INTRODUCTION

engages in reflection, argument, or discussion about what is morally right or wrong, good or evil... [A] moral philosopher... thinks and speaks about the ways in which moral terms, like 'right' or 'good,' are used by moralists when they are delivering their moral judgments."

Returning to the classical concerns about the nature of the good life and of human fulfillment in both its individual and social dimensions, the contributors to the present volume tend not to believe in any clean break between philosophical thinking about ethics and "moralizing"—if moralizing is taken to mean thinking about how human beings ought to live their lives. The two seminal philosophers in the contemporary discussion of the virtues, Elizabeth Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre, are both quite self-aware of being, in their role as philosophers, moral reformers. The bulk of this introduction will be an exposition of their central contributions.

Elizabeth Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy"

The recent turn to the virtues by mainline British and American philosophers was marked historically by the appearance, in 1958, of Elizabeth Anscombe's provocative and wide-ranging essay "Modern Moral Philosophy." According to Anscombe, the terms 'morally right,' 'morally wrong,' and 'moral obligation,' as used by modern philosophers, lack content in two ways. First, they do not rule out any particular actions. As modern philosophers use the term 'morally wrong,' even a court's knowingly condemning an innocent person need not be morally wrong: Where condemning an innocent person to death would, say, prevent a civil war, it might be the right thing to do. In modern philosophical usage, to call an action "morally wrong" always leaves open the possibility that in other circumstances the same action might not be morally wrong; and this suggests to Anscombe that the expression 'morally wrong' lacks content.

Second, the notions of right, wrong, and obligation are legal notions, thus implying the existence of some legal authority. Modern moral philosophers have wanted to speak of moral obligations and duties without tying these to any plausible notion of the giver of the law. But if you have an obligation, notes Anscombe, it must surely be with respect to some obliging authority, a person or group of persons who lays down the law and is justified by position, power, or nature in thus laying it down.

The natural and traditional way of grounding the moral law is by taking God to be its giver. He is the agent who creates obligations by His acts of legislation. But modern philosophers are disinclined to allow God this role. Even when they admit that God exists and gives laws, they tend to think that being moral requires that a person "have a judgment that he ought (morally ought) to obey the divine law." Thus, while God perhaps tells us what we ought to do (just as a parent may tell us this), it is not His saying so that makes it obligatory; it is obligatory because and only because it is moral. So God Himself must be "obedient" to the moral law, and unless He is, you are under no moral obligation to take Him seriously. And here one has to say "moral" in a certain tone of voice and with a certain look in one's eye and a certain feeling in one's heart. But, according to Anscombe, the look
in one's eye and the feeling in one's heart don't succeed in covering up the incoherency of the concept of a legislation without any legislator.

Modern philosophers have tried to find a source of moral legislation in society, conscience, nature, or some sort of contract, says Anscombe. But each of these theories has problems that render it unconvincing. If we do not believe in God, there is only one way to have ethical "norms": "It might remain to look for 'norms' in human virtues: just as man has so many teeth, which is certainly not the average number of teeth men have, but is the number of teeth for the species, so perhaps the species man, regarded not just biologically, but from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice in regard to the various departments of life — powers and faculties and use of things needed — 'has' such-and-such virtues: and this 'man' with the complete set of virtues is the 'norm,' as 'man' with, e.g., a complete set of teeth is a norm."

Anscombe goes on, however, to say that this way of securing "norms" for ethics does not quite secure "law" in the sought-for sense. The "obligation" expressed in such sentences as "a man ought to be at peace with himself" or "a human is fully functioning only if she is courageous," is not the same as that expressed when we say, "it is a person's duty to keep his promises." So, although the virtues approach provides a substitute rationale for moral norms, it does not justify us in speaking of moral obligations. Unless we take God to be the authority, we ought to give up talk about moral obligations, and just talk, as Aristotle does, about the virtues — about, that is, the kinds of actions characteristic of a fully developed specimen of humanity.

Presumably there is nothing impossible about an ethical view in which God is postulated as the authority behind the moral law and action and character-norms are buttressed with Aristotelian-like insights into what is "normal" or "natural" for a human being. The norms that God legislates are presumably consistent, on the whole, with the "demands" that can be read off human nature, even though the latter may be supplemented by the former and it will be in principle God's prerogative to override human wisdom on occasion. Indeed, the form that virtue ethics has taken during most of its history is theological: Since the nature that is to be realized is conceived of as the condition that God intended, it is possible to adjust one's understanding of human nature by considering what God has commanded human beings to do and be. But at the same time it is possible to let philosophical analysis of human nature set parameters for the interpretation of scriptural materials about ethics and the good life. If a virtue-based ethics is compatible with a concept of divine law, it would seem to follow from Anscombe's view that a person drawing on both of these resources would be in a better initial position than anybody else to give a full account of ethics.

What would philosophical ethics consist of if we took Anscombe's advice? Basically it would be a kind of normative psychology, whose purpose would be to determine what it is to be a human being, in the sense of a fully developed or "flourishing" one. The virtues would be the various forms of this well-being or flourishing that the philosophical inquiry would bring to light, and the theory would function by "locating" these virtues in the resulting larger depiction of human life.

