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**DOING GOD IN PUBLIC: AN ANGLICAN INTERPRETATION
OF MACINTYRE'S TRADITION-BASED REASONING
AS A CHRISTIAN PRAXIS FOR A PLURALIST WORLD**

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Doing God in Public: An Anglican Interpretation of MacIntyre's Tradition-Based Reasoning as a Christian Praxis for a Pluralist World

Sarah Caroline Rowland Jones

Abstract

‘We don’t do God’, Alastair Campbell famously said of UK government policy-making. In contrast, Anglican Bishops at the 2008 Lambeth Conference committed themselves to reflect on contextualising their faith, and pursue their conclusions in public ethical discourse.

This thesis proposes that the Bishops (and others) may justifiably pursue this two-fold course, through the application, reinterpretation and development of Alasdair MacIntyre's tradition-based moral reasoning. I contend that the validity of a MacIntyrean approach in contextualising Christianity is readily apparent; and can shed light on Anglican differences around human sexuality.

Through distinguishing between MacIntyre’s ‘utopian’ theory and his practical requirement merely to be ‘good enough’ to ‘go on and go further’, I argue that we find effective resources for extensive moral rational engagement with other traditions, and, more surprisingly, within liberal democracy. This, I agree with Jeffrey Stout, has the potential to operate, to a useful degree, as akin to a ‘tradition’.

I then outline how the Bishops can best pursue substantive, rational, ethical dialogue, first, with other communities of tradition; second, with those groupings, widespread throughout society, which, though not fully-fledged communities of tradition, nonetheless sufficiently reflect them to be able to sustain some degree of moral debate; and third, through developing MacIntyre's appropriation of Aquinas’ work on Natural Law, in circumstances that, or among those who, uphold no tradition. In each case, I argue the potential is greater than MacIntyre allows, and, importantly, is enhanced by constructive engagement, which it is therefore generally a morally rational obligation to pursue.

With examples drawn primarily from the work of Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, I point to practical ways in which my proposed MacIntyrean praxis can both strengthen the Church’s engagement in public discourse, and enhance the nature of the public space as a place for pursuing the common good.

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Doing God in Public: An Anglican Interpretation of MacIntyre's Tradition-Based Reasoning as a Christian Praxis for a Pluralist World

List of Contents

	Page
1. Why MacIntyre?	5
2. Starting with MacIntyre	30
3. The Problem with MacIntyre	84
4. Working with MacIntyre	114
5. MacIntyre against MacIntyre	149
6. MacIntyre beyond MacIntyre	178
7. After MacIntyre	211
Bibliography	263

Abbreviations

Works by Alasdair MacIntyre

AV	After Virtue (unless otherwise stated, 2nd ed.) London: Duckworth, 1985
WJWR	Whose Justice? Which Rationality? Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988
TRV	Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990
DRA	Dependent Rational Animals London: Duckworth, 1999
GPU	God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009

Works by Jeffrey Stout

EaB	Ethics after Babel (2nd ed.) Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001
DaT	Democracy and Tradition Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004

Chapter 1 – Why MacIntyre?

Introduction

‘We don’t do God’, Alastair Campbell famously rebuked a Vanity Fair journalist interviewing Tony Blair;¹ while he, on retirement, himself told the BBC that he had been wary of talking about religion while Prime Minister for fear of being seen ‘as a nutter’.²

A very different stance was taken by the Anglican Bishops at the 2008 decennial meeting of the Lambeth Conference. They committed themselves to reflect on their faith and how it should be lived within contemporary contexts, and then to bring to bear their conclusions within the wider world through lobbying and advocacy, engaging as appropriate with every dimension of public life.³

The aim of this thesis is to propose, through the application, reinterpretation and development of Alasdair MacIntyre's work on tradition-based moral reasoning, how the Anglican Bishops (and others like them) may justifiably pursue this two-fold course they set themselves. I hope to make the case that it is relatively straightforward to show the validity and value of a MacIntyrean approach to the first task, of contextualising Christianity with integrity for their own community of tradition, through their commitment to consider the interplay of gospel, culture and society.

However, the applicability of MacIntyre's work to the second task – of bringing the voice of faith, thus understood, into the public space – might at first seem more tenuous, given the limitations he places on the possibility of substantive rational engagement with those of other traditions, and, even more so, within the context of liberal democracy. I shall argue that, contrary to this impression, MacIntyre's work provides extensive and effective resources on which to draw. In doing so, I shall offer

¹ For an account of this encounter see Colin Brown, ‘Campbell interrupted Blair as he spoke of his faith: “We don’t do God”,’ *The Telegraph*, 4 May 2003, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1429109/Campbell-interrupted-Blair-as-he-spoke-of-his-faith-We-dont-do-God.html>. However, since leaving government he has argued that ‘all leaders, whether of religious faith themselves or not, have to “do God”.’ See Tony Blair, ‘Why we must all do God,’ *The New Statesman*, 19 March 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.newstatesman.com/religion/2009/03/world-million-faith-god.

² See ‘Blair feared “nutter” label,’ *BBC News*, 25 November 2007, accessed 15 May 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7111620.stm for a report of this interview.

³ In place of the resolutions of earlier meetings, the 2008 Conference produced the less formal ‘Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008’, also known as ‘Indaba Reflections’ with paragraph numbers cited here by §. Available at [www.lambethconference.org/vault/Reflections_Document_\(final\).pdf](http://www.lambethconference.org/vault/Reflections_Document_(final).pdf). See §56 and §58.

justification for Jeffrey Stout's contention that MacIntyre 'both underestimates the level of the agreement on the good actually exhibited by our society and overestimates the level required for us to reason coherently with each other in most matters of moral concern'⁴ and I shall indicate why I consider him right to assert that MacIntyre 'does not exclude, it seems to me, the possibility that moral discourse in our society can itself be understood as held together by a relatively limited but nonetheless real and significant agreement on the good.'⁵

On this basis, I shall commend to the Anglican Bishops and those they lead an approach by which best to pursue substantive and rational ethical dialogue, first, with those of other communities of tradition (where I argue that in practice there is far greater opportunity than the limited scope MacIntyre appears to allow); second, with those groupings, widespread through society, which, though not fully-fledged communities of tradition, nonetheless enjoy a sufficient breadth and depth of those characteristics to be able to sustain some degree of moral debate; and third, through developing MacIntyre's appropriation of Aquinas' work on natural law, with those who belong to no tradition, or in circumstances that uphold no tradition (which I argue are far more limited than MacIntyre asserts).

Here I shall propose that each context gives rise, even in vestigial form, to a specific 'language' for conducting ethical dialogue. This is, in all three cases, a very different language from the ostensibly neutral and objective discourse rooted in the Enlightenment which MacIntyre rightly condemns as a chimera. Rather, it reflects and expresses the instantiation within those particular circumstances of Aquinas' primary precepts of natural law, being the vehicle for conducting and promoting debate around what constitutes the common good and how it might best be pursued in this time and place: a fully developed 'language-in-use' as MacIntyre terms it, in the first instance; a more limited 'moral language', to borrow Stout's usage, in the second; and what I propose to call a 'communal language', the most basic form, in the third.

In addition, I shall argue that shaping public secular debate in accordance with such an approach provides the most fruitful context for participants in pluralist democracies to pursue the common good (as well as for freely following their own beliefs and practices). Therefore, unless overridden by other considerations, for

⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed (London: Duckworth, 1985), 215.

⁵ Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 211.

example political or tactical, there should be a general presumption that to engage in dialogue to the fullest degree possible is the best means to promote and strengthen the processes of authentic moral reasoning, as well as their content, whereas to withdraw is to be complicit in the erosion of both. In doing this, I shall implicitly make a case against those who claim that a faith-based perspective, together with the language and arguments derived from it, has no legitimate place in civil debate.

I shall concentrate, though not exclusively, on the United Kingdom, with particular attention to the writing and speaking of the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Mike Higton has described his ‘most pervasive ... political commitment’ being ‘to negotiation in pursuit of the common good; the commitment to what he elsewhere calls ‘the problem of restoring an authentically public discourse’.⁶ Though he professes to be consciously influenced rather more by the writing of Charles Taylor,⁷ in my view his work illustrates to a considerable degree the best of the breadth of the ‘MacIntyrean’ Anglican praxis across varying audiences which I propose. Assessing his writing and speaking from this perspective can also point to ways in which this approach may be strengthened, and more widely adopted and developed.

After saying a little more about the Anglican context, this chapter will turn to Alasdair MacIntyre and his work, and then describe in greater detail the themes of this thesis and outline its arguments.

Anglicanism, Culture and Politics

Anglicanism, my own tradition, has a considerable history of engagement with public debate and the wider political and social culture of the day. Alongside the long experience of Establishment of the Church of England, the resolutions of successive Lambeth Conferences, particularly since the beginning of the twentieth century, demonstrate how the world-wide Anglican Communion has habitually addressed matters of public concern, from war and the conduct of international relations and global economics, through to domestic political and socio-economic

⁶ Mike Higton, *Difficult Gospel: The Theology of Rowan Williams* (London: SCM Press, 2004), p. 125 – emphases in original – citing Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 36.

⁷ Private conversation, Lambeth Palace, December 2009.

questions. Furthermore, the need to take appropriate account of cultural context has been a recurrent theme since the Conference's inaugural meeting of 1867.⁸

In 1920, the Lambeth Conference enunciated what might be called the beginnings of a global Anglican theology of political engagement at both institutional and individual levels. It resolved that 'The Church cannot in its corporate capacity be an advocate or partisan, "a judge or a divider", in political or class disputes where moral issues are not at stake; nevertheless in matters of economic and political controversy the Church is bound to give its positive and active corporate witness to the Christian principles of justice, brotherhood, and the equal and infinite value of every human personality' (Resolution 75). As I shall aim to show, the value of the human person is one of the most central elements in the praxis I propose for the twenty-first century. The Conference also affirmed extensive public engagement by Christian individuals alongside that of the institutional church, stating that 'Members of the Church are bound to take an active part, by public action and by personal service, in removing those abuses which depress and impoverish human life. In company with other citizens and organisations, they should work for reform ...' (Resolution 77).

William Temple (Bishop of Manchester, Archbishop of York and then Archbishop of Canterbury from 1942 until his death in 1944) enlarged upon this approach in *Christianity and Social Order*. In response to criticism both from within the Church of England and from politicians for taking stands on political and economic questions, he argued that the church was 'bound to "interfere" because it is by vocation the agent of God's purpose, outside the scope of which no human interest or activity can fall'.⁹ It was therefore the responsibility of the church to 'announce Christian principles and point out where the existing social order at any time is in conflict with them. It must then pass on to Christian citizens, acting in their civic capacity, the task of reshaping the existing order in closer conformity to the principles.'¹⁰ On this basis, said Temple, 'nine-tenths'¹¹ of the so-called interfering would be done through the influence of individual Christians acting outside the

⁸ The recommendations and resolutions of all the Lambeth Conferences from 1867 to 2008 are available at www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/index.cfm.

⁹ William Temple, 1942, *Christianity and Social Order* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1942), 16.

¹⁰ Temple, *Christianity*, 35.

¹¹ Temple, *Christianity*, 17.

institutional life of the church, for ‘it is recognised that Christian men and women in the various walks of life should bring the spirit of Christ to bear upon their work.’¹²

Though primarily addressing a British audience, this writer of both philosophy and devotional works ‘remains a figurehead for Christians seeking to combine personal religion with social action’,¹³ even if some of the details of his approach have proved less applicable in later, more multicultural, societies.¹⁴ Subsequent Lambeth Conference resolutions have thus continued to reflect Temple’s assumptions of Anglican engagement as they addressed issues of public concern. One further example is contained in the Communion’s ‘Five Marks of Mission’, developed through the 1980s, which include a commitment to ‘to seek to transform unjust structures of society’.¹⁵

Against this background, Bishops of the global Communion met most recently in 2008.¹⁶ They focussed their discussions around the twin themes of Anglican Identity and Equipping Bishops for Mission. In other words, we might say that their debate was significantly shaped by their understanding on the one hand of their faith as expressed within their own community of tradition, and on the other of the relationship between this faith and the wider world. The two themes were recognised as inseparable and interwoven, as was indicated in the ‘Indaba Reflections’ document produced at the end of the Conference. Thus they saw encounter with the wider world as shaping their perception of the faith at the heart of Anglican identity, since ‘cultural and social issues ... impinge upon our interpretation of the Gospel’ (§56). At the same time, they viewed this faith as finding expression within the wider world, for ‘taking due regard of local contexts, we commit ourselves to advocating and lobbying (government, agencies, business, ecumenical, inter-faith partners and any other

¹² Temple, *Christianity*, 20.

¹³ Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1993), 637.

¹⁴ John Habgood, ‘Church and Society’, in *Celebrating the Anglican Way*, ed. Ian Bunting (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 39.

¹⁵ Available at www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm. It should be noted that Anglicans have a broad understanding of what mission encompasses, which includes all aspects of social justice. This is summarised in these ‘Five Marks of Mission’: to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach, baptise and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to seek to transform unjust structures of society; to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. A sixth Mark, addressing peace-making and reconciliation, is under consideration.

¹⁶ Though a number of Bishops did not attend the Conference, I am proceeding on the basis that this absence and related disagreements have no material implications for the subject matter of the thesis – though it may be that the conclusions of the thesis can offer some resources in addressing these disagreements. I shall return to this question in the next chapter.

appropriate agencies or bodies) on the many issues of social justice we find in our world' (§58). The importance of this dual focus will become clear when we consider the relevance of Alasdair MacIntyre's work.

However, William Temple began his book by observing 'The claim of the Christian Church to make its voice heard in matters of politics and economics is very widely resented. It is commonly assumed that Religion is one department of life, like Art or Science, and that it is playing the part of a busybody when it lays down principles for the guidance of other departments, whether Art and Science or Business and Politics.'¹⁷ Over sixty years later, the resentment faced by Anglican Bishops entering public debate is often far greater, particularly within the United Kingdom and other 'Westernised' and increasingly secular societies; and for many reasons beyond that of playing the busybody. While some consider faith to be entirely a private matter, and irrelevant to the ordering of the wider life of society, others argue that all religions are irrational and worse: being the well-spring of the most heinous atrocities against humanity over the centuries and of various continuing abuses. On this account religion should be explicitly excluded from the widest possible interpretation of the public space. Not only is God a delusion, he is a pernicious delusion.¹⁸

This is the context in which many Anglican Bishops and those they lead are required to operate, both in addressing contemporary questions within their churches, and in engaging in public debate. My contention is that Alasdair MacIntyre's work offers significant resources for more than meeting these criticisms and challenges – resources that are far more encouraging and extensive than the majority of MacIntyre's interpreters, or even he himself, appear to realise.

My search for such resources has been a long one. Prior to training for ordination within the Church in Wales in 1999, I was a British diplomat for 15 years, holding a number of appointments in which I was expected to contribute advice to government ministers on the shaping of policy. I certainly did not believe that my faith was an irrelevance, as I sought to produce analyses and recommendations with the greatest integrity I could muster. But in parish teaching and church bookshops I

¹⁷ Temple, *Christianity*, 7.

¹⁸ See, for example, Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, (London: Black Swan, 2007), 52; or the impassioned blogging on articles carried by the Guardian's 'Comment is free: Belief' pages, at www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief; or the responses to the article by Nicholas Watt, 'Alastair Campbell diaries: How Blair's Bible reading prompted Iraq 'wobble,' *The Guardian*, 14 January 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/jan/14/tony-blair-alastair-campbell-diaries>.

was only able to find resources that were superficial or tangential to the sort of questions I faced. The focus of the Christian network within the Foreign Office, generally on opportunities for evangelism or mutual support in the face of teasing or cynicism, did not help with addressing more substantive questions. For example, my last posting was to Budapest, from 1992 to 1996, where, once it was known that I was leaving for ordination training, I found myself deliberately sought out by Hungarians active in the political sphere who wanted to discuss questions around the rebuilding of public ethics following both communism and the fascism of Hungary's inter-war period. Had I known then what I have discovered through this research, my responses would have been markedly more adequate.

Since 2003 I have worked as the Research and Ecumenical Advisor to successive Anglican Archbishops of Cape Town, who are expected to have a significant public voice which contributes to shaping this multicultural and pluralist nation in the post-apartheid era. To a considerable degree, the methodological questions raised by my work in support of the Archbishops' public engagement are those which are addressed from a more theoretical perspective in this thesis, and so have provided a 'live context' in which to weigh the practical applicability of the theory I have pursued. Its relevance to other areas of inter-Anglican, ecumenical, and inter-faith dialogue has also been brought into particular focus through my experiences as a member of the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations, from 2000 to 2008, and of the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order since 2009.

For reasons of space, though my prime interest is in an approach to discernment in any and every part of life and its effective communication (and I believe MacIntyre offers this), I have made the role of the institutional church and its leaders in the public sphere the particular focus of this thesis. However, in my conclusions I shall indicate where I see the potential for further work specifically to assist Christian individuals such as I was as a diplomat, in appropriating Alasdair MacIntyre's work in order to live out their faith with integrity in their professional lives and more broadly beyond their own front doors.

Why MacIntyre?

Alasdair MacIntyre, it has been said, 'has, almost more than any other philosopher, shaped the course of contemporary moral philosophy and social

criticism.¹⁹ Since 1977, he has made his ‘single project’²⁰ answering what he considers the ‘central deliberative questions’²¹ of life, namely, ‘What should we do, here and now?’ or, in other words, ‘How then should we live?’ This concern with rational morality at its most fundamental lies at the centre of his three major works, *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, and is variously developed in his subsequent volume *Dependent Rational Animals* and his extensive other writings.²²

In pursuit of this end, MacIntyre’s work is, as Mark Murphy puts it, dominated by the twin consideration of ‘both what the substance of an adequate morality would be like and what a conception of rationality needed to show the superiority of this substantial morality would have to be like’. This twin consideration runs through both his earlier work and his ‘mature philosophy’, which has ‘developed and connected’²³ these two themes. And we should not be surprised to find them running in parallel. For the value of an ‘adequate morality’ that could not demonstrate its superiority beyond its own community of adherents would be questionable at best. From a theoretical perspective, such an inability would undermine its claims to superiority, and lay itself open to accusations of relativism and perspectivism. Therefore this hurdle must be also overcome. For a tradition that believed itself to have an adequate rationality of which it could not persuade others would be tempted to withdraw into itself. But in practical terms, in today’s increasingly interconnected and globalised society, it is not feasible to pursue the radical withdrawal of a faith community from the rest of human society.²⁴

¹⁹ P. J. Mehl, ‘In the Twilight of Modernity: MacIntyre and Mitchell on Moral Traditions and Their Assessment,’ *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 19.1(1991):51.

²⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, 1998, ‘An Interview for Cogito,’ in *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 269.

²¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement’, in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays*, Volume 2, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 72.

²² Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) hereafter *WJWR*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) hereafter *TRV*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999), hereafter *DRA*.

²³ Mark C. Murphy, ‘Introduction,’ in Alasdair MacIntyre, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

²⁴ Though certain streams of Christianity have advocated withdrawal at various times, most have acknowledged that the church is inevitably found in, even if not of, the world. As illustrated above, Anglicanism has, in contrast, tended to assume extensive engagement beyond the institutional church. A full consideration of the arguments around this question lies outside

It is the extent to which MacIntyre is successful in pursuit of this dual goal, and how far his theoretical approach can be instantiated within contemporary Anglicanism, particularly within the United Kingdom, which lies at the heart of this thesis. In this, I relate MacIntyre's pursuit of an 'adequate morality' to the desire of the Anglican Bishops to enunciate with integrity contextualised understandings of their faith within the life of the church; and link his 'demonstrable superiority' to their persuasive ability within public debate. For the Bishops as for MacIntyre, the two remain inextricably linked.

In a nutshell, MacIntyre argues for a 'practical rationality' found and sustained within a 'community of tradition'. Thus socially embedded individuals pursue the just and moral life, through a tradition aimed at the flourishing of both individuals and their community among whom it finds expression (this being humanity's proper telos), taking appropriate account of the context and circumstances in which they find themselves, honing their praxis²⁵ through intentional dialectical engagement with other perspectives. In chapter 2 I describe this 'practical rationality' and review the extent to which it has been acknowledged to provide the sort of non-relative, non-perspectival 'adequate morality' to which MacIntyre aspires. Through offering a detailed account of MacIntyre's work, I lay foundations on which to build my subsequent interpretations and developments of his approach, with particular attention to two key concepts. The first of these is what he terms 'social practices', and defines as 'any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.'²⁶ The second concept is his pairing of 'internal and external goods of excellence' where internal goods are those which result from the pursuit of excellence for its own sake, while external goods are those gains which are a by-product of our ability to achieve excellence. Thus one can strive to play the piano well for the sake of beautiful music, or for adulation and financial reward.²⁷

the scope of this thesis, though the related issue of the extent to which it is feasible for faith communities to engage substantively with those of other faiths and none is one of its more central themes.

²⁵ I take 'praxis' as encompassing the interplay and sum of mutually informing theory and practice, rather than merely practice alone, as the term is sometimes used.

²⁶ AV, 187.

²⁷ AV, 188ff.

MacIntyre asserts that a contemporary contextualisation of thoroughly realist Thomistic Aristotelianism most fully succeeds in meeting the demands of an adequate morality sustained through such practical rationality. This account of tradition-based reasoning has been broadly appropriated within Western Christian Tradition, for example, by his United Methodist interpreter Stanley Hauerwas in extensive writings, as well as by others including the Reformed Epistemologist Nicholas Wolterstorff.²⁸ After addressing various caveats – for example, the relationship between the need to uphold the orthodoxy of a religious tradition and MacIntyre's requirement for unconditional readiness to learn from others – I shall draw attention to some particular resources offered to the Anglican Bishops in addressing how ‘cultural and social issues ... impinge upon interpretation of the Gospel’ and how to take ‘due regard of context’, particularly in relation to current disagreements within the Anglican Communion over issues of human sexuality.²⁹ Later in the thesis, I shall comment further on what insights and advice my interpretation of MacIntyre might offer in practice.

It must be noted, however, that MacIntyre is not himself an Anglican, having returned to his Roman Catholic roots after a period as an atheist Marxist. Yet Anglicanism understands itself as largely ‘Reformed and Catholic’ and Aquinas (especially his work on moral theology and natural law) has had a persisting influence across the centuries, not least with such significant Anglican theologians as Richard Hooker³⁰ and William Temple.³¹ Therefore, notwithstanding the many strands within Anglicanism, I shall proceed with the assumption of a general compatibility between the sort of broadly Thomistic-Aristotelian approach MacIntyre espouses and contemporary mainstream Anglicanism, especially of the Anglo-Saxon world.

²⁸ Interestingly, both have strong Anglican / Episcopalian links: Hauerwas (who has sometimes described himself, tongue in cheek, as a ‘high-church Mennonite’, and has also worked or worshipped in Lutheran and Roman Catholic settings) currently attends an Episcopalian church, where his wife, an ordained Methodist, is licenced; and Wolterstorff is married to an Episcopal priest. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child* (London, SCM Press, 2010), 254.

²⁹ ‘Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections’, §56, 58.

³⁰ It has been argued that in the last century there was growing appreciation of Aquinas’ influence not only on the work of Richard Hooker, but more widely among Anglican Reformers – see Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 32, 343.

³¹ Adrian Hastings, ‘William Temple,’ in *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell (Oxford: IKON, 1992), 213.

MacIntyre and Dialogue

The questions then arise of whether, how, and to what extent, a MacIntyrean approach can also assist in the second goal of effective lobbying and advocacy within public debate. An initial reading of MacIntyre's argument points to tensions and ambiguities in his descriptions of communication between members of a community of tradition and those of another community or none, particularly in his descriptions of the 'bilingualism' that is necessary for this. Furthermore, MacIntyre appears pessimistic about the possibilities for Christians, whether on behalf of churches, or as individuals, to engage in substantive rational dialogue with those outside the church, and particularly within the public discourse of liberal democratic society. While he sees some grounds for genuine exchange with those of similarly constituted communities of tradition – particularly where there is some agreement both on humanity's telos, our common good, and on standards and procedures for rational evaluation – he is considerably more negative about the ability of those who belong to no such tradition even to participate in reasoned debate. Further, he views liberal democratic society as falling critically short of the characteristics required to constitute a 'tradition' with associated community, and so deliver the necessary context for the pursuit of practical rationality, ethical living, and human flourishing rightly conceptualised. Chapter 3 begins with a consideration of these limitations, from MacIntyre's perspective.

I then evaluate the relationship between MacIntyre's theory and his descriptions (still largely offered in abstract terms, or through theoretical cases) of its practical instantiation, and identify certain ambiguities that arise largely from the disjunction between the ostensible absolutes of abstract theory and what is 'good enough' to be valid in practice – an apparent conflict which he acknowledges. At first these might appear to be problematic to MacIntyre's assertions of an adequate morality. However, I do not believe this is the case, as there are grounds for arguing that this malleability can, on MacIntyre's own terms, provide effective justification for applying his approach in the specific contexts of ethical dialogue within Western society, and for going considerably further in overcoming the limitations he sees.

I shall take up this issue by asking 'How good does "good enough" have to be?' and shall support the view that such inevitable intrinsic discrepancies between theory and practice do not necessarily undermine MacIntyre's claims to rationality. However, they have crucial implications for his assessment of the potential for dialogue with others. A particular area of importance is his description of

‘bilingualism’ as a necessity for true dialogue between two different communities of tradition, for which he seems to require significantly lower standards in practice than his theoretical argument allows. Having first described such bilingualism in ways that suggest full fluency, he later requires only that one knows ‘how to go on and go further’ in the second language.³² Further, he admits the possibility of achieving an adequate degree of competence in a second language in practice without the individual having made a commitment to the community of tradition in which it is the language-in-use, which he had elsewhere made an apparent requirement for linguistic fluency within one’s home tradition.

This has important practical consequences for determining the conditions under which it is possible for Christians to communicate substantively with those of other traditions. In particular, the extent of agreement on MacIntyre’s two key areas (of humanity’s telos, and the nature of rational evaluation) that is necessary, or, we might say, sufficient or adequate, for effective dialogue may not be as extensive as initially inferred, and so may offer greater optimism than MacIntyre himself concedes. This is a point, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, made by Stout. I shall illustrate what this might mean in practice by considering examples of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s engagement first with Anglican diversity and with other branches of Christian tradition; and then with representatives of Islam and Judaism, being the two other ‘Abrahamic faiths’ with which there may be thought to be a greater degree of shared perspectives than with other religious traditions.

This way in which MacIntyre’s theories, often expressed in stark and uncompromising terms, find – even in his own writings – a far more pliant application in practice, is the central issue around which the main argument of this thesis pivots. For not only in areas of ‘bilingualism’ is it necessary merely to meet his criterion of ‘well enough’. In indicating the broader importance of this application of ‘MacIntyre against himself’, so to speak, I offer at this point some initial comments on how, similarly, there may be greater flexibility and potential in dealing with contemporary liberal democratic society than MacIntyre allows. This is given substantive consideration in chapters 4 and 5. Here the key question is how one may determine whether or not a society falls so short of MacIntyre’s criteria for a community of tradition as to render dialogue impossible, or whether sufficient commensurability exists to attempt to ‘go on and go further’ in the language-in-use of such society sufficiently adequately to sustain a degree of rational justification. I shall argue that it

³² WJWR, 382.

is only through attempting to ‘go on’ and failing that one can discover the limits, and that therefore the appropriate strategy should generally be, all other things being equal, to attempt the fullest possible dialogue.

MacIntyre and Public Debate

Chapter 4 tackles in more detail the specific challenges of instantiating MacIntyre's approach within western society.

In this, I consider MacIntyre's own account of what he terms the ‘Enlightenment Project’ and how he sees this finding expression within contemporary liberal democratic society: a society that, he says, falls far short of what constitutes a ‘community of tradition’, being based upon the false assumptions that there are context-neutral and objective perspectives and processes for evaluating how we should live. Incoherence and irrationality follow, and those who are part of such a milieu – being thus outside any community of tradition – are cut off from the possibility of participating in genuine rational enquiry, including on moral and ethical issues. They have, he argues, no means of weighing with integrity the claims of any tradition which they encounter, and their own attempts to make rational and moral sense of life are little better than incoherent.

A corollary of this is that public debate, including on ethical questions, conducted according to the norms of such a society, is similarly incoherent since there are no ‘standards of rationality, adequate for the evaluation of rival answers to such questions, equally available, at least in principle, to all persons, whatever tradition they may happen to find themselves in and whether or not they inhabit any tradition.’³³ The conclusion MacIntyre draws is that there is little value, if any, in participating in such discourse.

More than this, and in significant part as a consequence of its Enlightenment inheritance, MacIntyre sees the contemporary westernised nation state as primarily constituted through its need to balance competing economic and social interests, too often expressed through the pursuit of external goods such as money and power together with instrumental criteria such as bureaucratic efficiency, and its responsibility for the provision of public security. As a result, ‘there is always tension and sometimes conflict between the demands of state and market on the one hand and the requirements of rational local community on the other.’ Since it is only the latter which can, in MacIntyre's view, effectively deliver (even if always imperfectly) the

³³ WJWR, 393.

common good that is humanity's telos, it is at the local community level that we should direct our energies, preserving our independence from the state as far as possible, and regarding its agencies 'with unremitting suspicion'.³⁴

Stanley Hauerwas largely shares MacIntyre's interpretation, and applies it explicitly to Western Christian experience within public discourse, particularly in the United States of America. If they are correct in their analysis, the prospects for the Anglican Bishops effectively to pursue lobbying and advocacy on moral and ethical issues in the public arena at government and international level are slender, and they are misguided in setting themselves this task. (It should be noted that their responsibility to continue engagement on a more local level, for example through dioceses and parishes, is not in question, this being the scale of engagement MacIntyre argues is most effective for promoting rational moral dialogue.)

However, the obvious criticism arises that Hauerwas effectively contradicts his own position, through having persisted over many years in arguing his views within the public sphere, and MacIntyre does much the same within the academy.³⁵ This point has been made by, among others, Stout on whose writing, particularly in *Ethics after Babel* and *Democracy and Tradition*, I draw through this and subsequent chapters.³⁶ An ethicist and philosopher of religion, though not a theist, he has some sympathies with MacIntyre's criticisms of a hubristic version of enlightenment liberalism, though expresses 'doubts about both the details and the general trajectory of MacIntyre's historical narrative'.³⁷ In particular he believes MacIntyre (and Hauerwas with him) is far too pessimistic in the account he gives of the possibilities for substantive ethical discourse within contemporary western society. Instead, he contends that there are substantial grounds for viewing democratic discourse as an effective tradition by MacIntyre's own standards. He also asserts that MacIntyre provides 'conceptual tools' for promoting effective debate within contemporary society, particularly through a development of his concepts of social practices and the goods that are internal to these. While largely agreeing with Stout's reinterpretation and development of MacIntyre's work, I shall draw out in greater detail than he makes

³⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Toleration and the Goods of Conflict,' in *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 142-3. See also DRA, Chapter 11.

³⁵ AV, 342.

³⁶ EaB, and Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004) – hereafter generally referred to as DaT.

³⁷ EaB, 266.

explicit how justification for his views can be found within the MacIntyrean corpus on which he draws.

Going On and Going Further

The thesis then brings MacIntyre's descriptions of theory and practice into dialogue with the specific circumstances of Anglican engagement with contemporary Western liberal democratic society.

Chapter 5 begins by returning to the implications of his varying descriptions of 'bilingualism', and what it means always to attempt to 'go on and go further' not only with those whom we can clearly recognise as being from other communities of tradition and with whom we can therefore have expectations of substantive exchange (as discussed in Chapter 3), but also with those of no such commensurate tradition; and similarly what it means to engage in debate within the public arena of contemporary society, particularly that of the UK.

