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BOOK REVIEWS

Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition, by Alasdair MacIntyre. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990. Pp. x and 241. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewed by RICHARD T. DE GEORGE, University of Kansas.

The chapters of this book are the ten Gifford Lectures MacIntyre delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1988. In them he contrasts three approaches to philosophy and particularly to moral theory. The first is epitomized by the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, with its conception of ethics as a science in which progress is possible. The second he calls genealogy after Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, a method he finds continued by Michel Foucault. The third is Thomism, championed in Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, which led to the requirement that the theology of Thomas Aquinas be taught in Catholic seminaries and to the revival of Thomistic philosophy in Catholic schools.

The book is primarily an interpretative history of the three versions of moral enquiry, written from the acknowledged partisan view of a follower of Aquinas. In his lectures MacIntyre continues the themes he presented in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. His basic claim is that Thomism alone of the three versions of moral enquiry can account for the insights and failures of the other two positions, and so it emerges as rationally superior to them. The claim is not defended in such a way that all readers will be convinced of its truth, but then MacIntyre holds that only those who accept the Thomistic position can see its superiority from within. As a partisan, he places the Thomistic tradition in its best light as a flexible approach to morality. By contrast he saddles the encyclopaedists with their nineteenth-century dogmatic statements in *Brittanica*, and plays down the fact that few if any of their heirs hold such views today.

MacIntyre is at his best in describing historical positions. His own position is less than clear and frustratingly vague at crucial points. Those who had hoped that perhaps in this book MacIntyre might present his own substantive moral theory, a virtue ethic that would overcome the shortcomings of utilitarianism, Kantianism, and contractarianism, will be disappointed. The closest he comes to doing so is to endorse Aquinas' position in which morality and theology are inextricably and necessarily intertwined. In addition to virtue MacIntyre emphasizes that obedience to divine law is also "required if we are to achieve our good" (p. 130). The implicit conclusion is that MacIntyre does not believe a strictly philosophical virtue-based ethics is possible.

MacIntyre articulately exposes the inner workings of Augustinianism, of Aristotelianism, of Nietzsche and Foucault, and of the British encyclopaedists. If his thesis that we each see only through the lenses of our own system is correct, it is puzzling how he can so clearly see other positions, how he can bring us to see them, and why both he and we cannot evaluate them on the basis of their internal strengths and weaknesses, whatever our own philosophical position.

Although MacIntyre frequently refers to tradition, exactly what tradition he embraces is not clear. For the most part he cites and explains the position of Thomas Aquinas. He also cites, though not often or at length Pope Leo XIII, suggesting that by "tradition" he might mean the tradition of the Catholic Church. Whether that tradition includes Vatican II or the periods of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when Thomism was not in great favor, is unclear. He contrasts the Aristotelian and the Augustinian traditions. Whether they are part of the Thomistic tradition, which superseded them, is also not clear. Even the suggestion that the tradition he extols is a tradition since Aquinas is confusing, since it seems to exclude many of the later scholastics and Thomists with whom MacIntyre disagrees. If we are to build on a tradition we must know what that tradition is, and we must know how to learn from it. MacIntyre never makes either explicit for his reader.

The history of Thomism since *Aeterni Patris* has been mixed. Joseph Maréchal sought to reconcile Thomism with Kant. Others have tried to reconcile it with phenomenology and existentialism; still others with analytic philosophy. After a hundred years Thomism has been losing rather than gaining influence in American Catholic universities and on the international philosophical scene. In an otherwise very articulate book, MacIntyre never makes clear how we are to use whatever in Thomism he believes valuable.

Aquinas held that man's end transcended this life. He adopted what might be called the Judeo-Christian view of morality as developed through the doctrine of the Church, but he also argued from natural law. For him the two were compatible. But both have been critiqued, as has their compatibility. MacIntyre does not specify exactly what he is proposing in this regard, he does not mention the critiques and the problems they raise, and he does not tell us whether the authority to which we are to submit is the authority of the Pope, of the Church taken more broadly, of God (known how?), of the Bible (interpreted by whom?), or of some figure or figures within the Thomistic tradition as he envisions it. He is silent on the differences within the Catholic Church on moral questions.

Although MacIntyre claims that genuine incommensurability "can only be recognized and characterized by someone who inhabits both alternative schemes" (p. 114), he helps us appreciate the incommensurability of Augustinian theology and Aristotelianism at the University of Paris. He clearly

and brilliantly characterizes the task Aquinas faced of reconciling the philosophy of Aristotle with the Augustinian theological tradition influenced by Platonism. Each tradition had its own view of truth and its own world view available to those inside it. MacIntyre argues that the Augustinians and the Aristotelians of St. Thomas' day were unable to understand each other, since each side argued from its own position. Aquinas, through his teacher Albertus Magnus, was able to learn both traditions from within, and was thus able to do justice to both in his remarkable synthesis. He was able to give an internal critique of each position to show its shortcomings, and then he was able to show how these shortcomings could be overcome in the new position he developed.