The argument behind this psychological inquiry would run something like this:
INTRODUCTION

Since justice is a virtue, and injustice a vice, and virtues and vices are built up by the performances of the action in which they are instanced, an act of injustice will tend to make a man bad; and essentially the flourishing of a man qua man consists in his being good (e.g., in virtues); but for any X to which such terms apply, X needs what makes it flourish, so a man needs, or ought to perform, only virtuous actions; and even if, as it must be admitted may happen, he flourishes less, or not at all, in inessentials, by avoiding injustice, his life is spoiled in essentials by not avoiding injustice—so he still needs to perform only just actions.9

The fundamental concept here is that of human flourishing. The virtues are aspects of a fully human life, and are fostered by certain actions; therefore, these actions are normative for human beings—not in the sense of demanded or commanded, but in the sense of prescribed, on condition that one wants to flourish rather than live a spoiled life. (And, of course, anybody who thinks he or she doesn’t want to flourish is just confused.)

But how do we know what human flourishing consists in? For matters beyond the trivial such as the “normal” number of teeth, the “normal” blood pressure and temperature, and, moving farther out, the “need” for some kind of positive self-regard, this question can be answered only by a philosophical-psychological investigation of what it is to be human. Anscombe recommends that we start way back, far prior to ethics, and then work ourselves up to a philosophical psychology that includes analysis of virtue concepts: “But meanwhile—is it not clear that there are several concepts that need investigating simply as part of the philosophy of psychology and,—as I should recommend—banishing ethics totally from our minds? Namely, to begin with: ‘action,’ ‘intention,’ ‘pleasure,’ ‘wanting.’ More will probably turn up if we start with these. Eventually it might be possible to advance to considering the concept ‘virtue’; with which, I suppose, we should be beginning some sort of a study of ethics.”10 Concerning this enterprise, Anscombe goes on a little later in the essay: “It can be seen that philosophically there is a huge gap, at present unfilled as far as we are concerned, which needs to be filled by an account of human nature, human action, the type of characteristic a virtue is, and above all of human ‘flourishing.’ And it is the last concept that appears the most doubtful.”11

Anscombe’s well-known book Intention,12 as well as her numerous essays on philosophical psychology, can be seen as contributions to this project. But other thinkers in increasing numbers have taken up the challenge to provide “an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking.”13 Most of the essays in the present collection are examples of the continuing effort to meet this challenge.

Alasdair MacIntyre’s After Virtue

Our Predicament According to MacIntyre

Twenty-three years after Anscombe’s essay, Alasdair MacIntyre published After Virtue,14 the other focal point in the contemporary renascence of interest in the virtues. We will spend a large portion of the rest of this introduction expounding MacIntyre’s argument, in
part because of its intrinsic importance and pivotal character, and in part because, as an historical argument, it will take us through a lot of territory that ought to be touched upon in an introduction like the present one. MacIntyre’s book is, however, exceedingly rich and subtle, and no short summary can do it justice.

MacIntyre’s point of departure, like Anscombe’s, is the bankruptcy of modern moral philosophy, and indeed of the moral consciousness of most of recent Western civilization (which is dominated by what he often refers to as “modern liberal individualism”). In our world, moral debate about central issues tends to go on endlessly, neither side winning by rational argument. Some say that justice is served by forcing richer people, through taxation, to share their wealth with poorer ones, because everyone has a right to basic necessities of life. Others argue this is not just, because it unduly restricts the freedom of the wealthy (and of the poor, to the extent that they may become wealthy) to do as they please with the fruits of their labor, ingenuity, or good fortune. Some say abortion at an early stage of pregnancy is every woman’s right, since every person has a right to determine what happens in his or her own body, and an embryo at that stage is a part of its mother’s body. Others say that such abortions are almost always wrong, because an embryo, even at that stage, is an innocent, identifiable human individual, and knowingly to kill such an individual is immoral. Valid arguments can be constructed for each of the preceding four positions; the disagreement comes from the different premises, or starting points, of the arguments. (Philosophers, just like ordinary people, divide up into such camps as these; the chief difference is that the philosophers’ arguments are more careful and detailed.)

Why can’t people agree on their moral starting points? The reason, MacIntyre argues, is that we do not belong to any consistent, shared moral tradition. Instead we are the inheritors of fragments, often mutually inconsistent, of moral traditions and philosophies.

For the most part we are unaware of where these parts of traditions came from and indeed of the fact that they are leftover fragments, isolated from the whole systems of moral thought and life to which they originally belonged. Rather we vaguely believe there is something called “morality,” a single body of concepts on which all decent people draw when they make moral decisions. And so we are frustrated that we can’t terminate our moral debates rationally. Thus our moral mind-set comes to have two sides—one coming from our recognition that our contemporary moral debates are fundamentally unchangeable, the other from the residue of the moral traditions from which we have inherited our fragments, in which moral debates were settleable.

On the one side, because there is no way of securing rational agreement in moral debate, we tend to think morality is not a rational affair at all. We see it as a matter of commitments, feeling, individual interpretation, and individual choice. If you can’t rationally decide whether to make the right to necessities more basic than the right to free disposal of property, then you just “hunker down” over one side or the other, just make a “decision of principle” or consult your feelings. And you realize that the arguments you use in moral debate are ultimately just rhetoric. Their purpose is not to find or express truth or enlighten your opponent, but to give expression to your feelings and manipulate your opponent into seeing things your way, like the ads for soft drinks or an arms manufacturer lobbying for a government contract.