As noted above, when it comes to the practice (rather than theory) of dialogue, MacIntyre seems to have loosened his requirement to make a commitment to a particular world-view and its practices as a *sine qua non* of being able to speak its 'language-in-use'. One important implication of this is that it is possible to have genuine exchange with others without any requirement to accept their position. I argue that this should encourage exploratory engagement with all others, for, where no other overriding considerations apply (such as the need not to give succour to abhorrent perspectives, for example), it is likely that we have nothing to lose and everything to gain, including through encountering resources that can help us better hone our own 'adequate morality'.

Here I build on the assertion in Chapter 3 that it is only by attempting 'to go on and go further' that we can establish the extent to which others effectively inhabit communities of tradition commensurate with ours, with similar standards of rational evaluation, and similar conceptions of humanity's telos or common good, allowing for substantive exchange. Members of a community of tradition should therefore always be open to seeing quite how far they can get, being ready to pursue whatever opportunities present themselves for genuine communication and then to develop these as far as can be done. Thus, where we find that we can 'go further' and that we can actually communicate substantively, there we can then attempt in dialogue to evaluate each community's views of rational evaluation and telos. The extent of this common ground can also be explored through communication that aspires to move on

to what MacIntyre formally terms ‘debate’, which follows on from his processes for weighing the relative merits of each other’s approaches, to then considering together how each side answers questions of ‘how then shall we live’.

My contention is that making assessments between both communities of tradition, and those associations that fall short of MacIntyre’s high criteria for these, is easier, and more widespread in practice, than MacIntyre’s descriptions suggest. As MacIntyre himself points out, most of us have overlapping membership in all manner of groupings (unions or professional bodies, sports clubs, neighbourhood organisations and so forth). Many of these operate to a greater or lesser degree as communities of tradition. We become skilled enough to ‘go on and go forward’ in handling all their differing languages-in-use, and ‘translating’ between them. More than this, we develop skills in weighing the relative merits of, and prioritising, our own various commitments, as we pursue an overarching unity of life, directed towards a wider-reaching sense of human flourishing or telos – such as that which is provided by our faith community, being a more fully realised community of tradition. Furthermore, we also manage (as we so choose) to weigh sufficiently well to take informed decisions about which groupings we are not going to join. Some of these options, at least, we will be able to recognise as approximating towards a community of tradition, with something akin to a language-in-use – and yet, without becoming members, we can judge that they do not warrant our allegiance: they are not part of our more comprehensive answer to ‘How then shall we live?’ Thus, I judge, MacIntyre’s own approach in practice offers far wider possibilities for this rich form of dialogue with those who have some level of training in a community of tradition, even if not fully realised. We should show greater optimism than he allows.

And while it is the case that none of this may be done ‘perfectly’, it seems it can often be done ‘well enough’. More than this, with increased intentionality and reflection, not only can we do this better, we can encourage others in improving their practices: engagement contributes to a virtuous circle. The corollary also holds: that by failing to attempt to ‘go on and go further’, those who are skilled in the conduct of practical rationality are depriving others of the chance of encountering and learning from them: to withdraw is to contribute to a vicious circle.

As Stout notes³⁸, drawing on MacIntyre, at the heart of most such groupings and networks are social practices which inter alia uphold internal goods of intrinsic excellence over external goods such as status, power and wealth, though some have

³⁸ EaB, 271.

far narrower scope and far less depth than a fully-fledged community of tradition. Broad concepts of internal and external goods and some apprehension of the tensions between them are pervasive across society (as Stout argues³⁹), even among those who are less well trained in social practices or the pursuit of rational moral living. This, I shall argue, in rather fuller detail than Stout supplies, is what provides both possibility and justification for members of communities of tradition to engage in debate (which Stout terms ‘stereoscopic social criticism’⁴⁰) that draws attention to the competition between internal and external goods in the pursuit of social practices – particularly as these become institutionalised and so susceptible to the demands of instrumentalist criteria – and promotes internal goods.

In the conduct of this, Stout contends that there may be (as is the case, he says, in the US) a ‘first moral language’ that is rooted within these groupings and networks and their social practices. It is ‘varied and supple’, but it is more than merely a pidgin or creole, and is, or certainly has the potential to be, sufficiently rich and coherent to sustain moral discourse.⁴¹ Such is the variedness that elsewhere he speaks of many moral languages, and acknowledges the difficulties of resolving differences between them, yet asserts that disagreement between such moral languages even on the concept of the common good or telos does not necessarily render impossible debate between their speakers. One can therefore attempt to broaden stereoscopic social criticism beyond particular contexts towards more general application. The means by which best to further the flourishing of ‘a good human life’ is, says Stout, through acknowledging such pluralist discourse between these moral languages as a tradition in itself, and promoting its best practice.⁴²

In the light of this, I consider how Christians might exploit such opportunities, wherever they are afforded. Attempting ‘to go on and go further’ is to maximise our communication of our own perspectives and practices: it is only in making this attempt that we find out where we cannot ‘go further’, and so should look to other strategies (which are considered in subsequent chapters); and, furthermore, through doing so we also maximise our potential to promote and encourage open honest debate which supports internal over external goods, and the virtuous following of the social practices in which they are embedded. To fail to engage is to fail in our obligations to share and realise to the fullest that part of human flourishing that is promoted through

³⁹ EaB, 271ff, 285.

⁴⁰ EaB, 279.

⁴¹ EaB, 270-1, also 80.

⁴² EaB 287-8.

pursuit of internal goods of excellence, and undermined by the dominance of external goods and instrumentalist pressures – it is to be complicit with these negative tendencies, which (and here Stout concurs) MacIntyre rightly identifies as being all too influential within contemporary society, particularly in its institutional expressions.

Given that, by Stout's account, we are operating in a context where the 'varied and supple' shared moral language is likely to be considerably less fully formed or coherent than the moral language honed within our own Anglican community, what sort of discourse should we employ? I aim to demonstrate that our engagement should be primarily conducted using our own language-in-use – though we may assist others' comprehension at times through 'bilingually' employing the wider, even if more primitive, moral language(s) rooted in the social practices of our society. Through doing this, we not only promote their ability to use and develop 'thicker' moral languages, we also assist them in developing their own latent skills in bilingualism, which are at the heart of effective democratic pluralist debate. Through giving our own reasons, on our own terms, for promoting excellence, contextualising them within our concepts of telos and human flourishing, we can with intentionality both explain and model our own practices, in the expectation that this is the best means for others to learn from our praxis. For, as MacIntyre has set out in describing the functioning of practical rationality, this is fundamentally the same means we use (within our traditions) for training younger members of our community in what it means to live, and to know how to live, rationally and virtuously and well. Ultimately, it is this which we want to communicate to others.

In practice, I contend, this means that Christians should not be hesitant in employing Christian language and Christian reasoning, contextualised within our own consistent Christian lifestyle and practices. It is this which will most persuasively communicate our 'adequate morality' to those others who have some understanding, even if not fully-fledged, of communities in tradition, and best educate their ability to have some degree of bilingualism with us. Such a process would equally apply not only to those who wish to understand us, or whom (for example) we wish to persuade of our perspective when it comes to lobbying on social justice questions, but also to those who wished to join our community.

The conclusion of chapter 5 (illustrated with examples drawn from British and South African Anglicanism) is thus that, for reasons based in MacIntyre's own descriptions of how communities of tradition operate and may engage in substantive

discussion, we should be optimistic that even those with only very thin experiences of tradition, social practice and internal goods of excellence, and who do not want to join our community, may nonetheless often potentially be brought into some level of fluency in our language-in-use (including greater understanding of the praxis of a community of tradition). In practice, this will include a far greater proportion of Western society than MacIntyre allows in his caricature of liberalism. And while it is the case that none of this may be done ‘perfectly’, it seems it can be done ‘well enough’. More than this, with increased intentionality and reflection, not only can we, as Anglican Christians, engage in dialogue more effectively, we can also encourage others in improving their social practices and moral discourse, and so contribute to the sustaining of democratic debate – wherever it has a toe-hold – as an effective tradition. Here too, engagement contributes to a virtuous circle. The corollary also holds: that by failing to attempt to ‘go on and go further’, those who are skilled in the conduct of practical rationality are depriving others of the chance of encountering and learning from them, and weakening democratic practices. To withdraw is to contribute to this vicious circle.

Back to Basics

Though I argue, with Stout, for rather greater optimism than MacIntyre generally allows over the possibilities for substantial moral discourse within pluralist societies, it may nonetheless be the case that our attempts to go on and go further fail. We may find ourselves in contexts where moral language is too fragmented or incoherent to be functional, where sharing of interests falls far short of social practices, where external goods and instrumentalism overshadow internal goods, and where much of what MacIntyre decries within modern liberal systems does indeed hold sway.

In chapter 6 I consider how MacIntyre himself, for all that he asserts that those who belong to no tradition-bearing community cannot with any integrity tackle questions of how we should live, being deprived of any ability to comprehend the comprehensive ‘practical rationality’ that is only internal to traditions,⁴³ does not leave us resourceless in our attempt to promote effective debate around moral and ethical questions in such situations. For in his occasional writings, he develops his arguments in directions that might come as a surprise to those reading only his major volumes. He argues that practical reasoning ultimately turns on questions of the means for achieving a good human life, and reaching an impasse here should direct us instead to

⁴³ WJWR, 379.

what he terms ‘theoretical enquiry’.⁴⁴ This, in contrast, is focussed on ends, namely our telos, and what might actually constitute a ‘good human life’. He proposes that Aquinas’ primary precepts of natural law offer two avenues for conscious engagement.

Firstly, MacIntyre insists, with Aquinas, that all ‘plain persons’ on the basis of natural law, inferentially known to all, possess the capacity to judge their rulers and call them to account on matters of justice and how this reflects the pursuit of the common good. Therefore, it is always possible to engage around questions of the common good in whatever circumstances we find ourselves (for the primary precepts are always experienced through instantiation within a particular context). In practice, I contend, asking whether life might be better than it is here and now will rarely elicit the answer ‘no’, and therefore from this we can go on to explore what we mean by a better life, why it matters, how we can understand and pursue it, and how we instantiate it in our lives.

Yet to embark seriously on debating what it means for human beings to flourish, says MacIntyre, requires agreement on a context in which this ‘theoretical enquiry’ can be properly conducted. This, the second application of Aquinas’ primary precepts of natural law, directs us towards shared commitments that include truth-seeking and readiness to learn; honesty and transparency; setting aside ulterior motives (including external goods and instrumentalist goals); keeping promises; and mutual assurances of physical safety and respect on every level. MacIntyre gives the example of academic discourse as evidence of how the primary precepts are in practice widely upheld in this way, here being presupposed non-inferentially by those who would generally have no truck with Aquinas or MacIntyre’s siting of moral reasoning within communities of tradition.

This is not to say that debate upon this basis will be straightforward or easily yield constructive results. Often the reverse will be true. Nonetheless, I suggest, Anglicans desirous of public engagement can find here tangible possibilities for making a positive contribution. In particular, I see MacIntyre’s analysis as guiding not just the content of our engagement, but also encouraging us intentionally to work to shape the arenas of public debate in this direction. Through this two-pronged approach, tackling both the essence of human flourishing and how it is we debate it, we can address basic aspects of statehood – and the specific statehood of the nation to

⁴⁴ This chapter particularly draws on and develops the conclusions of MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement’.

which we belong – with its purposes, responsibilities and obligations, and how it can best provide a secure context in which we, its citizens, in an atmosphere geared to promoting trust and honesty between ourselves, one another, and government, can pursue internal goods of excellence directed towards our flourishing as human beings, through theoretical enquiry, and in actual practice.

However, the question then arises as to the nature of our discourse in discussing our common good and the appropriate shape of public space we inhabit (as the context both for this debate and for pursuing the common good we discuss), for MacIntyre rightly argues that there is no ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ public language as some forms of modernism or liberalism may assert. Though I find no hint of this within his writings (unlike previously explored areas where the resources for going forward are already present even if not fully recognised or spelt out), I argue that in fact MacIntyre implicitly allows for a very different shared language for public discourse. For if the primary precepts are inferentially available to all ‘plain persons’, then these ‘plain persons’ must have some means of expressing them. Even if only barely more than in embryonic form, there must, I argue, be a language-in-use for the articulation of the primary precepts of natural law within each specific context – a ‘communal language’ which finds ever fuller expression in the development of the particular ‘communal practices’ structured around such precepts within our own circumstances.

And such fuller expression must be one of our goals of engagement – for, as MacIntyre argues, the capacity of ‘plain persons’ to hold those who rule them to account on matters of ethical justice and the common good, is best educated by and expressed through participation in communal practices structured in accordance with natural law. Therefore, the participation of those who have such skills – as we believe we do within the community of tradition that is Anglicanism – should in part be directed to promoting these communal practices. Indeed, such discourse, when in promotion of the instantiation of the first principles of natural law within communal practices appropriate to our context, may be seen as an internal good – an argument Stout makes, though without explicating its justification. Thus democratic debate of this sort can be considered as at least a latent social practice embedded in tradition, or tradition-in-the-making, as we pursue ever more fully realised communal practices: one in which we can at least sometimes ‘go on and go forward’ adequately enough, even from this very basic starting point.

As before, optimistic engagement can always potentially strengthen what is present, and promote a continuing dynamic from the less adequate to the more adequate in public debate around moral questions, rooted in concepts of human flourishing. Conversely, pessimistic disengagement contributes to the undermining of the possibilities and practices of discourse, weakening democratic debate's ability to function as a tradition, and leaving internal goods unsupported in the contest over external goods.

Therefore, within our own public life, those of us who are skilled in the practices of a community of tradition should see it as an obligation to use these skills for promoting the development of communal practices, and of a communal language for expressing them, so that the primary precepts of natural law can indeed thus be increasingly instantiated – even though this is likely to be a less fully realised community of tradition than full-blown Thomistic Aristotelianism, and we are likely to find ourselves in long, uphill, struggles. Those of us who belong to such a community will also work to draw our fellow-citizens into increasing bilingualism, and from there, into substantive moral debate, and thence, we would hope, to convince them through our moral reasoning and praxis.

Shaping Democracy and Political Debate

In my final chapter I explore what such an approach to engagement within secular pluralist democracy might look like in practice. I begin by considering Nicholas Wolterstorff's arguments in an exchange of essays with Robert Audi on the place of faith commitments in public discourse, which consider the forms of liberal democracy and secularism within the United States.⁴⁵ In acknowledging, in different ways, the particular ambiguities and shortcomings of ostensible neutrality in relation to religions, the two come close to agreeing an approach that reflects some of the Thomistic elements of the previous chapter. I then address the examples offered by the former and current Anglican Archbishops of Cape Town, in their engagement in public debate within the context provided by the post-apartheid South African Constitution. This presents a very particularly shaped secular context, providing for individuals to engage in public debate on the basis of each one's particularities of culture, language, race, faith and so forth. The two archbishops have addressed both

⁴⁵ See Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997).

the instantiation of these constitutional provisions in the shaping and conduct of public discourse, as well as tackling more specific moral questions.

The nature of the public space within the United Kingdom is rather more contested than in South Africa. I reflect in some detail on the extent to which Rowan Williams is to a considerable degree justified by the arguments outlined above, in his promotion of a particular form of communal practice which he terms ‘procedural secularism’ – a mode of democratic tradition that best allows for the debate, and the pursuit, of the common good by all.⁴⁶ This, importantly, allows for the flourishing of faith-based communities of tradition, in that it upholds a neutrality between religions and also those of no religion, while expecting each to participate and contend on the basis of their own perspectives. This is precisely the sort of context appropriate for every level of encounter considered above, from dialogue between highly commensurate communities of tradition through to fundamental theoretical enquiry about the common good. (Thus not only does this provide the best context for the human flourishing of the wider society of which we are a part, it also is the best context within which communities of tradition, including the faith communities, can flourish, and can express our own commitments within the public space on our own terms.) Williams contrasts this with ‘programmatically secularism’, which denies a place for religion in the public space, and gives rein to an instrumentalism of bureaucratic efficiency that promotes external goods over internal. In his engagement he seeks to move the United Kingdom away from programmatic secularism and closer to procedural secularism (which is the form which South African public debate more nearly follows).

Furthermore, I argue that, in the way he addresses secular audiences, Williams appears to be developing an appropriate language-in-use for this community of tradition that is procedural secularism within the British context. He repeatedly returns to questions of the meaning and pursuit of human flourishing and the common good, and to the importance of a context of mutuality in trust, patience, acknowledged vulnerability and limitation, truthfulness and so forth – the marks of Aquinas’ primary precepts. He also points explicitly and implicitly to various of MacIntyre’s building blocks of the practices of communities of tradition, using both (procedural) secular and Christian vocabulary and explication, at times almost in ‘parallel translation’.

⁴⁶ Lecture at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: Rowan Williams, ‘Rome Lecture: “Secularism, Faith and Freedom”,’ 23 November 2006, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org.uk/articles.php/1175/rome-lecture-secularism-faith-and-freedom>.

Thus he offers his hearers possibilities for increasing understanding of the practices of the best communities of tradition, as well as for increasing bilingualism with Christianity. He also speaks to educate and encourage those within the Church to have confidence to engage with the secular world in the same way, as we would expect to happen within a community of tradition.

In considering these examples, I aim to draw out various guidelines for helping Christians initiate and develop a faith-based engagement within secularised political contexts. Though this may be easier in many ways for those, like these Archbishops, who speak formally for the Church, Christian individuals are equally justified in speaking from their own perspective, and then ‘bilingually’ with a public language so constituted, in every public arena, to promote the common good. All this is not to say that ‘going on and going further’ will be easily and swiftly possible, or even possible at all, in every context. But, I propose, the theoretical possibility always exists and we should be open to the possibility of exploring it (subject to considerations on other grounds, for example political or tactical). To fail to engage always risks missing valuable opportunities for expanding on, and improving on, rational moral discourse. For Anglicans, at least, this is good enough reason to continue persevering in our attempts by various means to engage from a faith perspective in moral debate, ‘in season and out of season’ (2 Tim 4:2), in line with longstanding tradition.

I also aim to indicate how this approach is not only true of the political arenas of public life. As previously noted, MacIntyre himself has argued that liberal secularised academics understand the primary precepts of natural law as the necessary basis for rational enquiry, even if they do not recognise them as such. In the arena of academic philosophy, in his own writing, is he not promoting a communal practice of debate that instantiates these precepts, and to some degree developing and employing an appropriate common language as he does so? Though it will doubtless often be a tough grind, there is no reason why a similar approach cannot be attempted in other forums, even where MacIntyre's worst caricatures of liberalism largely hold sway. As I illustrate, there are many openings in contemporary discourse which offer potentially fruitful starting points for engagement. Nor should we assume lost ground can never be reclaimed and is not worth fighting for. In this way, we can have confidence in William Temple's argument that ‘nine-tenths’ of the exercise of Christian influence would be via individuals, as citizens, through their work – though in this thesis, with its primary focus on the institutional engagement of the church within the public space, it is not possible to spell out in great detail what this might mean.

Final Reflections

MacIntyre's efforts to answer the question of 'How then shall we live?' suitably applied and, where necessary, developed thus provide twofold resources for the Anglican Bishops. They are helped both to enunciate with integrity contextual expressions of the Christian faith, and to promote effective debate within the world on moral concerns (of social justice broadly interpreted), within today's world, including within increasingly pluralist and secularised societies such as that in the United Kingdom.

At every level of encounter, those of us who have the competences of trained members of communities of tradition can choose, and choose how far, to share them with others. Whether debating moral questions with members of another, fully commensurable, community, or furthering bilingualism, or upholding social practices and internal goods of excellence, or promoting communal practices and language rooted in the primary precepts of natural law, there is everything to be gained by always attempting to 'go on and go further'. We can never tell how far further we can go unless we try. And where we find we can go no further, we can always drop a gear and attempt another strategy, with the ultimate fall-back of the far from insubstantial question of the common good, and the context in which this can best be debated – with promotion of a contextually appropriate form of the sort of 'procedural secularism' that is espoused by Rowan Williams.

Optimistic commitment always to attempt to 'go on and go forward', open to all opportunities, is a typically Anglican approach, ingrained in the 'indecent inclusivity' that has its roots in the English Parish system, that seeks to draw anyone and everyone closer to the centre that is Christ, through the centripetal impulse of salvation. Always and everywhere, we have good enough tools for 'doing God' with integrity and confidence.

Chapter 2 - Starting with MacIntyre

This chapter introduces Alasdair MacIntyre and his argument for a ‘practical rationality’ found within a ‘community of tradition’, as developed from a Thomistic Aristotelian perspective. In line with MacIntyre's insistence that our understanding cannot be separated from our personal circumstances, I begin by offering some background on the man himself. I then describe and discuss the comprehensive account he offers of socially embedded individuals pursuing the just and moral life, through a tradition which aims at the flourishing of both individuals and their community, and how it is that they hone their praxis through taking account of their context and intentionally engaging with other perspectives. I end with some reflections on how his approach can be appropriated by the Anglican Bishops in their first objective, of reflecting on their faith and how it should be lived within contemporary contexts, and, by way of illustration, outline in broad terms how it might offer resources for tackling the current disagreements around issues of human sexuality.

MacIntyre is often described as a moral philosopher. His most famous work is *After Virtue*, which publicly launched the project on the moral life that has dominated his work from 1977. However, from *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* onwards, it has been from the perspective of rationality rather more than the virtues that he has more often than not provided detailed accounts of and justifications for his proposals. So much is this the case that Jeffrey Stout was led to exclaim ‘I am here speaking of a language of the virtues, while Hauerwas and MacIntyre, the official champions of virtue ethics, are theorizing about the formal requirements of rational discourse.’⁴⁷ It is primarily from this perspective of rationality – a rationality that encompasses moral integrity – that I shall consider his work, and the extent to which it provides the sort of non-relative, non-perspectival ‘adequate morality’ to which he aspires. Such a standpoint is of particular help to the Anglican Bishops, since one of the primary criticisms they have to overcome in embarking on moral and ethical dialogue in the public square is that faith perspectives lack rational justification.

Various aspects of MacIntyre's account have been considered problematic, and in considering these, I shall highlight for later attention those which relate to the ability of a community of tradition to engage with those of other traditions or none. I shall also focus on aspects around which I shall subsequently aim to construct my

⁴⁷ EaB, 354.

reinterpretation and development of his work, including particularly his concepts of ‘social practices’ and ‘internal and external goods of excellence’.

Introducing MacIntyre

Alasdair MacIntyre was born in Scotland in 1929 and grew up in a remote Gaelic speaking fishing and farming community. After studying at London and Oxford, pursuing classics before turning to philosophy, he taught at Manchester, Leeds, Essex and Oxford universities. He moved to the United States in 1969, and held positions at Brandeis University, Boston University, Wellesley College, Notre Dame, Vanderbilt University and Yale. He returned to Notre Dame from 1989 to 1994, and from 1995 until his retirement in 1997 was the Arts & Sciences Professor of Philosophy at Duke University, where he is now Professor Emeritus. From 2000 he has been the Rev. John A. O'Brien Senior Research Professor at Notre Dame, and in 2010 took up a post as Senior Research Fellow at London Metropolitan University where he is pursuing a project on the implications of his work in ethics for political theory and practice.⁴⁸

Looking back on his career, MacIntyre divides his life as an academic philosopher into three periods:

The twenty-two years from 1949, when I became a graduate student of philosophy at Manchester University, until 1971 were a period, as it now appears retrospectively, of heterogeneous, badly organized, sometimes fragmented and often frustrating and messy enquiries, from which nonetheless I learned a lot.

From 1971 ... until 1977 was an interim period of sometimes painfully self-critical reflection, strengthened by coming to critical terms with such very different perspectives on moral philosophy as those afforded by Davidson in one way and by Gadamer in quite another.

From 1977 onwards I have been engaged in a single project to which *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rational Versions of Moral Enquiry* are central ...⁴⁹

⁴⁸ ‘Renowned Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre Joins Met’, London Metropolitan University, 1 July 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/news/latest-news/july-2010/renowned-philosopher-alasdair-macintyre-joins-london-met.cfm>.

⁴⁹ MacIntyre, ‘An Interview for Cogito’, 268, 269.

During the first phase, he gave up the Catholicism of his upbringing and for much of this time was a Marxist with Trotskyite leanings, though by the late 60s he had ‘become increasingly disillusioned with all forms of Marxist politics.’⁵⁰ He also began turning his back on analytic philosophy, and rejected the then widely held view of moral concepts as timeless, increasingly arguing they must be studied historically and contextually.⁵¹

During the second period, MacIntyre faced more fully what he had already come to realise, saying subsequently, with the benefit of hindsight:

I set out to rethink the problems of ethics in a systematic way, taking seriously for the first time the possibility that the history both of modern morality and of modern moral philosophy could only be written adequately from an Aristotelian point of view ... I [also] had occasion to rethink the problems of rational theology, taking seriously the possibility that the history of modern secularisation can only be written adequately from the standpoint of Christian theism, rather than vice versa.⁵²

Though some of the implications of this line of reasoning only became clear some time after writing *After Virtue*, by 1977 (when he began to write the final draft of the book) he had, he says, grasped the outline and general content of the project which has occupied him since.⁵³ He also returned to the Roman Catholicism of his upbringing (which is a very particular ‘community of tradition’ according to his definition), though he has since noted that his philosophical embrace of Thomistic Aristotelianism came first.⁵⁴

After Virtue focussed mainly on Aristotle, and ended with a call for a new St Benedict. However, thereafter it was to Aquinas that he turned, and it has since remained MacIntyre's position that a Thomistic Aristotelianism most fully succeeds in meeting the demands of his practical rationality. In his Preface to a 2006 collection of essays written between 1985 and 1999, he notes that these postdate his recognition that his ‘philosophical convictions had become those of a Thomistic Aristotelian,

⁵⁰ Kelvin Knight, ‘Introduction’ in ed. Knight, *MacIntyre Reader*, 2.

⁵¹ John Horton and Susan Mendus, ‘Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue* and *After*’, in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, eds John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 2.

⁵² MacIntyre, ‘Interview for *Cogito*’, 267, 268. This interview was given in 1991.

⁵³ MacIntyre, ‘Interview for *Cogito*’, 269.

⁵⁴ Another interview from 1991: Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘An Interview with Giovanni Borradori’, in Knight, *MacIntyre Reader*, 266.

something that had initially surprised' him.⁵⁵ He describes the collection as consistently giving 'expression to that Thomistic Aristotelian standpoint, albeit in very different ways', and though several essays refer neither to Aristotle nor Aquinas, 'nonetheless, each arrives at conclusions that are supportive of, derived from, or consistent with a Thomistic Aristotelian stance.'

Most of his work since the mid-1980s is concerned with broadening and deepening the scope of what he addresses, or with presenting clarifications and more balanced expressions of earlier work, in response to questions and criticisms. In the 2007 Prologue to the third edition of *After Virtue*, he wrote 'I have as yet found no reason for abandoning the major contentions of *After Virtue* ... although I have learned a great deal and supplemented and revised my theses and arguments accordingly.'⁵⁶

MacIntyre and Christian Faith

In the previous chapter, I said I expected to find a broad compatibility between MacIntyre's Thomistic-Aristotelian approach and contemporary mainstream Anglicanism, especially of the Anglo-Saxon world, and I noted the appropriation of his work by a broader span of explicitly Christian writers from mainstream protestant traditions such as Hauerwas and Wolterstorff. The question arises of MacIntyre's own personal faith, and his representation of faith within his writings.

As already noted, his philosophical embrace of Thomistic Aristotelianism, somewhat prior to 1985, preceded his return to the Roman Catholic Church. Interviewed in 1991, he said:

What I now believe philosophically I came to believe very largely before I acknowledged 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 the philosophical argument to theological enquiry. My philosophy, like that of many other Aristotelians, is theistic; but it is as secular in its content as any other.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ MacIntyre, *Ethics and Politics*, vii.

⁵⁶ See p. ix of his Prologue: *After Virtue after a Quarter of A Century*, in Alasdair MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue*, 3rd ed (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007).

⁵⁷ MacIntyre, 'Interview with Giovanni Borradori', 266.

In 1994 he made it clear that, in his development of Thomistic Aristotelianism, he was writing as a philosopher, and ‘neither a bishop nor a theologian’.⁵⁸ This led David Fergusson to comment, perhaps with some frustration, ‘What ... of MacIntyre’s understanding of God? Here he is uncharacteristically reticent.’⁵⁹ Yet MacIntyre’s 1986 article ‘Which God ought we to Obey and Why?’⁶⁰ had focused on the identity and the nature of God. Here he wrote of ‘the God of the Jewish and Christian scriptures’ as he considered divine will, and characteristics such as goodness, justice, mercy and faithfulness (not least in covenant relationships); and of our need to move ultimately to ‘friendship with God’, as understood by Aquinas. He concluded that our capacity to ‘judge’ God and the appropriate relationship we ought to have with him ‘is itself a work of God’. That said, the arguments of a philosopher predominate, and this is also the case, for example, in his later engagement with two papal encyclicals by John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* and *Fides et Ratio*.⁶¹

Despite this criticism, Fergusson saw considerable potential within MacIntyre’s approach for a more fully explicated Christian stance, noting that ‘MacIntyre’s position has the capacity to recognise that dependence upon divine revelation for Christian perception is not incompatible with a certain style of apologetic argument,’ pointing to one particular sentence from *Three Rival Versions* that ‘is remarkable for its theological potential’,⁶² namely:

The self-revelation of God in the events of the scriptural history and the gratuitous grace through which that revelation is appropriated, so that an individual can come to recognize his or her place within that same history, enable such individuals to recognize also that prudence, justice, temperateness, and courage are genuine virtues, that the apprehension of the

⁵⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘How Can We Learn What *Veritatis Splendor* Has to Teach?’, *The Thomist* 58.2(1994):171.

⁵⁹ David Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998),132.

⁶⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Which God Ought We to Obey, and Why?’ *Faith and Philosophy*, 3(1986).

⁶¹ MacIntyre, ‘How Can We Learn what *Veritatis Splendor* Has to Teach?’ (in which he touches on the importance of God’s grace in the lives of fallible humanity); Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Philosophy Recalled to its Tasks: A Thomistic Reading of *Fides et Ratio*’, *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Volume 1*, Alasdair MacIntyre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Truth as a Good: a Reflection on *Fides et Ratio*’, in MacIntyre, *Tasks of Philosophy*.

⁶² Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, 134-5.

natural law was not illusory, and that the moral life up to this point requires to be corrected in order to be completed but not displaced.⁶³

For while MacIntyre may have comparatively little to say about the nature of God, this quote is illustrative of the increasing attention he pays to the components of the life of faith, and the interrelationship of faith with reason. Fergusson notes with approval his capacity to address ‘notions of the will, sin, and grace which are lacking in classical philosophy but which are adequate to our moral predicament’. Given MacIntyre's insistence not merely on believing correctly, but in living morally, we should probably not be surprised by his insistence on faithful philosophical enquiry finding expression in lives ‘transformed by grace’ and ‘growth in holiness’, as he sees exemplified by Thomas Aquinas and others.⁶⁴

For MacIntyre, the proper task of philosophy – the task he sees Aquinas pursuing, and to which he commits himself – is to help human reason move from less to more adequate understandings of truth, where truth, grounded in Thomistic realism, ultimately means to see things as they truly are, when viewed from the standpoint of God, and to think of them as God thinks of them.⁶⁵ Such enquiry, MacIntyre insists, must be in the service not only of those who are philosophers and philosophers of religion, but also of ‘plain persons’ as they too seek to answer questions of how they should live.⁶⁶ Faith is certainly far more than cognitive acceptance of certain theological assertions, in the company of those who give similar allegiance. It is the lived life of discipleship, encompassing prayer, worship, and experiential encounter of God's self-revelation.

This is spelt out most explicitly in MacIntyre's recent writings, notably his 2009 volume, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, his *Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (as it is subtitled) in which he unequivocally identifies himself as a Catholic philosopher within the Thomist tradition.⁶⁷ Here he concludes that the task of the Catholic philosopher relates to both truths about the existence and nature of God, and about what it is to be human, with ‘a crucial relationship between metaphysics and ethics. For it is only insofar as we understand the universe, including ourselves, as dependent upon God for our existence that we are also able to understand

⁶³ TRV, 140.