The accomplishment of Thomas Aquinas was not to side with either but to find a third way that did justice to both positions, while avoiding their limitations. The example does not show that one side was able to demonstrate itself superior to its opponent, but that both were incorporated into a new system that is superior to both. Although some people and philosophers are so narrowly committed to their presuppositions that they cannot appreciate the strengths of other positions, this does not seem to be a universal malady. If we learn from Aquinas how to form a new system from competing old ones, why is this not a model for us today? Why opt, as MacIntyre does, for an existing system—Thomism? Why not rather reconcile contemporary modern science, modern philosophy, and Thomism, as Aquinas reconciled Augustine and Aristotle? Yet that is not what MacIntyre suggests. For him modern philosophy is a mistake to be ignored or refuted, and we are to take over Thomas Aquinas' thirteenth-century forms and fill them with twentieth-century content. Yet he rejects, for instance, Jacques Maritain's attempt to incorporate into Thomism a doctrine of human rights such as found in the *UN Declaration of Human Rights*. If MacIntyre's Thomism is an updated Thomism with contemporary content, then unless MacIntyre equates that with the teachings of the Catholic Church, we are still waiting for him to show us in detail what such a system contains. He says that Aquinas' answers to each question in the *Summa Theologiae* are incomplete insofar as they were simply the "best answer reached so far" (p. 124), and that "Except for the finality of Scripture and dogmatic tradition, there is and can be no finality" (p. 125). But beyond that he is mute on the morality for our time and place.

Both Aristotle and Aquinas formulated a theory that accounted for the morality of their times. MacIntyre does not either attempt to do this or suggest that this be done. Instead he vacillates between two tasks. One is the reformation of society, turning it into a (Catholic?) community with cohesive values. The other is the philosophical task of developing an ethics that is part of a larger system that also includes, and perhaps is even founded on, theology.

Aquinas sought a grounding for morality in an age of faith. The modern philosophers whom MacIntyre opposes seek a secular grounding for morality.

As best one can tell, MacIntyre wants to retrieve the grounding for morality based on faith. But since the political and most other realms of society are secular and not founded on faith, he must convert society to make it the appropriate kind of society for the theologically based morality he wants to defend. Philosophers typically reinterpret the world, rather than change it. Both Aristotle and Aquinas provided a rationale for the virtues and the good life accepted in their societies. MacIntyre implicitly reverses the role, and in this instance seems closer to Marx than to Aquinas; but his reformation is to come about from rational debate rather than from changing economic structures. We are to reject the growing and powerful doctrine of human rights as individualistic. We are to return in morality to a sense of community. But since we do not experience community of the requisite sort in society, we must change society so we can apply the proper morality.

If contemporary society is in as bad shape as MacIntyre claims, it is unlikely that his call for the acceptance of Thomism, which first requires conversion of some sort, can succeed. If he is right, he cannot convince people intellectually until they first believe the general truth of his claims, and implicitly those of Catholicism, which although not contrary to reason cannot be attained by reason alone and require religious faith. What role Thomistic morality can thus play in contemporary secular society is far from clear. Nor can one tell from the lectures whether Thomism is to supply the morality for the world and pressing global problems or only for those countries within the western philosophical tradition, as it developed together with Christianity through the thirteenth century.

As to the intellectual task, this work like his earlier ones places great emphasis on debate between positions holding fundamentally opposed views of rationality. Yet it is difficult to determine with any clarity or certainty MacIntyre's conception of rationality and its relation to religious faith. For Aquinas and most others faith cannot be reached simply by reason.

In the final chapter MacIntyre draws some implications for the university. He is opposed to the liberal university and argues for a university in which there is "constrained disagreement" (p. 231) such that we may be able to see the correctness of Thomism as interpreted by MacIntyre. He claims that Thomists and others who argue for moral and theological justification cannot be heard in any authentic and systematic way in the liberal university and he calls for new ways to allow those voices to be heard.

In the nineteen thirties Mortimer Adler at the University of Chicago defended Thomism against all comers. His lectures and debates drew students in droves. The debates were not required, nor was the university especially structured for them. University structures do not preclude MacIntyre and others who want to argue the importance of theology to morality from being similarly heard—and MacIntyre has been heard by many, as his invitation to

give these lectures illustrates. Contemporary interest in virtue ethics suggests that as he and others in the tradition he evokes (whichever it is) present a substantive ethical theory that shows itself adequate to the times and a true competitor of Kantianism, utilitarianism, contractarianism, and human rights theory, it will have an audience.

If MacIntyre wants to be heard more, he must produce the substantive theory that will engage his opponents. Simply to claim that Saint Thomas has the solution to the ethical and philosophical problems of our times is a move that has been tried in Catholic schools for over a hundred years, with less than compelling success. The medieval Church's position on the immorality of usury might lead one to question authoritative Church pronouncements on some moral issues, and many Catholics have come to question the position of today's Catholic magisterium on the immorality of contraception, especially when the position is defended by natural law arguments rather than by authority. MacIntyre does not deal with these or other substantive issues. He relishes uncovering and emphasizing contemporary dilemmas, while he underplays the consensus on everyday morality that holds that wanton killing, lying, and stealing are wrong, or that persons deserve respect, and he also underplays the growing transcultural agreements on the value of human freedom and the importance of human rights.

With *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, and the present work we know clearly what MacIntyre attacks. We also know his views on the incommensurability of philosophical positions, and his pessimism about the state of society, morality, and the university. This volume argues for a method. The proof of whether it is in fact superior to alternative and opposing methods will be whether it can yield a moral theory adequate to the times. This series of lectures claims that it can; but the lectures contain only a promise.

The God Who Commands, by **Richard J. Mouw**. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame press, 1990. Pp. vii and 214. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewed by JANINE MARIE IDZIAK, Loras College.

Mouw has undertaken an examination of the much discussed divine command ethical theory from a specifically Calvinist perspective. The book is *Calvinist* not in the sense of being a strict historical study of particular divine command moralists from that tradition, but in the sense of trying to capture the overall spirit of Calvinist theology. Much of the book draws upon previously published essays by Mouw. Thus the range of issues is wide, and the discussion sometimes digresses from an ethics of divine commands *per se* to such topics as Alasdair MacIntyre's exposition of the Reformation view of the "self," Christian hedonism, and even medical ethics.