Related to the loss of rationality in ethics is the loss of the moral self. MacIntyre
INTRODUCTION

sketches contemporary "characters"—that is, personality types that function for us as moral paradigms: the Bureaucratic Manager, the Rich Playperson, and the Therapist. These "characters" have in common that they are all manipulators of other persons, and tend to seek goods external to practices. (Money is a good external to the practice of medicine, while the well-being of one's patients is a good internal to that practice. Fame is a good external to the practice of philosophy, while wisdom is a good internal to it.) This tendency toward the failure of moral rationality and the deterioration of individual moral substance MacIntyre calls "emotivism," naming it after the twentieth-century movement in metaethics that articulates it philosophically.

But, on the other side, we are never completely at ease with emotivism. Even if we often find ourselves taking refuge in "decisions of principle," this remains a desperate move. It is not how things ought to be! We sense that as long as we are only expressing our feelings and manipulating our interlocutors, our stance cannot be called "morality." Candor about emotivist theory is incompatible with emotivist practice: even if we are crass enough to manipulate others in argument, still, we can't let our interlocutor know we are only subjecting him or her to nonrational rhetoric. The rhetoric won't work unless the listener believes we are offering an argument!

We are unhappy emotivists, and our predicament is the result of a long and bumpy history that MacIntyre chronicles in After Virtue. His construal of this history is also an argument that a version of a recurring moment in that history—the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues—contains a path out of our predicament. If we can become Aristotelians in a certain sense, we will find ways to settle our moral debates rationally, while at the same time rescuing our moral selfhood from the formlessness and emptiness characteristic of the twentieth-century "characters."

A History of the Virtues

Heroic Societies. The history begins with "heroic societies," the most prominent example being the one in Homer's Iliad. In that society the actions required of a person were determined by fixed social roles, which in turn were determined by the person's social status: "Every individual has a given role and status within a well-defined and highly determinate system of roles and statuses. The key structures are those of kinship and of the household. In such a society a man knows who he is by knowing his role in these structures; and in knowing this he knows also what he owes and what is owed to him by the occupant of every other role and status." To fulfill the role of head of household was to protect it in battle, and for this one must be fitted by courage. Such a person would also be bound by ties of kinship and friendship with other households and their heads; these ties would also demand entering into battle, with a consequent need for fidelity and courage. Duties in heroic society were not separable from social roles. To be a friend or brother meant to endeavor to take the life of anyone who took the life of your friend or brother. This meant that a certain storyline, of which the final episode was the violent death of the hero, characterized virtually every inhabitant of the role. Membership in a heroic society ensured the impossibility of moral doubt on the central issues, and ensured that the occupant of the role had a firm personal identity and undoubting sense of his or
INTRODUCTION

her identity. According to MacIntyre, the heroic poetry has two things to teach us about ethics: "First that all morality is always to some degree tied to the socially local and particular and that the aspirations of the morality of modernity to a universality freed from all particularity is an illusion; and secondly that there is no way to possess the virtues except as part of a tradition in which we inherit them and our understanding of them from a series of predecessors in which series heroic societies hold first place."16

The Sophists and Plato. By contrast with the society of Homer's poems, the Athens of Socrates (469–399 B.C.) and Plato (427–347 B.C.) showed what we would call moral "pluralism." The Athenians agreed with heroic society that virtues are conditions for personal success within a social fabric, but because of intercourse with the "outside world," the Athenians were vividly aware, as the heroes were not, of the variety of customs and of virtue concepts. Furthermore, the social matrix supporting and giving sense to the virtues had shifted from the Homeric family to the city-state. The result was a far less clear and consistent use of the moral vocabulary. For example, it was agreed that dikaiosune (justice) is a virtue and that it, like other virtues, is intimately linked with the pursuit of happiness and the fulfillment of desire; but there was much disagreement about what this virtue means.

The sophists concluded from this failure of agreement that there was no such thing as dikaiosune in itself, but only dikaiosune-as-practiced-in-a-given-city. This extreme "cultural relativism" was difficult to maintain and made some sophists easy prey of Socrates' efforts to trap them in inconsistency. If they claimed there is no dikaiosune-in-itself, while nevertheless assuming their own concept of dikaiosune in criticizing other conceptions, they seemed to say that there both is, and is not, dikaiosune-in-itself. This inconsistency could be avoided, as Callicles did (see Plato's Gorgias), by claiming without wavering that the "virtuous" person is one who uses his cunning to dominate others "and who uses his domination to satisfy his desires without limit."17

Plato's theory of the virtues tries to avoid both relativism and the ruthless, antisocial character of Callicles' conception of "virtue." His strategy is to present a universal philosophical psychology that entails an idea of happiness and satisfaction of human desire radically different from that of Callicles. The human soul is composed of three parts: the desiring part (bodily appetites), the high spirited part (certain emotions), and the reasoning part. Virtue is the proper functioning and harmonious interaction of these parts. A person has sophia ("wisdom") when the reasoning part is in touch with reality and above all with the Form of the Good. This enables it to legislate humanly appropriate behavior. Sophsosune ("temperance") occurs when the desiring part is restrained according to what reason declares to be humanly appropriate behavior. Andreia ("courage") is a preservative of knowledge of what is good, which functions where fear and pleasure threaten to diminish that knowledge. As the virtue of the high spirited part, courage would seem also to include those emotional dispositions implementing the dictates of reason — for example, feeling repugnance for wrongdoing and joy in good conduct. Finally, dikaiosune ("justice") is the presence of the other three virtues, each part of the soul functioning according to its nature and thus appropriately interacting with the other parts. The soul flourishes when it thus realizes its true nature. It is this, argues Plato, that human beings really desire, even
INTRODUCTION

though they may think they desire, as Callicles claims, to dominate others and enjoy the fruits of such domination.