⁶⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Truth as a Good’, 214.

⁶⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Truth as a Good’, 210-1.

⁶⁶ This is the overriding theme of MacIntyre, ‘Philosophy Recalled to its Tasks’.

⁶⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), hereafter GPU.

ourselves as directed toward God and what our directedness toward God requires of us by way of caring.⁶⁸ Thus relationship with the God of compassion is expected to bear fruit in compassionate relational living.

Of course, this still leaves major, central, theological areas, including christology and soteriology, largely untouched. But concerns around these, and other question-marks raised by MacIntyre's account of faith, I shall address as they arise.

MacIntyre's Method

MacIntyre's development and refinement of his own position through engagement with alternative viewpoints – whether of his choosing, or in response to questions and criticism – is both characteristic of his own approach, and at the heart of the processes he advocates. From *After Virtue* onwards, as I shall describe, MacIntyre's general mode of working is to consider possible alternative perspectives on morality and practical rationality, while at each point aiming to show the superiority of his own viewpoint through employing the very means which he is developing and honing over and against the alternatives. In other words, he is doing himself what he directs others to do, should they wish to be justified in their praxis.⁶⁹

Therefore I shall proceed on the general basis that there is considerable internal consistency, in both content and methodology, running through MacIntyre's work. In doing so, I concur with Nancey Murphy, who argues that there is significant coherence between the processes that MacIntyre espouses and follows, between the Thomistic and Aristotelian sources on which he draws and his own formulations, and between his earlier and later writings.⁷⁰ (I shall comment further on this relationship between sources in due course, given its significance for MacIntyre's claims to rational justification, and to himself belong to a tradition that evolves in faithfulness to its own origins). Where it appears that there has been some shift in his position, it is my contention that, on closer inspection, far more often than not the fundamental assertions remain little changed, but have rather been viewed from different perspectives, or developed in relation to some specific external stimulus. Furthermore, particular expressions of his views may also seem to vary because of the different contexts to which they are addressed. This is a necessary consequence of the

⁶⁸ GPU, 178.

⁶⁹ Nancey Murphy describes this approach of repeated reflection on and revision of both methodology and content at every level as 'fractal' philosophy – Nancey Murphy, 'Postmodern Non Relativism: Imre Lakatos, Theo Meyring, and Alasdair MacIntyre', *The Philosophical Forum* 27.1(1995): 49-50.

⁷⁰ Murphy, 'Postmodern Non Relativism', especially 47-9.

situatedness which he espouses, and another example of his own practice illustrating the approach he offers.

MacIntyre's methodology is marked by a comprehensive and dense interconnectedness, in which the entire breadth of human apprehension and experience, and their interrelationships, are grist to his mill; and his evaluative processes themselves are also continually open to evaluation and revision. There is no single linear path to be followed. And while this allows him to launch his writing, or tackle alternative viewpoints, from whatever starting point he considers most pertinent, it means that any description inevitably leaves many questions initially begging, until a sufficiently comprehensive account has been given to begin provide a structure in which the various pieces can come together. This is particularly the case within this chapter as it sets out the fundamentals of MacIntyre's work, while subsequent chapters take forward various of the loose ends that are encountered here.

MacIntyre's Project

MacIntyre embarked on his major project in moral philosophy convinced that contemporary Western ethical discourse had become fragmentary and incoherent, offering no 'rationally and morally defensible standpoint from which to judge and act – and in terms of which to evaluate various rival and heterogeneous moral schemes which compete for our allegiance'.⁷¹ Insistent that moral philosophy cannot be an abstract intellectual pursuit, to be conducted 'Oxford armchair style',⁷² but must address practical questions of how we should live a 'good' life, he set out to find a solution through the rediscovery and appropriate reapplication of historic traditions, with first Aristotle and subsequently Thomas Aquinas coming to dominate.

In the solution he has subsequently developed, MacIntyre contends that we cannot with integrity engage the practical questions that life raises without upholding rationality – though he draws this concept of rationality very broadly indeed. He asserts that such a practical rationality is fundamental to our ability to know how we ourselves, as we actually are, and in the specificity of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, can aspire with integrity to live morally and virtuously, and can defend our position to others. We will thus persistently find morality and rationality inextricably linked in his work, and his repeated assertion that one cannot be rational

⁷¹ AV, x.

⁷² AV, ix.

without also being moral, just, and virtuous.⁷³ I shall indicate why and how this is so, while, as noted, taking rationality as my primary point of departure.

The Case for Rationality

To consider the extent to which MacIntyre's project is rational first requires some conception of what rationality is, against which to evaluate it. Yet there is no universal agreement on what this might be, in relation to human living.⁷⁴ MacIntyre argues that 'neutral', 'objective', and 'impersonal' arguments are nothing of the sort when it comes to practical rationality, dismissing them, along with foundationalism and analytical philosophy in general, in his persistent critique of the broad swathe of what he variously terms 'the Enlightenment Project', 'Encyclopaedia', and liberal theory as he portrays it.⁷⁵ While there are problems with his accounts of these, including in his historic narrative and his tendency to set up caricatures as straw men to be sweepingly demolished (which will be considered in further detail in Chapter 4), there is nonetheless a general wider acceptance that there is no context-neutral standard or process for judging the rationality of human belief and behaviour.

What is at stake here is highlighted by the two somewhat tongue in cheek definitions offered by Stout (who on this subject aligns himself fairly closely with MacIntyre):

'Rational, objective, etc. (good sense): What you're aiming for when you take all relevant considerations into account and exhibit all the appropriate intellectual virtues; what you become, if you're lucky, after being exposed to exemplars of excellence and acquiring extensive experience in a truth-oriented social practice.

Rational, objective, etc. (bad sense): What you're aiming for when you try, per impossibile, to have your judgment determined purely by the matter under

⁷³ 'For MacIntyre, the notions of truth, realism and rational justification stand or fall together' Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, 133.

⁷⁴ Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 772: '... in its primary sense, rationality is a normative concept that philosophers have generally tried to conceptualize in such a way that, for any action, belief, or desire, if it is rational we ought to choose it ... no such positive characterization has achieved anything close to universal assent.'

⁷⁵ See, for example AV, Chapters 1 and 5; WJWR, Chapters 1 and 18; TRV, Chapters 1 and 8.

consideration and by reason itself without relying on anything inherited, assumed, or habitual.’⁷⁶

However, if we accept that it is indeed the case that context-neutral means are not available to us, the question then arises of whether all attempts at asserting rationality ‘in the good sense’ are inevitably open to the charges of relativism and / or perspectivism.

MacIntyre argues that this is not necessarily the case. We are not, he says, left resourceless in the face of the claims that we are then left with nothing more than what he terms ‘emotivism’ – ‘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’.⁷⁷ An alternative label which he gives to arguments that this is in fact the case is ‘Genealogy’, a term which he draws from Nietzsche’s *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, seeing his analysis of the ‘will to power’ as a particularly persuasive, if flawed, account of such emotivism.⁷⁸ Instead, MacIntyre argues that it is possible to develop criteria and processes for judging first, whether the rationality asserted within a particular context meets its own standards, and, secondly, whether it can meet the challenge of alternative formulations. Where both are achieved, rationality may justifiably be claimed.

It is this he aims to demonstrate through his writings, particularly in the narrative unfolding of his arguments through his three major volumes. He develops and hones his own case in dialogue with others of differing views, with the intention at each point of overcoming their objections through the very means which he himself espouses and elucidates – that is, demonstrating on his own terms, he contends, not only his own internal rationality, but the superiority of his own position against the challenges other perspectives raise.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ EaB, 295.

⁷⁷ AV, 12 – MacIntyre’s emphasis.

⁷⁸ AV, Chapters 1-3; and, contra Nietzsche specifically, TRV, Chapter 7. As with the Enlightenment and liberalism, here too MacIntyre tends at times to create caricatures which he can then readily demolish.

⁷⁹ ‘... every starting point for philosophical enquiry is initially question-begging ... there is no presuppositionless point of departure. What vindicates this or that starting point is what comes next, the enquiry thus generated and its outcome in the achievement of some particular kind of understanding of some subject matter. One mark of adequate understanding is that it explains retrospectively why enquiry well-designed to achieve it could have begun from some types of starting point but not from others. It is only by arriving at an adequate formulation of the

This, in a nutshell, is MacIntyre's account of how we should understand rationality. In describing and assessing this, I shall follow a similar course, in expounding in some detail MacIntyre's arguments and how he has developed them, and considering whether his account is rational by his own standards, including in its ability to meet the criticisms he has encountered along the way. In the course of doing this I shall discuss questions of relativism and perspectivism, as well as circularity – and, if such circularity is unavoidable, the further issue of whether it might be considered virtuous or inescapably vicious

The Human Dimension

Being Human – the Agents of Rationality

MacIntyre insists that we take the common sense view that to be rational in relation to questions of human living requires us to take account of what it is to be human beings, the agents of this rationality, as we really are. It should be equally clear, though academic philosophy has not always grasped this, that to assume we are other – for example that we operate entirely as detached adult rational minds – is to build on flawed assumptions, unless we are considering certain narrowly circumscribed fields of, for example, mathematics. The rationality we seek for ourselves cannot be abstract or impersonal, since it relates to actual lives pursued by real human beings, who are specific individuals in various relationships with others, living in particular contexts; and it finds expression within the realities of these people's lives.

From this starting point, MacIntyre began, in *After Virtue*, to consider what it means to be human from within the context of Aristotle's moral philosophy. Though repudiating much of Aristotle's biology, he affirmed the capacity for moral reasoning expressed by individual human persons within society, and retained Aristotle's term in describing us as possessing a 'metaphysical biology'.⁸⁰ He subsequently came to realise that his repudiation, though not wholly wrong, had gone too far. Though he had been right to reject, for example, Aristotle's sole focus on the men of the polis,⁸¹ he had failed to see other consequences of our animal nature, such as society's need to care for the very young and others unable to look after themselves, including the very

relevant set of first principles in the end that our initial assumptions and procedures are vindicated' DRA, 77-8.

⁸⁰ AV, 148.

⁸¹ For example, in *The Politics*, Book I, 5 – see Aristotle, *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*, edited by Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16-7.

old and disabled. His later writings, particularly in *Dependent Rational Animals*, have insisted that our answer to the fundamental question of ‘How then shall we live’ must be capable of addressing all such issues in practice, within our actual circumstances. Having realised he was ‘in error in supposing an ethics independent of biology to be possible’,⁸² he has since argued explicitly for an unavoidable interrelationship between ethics and how humanity is biologically constituted. Recognition that this was both more fundamental to his approach and wider in its implications than he had initially recognised, has broadened the scope of his ‘project’ and so strengthened his claim to be addressing his fundamental question comprehensively.

(It is worth noting that, as he readily acknowledges, he revised and refined his opinions through engaging with criticism of his appropriation of Aristotle’s work. This illustrates his own application of the methods he advocates for honing our understanding.)

Human Flourishing – the Goal of Rationality

Having begun by considering what it is to be human, MacIntyre turns to the question of what it means for humans to flourish. The concept of human flourishing, which he retained and developed from Aristotle, by way of Aquinas’ superior understanding, entails the flourishing of the individual within flourishing society. This, says MacIntyre, is the goal, the telos, to which our practical rationality and morality are properly directed, for flourishing is the consequence of answering well, in words and in action, the fundamental question of ‘How then shall we live?’ And we can only know what it is to flourish, if we know what it is to be fully, properly, human.

While, in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre explored this question primarily through sociological and practice-based examples, in later writings his broadened view of the biological nature of humanity led him to take into greater account such aspects as dependence and vulnerability, as noted above. Thus our aspirations to rationality require us to have a teleology that is both sociological and practice based, on the one hand, and biological on the other.⁸³

Just as our understanding of what it is to be human must be open to revision and improvement, so too, by way of automatic corollary, should we expect our

⁸² See DRA, x, 77, and also Jean Porter, ‘Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre’, in Murphy, Alasdair MacIntyre, 43.

⁸³ J. L. A. Garcia, ‘Modern(ist) Moral Philosophy and MacIntyrean Critique’, in Murphy, Alasdair MacIntyre, 103, citing AV, 196 and DRA, x.

apprehension of what human flourishing entails to evolve. Our reflective processes, intentionally undertaken, should always be leading us towards more adequate comprehension of our telos. And the fuller our understanding of our telos, the potentially greater our rationality in pursuit of it – though other factors also come into play.

That this is always a work in progress is evident in MacIntyre's admission that he himself has not done all that is required to give a full account of what it means to be human. Having begun to address not only our mental and relational capacities, but also our physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions, writing in 1999 he saw scope for further work that included 'human identity, perception ... and the psychological reality of certain types of character trait'.⁸⁴ Gradually tackling these topics and others in his subsequent writings, he has, for example, subsequently developed his reflections on embodiment in an essay published in 2006, 'What is a human body?'⁸⁵

Flourishing and Failing

However, MacIntyre brings further caveats to the assumption that to be rational requires a right conception of what it is to be human and to flourish; and that we should continually be aiming to understand both, to the best of our ability, as part of our pursuit of practical rationality. For, he insists, no matter how hard we try, our understanding of humanity and of our telos will inevitably be constrained and distorted in various ways.

First, we are inevitably limited by our finitude and therefore also by the particular perspectives delivered by our specific experiences. We are thus limited by our own context and by our own circumstances, and how we choose to live within them. The consequence of this is that whatever we claim to know, we must recognise as inevitably being a partial and provisional understanding; and we must always be striving for a fuller, more accurate apprehension. Nonetheless, he argues that it is possible for individuals and communities to have a good enough understanding 'for now' that can be judged sufficiently rational for that time and place – a critical point to which I shall return shortly.

⁸⁴ DRA, xii.

⁸⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, 2006, 'What is a human body?' in *The Tasks of Philosophy*. Another example of his broad explorations of what it is to be human is contained his essay on the brain and aspects of neuroscience in Alasdair MacIntyre, 'What Can Moral Philosophers Learn from the Study of the Brain?' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 18.4(1998).

Yet even beyond these constraints of finitude, MacIntyre insists that human knowledge is additionally and inevitably bedevilled by cultural, intellectual, and moral blinkeredness, errors and distortions of understanding. Human failings compound the consequences of finitude.⁸⁶ To be human means to be imperfect, individually and corporately. We are born into flawed and imperfect communities; as we grow up we learn in flawed and imperfect ways how we should live, from flawed and imperfect teachers, who themselves were flawed and imperfect learners and who now live flawed and imperfect lives: the whole undertaking is inevitably flawed and imperfect, and this must be taken into account at every stage of our reflection on rationality.⁸⁷ To fail to try to identify these shortcomings and to overcome them, or to accede in what we know to be deficient or defective, is certainly to render us irrational. Yet even here, vitally, with all our flaws and imperfections, it is nonetheless possible in practice to do ‘well enough for now’.

For all that he writes as philosopher not bishop, MacIntyre is nonetheless not shy of referring to aspects of the human propensity to error in terms of sinfulness.⁸⁸ He does so, reminding us that in the *Summa* Aquinas characterises sin as ‘transgressions of reason’.⁸⁹ Yet such failure of reasoning entails far more than making cognitive mistakes, and is rooted in infringement of the precepts of natural law, an important context to which I shall return later in this thesis.⁹⁰ In MacIntyre’s Thomistic Aristotelianism, a failure to reason well is inexorably linked to a failure to live well the moral and virtuous life.

This human capacity to error and self-deception (including wilful self-deception) demands the virtue of humility from us, says MacIntyre, which we must

⁸⁶ MacIntyre, ‘How Can We Learn What Veritatis Splendor Has to Teach?’ 175.

⁸⁷ DRA, 84.

⁸⁸ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement’, 66.

⁸⁹ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement’, 82, citing the *Summa Theologiae* Ia-IIae 73, 2 – see St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol 25, edited by John Fearon O.P. (London: Blackfriars, 1969), 63.

⁹⁰ In WJWR, 177-82 MacIntyre gives a broader account of Aquinas’ view of moral failure, beginning with natural law, that includes our capacity for ‘the collusion of our wills in moral evil’ (181). MacIntyre judges Aquinas’ understanding of moral failure is crucially different, and superior, to that of Aristotle, in its capacity to address both sin and grace. MacIntyre draws here extensively on the *Summa Theologiae* Ia-IIae 94 (‘The natural law’) and 95 (‘Human law considered in itself’). See Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, edited and translated by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 114-136. Here Aquinas builds on various elements of Aristotle’s thought (with quotations and allusions drawn widely from *Metaphysics*, *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, *Physics*, *Rhetoric*), finessing their interpretation through bringing them into dialogue with Augustine, Basil the Great, Isidore of Seville, John of Damascus and others, to developing his own conclusions.

show not only in respect of our own understanding, but in relation to the views of others with whom we engage. 'Practical reason requires of us, when we do encounter systematic and apparently irresolvable disagreement with our own point of view, that we do not assume that we are in the right, that it is our claims that we are well grounded and our account of human nature that is right. We have initially no grounds for judging. It may be that we are in the right or it may be that neither of us is.'⁹¹ Later in the chapter I return to the question of what it means for Christians to have such 'humility' in the face of counter-claims that challenge belief.

A Social Practice for Everyone

It would be wrong to imagine that the rational moral life which MacIntyre proposes is confined to those who possess particular expertise in moral philosophy and in the art of 'reasoning' – akin to the Aristotelian view, excluding women and all but the 'highest' classes of men, which MacIntyre rejects. Rather, one aspect of human reality on which he insists is that the rationality he espouses is essentially for everyone. Thus he speaks of 'plain persons', and concurs with the Aristotelian view that 'the questions posed by the moral philosophers and the questions posed by the plain person are to an important degree inseparable',⁹² not least since it is for everyone to reflect on the common good, namely, 'what is the good for me, and what is the good for us?'

Of course, some individuals may be more conscious of the theoretical aspects of such enquiry than others, but, apart from those who have some particular disability, it is potentially open to all young people to be brought up to learn to reason (including about what is 'good for us'), to learn to reflect on our reasons, and to learn to reflect on our process of reasoning.⁹³ This is not a matter for abstract study, requiring particular levels of intelligence. Rather, children learn gradually how to become practical reasoners as they develop emotional and mental capabilities, and are brought up and trained in what he terms the social practices of communities.⁹⁴ Though untutored humanity needs training and instruction in practical reasoning, in order to become what it might be, the great majority of us potentially can to a considerable

⁹¹ MacIntyre, 'Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement', 76-7.

⁹² Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues and Goods', *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66.1(1992): 3. Initially delivered as a lecture, this article gives no sources. But see, for example, *Nichomachean Ethics Book VI* – J. L. Akrill, *A New Aristotle Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 416-31; and *Politics, Book III* – Aristotle, *The Politics*, 61-91.

⁹³ DRA, 83.

⁹⁴ See, for example, DRA, Chapters 7 and 8.

degree be inculcated into good habits of continuing learning and refining our beliefs and judgments, and the ways we form them and live them out.

Ultimately, the pursuit of the rational moral life is essentially a social practice, a craft, which we follow (indeed, ‘practise’) as the foundational mode of our lives. This is one of the fundamental building blocks of MacIntyre's approach, to which we shall return throughout this thesis. It is one on which others, such as Stout and Wolterstorff, have found particularly valuable to build, as I shall discuss later.

Further, it is on the basis of this inherent capacity to acquire facility in practical reasoning that MacIntyre insists, following Aquinas, that all ‘plain persons’ have the capacity to judge their rulers on matters of justice and the pursuit of the common good.⁹⁵ This also is an essential point when it comes to developing a praxis for Christian engagement in moral discourse within pluralist liberal democracy – given that democracy, properly exercised, should be open to the full participation of all – as will become clearer later in this thesis.

Humanity's Telos

MacIntyre, in describing human endeavours and reasoning as directed towards our ‘flourishing’, conceptualises this concept of what humanity ‘might be’ in teleological terms. This teleology, as we shall see, is a significant component of MacIntyre's project: one of the anchors of rationality, and one of the two essential markers (together with shared evaluative processes and standards) of communities of tradition which are key in determining the possibilities for substantive debate around moral questions within and between communities.⁹⁶

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre begins by deriving his conception of telos and its centrality within a ‘moral scheme’ from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, drawing on the contention that ‘The syllogisms of practice have as their first premise: “Since the end (telos) and the best is of such and such a kind ...”.’⁹⁷ As MacIntyre asserts throughout his subsequent writings, our ability to answer the fundamental question of

⁹⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas’, in MacIntyre, *Ethics and Politics*, 49, where he references the *Summa*, *Ia-IIae* 47, 11 and 12 – see St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 36, edited by Thomas Gilby O.P., (London: Blackfriars, 1974), 35-41, particularly 37, 39.

⁹⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians’, in MacIntyre, *Ethics and Politics*, 39.

⁹⁷ MacIntyre, ‘Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians’, 30, citing NE 1144a31-33. See Akkrill, *New Aristotle Reader*, 429.

‘What is our good’ is dependent upon our understanding that we have an end, as conceptualised to a considerable degree in Aristotelian terms.⁹⁸

That said, MacIntyre also makes important distinctions between Aristotle’s teleology and that which he develops, in rejecting not only his metaphysical biology and social setting restricting the good life to the elite men of the polis (as mentioned above), but also, *inter alia*, his view that conflict only arises from flawed character.⁹⁹ MacIntyre argues these aspects can be set aside without damage to the fundamental Aristotelian approach,¹⁰⁰ and it is then to Aquinas that he turns for a superior and more comprehensive account of what constitutes humanity’s telos, and the unified nature of the good, within which a variety of heterogeneous goods can be accommodated.¹⁰¹

MacIntyre’s view that we can reject aspects of Aristotle’s ‘metaphysical biology’ while preserving his teleology¹⁰² is shared by others. Charles Taylor concurs that ‘the notion that human beings have something like a telos qua human can be separated from the thesis that everything in nature belongs to some class or other, whose behaviour is explained by some Form or Idea’¹⁰³ and Haldane affirms that in

⁹⁸ MacIntyre gives an extended defence of his particular interpretation and usage of Aristotle and of his assertion that ‘on any plausible view of practical reasoning reflection on the ultimate good for human beings must play some part in that reasoning, even if not for every practical reasoner’ in MacIntyre, ‘Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians’, (quote at 25). See below for further comments upon the validity of MacIntyre’s use of Aristotle, in relation to which it should be noted that he continues to revise and refine this usage in the light of valid criticism.

⁹⁹ AV, 197.

¹⁰⁰ See WJWR, 105, where he admits to an alternative view from Susan Moller Okin. An earlier exchange from a similar perspective is contained in Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, ‘MacIntyre, Feminism and the Concept of Practice’, in Horton and Mendus, *After MacIntyre and MacIntyre’s ‘Partial Response to my Critics’*, also in Horton and Mendus, *After MacIntyre*, 289-290.

¹⁰¹ WJWR, 165-6, 182.

¹⁰² AV, 162.

¹⁰³ Charles Taylor, ‘Justice after Virtue’, in Horton & Mendus, *After MacIntyre*, 17. In the same volume, Janet Coleman expressed concern that MacIntyre had rejected so much of Aristotle’s understanding of what it is to be human that his claim to stand in the tradition of Thomistic Aristotelianism was untenable – Janet Coleman ‘MacIntyre and Aquinas’, in Horton & Mendus, *After MacIntyre*, 85. Christopher Stephen Lutz later considered this question further and concluded that MacIntyre’s teleology was not so tightly bound to Aristotelian metaphysical biology as Coleman had asserted – Christopher Stephen Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism and Philosophy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 133-40. Arguments here draw from Aristotle’s *Physics* (2.7), *De Anima* (2.1), *On the Generation of Animals* (1.21-23), *Metaphysic* (7.13), and *Nichomachean Ethics* (1.7 [1097b27-1098a20], 13 [1103a4-10]). See Akkrill, *A New Aristotle Reader*, 105-6, 165-7, 241-5, 306-7, 369-72, 375-6 respectively.

doing so, we retain ‘the Aristotelian idea that an ethics of virtue requires a teleology of agency’.¹⁰⁴

MacIntyre insists that his teleology, framed in relation to the human person, should be conceived of in terms of the flourishing of human beings within a flourishing society that takes due account (as already noted) of the biological dimension of humanity, including aspects such as dependence and vulnerability.¹⁰⁵ (Similarly, though this is less central to the question before us, it is worth noting that in later work on the nature of embodiment, he argues that to answer adequately the question ‘What is a human body?’ requires not only scientific response but also philosophical reflection on the ends to which we are directed, within which teleological perspectives, beginning with, but going beyond, Aristotle, are unavoidable.¹⁰⁶)

Such ‘selective retrieval’ by MacIntyre might lead us to ask to what extent MacIntyre is being true to Aristotle, a topic which he himself addresses, through considering various alternative interpretations of Aristotle, in the two essays derived from the Brian O’Neil Memorial Lectures for 1997/8.¹⁰⁷ His self-understanding on this point is evident in the conclusions which he draws in these essays. In the first, in considering what of Aristotle continues to survive while certain Renaissance interpretations did not, MacIntyre concludes we are left with the challenge that:

on the one hand Aristotle insisted that the kind of knowledge of our ultimate end that is provided by his philosophical enquiries is of practical relevance and importance. It is no piece of mere theory. On the other hand he made it equally plain that what directs us towards that end in our particular practical judgments and actions is not theoretical reflection, but a kind of habituation.¹⁰⁸

Turning to this question in the second essay, he argues that ‘reflection on the ultimate good for human beings must play some part in [practical] reasoning’¹⁰⁹ about what should be done here and now, and that this is true both in public and private reasoning,

¹⁰⁴ John Haldane, ‘MacIntyre’s Thomist Revival: What Next?’ in Horton & Mendus, *After MacIntyre*, 94.

¹⁰⁵ Garcia, ‘Modern(ist) Moral Philosophy’, 103, citing AV, 196 and DRA, x.

¹⁰⁶ MacIntyre, ‘What is a human body?’ 102-3.

¹⁰⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians’, and Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Aristotle against some Renaissance Aristotelians’, in MacIntyre, *Ethics and Politics*.

¹⁰⁸ MacIntyre, ‘Aristotle against some Renaissance Aristotelians’, 21.

¹⁰⁹ MacIntyre, ‘Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians’, 25.

not least given ‘the unity of the moral and political life’.¹¹⁰ This relationship between practical reasoning (rather than theoretical enquiry) and ultimate end runs through MacIntyre’s writing.

Asking ‘which Aristotle?’ gives rise to a second question, given MacIntyre’s widespread assertion that it is Thomistic Aristotelianism which best instantiates the approach for which he argues. Though in essays such as the two just considered MacIntyre may appear to focus exclusively on Aristotle without reference to any subsequent Thomistic interpretation of his works, MacIntyre is at pains to point out that this is not his intention. As previously noted, in the Preface to his 2006 collection of selected essays, *Ethics and Politics*, he wrote that these were written after he had ‘recognized that [his] philosophical convictions had become those of a Thomistic Aristotelian...’; and asserted that ‘all of them give expression to that Thomistic Aristotelian standpoint’ and ‘each arrives at conclusions that are supportive of, derived from, or at least consistent with a Thomistic Aristotelian stance.’ Acknowledging that ‘the great majority of past and present Aristotelians are of course not Thomists’ and that ‘some Thomists have been anxious to stress the extent of what they take to be the philosophical as well as the theological differences between Aquinas and Aristotle’, he nonetheless underlines the importance of making ‘the case for understanding Aristotle in a way that accords with Aquinas’ interpretation’.¹¹¹ The implication is that when we read MacIntyre’s Aristotelianism, we should assume we are reading MacIntyre’s Thomistic Aristotelianism – and there is no reason to assume this is not the case in writings outside this collection. Specifically on the particular subject of telos, sometimes he links the two explicitly, for example writing of the consequences of the rejection of the ‘teleological understanding of enquiry in the mode of Aristotle and Aquinas’¹¹² while sometimes he refers only to one or the other.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ MacIntyre, ‘Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians’, 35.

¹¹¹ MacIntyre, *Ethics and Politics*, vii.

¹¹² Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues – The 1990 Aquinas Lecture’, Marquette University, in MacIntyre, *Tasks of Philosophy*, 173,4.

¹¹³ MacIntyre, ‘Philosophy Recalled to its Tasks’, 191. It should be acknowledged that MacIntyre’s interpretation of Aquinas, particularly in *After Virtue*, has come in for criticism. Though his later writing is more nuanced, he is still open to the charge that he views Aquinas too much as a philosopher rather than a theologian, and gives Aristotle and Augustine far too central a place, at the expense, first, of Scripture, and then of other sources, primarily a wider range of Fathers of the Church, from both East and West, and finally of other philosophers, on whom Thomas drew (though he does acknowledge their place within Aquinas’ thought, e.g. in *WJWR*, 155). For a fuller discussion of Aquinas’ use of Aristotle (and other sources) see, for example, Nicholas M. Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

One consequence arising from MacIntyre's all-embracing human teleology is the role our ultimate end plays as a touchstone for our discerning the more proximate objectives, the 'goods' (on which more below) we pursue, both individually and corporately, in the business of life. MacIntyre draws on Aristotelian principles in arguing for a teleologically-anchored rationality that enables us to make judgments and rankings between the various goods that it is open to us to pursue at any point of our lives, and to do so within our pursuit of the broader question 'What is the overall good for my life?' This is itself informed by asking 'What is the overall good of the community of which I am a member?' which in turn is shaped by the way we answer the ultimate question of 'What is the ultimate good for human beings?'¹¹⁴

While this raises questions about the autonomy of individuals within wider society, on which I shall comment shortly, in this way MacIntyre's teleology (coupled with narrative unity, on which see below) provides a directedness against which we can weigh the success or failure of life, through presupposing 'a good that transcends the individual', as Jean Porter notes.¹¹⁵ If there were no (justifiable) goal in mind, choices would become arbitrarily based in the desires of the moment, or become guided by considerations of money, power, status, and other forms of what MacIntyre would see as unjustifiable self-gratification. Certainly, they would not be directed towards what is virtuous, moral and excellent. Well-formed teleology enables us to evaluate the relative merit of various courses of action, either our own or those of others, and also both speculatively and retrospectively ('Will this / did this best further my / our ability to direct life towards its proper end?'), and thus strengthens the claim to be pursuing rational justification.¹¹⁶

More than this, because MacIntyre's teleology is rooted in his conception of human flourishing, and reflects a 'rightness' in doing what furthers such flourishing, it adds a moral dimension to practical reasoning. Abstract rational enquiry whose end is the truth is not merely a matter of logical argument. This too MacIntyre develops from Aristotle, arguing that his statement that 'Truth is the telos of theoretical

¹¹⁴ See MacIntyre, 'Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians', in which he additionally adduces a wide range of references from Aristotle's *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, and *De Motu Animalium*, alongside the *Nicomachean Ethics*. All can be found in Akrill, *A New Aristotle Reader*, or, for *Rhetoric*, online through the Perseus Project, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Aristot.+Rh.+1.1.1>.

¹¹⁵ Porter, 41.

¹¹⁶ Garcia writes, 'It seems to me that MacIntyre is basically correct that we need something like (along the lines of) an Aristotelian teleology, in which a valid value judgement is a species of factual judgement, in order to yield defensible, productive, objective, rational, convincing, and noncontroversial evaluation,' Garcia, 'Modern(ist) Moral Philosophy', 107.

enquiry'¹¹⁷ (a view which Aquinas followed¹¹⁸) should be understood as applying to the truthfulness of what we view as goods, rules, virtues, duties and so forth, and thus to the truthfulness of how we direct our lives – that is, the 'rightness' of how we live. Thus MacIntyre claims to overcome the conceptual division between 'is' and 'ought'. Garcia concurs that he has successfully bridged the distinction between 'facts' and 'values', since 'we evaluate a moral subject and her actions always in relation to some kind of telos – the kind of fact that incorporates the basis of certain value judgements.'¹¹⁹

Teleology, Rationality, and Moral Debate

Teleology thus conceptualised helps provide the directedness and purposefulness that is necessary for the pursuit of truthfulness at all levels of rational enquiry.¹²⁰ MacIntyre goes on to argue that not only is an appropriate telos intrinsic to the rational justification of the life well-lived,¹²¹ but that since this telos is grounded in a context of Thomistic realism, it contributes to the avoidance of the pitfalls of relativism and perspectivism.¹²² For, though our understanding of our telos is open to continuing revision and refinement, and this entails a certain kind of ineliminable circularity,¹²³ it is nonetheless one of the elements that ensures that the practice of dialectical enquiry is virtuous rather than vicious.¹²⁴ Our telos finds expression in the common good towards which we must always strive.

