tradition. At least in some passages, MacIntyre is what might be oxymoronically described as a postmodernist Thomist. This is most strikingly evident in his treatment of the universality of human rights. On the one hand, 'rights talk' is a particular discourse that makes no sense out of the context of Western Enlightenment traditions; on the other hand, gross violations of the inherent dignity of human beings rightly arouse his ire, especially when justified in utilitarian/Marxist terms. [I]t is perhaps the irresolvability of this dilemma that accounts for a certain thrashing on the beach in MacIntyre's later writings. Rather than addressing specific ethical issues, he has sought to address the conundrums of the built-in incommensurability of rival traditions. This might account for the impression one gets from time to time that the serious encounter between emotivists, rationalists, and Thomists for which I praised

⁴ 1 Peter 3:15.

⁵ MacIntyre, 'Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?' p. 78.

⁶ Oakes, 'The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre', p. 26.

him in my last paragraph has taken place more in MacIntyre's mind than in the public at large. But in our shrill times, even that is a considerable achievement.⁷

Surely Oakes does not mean to say that the hope of rapprochement is only a reality in MacIntyre's mind. If MacIntyre is an aid to the church's mission, his work must somehow bring the church closer to its rivals in reality. I offer two reasons for seeing MacIntyre's work as an aid to the church's mission. First, as I discussed in my second chapter on MacIntyre's constructive philosophy, he argues that the vocabulary of progress (which includes terms like 'closer') is intelligible only in terms of some movement toward a particular goal. The problem for postmodernists is that, by rejecting the teleological structure, their use of the vocabulary of progress becomes unintelligible. MacIntyre argues that 'the protagonists of the dominant standpoints in contemporary philosophy' are not entitled to use vocabulary that speaks of 'movement towards', because they are unable to answer the question, 'movement towards what?'⁸ More simply put, until modern moral philosophers can 'tell us their *telos*', they cannot say what progress is. Contrary to the plight of postmoderns, as the church claims to know the *telos* of the world's story it is entitled to say what 'closer' means and to carry out its mission to achieve this closeness.

My second reason to think that MacIntyre's understanding of rationality is an aid to the church's mission is that he gives good reasons for the church to be confident about its ability to carry out this task. I will support this assertion with an analogy rather than an argument. The Edinburgh theologian Duncan Forrester characterises the current moral situation, with its 'plurality of goals and widely divergent commitments', as a society 'whose conflicts are played out like a game of Australian Rules Football, in which... few rules seem to be recognized, and the referees' attempts to enforcement are patchy and ineffective.'⁹ While Forrester thinks that our cultural situation may be likened to 'an arena without rules or referee',¹⁰ an alternative interpretation of postmodernity is that, what appears to be a game without rules and referees, is actually a new game with a new set of rules. Before the failure of Enlightenment rationality was documented, moral debate could be likened to an Olympic figure skating competition where representatives of rival moral theories

⁷ Oakes, 'The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre', p. 26.

Edward Oakes, 'Correspondence', *First Things* 43 (May, 1994), p. 67.

⁸ *First Principles, Final Ends*, p. 66.

⁹ Duncan B. Forrester, *Beliefs, Values and Policies in a Secular Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 4.

performed before a panel of putatively impartial judges who scored the performances against a perceived objective standard. There were occasional murmurs of bias, especially by religious competitors who would either be barred from the competition or earned inexplicably low scores. Still, in spite of this perceived ill-treatment, it was generally assumed that the judgements of the enlightened judges were somehow rational. In time, however, others began to question the claims of a special gnosis by the judges and the presumed objectivity of the judgements which arbitrarily privileged some and penalised others. Eventually it was concluded that the *agon* of the ice hockey rink, where teams are evaluated by their *goals*, would be a better mode of rational evaluation.

While this analogy ‘limps’ in all sorts of ways, my point is to show that, according to MacIntyre’s philosophy, the church may be well-suited for the postmodern ice hockey rink. MacIntyre’s critical and constructive accounts of rationality argue that the clash of rival rationalities is much less like figure skating and more the ice hockey competition. Moreover, as the cultural game has changed, MacIntyre’s work shows why and how the church must utilise its resources and sharpen its skills to engage its competition.¹¹ Commenting on the present social situation, Forrester observes that as no tradition ‘has a privileged position in public discourse’, the church, along every other competitor

comes to the public square not as a referee or arbitrator, not as a recognized authority to which appeal may be made, but as a participation or contributor that must demonstrate by skill and insight the value of the contribution. [The church] does not have a reserved place in the public arena, but must constantly *earn* its position.¹²

The question is whether the church has the resources and skills to ‘constantly earn its position’ in the public debate. Meilaender notes that the recent moves toward virtue ethics, which MacIntyre has played a decisive role, suggests that the church is quite capable of entering into the postmodern *agon* of public discussion:

If action flows from vision and vision depends upon character, then religious beliefs may be of great importance in the shaping of an ethic. Religious disciplines (e.g., confession and prayer) may affect what we see and do by shaping the persons we are. This suggests the possibilities for breaking through – or by-passing – the seemingly endless debates about the relation of religion and morality that grow out of the Kantian tradition in ethics. The question will no longer be whether religion is

¹⁰ Forrester, *Beliefs, Values and Policies in a Secular Age*, p. 3.

¹¹ Cf. John Milbank, ‘Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty Two Responses to Unmasked Questions’, *Modern Theology* 7 (1991), pp. 225–237.

¹² Forrester, *Beliefs, Values and Policies in a Secular Age*, p. 6.

somehow necessary to morality if morality is understood in terms of the vision by which we see the world, a vision shaped by our character, and a character shaped (for the believer) by the disciplines of the religious life.¹³

While there are good reasons to be hopeful about the church's ability to discharge its moral task in the postmodern context, much has also been said regarding Lutheran deficiencies (and they are many), that would lead one to doubt Lutheranism's ability to fulfil the task of being a refuge from and mission to the postmodern world. As it is not at all clear how the church will respond to this task, it is crucial that Lutheran moral reflection remain centred in that grace which reminds us of the reality of divine action and the limits of human action. This grace entitles the church to pursue its task with intellectual and moral passion, while simultaneously enjoying that holy nonchalance which T.S. Eliot captures so very well: 'For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.'¹⁴

¹³ Gilbert Meilaender, 'Virtue in Contemporary Religious Thought', in ed. Richard John Neuhaus, *Virtue Public and Private* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 9.

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot, 'East Coker', *The Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1943), p.17.

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