The social matrix fitting such a person of virtue is a city-state with a structure analogous to that of a perfected human personality. The guardians (reasoning part) will legislate with wisdom, the warriors (high spirited part) will execute the will of the guardians, and the workers (desiring part) will provide the economic energy in the city. And each part will exemplify dikaiosyne as it performs its own, and only its own, function with excellence, thus fitting into an organic harmony with the whole. MacIntyre notes that while Plato believed there was no existing political order that supported virtue as he conceived it, "nonetheless the concept of virtue remains a political concept; for Plato's account of the virtuous man is inseparable from his account of the virtuous citizen."14

Several points can be made about Plato's conception of the virtues. First, it is in acquiring the virtues that a person achieves the well-being characteristic of humans. Second, what this well-being amounts to is dictated by a culture-transcendent human nature, reflected in Plato's philosophical psychology. But, third, Plato believes that the realization of that nature is tied to a political order or social matrix. Fourth, since no political order adequate to human nature exists on earth, the political order in which Plato embeds the virtuous person is itself transcendent (ideal). This raises the question whether having the virtues is a real possibility. Fifth, Plato does not believe in tragedy, if we mean by tragedy a situation in which a perfectly virtuous person is caught in a ruining conflict. Virtue = harmony = success = happiness; so, if a seemingly virtuous person is caught in a "tragic" situation, he must have a hidden personal flaw. There are no essentially tragic situations. Plato's disbelief in tragedy is tied to his belief in the unity of the virtues. Two virtues cannot conflict because to have any virtue is to have all the virtues. It is not possible, as the tragedian Sophocles believed it was, that exercising "the virtue of doing what is required of a sister (Antigone) or a friend (Odysseus) be at odds with the exercise of the virtues of justice (Creon) or of compassion and truthfulness (Neoptolemus)."19

Aristotle. On these points Plato's pupil Aristotle agreed with him on all but the fourth. Aristotle was more optimistic than Plato about the constitution of his own city-state, Athens, as providing a context for the actualization of human nature in the virtues. Thus Aristotle's "sociology" is less idealized and more empirical than Plato's. Indeed his ethics is equally an ethics of the Athenian citizen and a universally human ethics. On the second point, Aristotle agreed that there is a human nature independent of cultures, and that it is the job of the ethical theorist to explicate this nature and thus to show what its full realization in the virtues would look like. But in its details Aristotle's philosophical psychology is much richer than, and in some ways divergent from, Plato's.

As we remarked earlier, Aristotle is the hero in MacIntyre's story. It is the "Aristotelian tradition" in its various forms from which we must learn if we are to extricate ourselves from the confusions and characterlessness of "modern liberal individualism." This tradition includes such predecessors of Aristotle as Sophocles and Plato, and such successors as the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas (1224–74) and the English novelist Jane Austen (1775–1817); but Aristotle himself is the greatest representative of
INTRODUCTION

the tradition. Four aspects of Aristotle’s moral philosophy stand out as essential, in MacIntyre’s view, to the project of restoring ethical rationality and substance.

First, Aristotle’s ethical thought is teleological. The basic idea here is that human nature is not just whatever people happen, on the average, to be. It is a built-in goal, and one that perhaps few individuals ever reach. There is almost always a difference between the way humans are, and the way they would be if they achieved, or actualized, their nature. (It is conceivable, indeed, that no individuals ever achieve their human nature.) The virtues are features of self-actualization, characteristics of the human being who has become what his nature dictates that he should be. Furthermore, this achievement is something that people must themselves undertake. A beet seed contains within it the tendency to become a fully realized beet; and if it is placed in appropriate conditions of soil, moisture, temperature, and the passage of time, it will become the best beet it can, something with all the beet virtues. However, it is no part of beet nature to undertake to become a fully actualized beet; it is enough that it be placed in a fitting environment. But an aspect of the human virtues, dictated by human nature, is that the individual become a responsible initiator of the actions characteristic of justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom.

Second, the concept of pleasure has a central place in Aristotle’s ethical thought. He points out that pleasure naturally accompanies unimpeded excellent activity. When you are doing something well (let us say, building a deck on the back of your house), in conditions that do not hinder you, then you “enjoy yourself” in the activity. But the virtues are capacities for humanly excellent activities. So given unhindering external conditions, the virtues are capacities for pleasure, for leading a life of enjoyment. As the virtuous person enjoys being who he or she is and performing actions characteristic of himself or herself, the individual is directly aware of the goodness of his or her life.

MacIntyre points out how Aristotle differs from the utilitarians in his treatment of pleasure. For them pleasure (some call it happiness) is the good, the goal of all action, while for Aristotle it is a natural accompaniment of the humanly excellent life. For them the amount of pleasure an action produces is what determines the moral goodness or badness of it. For Aristotle the criterion is the much more complex matter of what human nature is, and pleasures are judged good or bad according to what activities they accompany. For the utilitarians pleasure is some single mental state that can in principle be measured and added up. For Aristotle pleasure is activity- and excellence-relative; there are as many different pleasures as there are “faculties” and activities of faculties.

Third, Aristotle gives a central place to the virtue of friendship. Indeed he devotes a larger proportion of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to this than to any other single topic. Friendship is important because it is the human bond necessary to the kind of community in which people can flourish (develop the virtues). What is friendship? It is not just liking one another, or enjoying some common hobby or professional pursuit, but sharing with others the aim of realizing the common, or “political” good (that is, the good of the *polis*). Thus friendship is at the same time patriotism.