When it comes to wider ethical debate, agreement on the common good is also, in MacIntyre's view, a marker for our potential ability fruitfully to pursue moral questions with those of other communities. He argues that considerable agreement on a telos, on a shared conception of the common good, is necessary if those who differ are to move beyond mere communication to genuine moral exchange with the

¹¹⁷ Metaphysics, II 993b20-I, cited in MacIntyre, A., 1994, 'Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification', in *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition*, ed. Luke Gormally (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), 11. See Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vols.17, 18, (trans. Hugh Tredennick, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1933, 1989) accessed 11 November 2011 at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0052%3Abook%3D2%3Asection%3D993b>.

¹¹⁸ See MacIntyre, 'Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement' 72.

¹¹⁹ Garcia, 'Modern(ist) Moral Philosophy', 103.

¹²⁰ MacIntyre, 'Truth as a Good', 212-3.

¹²¹ MacIntyre, 'First Principles', 166 – on how this is so, see later in this chapter.

¹²² WJWR, 352-8.

¹²³ MacIntyre, 'First Principles', 151.

¹²⁴ WJWR, 118.

possibility of evaluating options and so reaching agreement on specific moral questions, or even on the overall superiority of one or other competing traditions, or some enhanced version of one or other thereof. It also follows that where there is no agreement on the common good, or even on the central place of such a concept in moral debate, he is (or, at least, initially appears) extremely sceptical about the possibility of engaging in substantial rational enquiry.

However, some, like Stout, believe that MacIntyre sets, or appears to set, the bar of agreement too high, and in fact when viewed more carefully the case is different.¹²⁵ In chapter 4, when weighing MacIntyre's thesis against Stout's criticisms and alternative proposals, I shall devote further attention to the question of an appropriate telos, the goods in which it finds expression, and its position in public debate on moral questions.¹²⁶

A failure in rationality in relation to teleology arises from our failure to pursue the most truthful conception available to us, and has analogous consequences to a failure in rightly conceiving human identity and flourishing. To have an unjustifiable telos is to have a flaw at the centre of our processes of practical reasoning and rational enquiry. MacIntyre notes that 'Aquinas catalogues at least a dozen different conceptions of what the human good is, each of which would dictate a different way of life, eleven of which he takes to be in error!'¹²⁷ Here MacIntyre acknowledges that he shares with Aquinas the belief that it is only in lives directed towards a perfected relationship to God that our true telos is found.¹²⁸

The immediate implication of this might appear to be that Christians can only engage in substantive moral debate with other Christians, or perhaps other theists who have a largely similar conception of God. A further implication that Christians might be tempted to draw would be that the rational processes of those who have no appropriate telos are likely to be so flawed as to make genuine debate impossible.

¹²⁵ 'MacIntyre does not exclude, it seems to me, the possibility that moral discourse in our society can itself be understood as held together by a relatively limited but nonetheless real and significant agreement on the good', EaB, 211-2.

¹²⁶ Questions of the nature of and role played by our telos and/or common good in moral discourse seem to be so wide-ranging, that it may become the topic of a free-standing chapter. It is the area in which my current work is focussed.

¹²⁷ MacIntyre, 'Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement' 71, citing the Summa, Ia-IIae, 2,1-8; 3,6; 4,6-7), see St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Vol 16., edited by Thomas Gilby O.P. (London: Blackfriars, 1969), 31-57, 77-81, 106-113 .

¹²⁸ MacIntyre, 'Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement', 71, citing the Summa, Ia-IIae 1,5. See Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Vol 16, 19-23, in which Aquinas asks 'Can one individual have several ultimate ends?' and answers in the negative.

Further, they might even be rendered incapable of comprehending the Christian tradition in all its fullness and so of grasping its superiority – requiring instead the radical conversion of the Holy Spirit, untouched by logical argument. On this basis, Christians should not waste energy on engaging on moral and ethical questions in the public arena. I shall explain why I consider these conclusions flawed in chapters 6 and 7.

There are also implications for our claim to a rationality that avoids criticisms of perspectivism. For even if MacIntyre’s approach has an internal consistency that allows us to claim rationality, is it the case that others are able to say ‘Yes, I see you are rational from your own perspective, and that is fine, but I do not accept your telos and so the rest of what you say has no fundamental bearing on my life’? This is in part a matter of meeting the relativist challenge, on which more below.

Individuals and Community

As already touched upon, for MacIntyre the social dimension of life is another vital aspect of our humanity. This means considerably more than that we are inevitably situated within some specific social context. Rationality, MacIntyre argues, is found only within traditions, which are constituted within communities.¹²⁹ Individuals are trained into skilled performance of the rational practices of the tradition by more experienced members of the community. This necessitates wholehearted allegiance to the community, its beliefs and values, and its practices, owning them for oneself and sharing in the common life of the community, as appropriate to one’s abilities. The ongoing process of practical rationality is honed by dialectic between members of the community, as well as with others.¹³⁰

The converse is also true. An individual cannot pursue practical rationality alone, for one cannot be part of a tradition or a practice on one’s own – and without the resources of rational enquiry provided by a tradition or practice, one cannot even begin to reflect on what it is to be rational.¹³¹ One needs sustained commitment to the tradition, the community, the training, the practices, and the continuing dialectic, not

¹²⁹ WJWR, 350.

¹³⁰ In developing many of these points, he claims to follow both Aristotle and Aquinas, though in his arguments he tends to rely upon Aquinas’ use of Aristotle, quoting far more from Aquinas. See for example, see WJWR, 179-80, in which he quotes variously from Aquinas, particularly from the Summa, notably Ia-IIae 94 and 95 – see Aquinas, Political Writings, 114-137.

¹³¹ WJWR, 395.

least as without them we are particularly prone to self-deception. As MacIntyre says, ‘We should always therefore treat solitary deliberation as peculiarly liable to error.’¹³²

That said, rationality requires a community which is directed towards true human flourishing, reflecting an adequate conception of the right human end, and which upholds the highest standards of enquiry in pursuit of this. As MacIntyre says, ‘others are sometimes a source not of deliberative correction but of deliberative corruption. We need from others, as they need from us, the exercise of the virtues of objectivity. Lacking that objectivity, others may reinforce our phantasies and collaborate in our misconceptions.’¹³³ Such objectivity is of course not that of the ‘context-neutral’ standpoint of the ‘Enlightenment Project’, which MacIntyre rejects, but rather in the deliberate commitment continually to work at identifying and stepping back from cultural, intellectual and moral errors and distortions, not least those arising from the pursuit of pleasure, power, status and money – characterised in MacIntyre’s concept of ‘external goods’.

Though insisting that the community plays a central role in the upholding of rational, moral, life, MacIntyre is adamant that he is not a ‘communitarian’ as this is generally understood.¹³⁴ This he characterises as being defined by its exponents over and against liberal theorists, and though he accepts that his description tends to overstatement, he concludes that the two positions are ‘not only not in opposition to each other, but neatly complement one another’ with communitarianism ‘a diagnosis of certain weaknesses in liberalism, not a rejection of it’. He therefore rejects both in his pursuit of a better option.¹³⁵ Stout also sees liberalism and communitarianism, certainly as espoused by theorists, as denoting two sides of the same coin to a considerable degree. Though he tends to consider MacIntyre close to the communitarian perspective, he too is wanting to postulate an alternative approach to engagement with the contemporary political world.¹³⁶ I consider these issues in greater detail in chapter 4.

MacIntyre insists that rationality for the individual and for the community go hand in hand, and such goals are mutually reinforcing rather than in competition. Some critics would argue that the goods of the individual and of the community are

¹³² MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement’, p. 74.

¹³³ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement’, p. 74.

¹³⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good’, in Knight, ed., *The MacIntyre Reader*, 235.

¹³⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good’, 244.

¹³⁶ EaB, 6.

bound to clash,¹³⁷ but, while acknowledging that this may happen, MacIntyre still asserts that in general, and over time, the greatest good of all will be found in this symbiotic relationship.¹³⁸ This may be somewhat utopian, but we may still conclude it is more rational to retain this aspiration than otherwise – certainly within a community of tradition, even if questions then remain over the flourishing of a particular community of tradition in relation to the wider community – which we might take as nation or even the entire human family. Furthermore, as MacIntyre rightly stresses, while ‘external goods are ... characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers and well as winners’, in contrast it is ‘characteristic’ of internal goods that ‘their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice’.¹³⁹ Pursuit of internal goods, and all this entails, can therefore far more readily deliver win-win rather than zero-sum outcomes.

The Substance of Rationality

Having begun with MacIntyre’s insistence that we take the common sense view that for human beings to live rationally requires us to take account of what it is to be human beings, as we really are, I now consider the form such rationality takes.

Narrative Unity and Coherence

Just as MacIntyre wants fully to reflect what human beings actually are like, he also wishes to address the totality of life: for each individual to discover nothing less than the narrative unity of that person’s life.¹⁴⁰ This, he says, is to be found within ‘a coherent and comprehensive form of socially established cooperative human activity.’¹⁴¹ It is conceived against a background account of a social practice, and directed towards a moral tradition¹⁴² and thus is rooted in a community directed towards human flourishing, teleologically conceived.

¹³⁷ For example, Stout cites Martha Nussbaum on the all too often competing demands of professional and family life, even when in pursuit of goods internal to each EaB, 289 and n.18, 330.

¹³⁸ DRA, 109. In this MacIntyre says elsewhere that he follows Aquinas’ ‘conception of the ultimate unity of good’ which he develops through the Summa, (see WJWR, 166). This unity of the good is of course reflected elsewhere in Aquinas’ writings, including in relation to political organisation, to which I turn in later chapters – see, for example, De regimine principum XVI, in Aquinas, Political Writings, 43-4.

¹³⁹ AV, 190-1.

¹⁴⁰ AV, 205.

¹⁴¹ AV, 187, 208.

¹⁴² AV, 186 – and elaborated on further, through Chapter 14.

Stout is concerned that MacIntyre has not made an adequate case for employing narrative as ‘the privileged mode or ultimate context of rationality’.¹⁴³ But perhaps depicting it as ‘the’ privileged mode is placing on it a greater weight than MacIntyre asserts (for all his tendency to overstatement). Others are more sympathetic to his usage, for example Peter Johnson, who argues that MacIntyre’s approach fosters a strong link between narrative, accountability and the practice of democracy.¹⁴⁴ Though he admits there are ‘serious difficulties’ inherent in narrative in general as ‘a suitable mode for virtuous conduct or political decency’ he points to ways that MacIntyre’s specific conception of narrative, drawing in Aristotle, addresses these, through its integral relationship with practical wisdom and the virtues.

To put it in other words, MacIntyre is wanting to argue that the rational life is one that ‘makes sense’ as we journey from birth to death – a journey on which we, like the heroes of the past, pursue our goal of discovering and living out the ‘good’ – for ourselves and the wider community. Life is to be understood as ‘a teleologically ordered unity, a whole the nature of which and the good of which I have to learn how to discover.’ So life ‘has the continuity and unity of a quest, a quest whose object is to discover that truth about my life as a whole which is an indispensable part of the good of that life.’¹⁴⁵

MacIntyre, again making sweeping reference to Aquinas,¹⁴⁶ argues that to be truly rational, there must be some overarching coherence and singleness of purpose that runs through the whole of life, even though we may to some extent find ourselves as members of various overlapping communities (for example through our work or leisure activities). This is in stark contrast to the stance he describes John Rawls as holding, which is to argue that this is neither possible nor desirable – which, for MacIntyre, is further evidence of the arbitrariness of the life of both individuals and society that is ordered by no more than individual preferences and bargaining, that results from living by liberal norms.¹⁴⁷ Gary Gutting considers that MacIntyre sets the bar of rationality far higher than is necessary. Though stopping short of Rawl’s

¹⁴³ EaB, 349.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Johnson, ‘Reclaiming the Aristotelian Ruler’, in Horton & Mendus, *After MacIntyre*, 56-8.

¹⁴⁵ TRV, 197.

¹⁴⁶ WJWR, 164-5.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Human good is heterogeneous because the aims of the self are heterogeneous. Although to subordinate all our aims to one end does not strictly speaking violate the principles of rational choice ... it still strikes us as irrational or more likely as mad. The self is disfigured.’ This is quoted in WJWR, 337, having also been referenced in part earlier, 165.

version of liberalism,¹⁴⁸ he argues that we can and do live within a number of spheres, allocating time and energy among them through our own ‘pragmatism’. It is entirely up to us to decide whether we want any such coherence, and if so, whether to seek it from a tradition or ‘construct [our] own distinctive conception of the overall good’, that decision being good enough to require no further justification. But a conception of the good based on no more than our personal choice falls far short of the rationality to which MacIntyre aspires. Gutting says that MacIntyre offers ‘no reason for thinking that [his approach] is incoherent or otherwise inappropriate’ but Gutting’s assertion is undermined by his admission that he approaches the question as a ‘pragmatic liberal’ which leaves his entire stance susceptible to MacIntyre’s criticisms of a lack of coherent rationality.¹⁴⁹

Excellence in Social Practice – Internal and External Goods

Alongside a narrative ordering of human life, MacIntyre, as already noted, postulates a ‘background account’ of a ‘practice’¹⁵⁰ as a necessary component of the life well lived. He defines ‘practice’ as

Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.¹⁵¹

The narrative continuity of the social practices within a community are what form the basis of its ‘tradition’. Training in excellence in the craft of reasoning well – pursuing practical rationality and rational enquiry – is itself a social practice, and is essential to a community’s ability to sustain itself in the face of inevitable challenges. From this derives MacIntyre’s usage of ‘communities of tradition’ as one of his most frequent descriptions of the locus of moral, rational, living.

In spelling out the details of this ‘social practice’, MacIntyre draws the distinction between the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ rewards which excellence may bring. The former are those which result from the pursuit of excellence, the good, high

¹⁴⁸ Gary Gutting, *Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 191.

¹⁴⁹ Gutting, *Pragmatic Liberalism*, 105.

¹⁵⁰ AV, 187.

¹⁵¹ AV, 187.

standard, for its own sake. The latter are those gains which we make as a by-product of our ability to achieve excellence, such as the pursuit, for their own sake, of the material wellbeing, power, or status of some individual or group (often at the expense of others). A rather simplistic example of this would be if we play the piano well, but perform for the sake of adulation rather than the joy of producing beautiful music. More fundamentally, MacIntyre's concern is the development of a way of living that promotes the internal goods of excellence which bear fruit in virtuous, ethical living that furthers human flourishing.

MacIntyre stresses that external goods are genuine goods, adding that 'not only are they characteristic objects of human desire, whose allocation is what gives point to the virtues of justice and of generosity, but no one can despise them altogether without a certain hypocrisy'. However, unlike internal goods, they neither arise from, nor are shaped by, the virtues. Therefore, though it is possible to pursue both (to become rich and famous through some excellence), there is always the risk that external goods will come to dominate, as a consequence of which 'the concept of the virtues might suffer first attrition and then perhaps something near total effacement'.¹⁵²

The distinction between internal and external goods of excellence is central in MacIntyre's damning critique of contemporary society. Here, he argues, external goods have taken centre stage, and, with them, instrumentalist market mind-sets and bureaucratic convenience increasingly dominate. In contrast, internal values, in which virtue rests, are progressively marginalised.

While I shall return in chapter 4 to the question of how far MacIntyre overstates his case, nonetheless, the ability to distinguish between internal and external goods is essential to our ability to reason well – though of course the ability then to choose to act in accordance with the internal goods of excellence, rather than what are often the more immediately gratifying external goods requires the will to act well, in addition to believing well. As I shall discuss more fully, in chapters 4 and 5, while this distinction has an important bearing on the rationality pursued within a particular community of tradition, it also provides particularly powerful tools to assist those from communities of tradition – such as the Anglican Church – in engaging with both other communities and wider society. The unmasking of the role played by external goods is of fundamental importance in debate around ethical questions within the public arena.

¹⁵² AV, 196.

Related to this is MacIntyre's warning not to confuse the institutions that uphold standards of excellence with the practices themselves. Indeed, competition between the institution's desire to sustain and promote itself, and its commitment to that which it is designed to serve, can often arise. Nonetheless, MacIntyre notes that 'no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions' and adds that 'the ability of a practice to retain its integrity will depend on the way in which the virtues can be and are exercised in sustaining the institutional forms which are the social bearers of the practice'.¹⁵³

Despite noting the necessity of some form of institutional life to the sustaining of social practices that deliver genuine internal goods and the inevitability of competition between internal and external goods, together with instrumentalism, in such institutions, MacIntyre gives comparatively thinner theoretical consideration to how this competition should be handled than is generally characteristic of the detailed analyses he develops in other areas of his work. While, as Stout notes, both he and Hauerwas do give some consideration to these tensions in practice, for example within medical ethics around the cost of treatment, they do not make the same connections as Stout does to the implications for dialogue within the political arena.¹⁵⁴ Stout argues that MacIntyre's insights on the risks that come from institutionalisation, and from the interplay of internal and external goods can and should be applied to the practice of democracy (which he asserts is a tradition, in essentially the MacIntyrean sense, not least in that it 'inculcates certain habits of reasoning'¹⁵⁵). Stout says that 'the advantage of MacIntyre's distinctions is that they make possible a stereoscopic social criticism, one which brings social practices and institutions, internal and external goods, into focus at the same time.'¹⁵⁶ As I shall consider in greater detail in chapter 5, Stout's stereoscopic social criticism has the potential to enable a far more comprehensive and balanced account of both the context and the content of public debate.

This has important consequences for the pursuit of an effective praxis for Anglican engagement within a pluralist world. First of all, churches themselves – particularly institutional churches such as the Church of England – are not immune to the pressure of external goods. This can be seen for example in General Synod debates around tensions between 'management' issues and what may be characterised

¹⁵³ AV, 194-5.

¹⁵⁴ EaB, 278-82.

¹⁵⁵ DaT, 3.

¹⁵⁶ EaB, 279.

as the primary objectives of mission and ministry. For Church leaders to present themselves as coming from a moral, rational, tradition, they must show that they are honestly grappling with these issues internally. (MacIntyre may be accused of letting the Roman Catholic Church off the hook, in his acquiescence to the obedience it requires of its faithful, questioning only within the parameters it itself sets.¹⁵⁷) Second, as Rowan Williams' public speaking demonstrates, debate around the relative import of internal and external goods, and the influence of instrumentalism in policy making and in society's wider ordering, is a fruitful point of entry for public discourse.¹⁵⁸

I shall explore these important issues further, and argue that further rational justification for such an approach can be found within MacIntyre's appropriation of Aquinas' primary precepts of natural law, in chapter 6.

Rationality and Right Living

As already noted, MacIntyre stresses that practical rationality does not result in understanding and good reasoning alone. Practical rationality results in, and requires, the action of right living – echoing the view of Aristotle, followed by Aquinas, that we only become just by first identifying, and then performing, just actions.¹⁵⁹

One consequence of this is that practical rationality considers what one can do in one's actual circumstances – it is not rational to decide that one should do something that circumstances do not allow. It is person and situation specific – though neither perspectivist nor relativist.

Practical rationality thus also requires that we not only reason well what to do, but also carry this out. To do otherwise is to be less than fully rational, from both the viewpoint of the narrative of one's life, and the telos at which it aims. It is also a failure to live virtuously, since 'without the virtues we cannot adequately protect ourselves and each other against neglect, defective sympathies, stupidity, acquisitiveness and malice.'¹⁶⁰ In other words, it is a moral failing, a falling into sinfulness.

¹⁵⁷ MacIntyre, 'Philosophy Recalled to its tasks', 179.

¹⁵⁸ For example, Rowan Williams, 'Rome Lecture'.

¹⁵⁹ WJWR, 181.

¹⁶⁰ DRA, 98.

Right living is pursued by both the individual and the community, and is focussed towards a shared concept of the good, which directs both towards their common telos. To be rational is to pursue the life well lived, singly and corporately, and to flourish insofar as one is able.

The Rationally Mature Human Person

Through our lives we should grow in maturity, both rationally and morally. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre, noting the contribution our ‘metaphysical biology’ (as he sees it, rather than as formulated by Aristotle) makes to the rationality of our lives, identifies three components in our upbringing and our continuing relationships that are necessary to our ability to acquire a mature rationality, which add detail to the process of training in the social practices that deliver the true excellence of the internal good:

What we need from others, if we are not only to exercise our initial animal capacities, but also to develop the capacities of independent practical reasoners, are those relationships necessary for fostering

- the ability to evaluate, modify, or reject our own practical judgments, to ask, that is, whether what we take to be good reasons for action really are sufficiently good reasons,
- and the ability to imagine realistically alternative possible futures, so as to be able to make rational choices between them,
- and the ability to stand back from our desires, so as to be able to enquire rationally what the pursuit of our good here and now requires and how our desires must be directed and, if necessary, reeducated, if we are to attain it.¹⁶¹

In this way, MacIntyre gives an account of the place of our emotions and desires, in balance with purely cognitive reason. His is a rationality that can acknowledge and encompass both the cognitive and the affective dimensions of our humanity. Note too the importance of the context provided by the community, and the implication that each individual who so receives should likewise give, according to their ability.

MacIntyre also stresses the importance of growing self-knowledge (entailing also the virtues of honesty and humility) as necessary for mature reasoning. This can only be well-developed within an effective community. Furthermore, we need to keep learning, with the assistance of other members of the community, to the end of our

¹⁶¹ DRA, 83, with my formatting (though his emphases), to bring greater clarity to MacIntyre’s points.

lives.¹⁶² Friendship and collegiality are, he asserts, the best protection against both moral and intellectual errors.¹⁶³

The Process of Practical Rationality

It is within this framework, of maturing individuals rooted within a particular community of tradition that pursues the goods of excellence of the moral life, that the process of practical rationality is pursued. MacIntyre spells out in some detail how this process operates.

Practical Rationality

In the first instance, our reasoning in pursuit of daily practical rationality is a dynamic, and corporate, undertaking. There is a continual dialectical consideration by community members, especially those particularly skilled in the practice, of how the common good is to be understood, pursued and given practical expression within the evolving life of individuals and community, as we all face the many daily choices about how we should live our lives.

To a considerable degree, says MacIntyre, this becomes an automatic part of the individual's life within the community. Each of us lives our lives accountable to the community: everyone can question me, and so force me to consider further and refine, as necessary, the understandings and actions of my own narrative story; and second, I too am able, indeed, expected, to solicit a similar account from others, both individually and in relation to our shared community life.¹⁶⁴ Such questions can also be raised about the corporate understandings and life of the community.

Much of this constitutes what MacIntyre generally calls 'everyday practical reasoning', into the 'social practice' of which the community brings up its children to become habituated. MacIntyre describes this in terms of Aristotle's phronesis, 'the virtue of those who know how to do what is good, indeed, what is best, in particular situations and who are disposed by their character traits to do it'.¹⁶⁵ In a community that upholds this virtue, it may not be necessary for every individual always to

¹⁶² DRA, 94-6.

¹⁶³ DRA, 96.

¹⁶⁴ AV, 217-20.

¹⁶⁵ MacIntyre, 'Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians' 28. Here he quotes Nichomachean Ethics, 1103b32, see Akkrill, *A New Aristotle Reader*, 377. For Aquinas on training the young, see WJWR, p. 179, where he cites the *Summa*, Ia-IIae 95, 1 (see Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 126-9, where Aquinas also quotes from Aristotle, though from *Ethics*, *De regimine principum*, *Politics*, and *Rhetoric* on aspects of upbringing.)

undertake a full reasoned theoretical analysis of every choice, not least because within the context of the community, it may often be readily apparent what the right thing is to do. It comes naturally to the good character we seek to develop in ourselves and in each following generation.

Yet there must be some who ensure that more fundamental reflection is sustained. Within the community as a whole there must be continuing engagement in refining our understanding of the common good, and recontextualising what this means in practice on both individual and corporate levels, in the light of changing circumstances.

The stimuli for this come from several quarters. First, we must respond to the inevitable changes of life through time. Second, challenges may come from outside the community, to which we need to give an adequate account or response. Third, we are also required to seek out all possible alternate views and counter-arguments, insights from which can further hone our understandings and practices.¹⁶⁶ MacIntyre points to Aquinas' comprehensive engagement with available alternative opinion, and his intention to synthesise a comprehensive approach, with interdependence between its various elements, as indicators of his intrinsic rationality.¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, 'it is only by being open to objections posed by our critics and antagonists that we are able to avoid becoming the victims of our own prejudices.'¹⁶⁸ One mark of the vindication of a tradition is its ability on its own terms to address, analyse and overcome both internal and external challenges, through evolving in this way.¹⁶⁹ When a tradition passes the tests provided by all possible challenges, it is strengthened in its claim to be rational.

The Development of Tradition

This raises the important question of the extent to which all aspects of our own tradition are open to potential revision and development when confronted with challenge. There is of course the continuing subjection of beliefs and practices to systematic and deliberate refinement, as described above. But sometimes circumstances or challenges call for a more thorough-going review, which may lead to

¹⁶⁶ WJWR, 358.

¹⁶⁷ WJWR, Chapter 10, notably 164-5, 172.

¹⁶⁸ MacIntyre, 'Tasks of Philosophy,' Preface, p. xii.

¹⁶⁹ WJWR, 251.

more ‘abrupt’ changes. MacIntyre describes three stages for this process of development of a tradition:¹⁷⁰

- First, the relevant beliefs, canonical texts and their interpretation, and so forth, are accepted without question
- Second, inadequacies are identified, without yet being remedied
- Third, reformulations and re-evaluations are found to provide those remedies.

Thus all tenets, including the core commitments, are permanently open to question. As long as ‘some core of shared belief, constitutive of allegiance to the tradition,’ survives, they can be said to remain within that same tradition, even if they have passed through something of an epistemological crisis en route. However, as MacIntyre notes, sometimes more radical revision of core commitments and how they should be lived out is demanded – or adherents recognise that the discontinuity with previous tradition outweighs continuity.¹⁷¹

Gutting argues that MacIntyre's claim for rationality to be located within a tradition is undermined by his insistence on non-dissenting membership of a community, and that its core commitments are not subject to critique.¹⁷² However, Gutting bases this argument on selective quotations from *Three Rival Versions*, where, in fact, MacIntyre is describing, respectively, the arguments of Plato (p. 60) and Thomas Aquinas (p. 125), rather than his own approach, which requires continuing, honest and unconstrained, critique from within the community.

That said, Gutting rightly notes that there is a ‘core of truth not subject to interpretation, development, or rational rejection’ found ‘in the Catholic tradition which MacIntyre embraces’ which is ‘very extensive’.¹⁷³ This is an important challenge for faith communities’ aspirations to rationality. How far are Christians, for example, prepared to lay open to question such central tenets as the existence of God, or the formulations of the Creeds, or doctrines of the Trinity, or the nature of the incarnate Christ? What of the status and interpretation of Scripture, or longstanding practices of church Order? I return to these questions at the end of this chapter, and later in the thesis.

¹⁷⁰ WJWR, 355-6.

¹⁷¹ WJWR, 356.

¹⁷² Gutting, *Pragmatic Liberalism*, 91.

¹⁷³ Gutting, *Pragmatic Liberalism*, 91, n.13. Examples of Roman Catholic centralising control include the issuing of the nihil obstat and imprimatur, declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error; or ‘Pope Clarifies that only he can criticize a Cardinal’, *Zenit*, 28 June 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, www.zenit.org/article-29741?l=english.

In a similar vein, Porter notes some ambiguity, even inconsistency, in MacIntyre's treatment of the role of authority in safeguarding tradition. She asks how, given his account of Galileo, 'can we escape the conclusion that, in this case, authority functioned to undermine, rather than promote, rationality?' She concludes 'It may well be that MacIntyre can answer these questions through a more extended analysis of the warrants and scope of authority within a tradition, but he has yet to do so.'¹⁷⁴ This underlines the need for continued reflection on our reflective processes, and the need to ensure an adequate degree of openness to refinement even of centrally held tenets and processes, and the way we understand and handle them.

Rational Enquiry

Pursuing and refining practical rationality, and in consequence refining aspects of a community's tradition, is essentially something we undertake within the community – on one's own terms, so to speak. However, sometimes challenges arise which require a deeper process of engagement. MacIntyre tends to call this 'rational enquiry'¹⁷⁵ which 'extends and amplifies our everyday practical reasoning.'¹⁷⁶

In the first instance, this is still conducted within the community of tradition – for example when situations have arisen or challenges have been presented (including through deliberate search for alternative views) for which the existing formulation of the tradition does not have an adequate response or cannot provide an agreed resolution.

MacIntyre offers four 'crucial' characteristics of the stages through which the community will have to progress in order for the enquiry to achieve satisfactory, and rational, results. This is primarily an intellectual undertaking, though the situation which gave it rise need not be:

- Evolving stages of the enquiry will take account of earlier stages, for example in providing insights to those stages that were not then available and offering the means for moving forward.
- Later stages should be able to provide explanations for situations of disagreement which arose previously, and the reasons that they then lacked the means for resolution.

¹⁷⁴ Porter, 'Tradition', 66.

¹⁷⁵ Sometimes he uses the alternative term 'theoretical enquiry', though this in some contexts takes on a very particular meaning in relation to dialogue with those who are not members of any community of tradition, as discussed in chapter 6.

¹⁷⁶ DRA, 157.

- Each subsequent stage of the enquiry should provide a ‘successively more adequate conception of the enquiry’: not just ‘conceptually richer’ and providing a fuller account of the goal pursued, but also enabling the enquiry to be better directed towards that goal.
- Finally, ‘this gradually enriched conception of the goal is a conception of what it would be to have completed the enquiry. One and the same conception is to provide both the enquiry with its telos and the subject matter of the enquiry with its explanation. So that to arrive at it would involve being able to provide a single, unified, explanation of the subject matter and of course of the enquiry into that subject matter.’¹⁷⁷

Thus the particular issue which gave rise to the process of enquiry finds contextualisation within the wider telos of the community, even if its solution may in turn provoke further refining of that telos or its instantiation within the community.

Traditions in Dialogue

Rationality’s requirement for engagement with all possible alternative views, from both within and outside a tradition, necessitates a basis for engagement with other perspectives, whether offered by other traditions or from those from no tradition.

MacIntyre considers in some detail whether, under what circumstances, and to what degree, true dialogue is possible between different perspectives, whether with another tradition, or with those outside what he understands a tradition to be. The implications of these questions of translatability and commensurability are complex, not least in the application in the messy practical world of the rather more clear-cut analysis MacIntyre offers. I shall address these more fully in the next chapter and consider the consequences for Christian engagement in a pluralist, multicultural, and often increasingly secularised world. In what follows below I shall outline MacIntyre’s account more briefly, primarily in terms of the ability of a tradition to assert its rationality.

Translation and Commensurability

In order to consider the perspective of others, we need to be able to access the views of those who do not share our community of tradition, together with its contextual assumptions and practices, in order to embark on a proper assessment. First, I shall consider the perspectives of those of other communities of tradition, as

¹⁷⁷ WJWR, 79f.

defined along the lines already outlined, before considering the perspectives of those outside such a community.