From our modern individualist perspective, it is hard to conceive of people genuinely bound together by ties of affection in the pursuit of the well-being of their society. Instead we think of “politics” as a factional enterprise engaged in by persons seeking their own individual “political” advancement. MacIntyre states that “from an Aristotelian point of
view, a modern liberal political society can appear only as a collection of citizens of nowhere, who have banded together for their common protection. They possess at best that inferior form of friendship that is founded on mutual advantage. Thus we have no real sense of political community and, consequently, lack the social context that, according to Aristotle, is necessary if we are to become human.

Fourth is Aristotle's conception of practical reasoning, or reasoning leading to action. Aristotle's picture includes four elements: a want, a major premise, a minor premise, and an action. Anytime a person reasons practically, he or she must want something. Let us say you want to sharpen a pencil neatly and with minimum effort. You believe (major premise) that anyone who wants to sharpen a pencil neatly and easily is well advised to use a pencil sharpener. Through inquiry you learn that (minor premise) there is a pencil sharpener in the next room. Finally (action) you go to that room and sharpen your pencil.

Moral reasoning is a species of practical reasoning. If an agent is to reason about justice to any practical effect, he or she must be the sort of person who wants just states of affairs. In general, the virtues all contain or presuppose a concern about the well-being of the agent and the community. Second, the agent must believe (major premise) propositions of the following sort: job discrimination against persons on the basis of their ethnic background is unjust, taking away a person's property without his or her permission is unjust, and so on. Third, the agent must be able to recognize (minor premise) truths of the following sort: This is a case of ethnic discrimination, this is a case of taking property without permission, and so on. Practical circumstances, of course, are much more complicated than being just a matter of a single major and a single minor premise presenting themselves in splendid isolation. Consequently, these premises must be ranked in weight relative to other morally (and perhaps nonmorally) relevant beliefs; in other words, the agent must have refined judgment, or what Aristotle calls phronesis ("practical wisdom"). Practical wisdom is a virtue pervading all the other virtues, since actions will not properly exemplify the virtues if they are not intelligent. In this connection MacIntyre observes also how Aristotle's conception of the moral life differs from that of most modern philosophers, for whom moral rules are basic. For Aristotle, it is the virtues that are basic; the rules are, necessarily and at their best, embodied in the intelligence of the morally mature individual. As MacIntyre notes, "Knowing how to apply the law is itself possible only for someone who possesses the virtue of justice."

Stoicism and the Middle Ages. The next stage in our history is that of Stoicism (Zeno, fourth century B.C.; Chrysippus, third century B.C.; Epictetus, first century A.D.; Marcus Aurelius, second century A.D.), which arose when the city-state ceased to be the main form of political life and was replaced, first by the Macedonian kingdom and later by the Roman empire. Stoicism, anticipating modern morality, is a philosophy of individualism, a symptom of the individual's being cut off from a close-knit community committed to a social goal of human flourishing. To be a citizen, in Stoic terms, can only mean to be a citizen of the world at large. Stoicism is a morality of law, but not of the positive laws of a political community. Instead the laws are of nature—such as that all humans will die, that pain is a consequence of desire, or that people are in control of nothing that happens but only of their attitudes toward happenings. Virtue is central for the Stoics, but it is virtue in
INTRODUCTION

the singular rather than, as in the Aristotelian tradition, the multiple virtues of the good citizen. The one virtue is the submission of one's will to nature, the willing acceptance of the harsh ways reality is. And so virtue is interiorized; it is no longer embodied, as it was in heroic society, in action contributions to the communal welfare. Virtue is practiced, not as a way of securing a healthy social order, but as an end in itself. MacIntyre points out that elements of Stoicism recur regularly in the history of ethics. "Whenever the virtues begin to lose their central place, Stoic patterns of thought and action at once reappear" for example, in the twelfth century in Abelard and in the eighteenth century in Kant.

MacIntyre makes almost no mention of the Christian church fathers, and gives only a sketchy account of the medieval period. The latter was characterized by philosophical conflict and only partially successful efforts to synthesize diverse traditions, which included elements of Stoicism and of course Christianity, as well as Aristotelianism. Saint Thomas Aquinas, as a strict Aristotelian, is "an unexpectedly marginal figure to the history which I am writing." With his theistic framework Aquinas complicates and adds to Aristotle, without essentially altering the scheme: "The table of virtues and vices has to be amended and added to and a concept of sin is added to the Aristotelian concept of error. The law of God requires a new kind of respect and awe. The true end of man can no longer be completely achieved in this world, but only in another. Yet the threefold structure of untutored human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be, human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-relas and the precepts of rational ethics as means for the transition from one to the other remains central to the theistic understanding of evaluative thought and judgment." Aquinas, then, combines the notion that morality is obedience to the decrees of God with the notion that morality's function is to specify what it will take for humans to actualize their human nature or essence.

The Enlightenment. By the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, says MacIntyre, secularization was rooting out the belief that moral precepts could be traced to the will of God, and a new concept of rationality excluded thinking of human nature as something not actual and observable, but as a potentiality to be actualized. This new concept of rationality had roots both in Protestant theology, which claimed that sin had corrupted the mind's capacity to discern true human nature, and in the rising new science, which tended to think of rationality as methodical observation and generalization, and as deductive logic. At the same time, however, the ammnet of morality was derived largely from classical Christianity. David Hume (1711–76), for example, believed in the chastity of women, and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) believed in the absolute prohibition of lying. "Marriage and the family are au fond as unquestioned by Diderot's rationalist philosophe as they are by Kierkegaard's Judge Wilhelm; promise-keeping and justice are as inviolable for Hume as they are for Kant. Whence did they inherit these shared beliefs? Obviously from their shared Christian past." This combination of retaining belief in morality while undercutting its traditional rational supports posed an urgent challenge to philosophers, namely the challenge to find an alternative foundation for morality. The philosophers' response to this challenge MacIntyre calls "the Enlightenment project of finding a rational justification for morality."

All the participants in the Enlightenment project looked to actual, observable human
nature for a justification of traditional moral norms. Hume tried to find it in such supposedly universal feelings as the “sentiment of humanity”—a feeling of sympathy for one another that all human beings supposedly share. The difficulty with this view is that apart from a particular culture and training that inculcates such sentiments, people just don’t seem to have these feelings.

Kant argued that morality is founded on “pure practical reason,” a kind of rationality essential to human nature. The ultimate principle of this rationality is the Categorical Imperative: So act that you can will the maxim of your action as a universal law. Kant supposed that you could take any immoral maxim, such as “When there’s no other way out of a tough situation, lie” or “When your spouse is away for more than a week, you may adulterize with a friendly person.” If you then imagine its being made into a principle that holds universally for all human beings, then you will be imagining a contradictory state of affairs. Thus violating the rules of morality has a result similar to that of violating the laws of logic: you do so at the price of logical incoherence. The chief difficulty with Kant’s proposal is that it is false: universalizing an immoral maxim almost never yields a contradiction.

According to MacIntyre, the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) was addressing the same problem as Hume and Kant. But he looked for the foundation (not quite the justification) of morality neither in the sentiments nor in the rationality characteristic of human nature, but in “the characteristics of fundamental decision-making.”27 Looking back on the earlier, Humean and Kantian versions of the Enlightenment project, Kierkegaard sees clearly that there is no rational foundation for morality. Morality belongs to a different order than things that can be decided through reasoned investigation; it is something the individual must simply choose for himself or herself out of the vigor of his or her own will, without reasons. Thus Kierkegaard, in MacIntyre’s view, anticipates the emotivism and existentialism of the twentieth century. But Kierkegaard’s effort, too, is a failure, since it involves saying at the same time that traditional morality can have authority over us (otherwise it wouldn’t be morality), and that each individual is the sole and ultimate source of the principles of morality. MacIntyre remarks, “The contradiction in Kierkegaard’s doctrine is plain.”28

It remains for Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) to draw the radical conclusion from the failure of the Enlightenment project: the individual must “raze to the ground the structures of inherited moral belief and argument,”29 with their communal conceptions of justice, respect for others, and compassion, and rebuild upon the naked ground the honestly self-absorbed, self-glorifying, noncommunicating “great man” whose final authority is his own will to power.

In the last chapter of After Virtue, MacIntyre poses the alternatives: Nietzsche or Aristotle? The historical argument of the entire book has been that a broadly Aristotelian approach to ethics—which is to say, an ethics of the virtues—is the only rational way to avoid the Nietzschean conclusion, which in so many ways (though always half-heartedly) our contemporary culture has drawn. Let us conclude this very sketchy summary of After Virtue with a brief account of MacIntyre’s own proposed version of Aristotelianism—his account of the nature of the virtues.
INTRODUCTION

MacIntyre's Account of the Virtues

MacIntyre presents his concept of a virtue in terms of three conceptual "stages": the concepts of a practice, the narrative order of a single human life, and a moral tradition.

"Practices," in MacIntyre's sense, are complex and demanding activities with standards of excellence and goods "internal" to them. A few examples are chess, architecture, physics, baseball, historiography, farming, portrait painting, running a household or a city, and playing the violin. All the practices just listed can lead to such external goods as money, prestige, and the pleasures of the palate. But, in addition, they all have goods internal to them: in physics, say, insight into the relations between physical phenomena, in architecture the design of a beautiful and functional space, in violin playing a near-perfect performance of the Mendelssohn concerto, or in running a household the rearing of healthy and virtuous children. Attaining the goods internal to a practice requires the practitioner to submit to the rules of the practice (for example, the canons of scholarship, the techniques of farming, the rules of baseball), and this, in turn, places the practitioner in a social context. In some practices the immediate social context is very evident: a baseball player cannot play alone, a scholar is necessarily dependent on the work of other scholars, the violinist who plays the Mendelssohn concerto must work with the members of the orchestra, and so on. But every practice has the social dimension of the historical tradition that has given rise to its rules and canons of excellence. Even if the violinist plays only solo performances, he or she can begin to realize the goods internal to violin playing only by aligning himself or herself to the tradition by taking lessons from a teacher, studying the classical violin works, imitating some great violinists, and so forth.

Now MacIntyre argues that a virtue is a learned human quality necessary to attain any goods internal to a practice. "We have to learn to recognize what is due to whom [justice]; we have to be prepared to take whatever self-endangering risks are demanded along the way [courage]; and we have to listen carefully to what we are told about our own inadequacies and to reply with the same carefulness for the facts [truthfulness]." While there are certainly dishonest violinists, cowardly farmers, and cheating baseball players, still, without these virtues the kinds of social involvement that are the necessary background of these practices would not be possible. Furthermore, unless at least some practitioners along the way practice with the virtues, the tradition sustaining the practice is in jeopardy of decaying. If portrait painters began to care only about making money and being interviewed on talk shows, and consequently ceased to listen honestly to the tradition of portrait painting and its judgments upon their work, the practice would be in danger of dying out. One can see how MacIntyre's theory so far is broadly Aristotelian. Without practices, the characteristically human form of life would not exist; without certain virtues, practices could not be learned, carried on, and sustained; so these virtues are essential to any distinctly human form of life.