Each such community of tradition has, says MacIntyre, its own ‘language-in-use’, reflecting its conceptual world view.¹⁷⁸ MacIntyre affirms that, given the nature of what it is to be a community of tradition, there will always be something in common between the languages or sets of thoughts of any two such communities. However, this should not be taken as indicating there is necessarily any deeper commensurability between the two traditions. When first considering in detail what was required for effective communication between communities, as he did in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre focussed on what he termed ‘translatibility’. He posited that such communication required someone to be fully ‘bilingual’ (in his usage), that is, able to speak the two languages that reflect two rival traditions of enquiry as if each were a first language, in order to understand fully the precise contextual usages of words, concepts, evaluative practices and so forth. (The ability of people in practice to speak a ‘second first language’ raises both linguistic and philosophical questions, to which I shall return in chapter 3.)

Such a person may find – and recognise – that the language of one tradition ‘lacks concepts, idioms and modes of argument necessary for the statement of’ certain claims of the other tradition.¹⁷⁹ What is then required for the perspectives of the first language to be considered by the community of tradition of the second, is for the second language ‘to be enriched’¹⁸⁰ so that what was previously unsayable becomes sayable. The bilingual person can then express these perspectives in ways that can be fully understood within, and then assessed by, the second community, employing its own standards of evaluation.

Dialogue between Traditions

Rather more is required to move from mere communication to substantive discussion between traditions. I have just described how one community of tradition may, in its internal deliberations, weigh alternative perspectives from another community of tradition. But often the need is for two such communities then to go on to debate with each other possible answers to some moral question which both face.

¹⁷⁸ In what follows I draw primarily on *WJWR*, Chapter XIX.

¹⁷⁹ *WJWR*, 371.

¹⁸⁰ MacIntyre, ‘Partial Response’, 296.

For this to happen effectively there is a fundamental requirement for the emergence of common standards of evaluation. This requires rather more than merely a shared concept of what constitutes logic, which, on its own, is insufficient grounds for arbitrating between competing views.¹⁸¹ Only where the two sides agree on the criteria for weighing rational morality, can the contentions of one or other side (perhaps expressed through the hermeneutical enrichment outlined above) be shown to be, and be acknowledged by both parties to be, superior.

This is made possible, says MacIntyre, (and made possible in a non-relativist way, on which see further below) when there is ‘shared presupposition of the contending enquiries in respect of truth’,¹⁸² that is truth as exposed to dialectical testing against all possible questions and objections.¹⁸³ The traditions must share such standards of rational evaluation in relation not only to particular enquiry on certain subjects¹⁸⁴ but also to the incorporation of such enquiries within the pursuit of the overall life of human beings and communities. This therefore requires agreement on an appropriate telos towards which enquiry and human life are directed.¹⁸⁵

Subject to these conditions, MacIntyre proposes a two-step approach for traditions to engage in substantive dialogue:¹⁸⁶

- Each side ‘characterizes the contentions of its rival in its own terms, making explicit the grounds for rejecting what is incompatible with its own central theses, although sometimes allowing that from its own point of view and in the light of its own standards of judgment its rival has something to teach it on marginal and subordinate questions.’ This requires that some members of each tradition should be ‘bilingual’ (the understanding of which term I shall consider in the next chapter).
- Then each should ask whether the alternative, rival, tradition, ‘may not be able to provide resources to characterize and explain the failings and defects of their own tradition more adequately than they, using the resources of that tradition, have been able to do.’

The degree to which the two traditions are able to complete these steps demonstrates their relative strengths.

¹⁸¹ WJWR, 351.

¹⁸² MacIntyre, *Partial Response*, 297 – his italics.

¹⁸³ WJWR, 358.

¹⁸⁴ WJWR, 80.

¹⁸⁵ WJWR, 142-3.

¹⁸⁶ WJWR, 166f.

Further, this also points to the ways in which one tradition should accept, reject or refine their own practices (including on specific issues within the lived moral life, and the way these are understood) and tradition, in the light of the other tradition.

Rationality, and the claim to rationality – and, concomitantly, living, and the claim to be living, a virtuous, moral life – is strengthened through this continuing process of engagement and refinement.

It is MacIntyre's contention that Aquinas, through his training in Paris under Albertus Magnus, understood the importance of each of these steps, and followed them in his engagement with both Aristotelian and Augustinian traditions, though he was in effect in dialogue with himself as he considered each on its own terms and then set them alongside each other. In this way his 'first step with understanding Aristotle's texts ... was to let Aristotle speak in his own voice, so far as possible undistorted by interpretative commentary.'¹⁸⁷ Gutting points to the inevitable limitations of this endeavour, given that Aquinas did not know Greek¹⁸⁸ but nonetheless, his intention appears to have been to understand the two traditions 'from within' as far as possible, and certainly to a degree that was unprecedented.

However, to follow this process does not always guarantee straightforward agreement between the two traditions that one, or other, or some development that draws from both, is superior and should be adopted by all. For example, it may be beyond the resources of one tradition to grasp the superiority of the other: to a greater or lesser degree, one tradition may be in effect 'untranslatable' into the 'language-in-use' of a second tradition, no matter how skilful the attempts of those who are 'bilingual'.¹⁸⁹

Yet for those who are bilingual, the superiority of the second tradition will be evident, and it may well be that the superiority lies precisely in those areas that are untranslatable. MacIntyre insists that to be rational, a tradition has to be open to the possibility of encountering a superior tradition in this way, and in consequence finding its own stance, its own tradition, radically overthrown. As he puts it:

Only those whose tradition allows for the possibility of its hegemony being put in question can have rational warrant for asserting such a hegemony. And only those traditions whose adherents recognize the possibility of

¹⁸⁷ WJWR, 168.

¹⁸⁸ Gutting, 'Pragmatic Liberalism' 100.

¹⁸⁹ WJWR, 387-8.

untranslatability into their own language-in-use are able to reckon adequately with that possibility.¹⁹⁰

Thus, to be rational, members of a community of tradition must be open to the possibility that they may be required to accept they are mistaken at a very basic level, entailing drastic abandonment of their tradition, and wholesale transferral to some superior tradition. As MacIntyre puts it, it is fundamental that a tradition's understanding 'be formulated so that it is maximally open to the possibility of refutation ...[for] if a standpoint is not able to be shown, by its own standards, to be discordant with reality, it cannot be shown to be concordant either. It becomes a scheme of thought within which those who give it their allegiance become imprisoned and also protected from the realities about which their beliefs were originally formulated.'¹⁹¹ As already noted, this potentially poses a significant challenge to Christian claims to rationality.

Communication beyond Traditions

It follows from MacIntyre's contention that rationality is only to be found within properly constituted communities of tradition, that only those who are members of such a community can assess the strength of one tradition over another. It also follows that the theses of a tradition must be weighed on that tradition's own terms – whether by the tradition's own community, or those who are members of another tradition, but effectively bilingual in respect of the first.

However, even the process for debate between traditions outlined above assumes some degree of empathetic consideration, which is not automatically guaranteed. The extent of this, particularly in relation to shared standards of enquiry and conceptions of the common good, has significant bearing on how far true debate is possible.

Where two traditions have considerably different values and presuppositions (which may extend to being unable jointly to establish a basis for defining the essence of their disagreement or how it might be addressed), the possibilities for true dialogue are greatly reduced. This is even more the case when engaging with someone from a perspective, such as liberalism, which MacIntyre regards as less than a tradition, or someone who is ostensibly from no tradition at all, as, MacIntyre claims, are a considerable proportion of individuals within today's western fragmented societies.

¹⁹⁰ WJWR, 388.

¹⁹¹ MacIntyre, 'Interview with Giovanni Borradori', 259.

While all these corollaries flow logically from MacIntyre's approach, strictly interpreted and applied, they have a range of serious practical implications for the ability of any community of tradition to operate within wider contemporary society. Not least of these is the question of how a tradition can be shown to be superior – one of the goals at the heart of this project – to those who are, on MacIntyre's terms, incapable of assessing or even grasping its rationality. These are matters which are the focus of the following chapter, which I shall set to one side while continuing to consider the basis for MacIntyre's claim to rationality from the more narrowly drawn perspective of his communities of tradition.

The Role of Dialectic

MacIntyre insists that a dialectical approach is vital to the pursuit of tradition-based reasoning, claiming that here he is following both Aristotle and Aquinas.¹⁹² As he puts it, 'it is no trivial matter that all claims to knowledge are the claims of some particular person, developed out of the claims of other particular persons. Knowledge is possessed only in and through participation in a history of dialectical encounters.'¹⁹³ Only through debate with others – both within and beyond our own tradition – can we know that we know, and what it is that we know.

Dialectic also contributes to the strength of what MacIntyre describes as the 'double movement'¹⁹⁴ through which one's initial conception of what is good for one can lead to more fruitful reflection on what is the general good, from which one can then reflect more fully on one's individual good – and so on again.

Thus we flourish best when there is 'a recognition that each member of the community is someone from whom we may learn and may have to learn about our common good and our own good, and who always may have lessons to teach us about those goods that we will not be able to learn elsewhere.'¹⁹⁵ MacIntyre gives examples of what we stand to learn, not least from those we might regard as being in some way disabled. This includes being faced starkly with false value systems (e.g. making prejudicial judgements about other people on the basis of superficial appearance) and other errors of which we would otherwise be unaware, such as our 'inability to

¹⁹² AV, 118, also WJWR, 172. While both work by addressing questions that might seem counter to the point they wish to pursue, this dialectical approach is of course particularly reflected in the way Aquinas structures the *Summa*.

¹⁹³ TRV, 202.

¹⁹⁴ AV, 125.

¹⁹⁵ DRA, 135 – this picks up on the concept of mutual dependence that, he says, so surprised him in a prayer (unspecified) of Aquinas – p. xi.

separate ourselves from and to stand in judgment upon our own desires, lack of adequate self-knowledge, and failure to recognise our dependence on others'.¹⁹⁶ Implicit in this is the important moral affirmation of the value of each community member in pursuit of the task of answering the question 'How then shall we live?' rather than privileging those with particular ability, expertise or other status, influence or power.

A similar openness to learn from those of other traditions, or none, is also required. For it is dialectical engagement with challenges from both within and without the community of tradition which allows for escape from what might at first appear to be vicious circularity.¹⁹⁷ This is far more than the 'pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps' of a deductive approach, where each step is reliant solely on earlier ones and the same essential content-matter. Dialectic introduces new material to the process, new footholds to aid our climb towards our telos, even as we acknowledge its inevitable provisionality. Further, it is rooted in thorough-going realism.

MacIntyre accepts that we have here an 'ineliminable circularity', but argues that it is not the 'sign of some flaw in Aristotelian or Thomistic conceptions of enquiry. It is, I suspect, a feature of any large-scale philosophical system which embodies a conception of enquiry, albeit an often unacknowledged feature.'¹⁹⁸ The nub of his argument is that if one rejects, as he does, both foundationalist analytical philosophy, and aspirations to any neutral objective methodology or starting point, then there is no starting point to any enquiry that is not in some way internal to the issue at stake: to ask the first question requires addressing the situation in terms which reflect how it is at that point apprehended. There is no way of standing outside. Circularity is inevitable, but, says MacIntyre, it has the potential to be virtuous, if we fulfil our obligations to pursue the rational, moral, life.

It is this virtuousness that MacIntyre sees in Aquinas' use of dialectic – in which various other important aspects of MacIntyre's approach are also evident. While the essence of dialectic (certainly as understood by Aristotle) is to be incomplete – and this reflects MacIntyre's insistence on the provisionality of our understanding at any point – he argues that Aquinas' handling can give particular strength to what is deduced:

¹⁹⁶ DRA, 136.

¹⁹⁷ WJWR, 118.

¹⁹⁸ MacIntyre, 'First Principles', 150.

Aquinas' procedures entitled him, on many occasions at least, to place more rational confidence in the answers which he gave to particular questions than is provided for by the particular arguments which he adduces, and this for two distinct reasons. First, Aquinas was engaged in an overall work of dialectical construction in the *Summa* in which every elementary part finds its place within some larger structure, which in turn contributes to the order of the whole. Thus conclusions of one part of the structure may and do confirm conclusions reached elsewhere. Second, Aquinas was careful in each discussion to summon up all the relevant contributions to argument and interpretation which had been preserved and transmitted within the two major traditions. So biblical sources are brought into conversation with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, and all of them with Arab and Jewish thinkers, as well as with patristic writers and later Christian theologians. The length and detail of the *Summa* are not accidental features of it, but integral to its purpose and more particularly to providing both Aquinas himself and his readers with the assurance that the arguments adduced for particular articles were the strongest produced so far from any known point of view.¹⁹⁹

And so MacIntyre commends the same approach.

The Relativist and Perspectivist Challenges

Alongside refuting the claim to a flawed circularity, MacIntyre also asserts that he can refute the relativist and perspectivist challenges to his claim to pursue the moral, rational, life. He defines these challenges as follows: 'The relativist challenge rests upon a denial that rational debate between and rational choice among rival traditions is possible; the perspectivist challenge puts in question the possibility of making truth-claims from within any one tradition.'²⁰⁰

In the first case, MacIntyre argues that to issue the relativist challenge, one must be a member of a tradition. For if one is not a member of a tradition, one lacks the resources for 'rational evaluation,' being 'a stranger to enquiry ... in a state of intellectual and moral destitution'.²⁰¹ Such an individual is incapable of weighing the rationality of any tradition, let alone comparing various traditions. Conversely, if one is a member of a tradition, one can follow the processes described above for communication between traditions, which, where there is translatability, will provide

¹⁹⁹ WJWR, 172.

²⁰⁰ WJWR, 352.

²⁰¹ WJWR, 366-7.

clarity over the superiority of one tradition in relation to another. While translatability may be difficult or impossible in certain cases, that is an entirely different question from asking whether or not it is ever possible to weigh one tradition against another.²⁰²

MacIntyre argues that the perspectivist's assertion that 'no claim to truth made in the name of any one competing tradition could defeat the claims to truth made in the name of its rivals' also falls on similar grounds. It is, he says, rooted in the 'mistake ... which commonly arises because the perspectivist foists on to the defenders of traditions some conception of truth other than that which is theirs, perhaps a Cartesian or an Hegelian conception of truth or perhaps one which assimilates truth to warranted assertibility.'²⁰³ The perspectivist has failed to grasp that the conception of truth is integral each to its own tradition-constituted form of enquiry – and that it is fallacious to seek some free-floating, context free definition of truth.²⁰⁴ MacIntyre adds that, like relativism, perspectivism is a 'doctrine only possible for those who regard themselves as outsiders' – and he characterises this position as 'not so much a conclusion about truth as an exclusion from it and thereby from rational debate.'²⁰⁵

The Nature of Truth

MacIntyre rejects the understandings of truth of these critics, arguing (as noted above) first for an Aristotelian concept rooted in the telos of rational enquiry,²⁰⁶ to which he adds Aquinas's theological reinterpretation and development, namely that 'in directing ourselves toward truth we direct ourselves toward God'.²⁰⁷ Living truthfully entails being as faithful as possible to the best conceptualisation one can attain of how it is one ought to live: 'human beings achieve truth insofar as their judgments as to how things are are determined by how things are rather than by their physical constitution or their psychological makeup'.²⁰⁸

²⁰² Garcia graphically describes this argument as MacIntyre attempting 'to outrelativize the relativist. Rather than recoiling from relativism ... MacIntyre plunges so deeply into it as, we might say, to fall out the other side' Garcia, 'Modern(ist) Moral Philosophy', 103.

²⁰³ WJWR, 367.

²⁰⁴ Only in closed contexts such as analytical philosophy and mathematics can there be any possibility of tradition-independent standards for judging competing claims. See WJWR, 348; also Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism*, Chapter One.

²⁰⁵ WJWR, 368.

²⁰⁶ MacIntyre, 'Moral Relativism', 11.

²⁰⁷ GPU, 167.

²⁰⁸ GPU, 167.

As Fergusson points out, MacIntyre's 'notions of truth, realism, and rational justification stand or fall together.'²⁰⁹ He characterises MacIntyre's stance as 'ontologically realist but epistemologically relative'. However, he says, this is not a 'radical relativism' but instead one in which 'truth is not relative to a particular framework, though knowledge thereof is available only to those who inhabit the framework.'²¹⁰ Concepts of truth and rational justification find grounding in this realism,²¹¹ and, as noted above, overcome the false dichotomy between 'is' and 'ought'. It is within this context that MacIntyre writes:

The test for truth ... is always to summon up as many questions and as many objections of the greatest strength possible; what can be justifiably claimed as true is what has sufficiently withstood such dialectical questioning and framing of objections. In what does such sufficiency consist? That too is a question to which answers have to be produced and to which rival and competing answers may well appear. And those answers will compete rationally, just insofar as they are tested dialectically, in order to discover which is the best answer to be proposed so far.²¹²

This 'so far-ness', says MacIntyre, refutes any Hegelian conception of a final truth actually to be reached: this is 'a chimaera',²¹³ since 'philosophical enquiry, understood as the development of a tradition, has no eschaton'.²¹⁴ He adds 'Hegel, to whom this conception of enquiry owes so much was mistaken in supposing that anyone can ever have the last word.' This is another argument why concepts of objective truth as employed by the so-called Enlightenment project fail.

MacIntyre describes the relationship between truth, the social practices and the evaluative processes of a community as follows:

We flourish, or fail to flourish, live or die, as our theses, arguments, and doctrines live or die. And in asserting them we assert that it is they which are true or sound and so attempt to establish and succeed or fail in establishing the adequacy of our minds as judged by a measure which we did not make. Truth

²⁰⁹ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism*, 133.

²¹⁰ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism*, 7.

²¹¹ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism*, 133.

²¹² *WJWR*, 358.

²¹³ *WJWR*, 360f.

²¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'The Form of the Good, Tradition and Enquiry', in *Value and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch*, ed. Raymond Gaita (London: Routledge, 1990) 261.

as the measure of our warrants cannot be collapsed into warranted assertibility.²¹⁵

He goes on to add:

There is then an acknowledgment of truth as a measure independent of the tradition which aspires to measure itself by truth, but there is nonetheless no thesis, argument, or doctrine to be so measured which is not presented as the thesis of this particular historically successive set of tradition-informing and tradition-directed individuals and groups in whose lives the dialectical and confessional interrogation have gone on.

In Porter's assessment, this account of 'a tradition in its later stages' being able to 'provide a more adequate framework within which to attain that adequation of the mind with its objects that MacIntyre takes to be the authentic meaning of a correspondence theory of truth' is something that 'marks an important intellectual advance because, at this point, one can no longer equate the truth of a given judgment with its adequacy by the best standards of one's tradition. In other words, at this point truth can no longer be equated with warranted assertibility.'²¹⁶ The claims that one can make are considerably stronger. Fergusson concurs that MacIntyre has described an effective correspondence theory of truth.²¹⁷

In this way, therefore, insofar as a tradition succeeds in giving a superior account of the way the world is, in the face of competing claims, it has the right to say it is the best understanding available so far of the truth, and with it, the most rational way of life.

MacIntyre has thus provided an impressively comprehensive account of how we might answer the overriding question of 'how then shall we live?' This is not to discount the various concerns raised in the course of this chapter, particularly those which relate to the practical instantiation of his arguments and to which we shall turn in the next chapters. While there are problems with the way his approach can be applied in practice, his critics have also focussed on the ways in which he has rooted his abstract theory in historic and contemporary contexts. Thus, for example, his historic narratives and interpretations, and his political characterisations (particularly

²¹⁵ TRV, 201, 202.

²¹⁶ Porter, 'Tradition' p. 47.

²¹⁷ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism*, 125.

of liberalism), are strongly contested. His espousal of the Christian faith, particularly as practiced by the Roman Catholic Church, is also a source of criticism.²¹⁸

Fergusson, writing in 1998, said ‘MacIntyre’s work is of major significance in reintroducing the discourse of the Christian faith to moral philosophy at the highest level. In this respect, he has achieved more than any theologian. The theological deficiencies in his work are more in the nature of lacunae than fatal flaws. We see as yet only the outline of a theological position. But, if MacIntyre can continue to advance and develop his argument, one of the benefits to theology will ironically be a more prominent place in public debate.’²¹⁹

It is this place within public debate to which this thesis increasingly turns, by way of considering first interactions with other Christian and faith communities, and other bodies within contemporary society which, at least to some degree, exhibit characteristics of communities of tradition. Though at no point am I intending to address systematically questions of doctrine and ecclesiology, aspects of these will nonetheless arise from time to time. My hope is that through focussing on the resources offered by MacIntyre for discerning and communicating how we ought to live, the practical examples that illustrate what can be achieved will also demonstrate the thoroughgoing compatibility that I am asserting between MacIntyre’s approach (developed appropriately in the ways I propose) and Anglican understandings of faith and order. In the first instance, I now offer an excursus intended to show how MacIntyre’s work offers tangible resources for a deeper understanding of the root differences in current disagreements over human sexuality, from which practical recommendations can be made for finding possible ways forward.

Excursus: Tradition-Based Reasoning, Anglican Tradition and Human Sexuality

As set out at the beginning of chapter 1, the stated focus of this thesis is to explore the potential resources that can be drawn from MacIntyre's tradition-based reasoning to assist the Bishops of the Anglican Communion in their twin commitment first, to reflect on their faith and how it should be lived within contemporary contexts, and, second, to bring to bear their conclusions within the wider world through lobbying and advocacy, engaging as appropriate with every dimension of public life.

²¹⁸ For example, Fergusson writes of him having ‘evoked the wrath of Martha Nussbaum who discerns the spectre of an oppressive church riding roughshod over diverse and discrete local tradition while invoking the doctrine of original sin in support of its own necessary authority’ – see Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism*, 126 and n.45, 196.

²¹⁹ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism*, 137.

While it is the second objective – moral reasoning within a pluralist world, and particularly the difficult questions of how faith communities engage in debate with those of other faiths, or state their case effectively within the public arena – which will take up the greater part of the thesis, let me here offer some comments on the relevance of MacIntyre's description of the life of a community of tradition for the current strains within Anglicanism around homosexuality.

There are a number of elements which, as I shall now indicate, provide valuable starting-points for understanding the nature of the current disagreements – which is itself a necessary step towards any solution. In doing so I am not attempting to propose any solution, but rather to point to areas where enquiry guided by MacIntyre's approach might prove productive.

The first is the question of loyalty to tradition. Gutting has rightly pointed to the predicament that faith communities face over the degree to which their core commitments are open to critique, and the implications of this for any claim to rational integrity – a claim Anglicans make in some sense, in describing Anglicanism as being built on the foundations, ‘hammered out’ by the seventeenth and eighteenth century divines, of ‘Scripture, Reason and Tradition’.²²⁰ Tradition in this sense is not of course, wholly synonymous with MacIntyre’s understanding – ‘A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely about the good which constitute that tradition’²²¹ – though there are important parallels. The former Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane, in reflecting on Anglican identity, has offered this description:

Tradition is not a dispassionate history of institutional life, the dry and dusty account of some external observer. If that were the case, it would be hard to see why we should pay tradition more than limited attention. No. Tradition is holy remembering – remembering as Scripture teaches us to remember. “Remember how the Lord brought you out of Egypt” is God’s word to future generations in the Promised Land. “Do this in remembrance of me” are Jesus’ words to us, as we meet Sunday by Sunday, breaking bread and sharing wine, and finding ourselves joined with him and all that he has won for us through his one self-giving sacrifice for the sins of the world. Holy remembering is

²²⁰ See The Windsor Report, §53, (‘The Windsor Report 2004: The Lambeth Commission on Communion’. London: The Anglican Communion Office, 2004, also available online, and accessed on 15 May 2011, at www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/index.cfm and linked pages.)

²²¹ AV, 222.

far more than casting our mind across a widening gulf of years. Holy remembering is both to recall and to participate. It is to be caught up into the unfolding narrative of God's involvement with his people in every time and place. It is to recognise God at work in our church throughout the centuries, and to know ourselves in living continuity with his faithful people in every age. To remember is to take our place within God's story of redemption. Understanding tradition as the invitation to live in continuity with God's actions through his church shapes our understanding of the task before us now. It challenges us to see the fingerprints of God upon our history, and to ensure that we too can say that "what we have received from the Lord, we have passed on" (cf. 1 Cor 11:23).²²²

In this way he stresses many of the same elements as MacIntyre, particularly the centrality of reflecting on an evolving, coherent, narrative unity in both belief and praxis of individual and community that reaches towards an ultimate telos.

Yet in current Anglican disagreements, the question of loyalty to tradition is particularly problematic in relation to the status and interpretation of the Bible, which may be seen as having primary place among this triad.²²³ This is specifically so in relation to passages that may be taken to address questions of human sexuality and same gender relationships.

That said, the historic churches, while remaining faithful to the constituted canon of Scripture, have nonetheless been aware for a considerable time of the need for some degree of careful openness to changing interpretation of its content, for example in relation to slavery and to usury, on which there is now a generally held consensus.²²⁴ Matters such as contraception, remarriage after divorce, and the role of women remain rather more contested. The Anglican Bishops at the Lambeth Conference in 2008 described their approach to biblical interpretation in the following terms: 'we believe the scriptures to be primary and we read them informed by reason and tradition and with regard for our cultural context.'²²⁵ That a fuller account needs to be provided of what this means in practice is reflected in the launch of the 'Bible in

²²² Njongonkulu Ndungane, 'The Heartlands of Anglicanism', in *Faith in Action: Archbishop for the Church and for the World*, edited by Sarah Rowland Jones (Wellington, South Africa: Lux Verbi-BM, 2008), 131.

²²³ The Windsor Report, §53: Scripture 'takes first place' within the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.

²²⁴ Whether the decision around usury was a wise one is another matter – as has been noted in relation to the 'credit crunch' of 2008.

²²⁵ 'Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections', §100.

the Life of the Church Project'.²²⁶ In setting the outcome of this important project alongside the current debates around the interpretation and application of passages in Scripture relating to homosexuality, Anglicans might profit by taking from MacIntyre's work an invitation to ask whether those often described as 'conservative' are holding too tightly to historic 'core commitments' in scriptural exegesis, and those who are 'liberal', too loosely.²²⁷

This looseness of which liberals are accused applies not only to what might narrowly be understood as interpretation of Scripture, but also to their attitudes towards the status of Scripture and the handling of biblical texts, as well as wider practices of reviewing doctrine, ecclesiology and the ordering of the life of the church. Tradition (in MacIntyrean understanding) entails not only central beliefs but also ways of believing and behaving – including the processes of practical reasoning and debate within a tradition. From a MacIntyrean perspective, it is therefore welcome that there has been a realisation within the wider Anglican Communion of the need for greater understanding and agreement of what it is to be Anglican, and what constitutes 'the Anglican way' and Anglican identity.²²⁸ This must be clarified if there is to be debate around the breadth of internal diversity that is justifiable across all that might be taken to constitute Anglican tradition (again, in the MacIntyrean sense), and about how far this can and should be open to evolution. But considerable work remains to be done, and taking forward this task now lies before the Inter Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order.²²⁹ IASCUFO is also the body likely to be tasked with advising the Instruments of Communion on the oversight and functioning of the Anglican Covenant, which outlines areas of core Anglican belief and practice.²³⁰ An awareness of MacIntyre's approach can help in this work.

MacIntyre's contention that the theses of a tradition should first be weighed on that tradition's own terms is also pertinent. The Archbishop of Canterbury has highlighted this need, specifically asking 'How do we as Anglicans deal with this

²²⁶ See www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/bible/index.cfm.

²²⁷ For ease of reference, I shall use these two terms as shorthand, acknowledging that these are simplistic labels applied within what is a far more complex range of views and stances; and also noting that the latter term is not coterminous with MacIntyre's understanding of 'liberal'.

²²⁸ Anglican Identity was one of the two main themes of the 2008 Lambeth Conference, as previously mentioned.

²²⁹ I am a member of this Commission, established in 2009. Its remit may be found at www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/commissions/iascufo/index.cfm.

²³⁰ The final text is currently before Provinces for them to consider: The Anglican Communion Covenant, accessed 15 May 2011, www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/final/text.cfm.

issue “in our own terms”?”²³¹ Liberals are often accused of having abandoned both historic tenets, and established standards and processes of enquiry around them, and in consequence, it is said, they cannot claim still to be in continuity with Anglican tradition. It is asserted they have adopted, too comprehensively and too uncritically, both the perspectives and the evaluative methods of the surrounding culture – an accusation that they need to answer in ways that are recognisably speaking from within Anglican tradition.

MacIntyre does require traditions to engage with alternative cultures, and the necessity of taking seriously challenges from this quarter is a persistent thread within Anglicanism – even if it is acknowledged that often there are no easy answers as to how ‘the line between faithful inculturation and false accommodation to the world’s ways of thinking (note Romans 12.1-2) [is] to be discerned and determined’.²³² Further, as long ago as 1886/8, the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral recognised the need for the historic episcopate to be ‘locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church’.²³³ The consequence is that different contexts may legitimately require different instantiation of Anglican practices, in ways which may initially appear to be divergent, even contradictory, if context is not adequately taken into consideration.²³⁴ This adds an additional layer of difficulty to the task of discerning between appropriate inculturation and unjustifiable syncretism.

It is also the case that, where a tradition has weighed alternative perspectives on its own terms, MacIntyre does advocate attempting to go further, and to characterise the perspectives of an alternative tradition on its own terms through ‘bilingualism’, as a precursor to weighing the relative merits of each approach. Being able to talk the language of wider culture, however, does not necessarily entail buying in to all its assumptions (a very significant point – and why this is so I shall discuss in

²³¹ Rowan Williams, ‘The Challenge and Hope of Being an Anglican Today: A Reflection for the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the Anglican Communion’, 27 June 2006, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org.uk/articles.php/1478/challenge-and-hope-for-the-anglican-communion.

²³² The Windsor Report, §32.

²³³ See The Windsor Report, Appendix Three.

²³⁴ ‘Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections’, §31: ‘We affirm that the Church is called to be faithful in the exercise of its mission in the context within which it is located with due regard to culture. We acknowledge that in its understanding of the exercise of this responsibility what may be positive, acceptable and fitting in one culture, may be negative, harmful and may affect the witness and proclamation of the gospel in other parts of the Communion due to cultural differences. The Bible must be taken as authoritative guiding principle in our proclamation of the gospel. (2 Tim 2:16).’

the next chapter). The arguments of the liberals would be made more persuasive if they were able to demonstrate greater clarity and transparency in the following of a two-stage process of dialogue between traditions, in the way MacIntyre proposes.

However, there is the added complication that the surrounding culture of North America (and, to a lesser extent in terms of the divisions within the Anglican Communion, Western Europe) tends towards the sort of secular liberalism which MacIntyre denies constitutes a tradition with coherent and justifiable practices of moral rational enquiry (a matter for further consideration in later chapters). The liberals would need to counter arguments that they are not supportive of societal norms of largely unconstrained individual choice from a smorgasbord of ‘anything goes’ deracinated and compartmentalised options, in which the ‘leading of the Spirit’ becomes conflated with the sort of emotivist ‘what feels right for me here and now’ approach which MacIntyre so derides. (Suspensions that this is so are compounded by the complicating factor of whether, also, these liberals have a more inclusive or even universalist soteriology – arguments for which have existed for centuries within orthodox theology, but which are generally rejected by conservatives.)

But a MacIntyrean approach also provides critique of the stance of the conservatives. In addition to the charge, noted above, that they hold too narrowly to historic core beliefs and practices to sustain rational integrity, there are questions too about how they relate to the challenges of contemporary culture. Thus they must answer criticism that they are more closed to these than is justifiable – failing to give due consideration to the available evidence and continuing research around homosexuality; or to the possibilities of evolution in their processes of enquiry (including openness to engage with developments in biblical studies and hermeneutical understandings) or other developments of context and circumstance.