The second stage in MacIntyre's account of the virtues is "the narrative concept of selfhood." Throughout After Virtue, MacIntyre is on the prowl against a particular concept of the human self, with roots in the Enlightenment, which is incompatible with the Aristotelian virtues. The emotivist or existentialist self is a being who has a past and a future only incidentally; its "character" (if you want to glorify it with that name) is
determined by what it happens at the moment to be choosing or by the role that it happens at the moment to be playing. "Authenticity" is procured by forthrightly owning up to one's choices and to the fluidity with which the self moves from role to role. Authenticity so understood is the only human virtue.

Against this radically disjointed and nonhistorical concept of selfhood, MacIntyre contrasts "a concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end." This, then, is the concept of a self with continuity, with personal identity—a self that can be "characterized" not just by its present role or decision, or even by the chronological listing of its life-episodes, its decisions and its evolution through roles, but by the unity that is its biography, both retrospective and prospective. MacIntyre invites us to notice that biographical narrative is what makes sense of the individual episodes—the actions and decisions—of a human life. Without their setting-in-the-story, these actions and decisions do not present themselves as intelligible.

The individual person must be a self whose actions make sense as parts of a narrative whole stretching back into his or her past and forward into the future. The details of this story are largely determined by factors other than the individual's decisions—that is, the persons the individual finds himself or herself related to, the nation and culture he or she is born into, and the individual's status within these. By virtue of being placed, and taking one's place, in such a setting, the individual has a personal identity and comes to know what that identity is.

But not just any narrative form shapes a self capable of possessing justice, truthfulness, courage, and friendship; not all narratives are such that the protagonist needs the virtues for successful pursuit of the story line. What, then, is the required narrative form? It is the form of a quest for the human good. An individual life must be the story of a search to know and achieve his or her human well-being or flourishing. But where shall we seek a conception of the human good? We start, says MacIntyre, with our knowledge of the goods internal to human practices and with the recognition that these goods need to be ordered. The goods internal to chess are surely on a different plane of importance than the goods internal to structuring a society. In the process of seeking to rank things that we already know to be good, and to order our lives with respect to this ranking, we will come to a clearer understanding both of what the human good is, and of ourselves. And the virtues will be qualities required of us in this quest for the human good: "The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good."13

The third stage in MacIntyre's account of the nature of the virtues is the concept of a moral tradition. There is no such thing as abstract, universal morality. Each of us must launch the quest for our human good from the vantage point of some particular moral tradition, indeed from our own particular place within that tradition. If you are an American, your moral tradition unavoidably includes certain democratic ideals, an individualistic conception of political freedom, and, in its history, the institution of black
slavery and the bombing of Hiroshima. Even if you stand in rebellion against certain elements of this tradition, the terms and issues of your rebellion are set by the tradition. The values to which you appeal in your rebellion must initially be found in the tradition. Furthermore, the particular dimensions of your quest for the human good are determined by such things as the period in that history in which you were born, the moral and political persuasions and powers of your family, and your race. Your moral tradition is neither a straitjacket nor a dispensable outer garment: "Without those moral particularities to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin; but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists. Yet particularity can never be simply left behind or obliterated. The notion of escaping from it into a realm of entirely universal maxims which belong to man as such, whether in its eighteenth-century Kantian form or in the presentation of some modern analytical moral philosophies, is an illusion."  

If a moral tradition is a necessary background for an individual's life to have the narrative form of a pursuit of the good amid the goods internal to human practices, a moral tradition itself requires the historical background of courageous, truthful, and just individuals who inhabit it. Moral traditions are subject to decay, disintegration, and disappearance, and they are sustained, ultimately, only if there are persons who practice them with integrity. This is the third way in which the virtues are necessary for the prosecution of a fully human life. MacIntyre nicely summarizes: "The virtues find their point and purpose not only in sustaining those relationships necessary if the variety of goods internal to practices are to be achieved and not only in sustaining the form of an individual life in which that individual may seek out his or her good as the good of his or her whole life, but also in sustaining those traditions which provide both practices and individual lives with their necessary historical context."

The Virtues and Contemporary Moral Debate

How can reckoning with these very general truths about the nature of the virtues help us to resolve the interminable moral debates of our day and to escape the emotivist self that we are all threatening to become? Obviously MacIntyre's theory of the virtues is not directly a solution to the question of whether early abortions are permissible, or whether building weapons capable of destroying the earth is an acceptable strategy in international politics, or whether it is just for government to tax the rich to support the poor. It is not a formula for resolving moral debates. Rather, it is an invitation to adopt a different conception of the nature of morality, and thus of moral debate, than the one presupposed by the parties to the previously mentioned debates.

MacIntyre's book is an argument that our incapacity to resolve such moral debates is the result of a mind-set that has evolved historically from abandoning the Aristotelian perspective in ethics. If we recognize that morality is always bound to a social tradition, we will not expect conclusive resolutions of moral debates unless these are carried on within a sufficiently rich and coherent tradition. And if we reckon that moral thinking requires a notion of human nature not just as it is, but as it would be if it realized its telos, or ultimate end, then we shall seek to recapture a tradition in which inquiry into our telos is a basic and legitimate exercise of human rationality. The questions these debates raise cannot be
INTRODUCTION

answered rationally in our secular and "pluralistic" situation ("modern liberal individualism"), which is one of a moral noncommunity not focused on human-nature-as-teles but seeking instead, with only confused fragmented remnants of traditions, abstract community- and tradition-free moral principles. But the questions can be answered rationally within a concrete moral community in which the human teles is concordantly sought.

MacIntyre's optimism about finding rational answers to the moral questions besetting us is due in large part to his rejection of the Enlightenment belief in rationality with a big R. Part of the restoration of morality in our day must be a liberation from this false and constricting picture. Rationality is far more faceted, historical, community-centered, and infused with human needs and yearnings than the Enlightenment would have us believe. And because rationality is good for more than just figuring out how things "tick," there is a place in it for Aristotle's project of debating and envisioning the human good.

The Nature and Structure of This Anthology

The present collection of essays is divided into three parts, characterized by increasing specificity. The first part contains an essay on the social importance of the virtues and essays on moral theorizing and the relevance of the virtues to this enterprise. The second part has papers on general features of moral psychology: the nature of the moral self, the connection between desires and ethical reasoning, the character and place of will power in the moral life, and the nature, significance, and conditions of perfection of character ("sainthood"). The essays of the third part are about individual vices and virtues: envy, servility, and sentimentality; justice, autonomy, generosity, and compassion. These are, of course, but a tiny sampling of human virtues and vices, and in this volume the papers serve as illustrations of the kind of detail-work that is being done and needs to be done.

If an ethics of virtue is to be built upon the ruins of moral philosophy, it needs to include both close-ups and aerial photographs of the terrain. To MacIntyre's historical argument and broad theory of the virtues must be added the detailed philosophical work in moral psychology that Anscome has urged us to do. If well done, this work will put meat on the bones of virtues reflection in the coming years. If MacIntyre is right, philosophy is not, or at any rate need not be, a side-issue of culture—an inessential, if fascinating, concern of the folks at the university. In the past it has significantly shaped our moral consciousness. It can and probably will be a shaper of our cultural and individual lives in the new century that is dawning. Often quietly and behind the scenes, no doubt, it will shape our self-concepts, our science, our education, our theology and church life, and our politics. The essays in Parts Two and Three are but a number of beginnings in the direction of that detailed philosophical work to which Anscome has challenged us and of which MacIntyre's history suggests the need.

Notes

1. Normative ethics is the enterprise of justifying ethical precepts in the sense of establishing (1) that the precept is ethical as opposed to nonethical, thus showing, for example, why "Speak the truth" is an ethical precept while "Trim your toenails on alternate Tuesdays" is not, and (2) that the
INTRODUCTION

precept is ethical as opposed to unethical, thus showing, for example, why "Share your goods with those in need" is an ethical precept while "Disregard those in need" is an unethical one. The two chief competing normative ethical schools in modern moral philosophy are the utilitarian and the deontological. Utilitarianism justifies ethical precepts by reference to the Greatest Happiness Principle ("Always so act that your action results in the greatest possible balance of happiness for the greatest possible number of people"). Immanuel Kant, the greatest of the deontologists, justifies ethical precepts by reference to the Categorical Imperative ("Always so act that you can consistently will that the precept enjoining your action be a universal law").

2. The metaethicalist, unlike the normative ethicist, tries not to advocate any morality, but only to engage in the morally neutral activity of describing the meaning of ethical terms. Thus when G. E. Moore says that 'good' stands for an intuitible nonnatural property, and C. L. Stevenson says ethical utterances are expressions of feeling and efforts to get others to share your feelings, and R. M. Hare says that ethical utterances are universal prescriptions, they are all "doing metaethics." See the quote from Hudson in this section.

5. Ibid., 8.
7. Ibid., 14.
8. See Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, 2d ed., 53.
10. Ibid., 15.
11. Ibid., 18.
15. After Virtue, 115 [122].
16. Ibid., 119 [126–27].
17. Ibid., 131 [140].
18. Ibid., 132 [141].
19. Ibid., 133 [142].
20. For comments on the relations Aristotle bears to this tradition, see 154 [165].
21. Ibid., 147 [157].
22. Ibid., 143 [152].
23. Ibid., 158 [170].
24. Ibid., 166 [178].
25. Ibid., 51 [53].
26. Ibid., 49 [51].
27. Ibid., 70 [92].
28. Ibid., 41. MacIntyre's interpretation of Kierkegaard is more plausible as an account of how Kierkegaard has been read in the twentieth century, than as a reading of Kierkegaard himself. As MacIntyre admits, his reading goes against both Kierkegaard's self-interpretation and that of "the best Kierkegaard scholars of our own time, such as Louis Mackey and Gregory Malanschuk" (40). The editors believe that Kierkegaard's thought about the human condition has far more in common with Aristotle's than with that of C. L. Stevenson, R. M. Hare, and J.-P. Sartre. He should be read as in some respects like Aquinas—as a relatively lonely figure trying to restore the tradition of the virtues in his own day.
29. Ibid., 238 [256].
30. Ibid., 178 [191].
31. Ibid., 202 [217].
INTRODUCTION

32. Ibid., 191 [205].
33. Ibid., 204 [219].
34. Ibid., 205f [221]. Maclntyre is referring in this last line to such philosophers as Alan Gewirth, whose work he discusses on 64–65 [66–67].
35. Ibid., 207 [223].