A second challenge to conservatives in relation to culture is to require an account of whether they are unduly influenced by what MacIntyre calls the Enlightenment Project in their tendency to characterise ‘objective truth’, ‘the faith once for all delivered to the saints’, the ‘plain’ sense of biblical interpretation and so forth, in terms of absolutes not only from the perspective of an infinite omniscient God, but also in human understanding, that is uninfluenced by the finitude of our existence, experience and context.²³⁵ It is worth noting that historically the

²³⁵ See, for example, the Jerusalem Statement, issued at the end of the June 2008 Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) available at www.gafcon.org/news/gafcon_final_statement/; and the commentary on this, *Being Faithful*:

Evangelical Movement is very much a child of the Enlightenment era, and could be depicted as an appropriate endeavour to enunciate the gospel in ways that connected with the mores of that time, for example in its emphases on propositional formulations. However, there is nonetheless the obligation to show that such a self-understanding is neither susceptible to the worst weaknesses of the Enlightenment mindset nor an historic anachronism; that there is appropriate openness to continuing necessary evolution in response to the changing contexts of subsequent centuries; and that there is authentic enunciation of the gospel within the various global cultures of today's world, rather than an expectation of conformity to one particular expression of Anglicanism frozen in the time and customs of the missionaries who spread it.

Another angle from which MacIntyre's approach might prove valuable would be to view liberals and conservatives as two distinct sub-traditions within Anglicanism, each with their own 'language-in-use'. This would apply not merely in terms of the vocabulary they use, but also to a considerable degree in relation to their evaluative practices – for example, in the differing weights each accords to the elements of Scripture, Reason and Tradition, the differences in their understandings of each of these terms, and the consequently differing processes by which they reach differing conclusions about both belief and practice. My own view, generalising broadly, is that in the continuing disagreements of recent years, there has been inadequate acknowledgement that the two groups are to a considerable degree 'speaking different languages' and inhabiting very different cultures (that is, thought worlds, rather than, say, geographical cultures) in respect of what it means to be Christians and Anglicans, in ways that go far beyond merely questions of homosexuality. The failure (whether conscious or deliberate) of each side to address the concerns of the other in ways that they find comprehensible has perpetuated and exacerbated the gulf between the two; and there has not always been adequate understanding by those such as the Archbishop of Canterbury of what it means to communicate effectively to all parties 'in their own language'.

Therefore, both sides should be challenged to give an account of their own perspectives, priorities, conclusions and evaluative processes, not only in their own

The Shape of Historic Anglicanism Today, available at www.gafcon.org/images/uploads/BeingFaithful_JD_Commentary.pdf. See pp. 17ff of the latter for a consideration of what is understood by 'truth' and 'reason'. Throughout this document the particular nature of the high priority given to historic tradition is evident. That said, some elements of diversity are allowed for, for example in the acknowledgement that the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans 'is not claiming to be the sole representative of true Anglicanism' – p. 45.

terms as they tend to do, but also in the terms (or conceptual ‘language-in-use’) of the other. As has been mentioned above, to do so should not be seen as connoting any level of acceptance of the other tradition’s stance. Assuming this is possible (and it may be rather that this leads to the conclusion that the gulf is too wide to be bridged, and that there are in fact two distinct, separate traditions in operation which cannot meaningfully be held together under a single umbrella of unity), this, says MacIntyre, is the only way, first, to communicate, and second, to evaluate which approach is superior. But one cannot leap to the second stage without adequately going through the first, of dialogue that employs effective levels of ‘bilingualism’. For this reason, the Anglican Communion is right to accord a high priority to the Continuing Indaba Project that takes forward and expands the Listening Project first endorsed at the 1998 Lambeth Conference, promoting genuine conversations and intensifying relationships across the Communion.²³⁶ It is this ability to keep in close dialogue and vulnerable interpersonal sharing which the Anglican Bishops of Southern Africa claim has enabled them to hold together in unity, despite spanning the breadth of views within the Anglican Communion as a whole.²³⁷

What is certain is that without such dialogue, the chances of overcoming current disagreements will remain slight at best. MacIntyre, however, offers resources that would assist the Anglican Communion in finding clarity over, and providing rationally justifiable grounds for concluding, whether, and how, differences can indeed be overcome, or whether in fact they are insurmountable and that a parting of the ways is the only sensible outcome.

²³⁶ See ‘Ministries – Continuing Indaba’, accessed 15 May 2011, www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/continuingindaba/index.cfm and linked pages.

²³⁷ See the Archbishop of Cape Town’s address to the annual USPG conference: Thabo Makgoba, ‘Addressing Anglican Differences - Spirit and Culture at the Foot of the Cross’, 10 June 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2010/06/addressing-anglican-differences-spirit.html>.

Chapter 3 – The Problem with MacIntyre

In the previous chapter, I described the densely interconnected processes through which MacIntyre claims humanity can best live a rational moral life, and can comprehensively and coherently address the situations in which we find ourselves, by means of belonging to what he terms a community of tradition. Such a living tradition he characterises as a historically extended, socially embodied argument about the internal goods of that tradition which we pursue within the context of pursuing, both in understanding and in practice, its overall telos. I asserted that to a considerable degree this provided an effective basis upon which those such as the Anglican Bishops gathered at the 2008 Lambeth Conference could with rational integrity address how to express their faith, in word and action, in engagement with the contemporary contexts within which they found themselves, before going on to engage in substantive ethical dialogue with others.

However, at various points I noted ambiguities and tensions within MacIntyre's account in relation to the capacity of members of a community of tradition to engage with those of other traditions or of none. A question-mark against this ability to engage with others is potentially problematic on a number of levels, and this affects both strands of the Anglican Bishops' aspirations to rationality in various ways.

In the first instance, one of the requirements that must be met in any assertion of rationality in living an ethical life, let alone any assertion of rational and moral superiority, is that all alternative perspectives have been adequately considered and appropriately taken into account. This requires them to have been rightly understood, not only from the perspective of the first community of tradition, but also on their own terms, particularly where they arise in a community of tradition with its own comprehensive understanding of rationality. Consideration of how we rightly understand others (and know that we have rightly understood), and of how we rightly take their perspectives into account, begins this chapter.

But the concern of the Anglican Bishops is not only to understand others in this way, but to have means, and grounds, for persuading others of the superiority of their claims to rational ethical living. This requires communication in both directions – and further, a level of communication that can sustain substantive dialogue on questions of commensurability of both rational and ethical standards. But an initial reading of MacIntyre's arguments appears to suggest that the possibilities for being

able to pursue such dialogue decrease to the point of becoming negligible, when one is in conversation with someone from a community of tradition with divergent standards of evaluation or telos, or from outside any community of tradition. This question of how these apparent difficulties may be overcome is addressed in the second part of this chapter.

Understanding Others

MacIntyre's foundational description of how we hone our understanding (and hence our praxis) through engaging with the perspectives of others is set out in Chapters XVIII and XIX, 'The Rationality of Traditions' and 'Tradition and Translation', in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* It is this account which has been the focus of most debate among commentators.

As described in the previous chapter, MacIntyre here puts forward the various steps that must be taken for a community of tradition to sustain best possible rational and moral living through engaging with all possible challenges and differing viewpoints. In addition to responding from within the community's own resources to unfolding circumstances as they arise, this entails engaging with alternative perspectives from outside the community, whether from members of other communities of tradition, or from those who are members of no such community. First, let us consider the challenges that are posed by another community of tradition.

The capacity to engage with another tradition rests, says MacIntyre, on the ability of individuals from one tradition to speak, or learn to speak, not only their own language-in-use but also that of the other tradition, as a 'second first language'.²³⁸ The task then becomes to express the beliefs of each tradition and their justification not only in the language of one's own tradition, but also – with necessary 'conceptual enrichment', as previously noted – in the language of the other tradition. Even if this is found not to be possible reciprocally (i.e. that it is beyond the capacity of the second tradition to understand the concepts of the first, 'enrichment' notwithstanding), for a tradition to claim rationality it must know that it has rightly understood the alternative perspectives of others, on their own terms, and overcome the challenges these might pose from within its own resources.

MacIntyre considers what it means for concepts to be, as he puts it, 'translatable' in this way. His first concern is to draw a clear distinction between potential communication between traditions, and the ability to engage in substantive

²³⁸ WJWR, 364.

evaluative dialogue. Some level of communication is almost always present, he argues, for to assert this is ‘saying no more than what would be conceded, I take it, by anyone: that there will always be something in common between any two languages or sets of thoughts.’²³⁹ Within reason, we can find approximate parallels for nouns, verbs, grammatical logic, and so forth, between any two languages. At this level, translation from one language to another will require what MacIntyre calls either ‘same-saying’ or linguistic innovation – the latter case being where ways are found or developed for enunciating something that was previously unsaid or unsayable within the language in question, in ways that it can be understood by monoglot speakers of that language. One example MacIntyre gives of this is the way that the ‘Hebrew forms, concepts and idioms’ of the Old Testament were rendered into Greek in the Septuagint.²⁴⁰

Translatability and Commensurability

But having the capacity to enunciate, and from that to go on properly to apprehend, on one’s own terms, an alternative perspective, does not guarantee that those who hold that second perspective can also come to apprehend on their own terms the views of the first party. And even where that is achieved, it still does not follow automatically that there will be any agreement over questions that are under debate between the two linguistic traditions, nor even over how such questions are to be posited and addressed. As MacIntyre stresses ‘To have achieved this [basic communication] is of course not necessarily as yet to have achieved commensurability of standards.’²⁴¹ This is a vitally important point: being able to communicate is not the same as being able to find grounds for agreement, or even for agreeing how differences should be approached. For the language-in-use of a community of tradition not only entails grammar, vocabulary, and so forth, but is embedded in the beliefs, presuppositions, values and practices of a particular tradition. The concepts that hold sway in one tradition may be beyond the ability of another to grasp.²⁴²

²³⁹ WJWR, 371.

²⁴⁰ WJWR, 372.

²⁴¹ MacIntyre, ‘Partial Response’, 296.

²⁴² Stout illustrates such a case by describing two imaginary groups, one with Kantian ‘modernist’ views, another rather mafia-like, and argues that they would find each other’s concepts of the virtues mutually incomprehensible. For example, ideas of family loyalty and honour within the latter community would be unintelligible to the former – the whole underlying motivation would be conceptually alien, even if such conventions of behaviour could be described within their language. See EaB, Chapter 3.

This distinction, and its consequences, is evident in the disagreements within the Anglican Communion. Too often those groups most opposed to one another seem to be occupying conceptually different universes, and, further, give the appearance of failing to realise – or, perhaps, acknowledge – that they tend to talk at cross-purposes in this way. This is particularly the case in relation to the handling of the Bible and of historic doctrinal tradition, for what to one group are the ‘plain and canonical sense’ of Scripture and ‘the faith once and for all delivered to the saints,’ are not only understood differently by the other, but are apprehended upon different hermeneutical bases and through different approaches to tradition and its development.²⁴³ It is as if they are speaking different conceptual languages rooted in different premises, even where they have vocabulary in common. Where such differences are acknowledged, this is often done through characterising differing approaches or conclusions as illustrating the other’s evaluative failings.²⁴⁴ The amount of debate where one side attempts to address the other’s concerns on the other’s terms is small (and it is open to argument over the extent to which this is because the bulk of what is said is deliberately directed to the speaker’s own constituency and reinforcing views held there, or whether it in fact reflects an underlying unwillingness to engage substantively with those holding differing views).

On the basis of his analyses of translatability and commensurability, MacIntyre asserted in *WJWR* that Donald Davidson had not dealt adequately with the distinction between mutual comprehension and the possibilities for reaching agreement on substantive evaluative processes, when he argued for the existence of a far greater capacity for reciprocal understanding between differing traditions.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ For example, contrast the approach taken to both Scripture and tradition in the ‘Final Statement and Jerusalem Declaration’, GAFCON, accessed 15 May 2011, www.gafcon.org/news/gafcon_final_statement/, with that of Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, in an interview: *Bill Moyers Journal*, 8 June 2007, accessed on 15 May 2011, www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/06082007/transcript3.html.

²⁴⁴ Thus, for example, the ‘Jerusalem Declaration’ refers to viewing same sex relationships from a human rights perspective as ‘false gospel’; while Bishop Jefferts Schori implies a lack of ‘some very serious scholarship’ and failure to take adequate account of context, in the drawing of ‘black and white’ biblical interpretations with which she disagrees. Some liberal scholars have, of course, addressed the passages of Scripture that are ‘difficult’ in relation to same sex relationships (see, for example, Brian Ruttan, ‘Two Studies on the Bible and Homosexuality’ in *The Blessing of Same Gender Unions and Holy Scripture: Essays written for the Bishop of Niagara and as part of a conversation with Anglicans in Tanzania*, compiled by The Diocese of Niagara Group, accessed 15 May 2011, www.niagara.anglican.ca/Niagara_Rite/docs/Same_Gender_Theology_2nd_Set.pdf, 10-19) but sustained consideration of these passages in dialogue, or exploration in evangelical terms of human rights concerns and specifically their relationship to human sexuality, are rare.

²⁴⁵ *WJWR*, 370-1.

Haldane and Kelly take issue with this brief reference, prompting MacIntyre to spell out his position in greater detail; and to explain why the ability to disagree necessitates the existence of significant agreement, at least over what constitutes the point at issue – and that this requires a considerably greater shared framework than merely the ability to ‘samesay’.²⁴⁶

Herein lies the answer to those of MacIntyre’s critics who ask how it is that he can give such detailed analysis of other versions of moral enquiry, while simultaneously arguing against commensurability. For MacIntyre in his own work can be seen as aiming to demonstrate the assertion that while linguistic enrichment ‘may have made possible a dialectical exchange between the two rival standpoints’²⁴⁷ (which he claims he is doing in offering detailed analysis of the perspectives of both liberal/enlightenment and genealogist) it nonetheless offers no guarantee that this will lead to both sides being able to understand the other sufficiently adequately to engage on and resolve disagreements on moral questions (and thus he sets out his reasons why he believes that those of no community of tradition can truly understand his arguments). It is, he asserts, rather the case that the superior tradition – his own – may well be able to understand the inferior on the terms of both, and also to give a comprehensive analysis of the weaknesses of the second, without the second being able adequately to apprehend the first.

Furthermore, we may in this way come to understand why others reach a particular view on their own terms, and even to admit that this view is rationally justifiable from within their own context, but we may nonetheless still continue to believe (and offer good enough reasons for believing) they are wrong in their presuppositions and therefore wrong in what they conclude. For example, we may have justifiable grounds for judging that their context or methodology may be too limited – they may have failed to recognise, and so take note of, relevant alternative perspectives or approaches, in their own evaluative processes. While this may be an unwitting error of omission, occasions may also arise where, says MacIntyre, one tradition simply does not have the capacity to comprehend the viewpoint of another without undergoing radical revision.²⁴⁸ The likelihood of disagreement increases with the disparity between conceptions of what constitutes the ‘good’ and the ‘truth’ in

²⁴⁶ WJWR, 370ff, and TRV, 171. See also Haldane, ‘MacIntyre's Thomist Revival’, 95, and Paul Kelly, ‘MacIntyre's Critique of Utilitarianism’, in Horton & Mendus, *After MacIntyre*, 137; with reply at MacIntyre, ‘Partial Response’ 294ff.

²⁴⁷ MacIntyre, ‘Partial Response’, 297.

²⁴⁸ WJWR, 387-8.

relation to human living.²⁴⁹ The other side of the same coin is that the greater the agreement on the nature of human flourishing or of our telos, and on the evaluative processes and criteria to be employed in considering these concepts, the greater the likelihood of substantive dialogue on moral and ethical questions, and the greater the likelihood that the two traditions can agree on which overall is superior.

But, given MacIntyre's approving reference (cited in the previous chapter) to Aquinas' view that there are 'at least a dozen' conceptions of humanity's right end, of which all but one are false; and his general disparagement of other traditions, including other long-lived branches of Christian tradition²⁵⁰ and let alone the views of those of other faiths or none, one might easily gain the impression that the possibilities for substantive dialogue, even among Christians, leading to agreement on ethical matters, are little better than slender at the best of times.

Learning Another Language-in-Use

Before turning to the question of how we judge where mere communication might, however rarely, move into substantive dialogue, there are other questions that need to be addressed in relation to MacIntyre's account of translatability and the ability of one tradition to understand another as part of its own pursuit of rationality. Two of these were raised by Alicia J Roque, who thus prompted important elucidations from MacIntyre.²⁵¹

The first issue is perhaps something of a misunderstanding on Roque's part: that she has interpreted MacIntyre's description of the need for members of one community of tradition to learn the language-in-use of another as something of a general methodology to be followed by everyone in all cases. As she points out, in practice this is often easier said than done. MacIntyre offers the clarification that 'there is no task of understanding other cultures in general; each particular culture presents to the inhabitants of each other culture its own specific range of obstacles to understanding and these also vary with the culture of the aspiring interpreter'.²⁵² Thus it is not the case that any and all members of one tradition can, let alone should, attempt to learn the language-in-use of any or all other traditions. This is a task for those gifted with appropriate talents and opportunities, in relation to specific pairs of

²⁴⁹ WJWR, 359.

²⁵⁰ See, for example, his critique on the shortcomings of Martin Luther in TRV, 141.

²⁵¹ Alicia J. Roque, 'Language Competence and Tradition-constituted Rationality', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51.3(1991):611-617 and Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Reply to Roque', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51.3(1991): 619-620.

²⁵² MacIntyre, 'Reply to Roque', 619.

traditions. A particular individual from one culture, through long immersion in another – ‘an immersion often requiring prolonged residence in the alien culture’ – may be able to acquire the ability ‘to conjecture in it, judge in it, imagine in it and argue in it, just as do those whose first language it is’. There is no ‘universal capacity for either translation or intercultural understanding, let alone an innate capacity’. It is perhaps a relatively rare occurrence, says MacIntyre, but it can and does happen, and this is sufficient justification for the workability of his schema. Nevertheless, he appears to leave us in the position that what is theoretically possible is in practice difficult and atypical.

The obligation upon a community to do its best to ensure rationality through engagement with alternative perspectives raises the question of the extent to which, first, those who have the capacity to sustain these levels of communication have a particular responsibility to consider devoting their time and energies to this work; and, second, the community as a whole has a duty to ensure that sufficient numbers of such people are adequately resourced (and compensated) for doing so. The community also has an obligation to consider the extent to which it should nurture and develop a continuing capacity within its membership. Failure to address these questions adequately undermines the claims of any community of tradition to rationality.

The Anglican Communion follows such good practice in its devotion of resources to sustaining longstanding formal discussions with other communities of tradition, both within the wider Christian family, and with those of other faiths. It does so both drawing on existing expertise and also encouraging its development in others through its appointments to these ecumenical and inter-faith dialogues.

There are further lessons here also for inter-Anglican relations. If efforts to hold the Communion together are to be made seriously, then there must be capacity for effective ‘translation’ between differing constituencies, along with a visible commitment to this. It is therefore noteworthy that the membership of the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order, established in 2009, was decided only after a deliberate process of consultations around Provinces, with appointments then made to ensure representation from every region of the globe, and from across the breadth of church traditions.²⁵³ That said, the work of IASCUFO in

²⁵³ See ‘Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order – IASCUFO’, Anglican Communion News Service, 1 July 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.aco.org/acns/news.cfm/2009/7/1/ACNS4638. This deliberate attempt to ensure balance and breadth is in contrast to appointments largely on the basis of prior expertise in earlier pan-

2010 in relation to Anglican identity and the conduct of life within the Communion was hampered by the absence of Nigerian and Ugandan members, and the consequent lack of engagement with the perspectives they represented. However, the value of this shared Communion-wide commitment has since been undermined in the membership of the Standing Commission. On the one hand, various conservative members have withdrawn, arguing that the Standing Commission's membership was biased in favour of liberals, with conservative perspectives being inadequately valued. This has (perhaps deliberately?) been something of self-fulfilling prophecy, and strengthened grounds for such criticisms. On the other hand, while remaining members expressed 'regret that their voices would be missed and that the Committee's work was diminished when it lacked a range of opinion as well as representation' – a view that reflects a MacIntyrean understanding – nonetheless, the sincerity of this concern for breadth and representivity was brought into question by decisions on replacement members and how these were taken.²⁵⁴ Both actions raise concerns over the extent to which either conservatives or liberals are genuinely committed to true dialogue, and through this to the possibility of healing the divisions within the Communion. The fundamental importance of mutual trust and genuine commitment to honest, truth-seeking, dialogue is something which will be addressed in due course when considering the essential role of Aquinas' primary principles of natural law (as interpreted by MacIntyre) in providing a context for an authentic shared search for agreement.

Language Use and Membership of its Community

A second, more substantial, point raised by Roque is her identification of an apparent contradiction from a philosophical perspective within MacIntyre's account of communication through learning the language-in-use of other communities. For, in writing that 'Learning its language and being initiated into their community's tradition is one and the same thing,'²⁵⁵ MacIntyre has seemed to indicate that in order to become competent in the language-in-use of a community of tradition, one is required to become a committed member of that community. This is so, since the world-view

Anglican bodies, which led to membership heavily weighted towards 'first world' representatives.

²⁵⁴ 'The Standing Committee Daily Bulletin – Day 1', Anglican Communion News Service, 24 July 2010, accessed 15 May 2011,

www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2010/7/24/ACNS4716 contains the implicit admission that the appointment of a known 'liberal' was delayed until a change in the Anglican Consultative Council's Articles of Association allowed it, even though it was agreed while the old Constitution was still in force, contrary to its provisions.

²⁵⁵ WJWR, 381.

of a tradition (including its understanding of rationality) is intrinsically bound up in the life lived out through participation in that tradition, which can only be experienced from within.

On this account, one has, so to speak, both to talk the talk and walk the walk, to be able to claim to be living the rational, moral, life. How is it, then, that one can competently learn another language-in-use, while retaining allegiance to one's home tradition? (For MacIntyre has also asserted that, unless one's home tradition is experiencing some epistemic crisis, there is no reason to have to put one's 'allegiance in question' when engaging with another tradition.²⁵⁶) MacIntyre's account of learning a 'second-first-language' thus appears to require the impossibility of simultaneous commitment to two different communities and traditions, each with a different understanding of the good, directed towards a differing telos, and different lived-out rationalities.²⁵⁷

In responding to Roque, MacIntyre admits to tension in this area.²⁵⁸ His solution, touched on but perhaps without adequate explanation in WJWR, and now spelt out in his Reply and subsequent writings, is to look to the example provided by anthropologists. He writes

... through the exercise of philosophical and moral imagination someone may on occasion be able to learn what it would be to think, feel and act from the standpoint of some alternative or rival standpoint, acquiring in so doing an ability to understand her or his own tradition in the perspective afforded by that rival. The analogy here is with the ability of an anthropologist to learn not only how to inhabit an alternative and very different culture, but also how to view her or his own culture from that alien perspective.²⁵⁹

Thus it is enough, says MacIntyre here, merely to be 'at home' within the second language and its tradition, and let it speak on its own terms. Though this may require considerable sacrifices in terms of the level of immersion required and readiness at least to act in line with the practices of the second tradition, it does not necessitate one actually making a personal commitment to all that the second tradition affirms.

²⁵⁶ WJWR, 367.

²⁵⁷ See Roque, 'Language Competence', especially 616.

²⁵⁸ MacIntyre, 'Reply to Roque', 619.

²⁵⁹ MacIntyre, 'Moral Relativism', 23.

It is important to note that even here, anthropologists cannot pretend to be viewing the culture they study from any sort of ‘objective’ or ‘neutral’ position, but can only start out from their own context. They must be honest in admitting this is so, in order to recognise their own ‘baggage’ and its influence on how they develop a facility in the new language-in-use. (Further, of course, if there is to be any dialogue between traditions, rather than merely one side attempting to get under the skin of the other, then this demands similar honesty in communication with the second tradition.)

The consequences of this ability of at least some people from within one community of tradition to ‘speak another second first language’ from outside their community are considerable.

First, from the strict perspective of rationality, it means that there are no impediments to certain members of one community having contact and dialogue with members of a second community, no matter how reprehensible that community and its views may be – though it may be decided on other grounds that this is inappropriate. For a member of one community to speak with another, even to be able to speak with another on the basis of the latter’s own language-in-use, carries no automatic implications at all about the level of the speaker’s commitment to, or approval of, that second community. Arguments about ‘taint’, or about ‘giving succour’ to others, must therefore be recognised and acknowledged as being rooted in other considerations, such as political or tactical concerns. It will not do to claim to be rational while having blanket bans on all engagement with those of whom one disapproves – not least, because, even in the most abhorrent cases, it is nonetheless possible that there may be arguments or perspectives from which the first tradition can stand to learn, and have its own claims to moral rational practice strengthened, and there is an obligation on the community at least to consider exploring this possibility.

Furthermore, as MacIntyre argues, the best means of overcoming the intolerable is (as with educating the ignorant) through engagement with it and persuasion of a better way. This is not to say that this will be easy, especially in the complexities of the public arena, and many other dynamics may come into play, including political and media manipulation. But it does mean that, all other things being equal, our overall approach of pursuing the best possible answers to the questions of how we ought to live, through, inter alia, the basic assumption of always

promoting substantive rational moral debate as far as we are able, is not invalidated or threatened by the unacceptable views of those with whom we engage.²⁶⁰

Yet it is not easy to make clear that this is an acceptable course of action in practice. This is evident within Anglicanism, where some argue that differences have become so great as to result in what are effectively two different ‘communities of tradition’. Thus some conservatives refuse to participate in any Communion-wide meetings, as long as representatives of The Episcopal Church are not excluded.

On the other hand, in ‘The Challenge and Hope of Being an Anglican Today’, Rowan Williams described what he saw as the ‘politicisation of a theological dispute taking the place of reasoned reflection’.²⁶¹ Here (as elsewhere²⁶²) he argues that fundamentally unity and truth are inseparable, and both will only be fully realised in the ultimate telos found in Jesus Christ. We cannot pursue truth through turning our backs on one another, especially not on those with whom our lives are already bound up, through our shared unity with Christ. He implicitly advises against giving truth ‘a higher value than unity’, and, though acknowledging that in certain cases ‘it is understandable that [some] are prepared to risk the breakage of a unity they can only see as false or corrupt’, he cautions that ‘it is never easy to recognise when the moment of inevitable separation has arrived – to recognise that this is the issue on which you stand or fall and that this is the great issue of faithfulness to the gospel.’ Further, he warns against separation as a constructive way of dealing with differences within what he considers ought to be a united (though by no means uniform) body: ‘once you’ve lost the idea that you need to try to remain together in order to find the fullest possible truth, what do you appeal to in the local situation when serious division threatens?’ His implication is that there is nowhere then to go. (The former Archbishop of Cape Town has similarly argued for Anglicans to keep wrestling together – pointing out how arguing face to face enabled his own Province to remain united even through life-threatening disagreements over apartheid, whereas historic divisions on other issues became irreversibly institutionalised.²⁶³)

²⁶⁰ This point is argued in greater detail in MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’. I return to some of the issues raised here, particularly about the implications for public debate, in the next chapter.

²⁶¹ Williams, ‘Challenge and Hope’.

²⁶² For example, Rowan Williams, ‘Concluding Presidential Address to the Lambeth Conference’, 3 August 2008, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org.uk/articles.php/1350/concluding-presidential-address-to-the-lambeth-conference.

²⁶³ For example, his references to the Church of England in South Africa, and the Ethiopian Episcopal Church, in a sermon to the Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California, in

But Williams' conservative critics would argue that the point of inevitable separation has been passed, for disagreements on human sexuality are merely part of 'the acceptance and promotion ... of ... a false gospel'²⁶⁴ which is heterodox in its Christology, soteriology, and more. Therefore to say they are 'out of communion with bishops and churches that promote this false gospel' is merely to recognise that there is such divergence in the construal of teleology (in the MacIntyrean sense) that they can no longer be considered as belonging to the same community of tradition. If one accepts this judgement, then it could be argued that their decision to withdraw from dialogue is not so much a refusal to pursue rationality through maximising potential engagement with new perspectives, but rather an insistence that it is irrational to proceed with what purports to be substantial ethical debate when there is inadequate agreement on telos to sustain this. Since this disagreement, from their perspective, largely arises from inappropriate handling of Scripture and attitudes to culture, it is also pointless to participate in the Continuing Indaba project, since this will never reach conclusions because of inadequate commonality – indeed, considerable divergence – in hermeneutics and so in evaluative processes.

In other words, if all this is so, the two groups are not capable of 'speaking the same language' to any useful degree, and must engage as members of separate traditions, through pursuing bilingualism.

Going On and Going Further: Being Good Enough

A further problem posed to MacIntyre's concept of bilingualism arises from the perspective of linguistic studies. He concedes that, apart from the case of those who are brought up bilingually as children, very few, if any, adults are likely to develop true fluency in two first languages²⁶⁵. He therefore must explain more carefully what the sufficient competence he requires in a second first language might in practice entail. It is, he says, the ability fully to 'inhabit' the second culture – knowing what it would be to think, feel and act from the alternative standpoint.

The test of this, says MacIntyre, is being sufficiently at home within a tradition that one knows 'how to go on and go further' – whether linguistically (understanding 'such distinctions as those between the literal and the metaphorical, the

'Southern Africa: Archbishop Ndungane condemns Anglican covenant as "a mechanism for exclusion",' Episcopal News Service, 22 October 2007, accessed 15 May 2011, www.episcopalchurch.org/81808_91157_ENG_HTM.htm.

²⁶⁴ Preamble, 'Final Statement and Jerusalem Declaration'.

²⁶⁵ WJWR, 374.

joking, the ironic, and the straightforward, and later, when the going becomes theoretical, the analogical, the univocal and the equivocal²⁶⁶), or in terms of knowing how to behave appropriately in response to a particular situation.²⁶⁷ Being able to ‘go on and go further’ in this way is the indicator of whether one’s ability in the second language-in-use is good enough (my emphasis) for being able to engage not only in samesaying, but to embark on the substantive processes of considering questions of communication, translatability, commensurability and true dialogue with first-language speakers of this language-in-use.

Being good enough is a far lower bar than MacIntyre at first appeared to set, when he wrote of needing to learn a ‘second first language’. The possibilities for this occurring are inevitably wider than under the narrower criteria for bilingualism as initially described. Thus, when it comes to understanding another tradition on its own terms, and knowing that one has so understood it, the degree of competence in the second language-in-use which is required is considerably less than might have been supposed from MacIntyre's initial analysis.

It is my contention that this suppleness between the absolutes of stark theory and actual practice is fundamental to the capacity of MacIntyre's whole project to have tangible applicability in the actual situations of twenty-first century life.

This is the key insight at the heart of this thesis. Recognising this enables a far more fruitful instantiation of MacIntyre’s approach than is generally assumed from his writing (in which he has a tendency to overstate what he asserts, setting it up against worst case scenarios of what he denies²⁶⁸). It is what bridges the gap between the ideal for which we strive, and the practicable ‘next step’ that we must take from whatever place we find ourselves in. In developing this thesis, I shall aim to show that this not only applies in this particular case of engaging with the perspectives of another tradition, but far more comprehensively in our dealings with those of other traditions or, indeed, of none. We should go forward, using MacIntyre against himself, so to speak, in this way, with far more optimistic expectation of the possibilities of fruitful outcomes, notwithstanding the often substantial difficulties that nonetheless have to be overcome in such dialogues.

²⁶⁶ WJWR, 382-3.

²⁶⁷ WJWR, 375.

²⁶⁸ A criticism from Stout, among others –e.g. see EaB, 216.

Reality and Utopia

Yet we should not be surprised at this apparent stepping back from the high standards of abstract theory, since there has been a similar implicit – though largely unacknowledged – acceptance of being ‘good enough’ or ‘good enough for now’ at other points in MacIntyre's methodology. Thus, for example, I noted in the last chapter that while from the theoretical standpoint MacIntyre insists that each community is required to strive for the fullest possible realisation of morality and practical rationality, nonetheless this will always remain intrinsically partial, provisional, perspectival, and flawed by humanity's inherent shortcomings; and yet still be good enough to be justifiable.

Even so, the ideal and the reality must be held together in creative tension, argues MacIntyre. Thus, while accepting that his account of fully functioning communities of tradition may be in some sense Utopian, he still asserts that ‘trying to live by Utopian standards is not Utopian’.²⁶⁹ In this way, though we must direct ourselves towards an aspirational telos, we do so recognising that we will never fully achieve it. Furthermore, our apprehension of this goal is always to some degree inadequate and itself permanently in need of refinement, not only because of the need to respond to evolving circumstances, but also because of human finitude and failings. Yet, as noted in the last chapter, MacIntyre concludes that these inevitable shortcomings neither fatally compromise our pursuit of an ‘adequate morality’, nor our assertion of rationality: given the reality of human limitations, both may be fully justifiable, if we are striving sufficiently towards our ideal standards.

MacIntyre's realistic appreciation of, and accommodation with, the disjunction between ideal and actuality is vitally necessary in helping inform how, in practice, we live out our commitment to a dynamic trajectory towards ever greater understanding and pursuit of ‘How then should we live?’ which rational justifiability requires. MacIntyre asserts, and rightly, that while acknowledging that we never actually reach a full and final answer,²⁷⁰ we must nonetheless always ‘do our best’ in pursuing the truthfulness and rationality that find expression in just and moral living, directed towards human flourishing (all these being inseparable elements of the whole). But while we must ensure we ‘accord to the good of truth a place that does not allow it to be overridden by other goods’, this does not mean, says MacIntyre, that ‘the pursuit of truth always takes precedence over all other types of activity. That would be absurd.

²⁶⁹ DRA, 145.

²⁷⁰ Because of both human limitation and changing circumstances.

There is a time to enquire and a time not to enquire, but instead to catch fish or sing the blues or whatever.²⁷¹ Yet while MacIntyre goes on to say that ‘a more adequate understanding in respect of truth is always to be preferred to a less adequate understanding’, it seems implicit in his writing that as long as this commitment guides our behaviour and our ordering of our priorities, adequate for the moment can actually be good enough.²⁷²

But how good is good enough? This is a question of fundamental importance to our claims to justifiable, rational, morality, which poses itself in a number of ways – not only in relation to speaking a second first language – which I shall outline in the rest of this section, and then consider in further detail (including how we might reach answers) later in this and subsequent, chapters.

First, it is a question that a tradition must ask of itself. Considering whether we are directing our time and our energies appropriately is, as has been noted, inevitably an integral part of MacIntyre’s on-going requirement to reflect on our reflective processes. As one part of this, a tradition must ask itself whether it is engaging sufficiently, and sufficiently well, with others: have we understood them enough to recognise and respond to the challenges they pose to us?

Second, it must be applied, in various ways, to a tradition’s attempts to conduct substantive dialogue with others. How closely aligned do communities of tradition have to be, what degree of agreement are we require to share in our understandings of human flourishing, the common good and our appropriate telos, and in our evaluative processes and standards, for us to be able to engage substantively on moral questions? Or, to view it from the other side of the coin, how do we recognise when there is insufficient common ground between us and another tradition? How closely is some human network or association required to conform to MacIntyre’s criteria for a community of tradition, for us to have sufficient shared grounds for substantive dialogue?

This is a particular problem in relation to contemporary democratic society. In Chapter XVII of WJWR, ‘Liberalism Transformed into a Tradition’, MacIntyre appears to allow that, though seriously flawed, liberalism can indeed be viewed as a

²⁷¹ MacIntyre, ‘Moral Disagreement’, 77.

²⁷² My emphases. MacIntyre also applies this provisionality-yet-sufficiency to Christian tradition, repeatedly describing Thomistic Aristotelianism as supplying the best framework ‘so far’ for living, e.g. WJWR, 403.

tradition within his sense of the term.²⁷³ But later in the same book, and to a greater degree through other subsequent writings, he argues that, not least in its assertion of context-neutral standards of rationality and evaluation, it is an inimical environment to the sort of debate that moral rationality requires. Insofar that this is the case, the consequence would be that those whose primary community is some form of liberalism are rendered incapable of engaging in such debate.²⁷⁴ What is more, the state as generally constituted in contemporary western democracies is also a context which impedes such debate, for reasons including its liberal presuppositions, its goals of power, economic gain and bureaucratic efficiency, its compartmentalisation and professionalisation of life, and the sheer scale of its operations.²⁷⁵ The questions of whether, how far, or under what circumstances, contemporary liberal democratic societies can be considered as communities of tradition for the purposes of substantive moral discourse are the focus of the following chapter.

A related issue is the language employed by those who are not members of a community of tradition, and how far this can be considered the sort of coherent language-in-use which MacIntyre considers necessary for rational moral discourse. Just as there is no context neutral perspective from which to discuss ethical issues, so too there is no neutral language-in-use which can be used for this purpose. What MacIntyre refers to as ‘internationalised languages’, such as the simplified version of English that is the common currency of much of international commerce, certainly do not have this capacity, he argues. International English is generally not the mother tongue of those who employ it, who require only sufficient grasp of grammar and vocabulary necessary to transact exchanges within their specific area of interest. It sits lightly to any particular tradition or culture, and its lack of depth indicates the shallowness of shared world view which its users require in order to conduct business satisfactorily. MacIntyre describes this as reflecting the ‘thinner’ shared world view of ‘modernity’, which, he argues is insufficiently developed to provide the foundations of a community of tradition or any debate of substance around matters of ethics and values.²⁷⁶ However, between such somewhat artificial language use and that of mother tongue speakers within the setting of their own community, language may be used in a variety of registers, for example, in professional settings such as law courts or medicine or, more pertinent to us, the conduct of politics and public life. Some are

²⁷³ WJWR, 326-48, and particularly 346-8.

²⁷⁴ WJWR, 392-7.

²⁷⁵ For example, DRA, Chapter 11, ‘The political and social structures of the common good’; and MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’.

²⁷⁶ WJWR, 373ff.

what Stout calls ‘moral languages’, having at least some capacity to convey social practices and internal goods.²⁷⁷ The question of where, across this range, the capacity for commensurability in discussing rational morality can, and cannot, be sustained, is one to which I now turn. These modes of speech bring their own challenges to translation to which we shall return when considering further the means for discussing ethical questions within such contexts.

Good Enough for Ourselves

So then, how do members of a community of tradition judge, first of all, whether they have been ‘good enough’ in their engagement with alternative perspectives, through an adequate approximation of bilingualism, to claim to have understood and overcome the potential challenges offered by another community of tradition?

Continuing reflection on whether we have understood another tradition adequately enough to recognise and respond to the challenges they pose to us, and also on the assessment process itself, is a necessary part of the wider requirement for on-going reflection of our community of tradition’s evaluative practices. Questions of whether we are ‘good enough’ apply not only to the degree of understanding we have of others, but to the whole conduct of our reflective processes and the way we live out our lives, including in the allocation of our resources, whether of time and energy, or of our material assets.

Fortunately, we are not obliged to resort to optimising complex calculations with potentially almost endless variables, each of which must be given carefully calibrated appropriate weight within this calculation! In practice, learning how to be ‘good enough’ is one aspect of the skills of practical reasoning in which competent members of the community train its children and new members. In chapter 5, I return to the wider issue of what it means for a community of tradition to be ‘good enough’ in every respect, but in this chapter I continue to focus on questions of engagement with other perspectives, and what it means to be able to ‘go on and go further’.

It is my contention that we have the clearest indication of the scope of adequacy at the point where we discover, for whatever reason, that we cannot go on and go further.

²⁷⁷ AV, 3.

Herein lies the second key contention of my thesis. Building on the earlier insight that, in practice, MacIntyre's approach potentially has far more fruitful application than might at first be thought, I now argue that this additionally entails an obligation (subject to considerations that arise on other grounds) to endeavour to proceed as far as possible in engagement with others. One has to keep on attempting to go on and go further, until some difficulty of fluency is encountered. A tradition's commitment to ensuring its members are trained in the craft of self-reflection, in pursuit of ethical rationality, would include requiring those who are engaged in these processes of translation to take continuing prudent care to check that they have rightly understood. It is therefore reasonable to assume that, prior to meeting some point of difficulty, they are indeed good enough in their linguistic skills. When difficulties are encountered, the first response should be to attempt more detailed or imaginative same-saying, innovation and enrichment (as MacIntyre has proposed), so that concepts from a second tradition can be rendered comprehensible in the first. Perhaps inadequate resources have been given to the task (this is itself a failure in rationality). Perhaps the lack may lie in the ability of the individuals concerned – and others can help them overcome the challenge.

It is also possible to see the Continuing Indaba project as arising from a commitment to improve 'bilingualism' within Anglicanism in precisely this way, following recognition that communication between Anglicans was not 'good enough'. For, as Williams has noted,²⁷⁸ Anglicanism 'has tried to find a way of being a Church ... that is seeking to be a coherent family of communities ... we have tried to be a family of Churches willing to learn from each other across cultural divides, not assuming that European (or American or African) wisdom is what settles everything, opening up the lives of Christians here to the realities of Christian experience elsewhere ...' In theory, this objective aligns well with MacIntyre's processes. However, as Williams acknowledges, the way that the Anglican Communion has pursued such exchanges through informal processes and relationships has proved in some respects inadequate for coping with the 'diversity of views that will inevitably arise in a world of rapid global communication and huge cultural variety.' Williams' remedy is precisely in line with what MacIntyre would recommend – to call for greater clarity around processes of understanding, of our telos and of our evaluative processes: 'The tacit conventions between us need spelling out – not for the sake of some central mechanism of control but so that we have ways of being sure that we're still talking the same language,' in other words, ensuring mutual bilingualism. For we

²⁷⁸ Williams, 'Challenge and Hope'.

need to be ‘aware of belonging to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ,’ all of which are markers of how we see our ultimate identity and telos. ‘It is becoming urgent to work at what adequate structures for decision-making might look like,’ he adds – in other words, we must reflect on our evaluative processes. That all this requires a degree of bilingualism is reflected in his contention that ‘we need ways of translating this underlying sacramental communion into a more effective institutional reality.’²⁷⁹

But the point may come where members of a community of tradition find that they cannot ‘go on and go further’ in their attempts to understand and overcome the potential challenges of another tradition, despite all these efforts. For inability to go on and go further may be rooted in deeper, structural, issues, according to MacIntyre’s account. In the ‘worst case’, a tradition may not have the capacity to grasp the perspectives and understandings of another, despite significant enrichment and adoption from the latter. In some cases, bilingual members of the tradition will recognise the latter as superior, in which case the tradition will find itself at the point of epistemological crisis outlined in the previous chapter, where it must abandon much of its past and adopt the superior approach, if it is to continue to lay claim to moral rational living. Or it may be that its bilingual members conclude that the degree of disagreement around both telos and evaluative standards are so great that there is insurmountable incommensurability and other strategies will have to be employed for communication and assessing moral rationality – strategies to which I turn in chapters 4 and 5.

Where there has been inability to go forward together as Anglicans, some might argue that the problem is not so much bilingualism within the Communion as the question of whether divergence has been so great as to take us beyond questions of whether each group has made adequate efforts to understand the other on both its own and the other’s terms, in order to substantiate its claim to rationality, and instead into the field of assessing whether there is potential for commensurability and effective communication.

Good Enough Commensurability

Take the case where a tradition is pursuing rational moral living, able adequately to comprehend and respond to the challenges raised by alternative perspectives, and so is justifiable in its claims to superiority. Its task then becomes to

²⁷⁹ Williams, ‘Challenge and Hope’.

persuade other traditions, which it believes it has overcome, of the superiority of its own viewpoint through substantive dialogue. It is to such substantive dialogue that the Anglican Bishops are committed, once they have thus honed their understanding of their faith and how it should be instantiated within their own context. For their aim is advocacy – first, to inform others of their own perspectives, but then to go on to persuade them that these perspectives are superior, so that they may change attitudes, actions and policies, for the common good of all. It would be irrational to be justified in believing one's tradition to be superior to others, and then decline to attempt to persuade others of this.

As has been noted, MacIntyre argues that to move from communication to substantive debate on moral questions requires both a shared understanding of an appropriate telos towards which enquiry and human life are directed, and common standards of evaluation: a 'shared presupposition of the contending enquiries in respect of *truth*',²⁸⁰ that is, truth as exposed to dialectical testing against all possible questions and objections.²⁸¹

The question we must therefore ask is what level of agreement on standards of rational evaluation, and on telos is adequate in practice? How do we judge? My view is that, as with bilingualism, it is only through the attempt to move from communication to substantive moral dialogue that we will discover whether indeed we have sufficient shared resources between two communities for 'knowing how to go on and go further' or where our limitations lie.²⁸² Indeed, analysis of the points at which we find we cannot go onward can, in my view, provide diagnostic tools for clarifying the nature of the difficulties of commensurability we face, and indicating the sorts of communicative strategies that can be pursued to maximise the potential level of substantive dialogue.

What this might mean in practice can be illustrated by some examples first from within Anglican pursuit of ecumenical relations, where one might expect it to be possible to assume a very high degree of agreement on humanity's ultimate telos and

²⁸⁰ MacIntyre, 'Partial Response', 297 - emphasis in the original.

²⁸¹ WJWR, 358.

²⁸² Here I am assuming that when Stout asserts that a relatively limited agreement on the good – i.e. our telos – can be understood as holding together moral discourse within society, he is aspiring not only to dialectical exchange, but the basis for considerable areas of agreement ('ordinary justificatory work') within diverse society, even though this may not 'eliminate disagreement on many matters of importance', AV, 213.

evaluative hermeneutical processes, and then from Christian-Muslim and Christian-Jewish dialogue.

Ecumenical Relations

Williams claimed in ‘The Challenge and Hope of being an Anglican Today’ that, insofar as the Anglican Communion succeeds in being a ‘coherent family of communities ... a family of churches willing to learn from each other’ across the breadth of our reflective engagement with Scripture, reason and tradition, drawing on our Catholic and Reformed heritages and practices, and culturally engaged across all the cultures in which we find ourselves, then this gives us a basis of some integrity for ‘useful and necessary questions to explore with Roman Catholicism ... and to pose to classical European Protestantism, to fundamentalism, and to liberal Protestant pluralism.’ Yet we do so from a position that remains ‘fragile and ... provisional’ – as MacIntyre would demand.

Within ecumenical dialogue, Williams assumes a considerable degree of mutuality and reciprocity, as should be expected where there is very close alignment of telos and evaluative practices – indeed, considerable belief that though our proximate enunciation of our telos may differ, it is one that we ultimately share ‘in Christ’: ‘The heart of our search for unity is very simply the search for that silence where we are able together to hear the voice of Jesus ... We try to listen to Jesus in one another, to hear what Jesus Christ is saying to us through the mouth of a stranger, somebody with another loyalty, another theology.’²⁸³ So alongside the acknowledgement that we are separate communities of tradition, there is expectation that we will be able to explore ultimate questions with considerable ease, as we ‘talk about the things that interest us, divide us, enthuse us and at times ... talk one another into exhaustion.’ More than this, as we do so, we can help each other listen to the ‘voice which is devastatingly critical of the self-deceit of so many kinds of religion, devastatingly critical of self-righteousness and self-satisfaction.’ Williams rightly points to the need together to retain a healthy self-suspicion recognising that those who share similar perspectives may be particularly prone to reinforcing one another’s blind spots.

²⁸³ Rowan Williams, ‘Sermon at Vespers in Westminster Cathedral during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity’, 22 January 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/955/sermon-at-vespers-in-westminster-cathedral-during-the-week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity.

This starting point of considerable agreement is evident in the language of ‘we’, of common interests and perspectives, shared vocabulary and theology, employed across Williams’ many ecumenical addresses.²⁸⁴ Yet he also intentionally brings the focus onto questions around areas where there may be difficulties in ‘going on and going further’ in order to open up possibilities for deepening engagement. One particular example of this is found in an address given at the invitation of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.²⁸⁵ Here, after affirming the ‘striking convergence’ in the agreed statements of the Roman Catholic Church and its ecumenical partners since the Second Vatican Council, about the nature of the Church of God, he challenges Anglicans and Catholics to consider:

whether in the light of that depth of agreement, the issues that still divide us have the same weight – issues about authority in the Church, about primacy (especially the unique position of the pope), and the relations between the local churches and the universal church in making decisions ... Are they theological questions in the same sense as the bigger issues on which there is already clear agreement? ... The central question is whether and how we can properly tell the difference between “second order” and “first order” issues. When so very much agreement has been firmly established in first-order matters about the identity and mission of the Church, is it really justifiable to treat other issues as equally vital for its health and integrity?²⁸⁶

In this way, Williams encourages the parties to reflect together not only on content and practice of our faith traditions (the beliefs and social practices of our communities, to use MacIntyre’s terminology), but also on the reflective processes we follow, both separately and in partnership. This is precisely the way forward that a MacIntyrean approach would advocate with the recognition that deeper consideration of our reflective processes may well offer the key to overcoming apparent differences at the surface. When we understand the reasons why others say and do certain things,

²⁸⁴ For example, Rowan Williams, ‘Archbishop addresses Methodist Conference - "What's the life we're prepared to lay down for Christ?"’, 29 June 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/573/archbishop-addresses-methodist-conference-whats-the-life-were-prepared-to-lay-down-for-christ; and Rowan Williams, “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread” - Archbishop’s address at Lutheran World Federation Assembly’, 22 July 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/572/give-us-this-day-our-daily-bread-archbishops-address-at-lutheran-world-federation-assembly.

²⁸⁵ Rowan Williams, ‘Archbishop’s address at a Willebrands Symposium in Rome’, 19 November 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2616.

²⁸⁶ Williams, ‘Willebrands Symposium’.

especially when we share similar reasoning processes, directed towards similar goals, within our own historically situated context, we may well find that their actions and utterances are far less in contradiction to our own than we had at first imagined.

Lessons from Ecumenical Relations

Implicit in the approach Williams encourages is the presupposition that we should pursue ecumenical dialogue with the expectation of being able to ‘go on and go further’. There are of course deep theological reasons, of eschatological hope and promise, for this. As he puts it at the Willebrands Symposium, ‘the ecumenical glass is genuinely half-full’. We should always proceed with optimism.

To do so is also the most rational approach to take, in MacIntyrean terms – though this does not appear to have been recognised explicitly by MacIntyre himself. For, first of all, attempting to go forward may often take us smoothly far farther than we had expected. Second, it is only by going as far as we can that we discover whether and where we may encounter points of difficulty. And then, it is through clarifying the points of difficulty, and working to understand why these have arisen – singly and jointly, through attempting our analyses in our own language-in-use and also in that of our dialogue partner – that we will find the best route to maximising mutual understanding: both to recognising the extent of our shared perspectives, and to increasing our ability to learn from one another and draw on the best which we have to offer one another. This is the third fundamental assertion of this thesis.

To attempt to ‘go on and go further’ in moral rational dialogue with others is not only the best means of realising whatever potential exists for achieving agreement, it also offers the possibility of increasing the scope of moral rationality beyond that which existed prior to making the attempt.

The converse is also true. If we refrain from attempting to go on and go further, or draw back at the prospect of encountering difficulties, we cut ourselves off from making whatever gains are open to us. We fall short in our integrity, and we fall short in promoting a better answer, for ourselves and for those with whom we could otherwise engage, to the fundamental question of ‘how then shall we live?’

Of course, the decision to engage in dialogue, and to attempt to go further together, especially where we know that we will encounter differences that may be difficult, challenging, even painful, to face and attempt to overcome, is not merely one of rational morality. But knowing that rational morality is, so to speak, on our side, can be an encouragement to us to promote a context in which we can dare to attempt

going forward. This would include such aspects as building mutual trust; committing ourselves to pursuing learning and truth with openness, transparency and honesty; acknowledging our shared pursuit of ‘the common good’ in terms of God’s ultimate telos for us; acting and speaking with respect and giving assurances to uphold mutual undertakings.

All of these, says MacIntyre, are the common sense preconditions for all effective human relationships, and so therefore of shared rational enquiry of every sort – from enquiry conducted within traditions, through to that between, for example, moral philosophers of widely differing perspectives. Furthermore, he argues, they conform to Aquinas’ primary precepts of natural law, being of universal application, exceptionlessness, self-evident for everyone, and presupposed rather than derived from enquiry.²⁸⁷ The indispensable value of these in promoting dialogue between those who do not come from commensurable communities of tradition is something to which I shall return in chapter 6.

Interfaith Dialogue

Recent Christian-Muslim exchanges illustrate how such an approach can work where there is a realisation that, though there is much in common, the precise breadth and depth of this is less assured and less well understood and acknowledged. That there is indeed expectation that it is possible to proceed on a basis of considerable shared ground is evident even from the title of the lengthy message ‘A Common Word Between Us and You’ which was issued by a broad cross-section of Muslim scholars in October 2007 with the stated intention of ‘declar[ing] the common ground between Christianity and Islam’.²⁸⁸ In July 2008 Williams, as Archbishop of Canterbury, made a substantive response.²⁸⁹ The tone and content of both documents, with the way each attempts to engage with the other, through exploring issues from both their own and the other’s perspective, distinctly reflects the sort of processes that MacIntyre advocates be followed between two traditions.

Williams’ choice of title, ‘A Common Word for the Common Good’, echoed the earlier document’s expectations of commonality, and then directed discussion

²⁸⁷ MacIntyre, ‘How Can We Learn’ 184-5; and MacIntyre, ‘Moral Disagreement’, 79-80.

²⁸⁸ This quote is taken from ‘Introduction to A Common Word between Us and You’, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://acommonword.com/>. See also ‘A Common Word between Us and You’, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=option1>.

²⁸⁹ Rowan Williams, ‘A Common Word for the Common Good’, 15 July 2008, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1107/a-common-word-for-the-common-good>.

towards consideration of how human flourishing is understood within the two traditions. This is, of course, one of the two key issues (the other being evaluative standards) around which the potential for substantive engagement hinges, according to MacIntyre. Within the paper, he focused on five areas of the Muslim text which he considered might be fruitfully for further consideration:

1. the love and praise of God, including for all of creation;
2. love of neighbour rooted in the love of God, which, says Williams, ‘suggests that we share a clear passion for the common good of all humanity and all creation’;
3. for each faith community to share from the heart of its tradition how they understand, study and use their Scriptures;
4. how, however much or little ‘common ground’ is initially sensed, to build practices of relating to each other, each from the heart of their own faith, ‘respecting and discussing differences rather than imprisoning ourselves in mutual fear and suspicion’;
5. acknowledging and building together on the Muslim’s tentative identification of ‘the centre of a sense of shared calling and shared responsibility’ in loving God and neighbour.

It is not hard to see in these a focus on questions around human flourishing here and now and its relationship with an ultimate, God-focussed, telos, and around evaluative standards (including the scriptural hermeneutics of both traditions); and on promoting a productive context for taking forward such explorations together. It is also important to note that Williams calls on each side to enter the debate on its own terms, and for debate to begin by working to enable each side to understand the other, from that other’s own perspective. There is explicit rejection of any attempt to search for ‘least common denominator’ agreement, recognising that this is too often rooted in awkward compromise that takes each community to the ‘margins’ of what it holds to be true. All this accords with MacIntyre’s approach.

The potential for broader assumptions of commensurability in Christian-Jewish relations is exemplified by Williams’ invitation to the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain to give a keynote address on the subject of Covenant, from the perspective of his own faith, at the 2008 Lambeth Conference.²⁹⁰ The generally informal tone of Williams’ 2004 lecture, again around themes of Covenant, at a conference at the

²⁹⁰ Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, ‘The Relationship between the People and God’, 28 July 2008, accessed 15 May 2011, www.lambethconference.org/daily/news.cfm/2008/7/29/ACNS4484. Conversations suggest that for many present, this was one of the Conference’s highlights.

Centre for the Study of Jewish Christian Relations,²⁹¹ points to greater ease, in this particular forum at least, between Jews and Christians, than is reflected in the far more careful language employed by both Muslims and Williams in the 2008 exchange. Once again, reflection considers not only the ostensible subject matter under debate, but also processes of reflection, and attempts to offer perspectives, including of points of disagreement, from both sides. Difficulties are honestly described, and the dynamics of promoting trusting debate are affirmed. The final passage of the address exemplifies a comprehensive breadth of the elements of MacIntyre's rational morality, as they are pursued in the best of dialogue between traditions:

... only the enormous and tragic tensions of actual and local history can say what covenant really means ... Covenant promises one world, not a totalising conformity enforced by central power, but a mutual recognition of the debt of honour and love, and a search for ways in which the good of each and the good of all may coincide. And the Christian and the Jew stand face to face, expressing to each other the most serious challenge to such a hope that can be conceived; we could almost say they defy one another to maintain faith in one God and one divine purpose. If that face to face challenge is truly a matter of fraternal love, undertaken as a sort of mutual human covenant – if we as Jews and Christians can be faithful to each other – we ought to be able to leave behind something of the bitter legacy of what Christians see as Jewish rejection and Jews see as Christian oppression and murder. We ought to be able to be amazed at each other and in that amazement to find something of God; and from that will flow a strange but real shared testimony to the world, about God's nature and our own.

All this is not to say that there are not considerable differences between Christians and both Jews and Muslims. However, in both cases, these are being addressed within the context of an unfolding substantive dialogue based on shared assumptions of adequate commensurability between the respective pairs of faiths which allow them to proceed with hopefulness, itself a factor that contributes to the likely success of the undertaking.

Thus we see that, despite the difficulties apparent in the strict application of a 'utopian' version of MacIntyre's account of 'bilingualism' and of possibilities for

²⁹¹ Rowan Williams, 'A lecture given at a conference on "The place of Covenant in Judaism, Christianity and Jewish-Christian relations",' 6 December 2004, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2103/a-lecture-given-at-a-conference-on-the-place-of-covenant-in-judaism-christianity-and-jewish-christia>.

dialogue between members of different communities of tradition, in practice his approach offers productive avenues to follow in seeking to maximise the engagement and understanding between these communities.

However, in other cases, it may not be possible to go forward with such confidence. It may be that either or both of a second community of tradition's telos or its evaluative traditions are too divergent from that of the first's, and that attempts by those who are bilingual to bridge the gap fail. In this case epistemic crisis, as mentioned above, may follow, or the parties may have to resort to alternative strategies for communication at a more simple, basic level. Such strategies will also need to be pursued when it is not possible to go on and go further, because the second community has an insufficiently developed tradition, as set out in MacIntyre's terms, to be able to sustain the sort of dialogue which he commends. Before addressing what alternative strategies for debate might be adopted in such circumstances (the substance of chapter 5), I offer some comments on what makes a tradition sufficiently developed to be able to engage in rational ethical debate.

Beyond Traditions

It follows from MacIntyre's insistence that rationality is only to be found within traditions which subsist in communities that those who belong to no tradition-bearing community cannot effectively engage in questions of practical rationality.²⁹² He asserts that the theses of a particular tradition can only be weighed when framed in relation to 'the specific character and history of that tradition'. Furthermore, they can only be weighed by individuals who belong to a specific tradition, and so are habituated into its character and practices – whether of the tradition whose theses are under debate, or of another, but being effectively 'bilingual' in the language in use of the former.

And, while those who are members of a functioning community of tradition are thus trained in the evaluative processes necessary to weigh human cultures and practices that do not meet MacIntyre's criteria for constituting such a community, the reverse is not true. Those who do not belong to any community of tradition not only have no rationally sound means of evaluation, they do not have the skills that would allow them to become bilingual, in the sense of being able to grasp the language-in-use of a community of tradition, given its embeddedness in a comprehensive context of ethical understanding and practice.

²⁹² WJWR, 367.

But if this is the case, how then can any community of tradition show itself to be superior to a person who is, to use MacIntyre's language, 'alienated' from the ways of such traditions? How specifically can the person of no tradition, perhaps a speaker of the deracinated 'internationalised languages of modernity, the languages of everywhere and nowhere'²⁹³ engage upon the 'dialectical engagement' required for judging the merits of a tradition? This is a vital question, given MacIntyre's claim that his approach provides for a moral and rational community to be able to demonstrate such superiority.

The answer he provided in 1988 implied that the gulf is so great that any such alienated individuals would have to undergo a radical movement, a sort of 'conversion,' in order to be brought into a community of tradition. Such individuals should then confirm (or otherwise) their assumptions of the tradition they have joined, by learning how to apply the processes of rational enquiry within the tradition, and then, as they are now enabled so to do, assessing whether this tradition itself, or some other, gives the best account of how the world is, and how life within it should be lived. Others may have no such sudden moment of what is essentially irrational insight (since they have no adequate skills of rationality), and may resort to 'an act of arbitrary will' to bring them into engagement with a community of tradition, where they can similarly be trained to judge the strengths of that tradition and others, through, at the very least, behaving 'as if' they were wholly committed to the tradition. And since a mature tradition of enquiry should be able not only to give an account of the shortcomings of other traditions, it should also be able to explain the failings of the world outside traditions, uncommitted individuals will then be provided with the resources of one or more traditions, both to understand their own situation, and to consider, by means of dialectical engagement, the claims of the various traditions in their own terms.²⁹⁴

And similarly it will not do to attempt to resort to discussing substantive moral questions in any of the internationalised languages of modernity. For it is not possible, argues MacIntyre, adequately to translate moral concepts into these, since they are only 'tied very loosely to any particular set of contestable beliefs but are rich in modes of characterisation and explanation which enable texts embodying alien schemes of systematic belief to be reported on ... in detachment from all substantive criteria and standards of truth and rationality.' This follows from the 'minimal

²⁹³ WJWR, 396.

²⁹⁴ WJWR, 395-9.

presuppositions' these languages have in respect of rival belief systems, which results in translations being 'presented in a way that neutralizes the conceptions of truth and rationality and the historical context.'²⁹⁵

This gives rise to the postmodernist view that 'the understanding of the text is not controlled by authorial intention or by any relationship to an audience with specific shared beliefs, for it is outside context except the context of interpretation' and thus an 'indefinite multiplicity' of both interpretations and translations is possible. This holds for all translation, not only of written texts. Thus very little counts as mistranslation, not least since it is only through the tools of a tradition that one is able adequately to gauge the accuracy of any translation, or even constructively pursue the process of translation in the first place.²⁹⁶ MacIntyre rejects this entire stance as wholly inadequate for an enquiry into moral rational living, and for judgments on truth and falsity – reflecting a 'certain rootless cosmopolitanism ... [of] citizens of nowhere'²⁹⁷, which is the consequence of modernity.

But all this leaves us with a potential problem. For a community of tradition's claims to be able to demonstrate its rational and moral superiority are pretty empty, if they are dependent upon those outside any such community either experiencing radical conversion or committing themselves to walk so closely in the ways of a community's tradition that they can see the world through that community's eyes. It is akin to the Anglican Bishops declaring that those who are rooted in secular modern society must first become, or at least learn fully to behave as, a Christian, an Anglican, in order to see the sense of the positions for which they argue in public debate – and that if they do not, they are so to speak doomed to remain for ever in ignorance. It is hardly an approach one can convincingly espouse in contemporary pluralist discourse (though, alas, there are some Christians, particularly of a more fundamentalist turn, who seem to take such a stand)!

Good Enough Traditions

The first steps towards a remedy lie within MacIntyre's own approach, and specifically in consideration of wider applications of the supple relationship between 'utopian' theory and concrete practice, as described above in relation to bilingualism. For it is not the case that in practice, the only choice is between fully fledged and wholly morally rational communities of tradition on the one hand, whose membership

²⁹⁵ WJWR, 384.

²⁹⁶ WJWR, 384-5.

²⁹⁷ WJWR, 388.

is entirely clear cut and fully committed, and extreme modernity on the other where people live utterly random and incoherent lives. Rather, there is a continuum across this spectrum. Even MacIntyre allows for people who may be at the margins of some community of tradition or other, who ‘upon encountering a coherent presentation of one particular tradition of rational enquiry ... will often experience a shock of recognition’ as they find a context within which their prior understandings ‘fall into place’ and make sense in a way at which they had previously only grasped.²⁹⁸

Others may be members of communities where traditions, practices, understandings may not be as developed as MacIntyre’s abstract account demands, but which may turn out in practice to be ‘good enough’ to allow for at least attempting to ‘go on and go further’ with some degree of substantive rational moral dialogue. The key question to which I turn in the next chapter is whether, and under what circumstances, contemporary westernised society, and particular the practices of democratic debate, might have the capacity to be ‘good enough’ in this sense – a position that, as go on to explore, is particularly argued by Stout.²⁹⁹

And where such attempts to go on and go further fail, we shall also find, perhaps rather more surprisingly given the tenor of his major volumes, that MacIntyre himself offers in later writings a further level of resources on which to fall back, which are rooted in Aquinas’ primary precepts of natural law, which we have already seen are of relevance to engagement in dialogue. These are the subject of chapter 6.

²⁹⁸ WJWR, 393-4.

²⁹⁹ EaB, 211.

Chapter 4 – Working with MacIntyre

The starting point for MacIntyre's whole 'project', begun in *After Virtue*, is the assertion that the contemporary world (by which he largely means Euro-Atlantic society – though there are occasional references e.g. to African and Asian cultures and philosophy) has lost touch with its historic traditions. Instead, he argues, we have inherited a jumble of fragments of past conceptual moral schemes, but have lost sight of the contexts in which they were framed. Living in different contexts, and without proper knowledge of what went before, we are unable to apply them in anything but a fragmentary and incoherent way. 'We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.' Striking examples of this incoherence range across currently popular but incompatible views on just war, abortion and public services such as health and education. Neither analytical nor phenomenological philosophical analysis can help us, being internal to the 'calamity.' But we are not left helpless. The solution, he says, is to go back and rediscover the historic traditions, as best as we are able.³⁰⁰

Each of the three volumes contains a great, if selective, historic sweep, at the end of which, broadly speaking, he concludes that there are only three options before us. These are what he terms 'the Enlightenment project' or 'encyclopaedia', 'emotivism' or 'genealogy' (which, he argues, to a considerable extent is merely the obverse of the same coin), and 'tradition' – the last being a contemporary version of Thomistic Aristotelianism, which he asserts is the only approach with moral rational integrity.

In this chapter, my intention is to address MacIntyre's consideration of the enlightenment, modernity and liberal democracy from the perspective of the conclusions he draws about the possibilities – or lack of them – for substantive moral debate within contemporary society, and specifically the public arena. For the most part I shall leave to one side detailed questions about the accuracy of his historic account and analysis³⁰¹; and about the extent to which he is or is not either a historicist or a communitarian as these terms are generally understood – both of which charges

³⁰⁰ AV, 32-6.

³⁰¹ There have been 'many detailed studies of MacIntyre's account of the history of ethics' – David Solomon, 'MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy', in Murphy, Alasdair MacIntyre, 142.

he denies³⁰² – and address these only insofar as they relate to the possibilities of public ethical debate.

Here, in MacIntyre's view, the failings in rationality and morality of 'the Enlightenment project' are compounded by the nature of the nation state. For, he argues, in consequence of these failings, of its inability to retain any primary commitment to the virtues, of its size, and of its responsibilities for governance and upholding security (even through forceful means), it is unavoidably susceptible to the arbitrary and incoherent expression of 'will' and 'desire' – whether found in bureaucratic individualism, managerial utility, economic instrumentalism, or the pursuit of economic and political power for its own sake. 'External' rather than 'internal' goods inevitably dominate, to the detriment of the latter, and of the virtues they embody. And so the state is incapable of providing a context for rational debate about the nature of what it is to be human and to enquire after and pursue humanity's proper telos. The contemporary liberal democratic state cannot, he argues, orient itself towards delivering the common good for its citizens.

However, it is my contention that, while, to a considerable degree, MacIntyre is right to point to the considerable weaknesses of liberalism and of the nation state, in typical fashion his denial of the possibilities of substantive discussion of moral questions goes too far – not least, because, as before, in practice there is considerably more capacity to 'go on and go further' than his more stark presentation of the theory, if strictly applied, might suggest. I shall also introduce Stout's 'selective retrieval' and development of elements of MacIntyre's approach, built upon his largely empathetic view of MacIntyre's analysis of liberalism. His contention is that those expressions of liberalism that are found in particular democratic practices – which conform sufficiently adequately to MacIntyre's social practices and promote concepts of a broad common good – may indeed be viewed as akin to a tradition, in MacIntyrean terms.

³⁰² On historicism, see AV, 264-72. Hauerwas, refers to MacIntyre's 'particular way of being a historicist' (see Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre', *First Things*, October 2007, accessed 15 May 2011, www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=6041; while it has also been argued that while MacIntyre's approach 'does not conform to an understanding of historicism according to which validity is determined by history and all standards of rationality are nothing more than contingent historical products,' nonetheless, 'it merits the designation "historicism" because it is only in and through history that human beings become fully conscious of and fully justified in holding even those principles or conclusions of enquiry that are presupposed by the enquiry at the outset' – Jennifer A. Herdt, 'Alasdair MacIntyre's "Rationality of Traditions" and Tradition-Transcendental Standards of Justification', *The Journal of Religion*, 78.4(1998), 541. On communitarianism, see MacIntyre, 'Politics', 235, and the discussion on this in chapters 2 and 6 of this thesis.

MacIntyre on Liberalism

MacIntyre gives lengthy, if selective, historical accounts of the emergence of the Enlightenment in his three major volumes, aiming to provide a narrative account of how liberalism came to occupy such a dominant position in the late twentieth century world.

However, his arguments for ‘Why the Enlightenment Project had to fail’ – the title of Chapter 5 of *After Virtue* – come after a relatively short (by his standards!) historical appraisal, and are, for the most part, not dependent on the accuracy of his narrative description, or his analysis of the interrelationship of events. Rather, it is the goal, and underlying philosophy which is presupposed, which is, he argues, fatally flawed. For in its assumption of a context neutral, objective, impersonal rationality, liberalism shares the same irremediable defects as analytical philosophy, which he equally rejects – regardless of the context, or period of history, in which it is expressed. Worse, through what he describes as the ‘invention’ of the ‘individual’, who is able to decide upon his or her own ‘good’ according to personal choice rather than through any ‘notion of a telos’, it fundamentally ‘changed the meaning’ of what had been understood as morality over long centuries, making a decisive disjunction with the past. He describes the consequences thus:

So the “No ‘ought’ conclusion from ‘is’ premises” principle becomes an inescapable truth for philosophers whose culture possesses only the impoverished moral vocabulary which results from the episodes I have recounted. That it was taken to be a timeless logical truth was a sign of a deep lack of historical consciousness which then informed and even now infects too much of moral philosophy. ... [O]nce the notion of essential human purposes or functions disappears from morality, it begins to appear implausible to treat moral judgements as factual statements.³⁰³

Thereafter, he says, to speak in terms of ‘You ought to do so-and-so’ becomes no more than ‘forms of expression for an emotivist self’.³⁰⁴ In the following chapter he goes on to say that resultant attempts to approach ethical questions either in terms of utilitarianism (such as ‘maximising the happiness of the greatest number’) or through developing systems of ‘rights’ can equally be shown to be arbitrary. They are thus open to contestation, with no means of arbitrating between, for example, criteria of

³⁰³ AV, 59.

³⁰⁴ AV, 60.

modes of practice, or those drawn from aesthetic or bureaucratic perspectives. This is true for us as we face choices both as individuals and within wider society.

Citizens of modernity are thus left in a state of moral incoherence, from which we are unable to rescue ourselves, because we have lost the capacity for moral rational evaluation. He spells out the arguments for this particularly starkly in the following passage from *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

... it is an illusion to suppose that there is some neutral standing ground, some locus for rationality as such, which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions. Those who have maintained otherwise either have covertly been adopting the standpoint of a tradition and deceiving themselves and perhaps others into supposing that theirs was just such a neutral standing ground or else have simply been in error. The person outside all traditions lacks sufficient rational resources for enquiry and a fortiori for enquiry into what tradition is to be preferred. He or she has no adequate relevant means of rational evaluation and hence can come to no well-grounded conclusion, including the conclusion that no tradition can vindicate itself against any other. To be outside all traditions is to be a stranger to enquiry; it is to be in a state of intellectual and moral destitution ...³⁰⁵

Context and Tradition

One of the fundamental objectives of liberalism is to seek ‘some neutral tradition-independent standard of a rationally justifiable kind to which we may appeal’³⁰⁶ when weighing alternative approaches to moral questions. On the face of it, that might seem a not unreasonable aspiration. It is therefore worth considering in more detail the relationship between MacIntyre’s analysis of why such an objective is not achievable (given his assertion that moral rationality is found within a community of tradition that exists within a particular historic and cultural context), and his conclusion that liberalism cannot be considered as a tradition.

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre assesses two candidates that might at first appear to offer a plausible tradition-neutral approach. The first is that embodied in the ‘common sense’ of Thomas Reid and ‘the fundamental laws of human belief’ of Dugald Stewart. However, he argues, neither was able to account for moral error within communities in general terms, and both specifically failed to

³⁰⁵ WJWR, 367.

³⁰⁶ WJWR, 329.

provide any basis for judging between pro- and anti-slavery views.³⁰⁷ The second is practical reasoning from ‘the facts themselves’ on what might constitute right conduct, justice, and the consequent human actions. But this approach also founders, since there is no agreed theory of theorising, which sets out which are the relevant facts of any matter, and how they are to be construed. All that can be achieved is a set of explanations of what follows when we adopt this or that theory for assessing a situation – but with no neutral means of judging their choice of theory, the adequacy of the rationality with which it is pursued, and the concept of justice it delivers.³⁰⁸

MacIntyre concludes that ‘those conceptions of universality and impersonality which survive this kind of abstraction [i.e. specifying and furnishing a tradition-independent moral standpoint] from the concreteness of traditional or even non-traditional conventional modes of moral thought and action are far too thin and meagre to supply what is needed’³⁰⁹ to provide grounds for judging between competing traditions. Kant and his heirs, says MacIntyre, have failed in this respect, for, though they provide sophisticated accounts of various moral and philosophical issues, showing what logical or conceptual commitments are incurred by asserting or denying a particular thesis, they have not provided any ‘general shared standards by which to judge whether or not it is rational to incur them.’³¹⁰ He adds that ‘in respect of the ineradicability of disagreement so-called continental philosophy does not differ significantly from analytical philosophy.’³¹¹

Thus liberalism, in its social, cultural, legal and political expressions as well as the philosophical, has a conception of ‘human good’ which is little more than the expression of the preferences of individuals or of groups of individuals ‘summed in some way or other.’³¹² Indeed, the individual has no systematic means of ordering their own preferences (which are arbitrary expressions of their personal desires), and so lives ‘with no overall good supplying an overall unity to life’, one of MacIntyre’s fundamental tenets for a rational and well-lived life. This is in sharp contrast to John Rawl’s assertion that ‘although to subordinate all our aims to one end does not strictly

³⁰⁷ WJWR, 329-332.

³⁰⁸ WJWR, 323-333 – emphases in original.

³⁰⁹ WJWR, 334.

³¹⁰ WJWR, 335.

³¹¹ WJWR, 335.

³¹² WJWR, 336.

speaking violate the principles of rational choice ... it strikes us as irrational or more likely as mad³¹³ – a stance which MacIntyre regards as a recipe for chaos at best.

The question then arises as to whether the practices of ‘practical reasoning of liberal modernity’, conducted by ‘the individual qua individual’,³¹⁴ can in any way be judged to be a tradition in the sense MacIntyre describes. MacIntyre argues that one consequence of the lack of any overarching ordering principle is that reaching a particular judgement does not lead automatically to implementing action, since other options may arise, and other preferences present themselves in the interim. Furthermore, while it may be possible to exercise some degree of practical rationality (through ordering preferences, translating them into decisions and actions through sound arguments, and acting to ‘maximise the satisfaction of those preferences in accordance with their ordering’³¹⁵), this rationality does not necessarily entail justice, since ‘the conception of justice is in this liberal culture no more and no less than the need for some set of regulating principles by which cooperation in the implementation of preferences may be so far as possible achieved and decisions made as to which kinds of preference have priority over others.’³¹⁶

Considering the way that debate on matters of justice are conducted within a liberal system, MacIntyre concludes that the ‘function and notion of justice in such a culture and social order’³¹⁷ rests within its legal system, such that ‘the overriding good of liberalism is no more and no less than the continued sustenance of the liberal social and political order.’³¹⁸ Thus it is self-contradictory – having denied the existence of any overall theory of the good, it in practice operates by appealing to premises that presuppose the upholding of liberalism, which thus provides an overarching theory.

From this MacIntyre infers that ‘liberal theory is best understood, not at all as an attempt to find a rationality independent of tradition, but as itself the articulation of an historically developed and developing set of social institutions and forms of activity, that is, as the voice of a tradition.’³¹⁹ Furthermore, liberalism is shaped by those who have the power ‘to determine what the alternatives are between which

³¹³ WJWR, 337.

³¹⁴ WJWR, 339.

³¹⁵ WJWR, 342.

³¹⁶ WJWR, 342.

³¹⁷ WJWR, 342.

³¹⁸ WJWR, 345.

³¹⁹ WJWR, 345.

choices will be made' and so 'the cosmetic arts'³²⁰ – those which operate through persuasion – are highly prized.

MacIntyre draws two conclusions from this. First, within human history, liberalism has offered the best attempt at providing a neutral standpoint for rationality and justice – and therefore its failure 'provides the strongest reasons that we can actually have for asserting that there is no neutral ground, that there is no place for appeals to a practical-rationality-as-such or a justice-as-such to which all rational persons would by their very rationality be compelled to give their allegiance.'³²¹

Second, viewed against the criteria for a tradition that MacIntyre has previously developed, liberalism has significant, even fatal, problems in dealing with contradictions within its understanding of 'the liberal self', and of 'the common good in a liberal social order'. For, first of all, it both requires the individual to present themselves as a 'single, well-ordered self' and at the same time asserts that choices are 'irreducibly heterogeneous and without any overall ordering'.³²² Likewise, liberalism on the one hand claims that no goods can be treated as overriding all others – yet 'if the good of liberalism itself, the good of the pluralist democratic polity ... is to be achieved, it will have to be able to claim an overriding and even a coerced allegiance.'³²³

In his judgement, any search for some neutral tradition-independent standard of a rational morality is doomed to futility. The reader of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* should not be misled by the title given to Chapter XVII – 'Liberalism Transformed into a Tradition' – into thinking that MacIntyre accepts that liberalism does or even could operate as a tradition of enquiry, meeting his criteria for moral rationality. The reverse is true. It is his contention that liberalism, through pointing to its historic evolution, may lay claim to being such a tradition, but is wrong to do so (hence his reference above to 'covertly ... adopting' this 'standpoint'³²⁴). So although in Chapter XVII he may write of liberalism as being 'the articulation of an historically developed and developing set of social institution and forms of activity, that is, as the voice of a tradition',³²⁵ in the following three chapters, through the arguments outlined

³²⁰ WJWR, 345.

³²¹ WJWR, 346.

³²² WJWR, 341. In such a society, says MacIntyre rather derisively, preoccupation with therapy to resolve the conflict between unity and division of the self is not surprising.

³²³ WJWR, 347.

³²⁴ WJWR, 367.

³²⁵ WJWR, 345.

in the foregoing paragraphs, he makes it clear that in practice, liberalism inevitably and utterly fails to operate as the sort of tradition within which he believes moral enquiry can, and must, be pursued.

Traditions and Traditionalism

But confusions over MacIntyre's depiction of liberalism as, to some degree, a tradition, are a reflection of the inconsistency with which he uses the latter term. And this reflects the lack of a clear answer to the fundamental question of how 'good' a tradition has to be, how closely it has to conform to MacIntyre's criteria, in order for it to deliver the sort of moral rationality he describes as subsisting in the practices of communities of tradition.

Stout highlights this when he refers to various precursors of contemporary ethical discourse as 'traditions' and adding the explanation that 'all I mean by the term "tradition" in this context is a discursive practice considered in the dimension of history.'³²⁶ He points out that at times this is the sense in which MacIntyre also uses the term, while at others it is far more narrowly defined. He quotes Susan Moller Okin, who, he says 'rightly observes that [MacIntyre] equivocates between the two senses'. She writes that MacIntyre 'gives conflicting accounts of what a tradition is. At times he describes it as a defining context, stressing the authoritative nature of its "texts"; at times he talks of a tradition as "living," as a "not-yet-completed narrative," as an argument about the goods that constitute the tradition.'³²⁷ She also voices feminist concerns that to stress too 'conservative' a view of continuity within a tradition brings the specific dangers of sustaining oppressive attitudes and behaviour towards women. This is merely symptomatic of a greater risk that biases, prejudices, and other failings within any historic tradition can become institutionally entrenched. Stout too is concerned that MacIntyre's approach falls into this trap, with its stress on rationality's 'embodiment in institutions that are capable of securing agreement on the doctrine of the human good (presumably, by means of catechism directed at new comers and a combination of magisterial suasion, discipline, and excommunication directed at dissenters).'³²⁸

But my own view is that if MacIntyre overstates these aspects, then, with his propensity for sweeping assertions, he similarly overstates the counterbalancing

³²⁶ DaT, 135.

³²⁷ Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books 1989), 60-61, emphasis in the original, quoted in DaT, 135 and n.23, 320.

³²⁸ DaT, 136.

criteria. This ranges across his stress on, for example, never-ending dialectic (including engagement with all possible criticisms);³²⁹ through the permanently provisional and evolutionary nature of any ‘tradition’; and the commitment required for everything, even the most central texts, tenets and practices, to be always open to question and revision;³³⁰ through to the need of a community of tradition always to be alert to the corrupting dynamics of the institutionalisation that it inevitably needs in order to sustain itself, which include the possibility of inappropriately over-emphasising external goods – such as privileging certain individuals at the expense of others.³³¹ Indeed, it is this last concern on which, as we shall see later, that Stout draws, in developing his ‘stereoscopic criticism’ which is so central to his own processes of conducting ethical debate in the public sphere. In all of these areas, one might ask whether MacIntyre is sitting so light to the question of historical continuity that he jeopardises his own descriptive use of ‘tradition’.

Thus we again find that what at first may appear to be a clear cut and decisive description of theory, turns out in practice to be rather more fluid. This is not only in relation to the possibilities for bilingualism and translation, as I argued in the previous chapter, but across many other aspects of MacIntyre’s account of the pursuit of moral rationality. This is also the case when it comes to identifying workable communities of tradition. As I shall argue in greater detail in the next chapter, here too it is only through making the attempt in practice to ‘go on and go further’ with our engagement with potential dialogue partners – while continuing to reflect and evaluate on both ones processes and what they deliver – that one can hope to discern in any given case with what degrees of flexibility his criteria for effectively functioning communities of tradition should be interpreted.

If MacIntyre is not so tightly wedded as might first appear to a narrowly conservative view of upholding tradition, it is also the case that he is not as wedded to the past as some might consider – and as might seem to be implied by Stout’s description of him, particularly in *Democracy and Tradition*, as a ‘traditionalist’.³³² But Stout himself had recognised this earlier, when, though referring to the ‘sense of

³²⁹ Here it is worth recalling, as noted in chapter 2, that MacIntyre revised his appropriation of Aristotle, acknowledging the strength of earlier feminist criticism from Okin – thus following his own methodology.

³³⁰ WJWR, 355-6, 388.

³³¹ AV, 194-5.

³³² DaT, especially Chapter 5. The distinction has been laconically rendered ‘Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living’ – see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1984), 5.

belatedness' in MacIntyre's writings, he acknowledged that he did not see MacIntyre calling for a return to some idealised good old days. Stout criticises Rorty's claim that MacIntyre's call for a new St Benedict, at the end of *After Virtue* is no more than misplaced 'terminal wistfulness', and argues that any wistfulness is 'rather a function of everybody's inability to imagine a full-blown alternative to our society that would be both achievable by acceptable means and clearly better than what we have now.'³³³ It is easy enough to conceive that society might be better – but it is the harder work of seeing how to go forward and persuading others to join in doing so, to which Stout is prepared to commit himself, and for which he believes MacIntyre provides effective resources.

Pinkard takes a similar line in his consideration of 'MacIntyre's Critique of Modernity', arguing that to lay the 'charge of nostalgia' against MacIntyre 'is a serious misreading of his key ideas'.³³⁴ He goes on to say 'What seems to provoke MacIntyre's ire is the unspoken assumption that the point at which we have ended up – in the triumph of global capitalism and the widespread affirmation of the market as the only proper social institution to deal with our problems – is necessary (that we had to end up in this place in history), is the only proper or authentic expression of unalloyed human nature (that it is the only social system that fits human nature instead of being at war with it), or represents progress over the past.'³³⁵ But, says Pinkard, a 'close reading of his work belies' any interpretation of his 'sustained attack on the notion that "the present is progress"' as indicating that he is 'some kind of nostalgic premodern thinker.' Rather, his 'major criticism of modernity has to do with its underlying individualism, the practical failures of that form of individualism, and the social structures and modern philosophies that systematically distort our abilities to comprehend any real alternative to themselves.' However, he continues, 'MacIntyre's proposal has never been' for us to attempt to 'turn back the clock' ... 'he has instead suggested what alternative process would be necessary for a new, nonindividualist society of the future to take shape.' This leads him, like others, to a conclusion that reflects how far MacIntyre's work runs counter to predictable debate: 'If anything, MacIntyre's critique of modernity is better characterized as revolutionary rather than reactionary.'³³⁶

³³³ EaB, 228-9.

³³⁴ Terry Pinkard, 'MacIntyre's Critique of Modernity', in Murphy, Alasdair MacIntyre, 176.

³³⁵ Pinkard, 'MacIntyre's Critique', 180-1 – emphases in the original.

³³⁶ Pinkard, 'MacIntyre's Critique', 181.

A Reasonable Liberalism?

We must consider whether MacIntyre has fairly and accurately depicted ‘the Enlightenment project’, liberalism, and their consequences for contemporary western moral debate, or whether he has drawn an exaggerated caricature which is no more than a straw man easily demolished.

Commentators are often more ready to accept his account of present-day ethical discourse than his analysis of how we arrived at this state. David Solomon asserts that ‘the description he gives [of the character of contemporary culture and the state of contemporary moral discourse] rings true at least in broad outline to many readers.’³³⁷ He notes that other philosophers, including Bernard Williams and Charles Taylor, though they might ‘disagree with many other features of MacIntyre’s view, are in broad agreement with his claims here.’

Stout puts his emphasis elsewhere: ‘I am happy to grant, indeed to affirm, that MacIntyre’s narrative is to be preferred to the self-congratulatory stories the Enlightenment told about itself – the Kantian’s essentially uniform story of modest progress toward perfect rationality, for example, or the standard utilitarian story of triumph over traditional superstition ... contemporary reformulations of these stories tend either to gloss over evidence of moral diversity and conceptual change or to make our ancestors and distant cultures look unduly irrational. MacIntyre, in contrast, is able to take evidence of moral diversity and conceptual change seriously ... MacIntyre is hardly the first to declare the Enlightenment project a failure.’³³⁸

In fact, Stout sees MacIntyre as being somewhat sympathetic to the efforts of Enlightenment thinkers to tackle the challenges before them, adding ‘he takes pains to show how reasonable human agents, under such circumstances, could have found that project a plausible response to the problems at hand. They were right, for instance, in finding fault with received Aristotelian tradition, and MacIntyre feels compelled to correct those faults, in his own selective retrieval and reconfiguration of traditional concepts and arguments, before he can lay claim to that tradition as a living legacy.’³³⁹

Stout advises his readers, ‘Grant then, that MacIntyre’s verdict on the Enlightenment’s foundationalist project is correct. Grant, as well, that his explanation of the Enlightenment’s failure to secure an ahistorical foundation for morality is

³³⁷ Solomon, ‘MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy’, 143.

³³⁸ EaB, 209.

³³⁹ EaB, 209.

neither unduly reductive nor uncharitable.³⁴⁰ It is on this basis that he proceeds to construct his selective retrieval and development of MacIntyre's work – though he does so, rather less convinced of MacIntyre's account of the collapse of coherent moral debate. Rather, his intention is to 'borrow some terms from him, disconnect them from his story of decline and fall, and try to show how they might contribute to a more perceptive account of our society than he himself provides.'³⁴¹

Liberalism and Communitarianism

Insofar as MacIntyre is open to accusations of presenting liberalism in somewhat stark, even overstated, terms, then it is perhaps because political theorists are prone to do the same, as Stout claims of both supporters and critics of liberalism. Stout's intention is to reject 'what both liberals and communitarians often accept, our society pictured as a way of managing conflict of interest among individuals utterly unconnected by agreement about the good. Liberals like what they see in this picture. Communitarians despise what the liberals like.'³⁴² In this sense, they are alternative sides of the same coin. MacIntyre largely shares this view,³⁴³ though he would place himself at a greater distance from what is generally recognised as communitarianism than Stout depicts him. At this point it is worth saying something more about MacIntyre's understanding of communitarianism and why he views his own stance as distinct.

Commenting on this lack of agreement about the common good which he sees across contemporary society, MacIntyre scathingly asserts that modern, heterogeneous government 'both needs and has an assorted ragbag of values, from which it can select in an ad hoc way' to meet the challenges of the moment – and within this 'ragbag' both liberal and communitarian values coexist. He claims that for the most part this suits both parties, since they participate in the shifting coalitions of interest and power that come into play when conflicts arise over policy questions. The communitarian conception of the common good differs significantly from his, as it fails to build a 'community of political learning and enquiry participation in which it is necessary for

³⁴⁰ EaB, 209.

³⁴¹ EaB, 265.

³⁴² EaB, 6-7.

³⁴³ MacIntyre, 'Politics', 244, 'There are certainly some forms of liberal theory and some formulations of communitarian positions which are such that the two are not only not in opposition to each other but neatly complement each other.'

individuals to discover what their individual and common goods are.’³⁴⁴ The elusiveness of the communitarian concept of the common good and how it is derived he puts down to the accommodation of communitarians with ‘the realities of contemporary politics’. Thus he sees communitarianism as very differently oriented and conducted to his own description of communities and the traditions of excellence in pursuit of an authentic common good that is concerned that the well-being of the community should not be at the expense of the individual, as well as vice versa.

Stout’s concerns about communitarianism, its relationship with liberalism, and the critique they give of each other, highlight further weaknesses:

The main problem with communitarian criticism of liberal society then, is its implicitly utopian character. The critics do succeed, at times, in articulating quite reasonable misgivings many of us feel concerning life in our society. Yet they very rarely give us any clear sense of what to do about our misgivings aside from yearning pensively for conditions we are unwilling or unable to bring about. When you unwrap the utopia, the batteries aren’t included. Liberal responses to communitarian criticism, on the other hand, often show what seems to be smug insensitivity.³⁴⁵

Stout’s conclusion is that we should – and can – draw a picture of contemporary debate ‘in which the opposition “liberal versus communitarian” is beside the point.’ He says we can ‘redescribe pluralistic society and reappraise its characteristic problems, breaking free from both the “terminal wistfulness” of the communitarians and the complacency of liberal apologists’, and can do so using tools provided by MacIntyre (particularly drawing on his ‘concept of social practices’ and his ‘distinction between internal and external goods’), though we should ‘dispense with his sense of belatedness and his account of moral diversity’.³⁴⁶

Family, Community and Nation State

If MacIntyre is often thought to be a communitarian in the generally accepted sense, it is because of the nature of the ‘nonindividualistic society’ he proposes. In arguing that the nonindividualistic societies which provide the best means of answering fundamental questions of ‘how then shall we live?’ are constituted as

³⁴⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Politics’, 245-6. This article considers in some detail the breadth of liberal theorising and practice and its relationship with various forms of communitarianism.

³⁴⁵ EaB, 229.

³⁴⁶ EaB, 7.

‘communities of tradition’, he insists that local community provides the necessary scale for pursuing the moral rational life. Neither the smaller unit of the family, nor the larger structure of the state, is as capable of delivering this outcome.

MacIntyre reaches this conclusion through asking ‘What are the types of political and social society ... through which our individual and common goods can be achieved?’³⁴⁷ This is a ‘common good’ not of abstract theorising, but one which embodies ‘relationships of giving and receiving’, and includes the ‘virtues of acknowledged dependence’³⁴⁸ which reflect the realities of human living, from the most vulnerable baby through the various capacities and capabilities of adulthood to the frailties of age – aspects of our true ‘metaphysical biology’ that he particularly considers in *Dependent Rational Animals*. He presents this volume as ‘not only a continuation of, but also a correction’ of the work in his three major volumes on virtue and rational morality, having concluded that he was ‘in error in supposing an ethics independent of biology to be possible’ and had inadequately taken account of the realities of human life and society, particularly the realities of dependence.³⁴⁹

In seeking appropriate forms of society for realising our individual and common goods, MacIntyre points to three conditions that must be satisfied. First, such societies must ‘afford expression to the political decision-making of independent reasoners on all those matters on which it is important that the members of a particular community be able to come through shared rational deliberation to a common mind.’³⁵⁰ He goes on to say ‘there will have to be institutionalized forms of deliberation to which all those members of the community who have proposals, objections and arguments to contribute have access. And the procedures of decision-making will have to be generally acceptable, so that both deliberation and decisions are recognizable as the work of the whole.’ As a broad summary of what we aspire to in democratic processes, this seems generally uncontentious, and one might expect it to be shared by people across the spectrum of contemporary westernised society.

His second condition, however, is less likely to receive such widespread affirmation: ‘in a community in which just generosity is counted among the central virtues the established norms of justice will have to be consistent with the exercise of this virtue.’ Further, ‘no single simple formulation will be capable of capturing the

³⁴⁷ DRA, 128.

³⁴⁸ This is the title, and subject matter, of Chapter 10 of DRA.

³⁴⁹ DRA, x-xi.

³⁵⁰ DRA, 128.

different kinds of norm that will be necessary for different kinds of just relationship ... Between those capable of giving and those who are most dependent and in most need of receiving – children, the old, the disabled – the norms will have to satisfy a revised version of Marx’s formula for justice in a communist society, “From each according to her or his ability, to each, so far as is possible, according to her or his needs” ...’ MacIntyre recognises that the finitude of economic resources ‘allow only for its application in imperfect ways’ but insists that ‘without its application ... even if very imperfectly, we will be unable to sustain a way of life characterized both by effective appeals to desert and by effective appeals to need, and so by justice to and for both the independent and the dependent.’³⁵¹ In this way, for MacIntyre, the common good truly expressed entails a radical justice of a very particular fairness and equality for all, that is also reflected in his third condition: ‘the political structures must make it possible both for those capable of independent practical reason and for those whose exercise of reasoning is limited or non-existent to have a voice in communal deliberation about what these norms of justice require. And the only way in which the latter can have a voice is if the role of proxy is given a formal place in the political structure.’³⁵²

MacIntyre’s objective, he says, is no more than a society which adequately takes account of the inevitable disability and dependence of some of its members. Justice requires that this is not a case of ‘the interest of one particular group rather than of others’, but rather that ‘the interest of the whole political society’ must be ‘integral’ to this society’s ‘conception of their common good’. He then asks ‘what kind of society might possess the structures necessary to achieve a common good thus conceived?’ His conclusion is that both the modern state and the contemporary family are variously ‘incapable of providing the kind of communal association within which this type of common good can be achieved.’

For, on the one hand, though ‘families at their best are forms of association in which children are first nurtured, and then educated for and initiated into the activities of an adult world’ (including initial training in the virtues and ‘social practices’), yet ‘the family flourishes only if its social environment also flourishes.’ For individual members of families also participate in relationships in ‘a variety of other institutions and associations: workplaces, schools, parishes, sports clubs, trade union branches, adult education classes and the like’. It is here that they are potentially able ‘to

³⁵¹ DRA, 129-30 – emphasis in original.

³⁵² DRA, 130.

recognize and pursue the goods internal to the practices' of these bodies, which contribute to the goods of community life. MacIntyre concludes that 'generally and characteristically then the goods of family life are achieved in and with the goods of various types of local community.'

Yet, if the family is too small a unit to be able to sustain pursuit of the common good as MacIntyre conceives it, then it is not merely the case that the nation state operates on too great a scale. Nor is it the case that, of necessity operating through institutions, the state has merely fallen wholesale into its traps of corrupting power against which MacIntyre has warned. There are more fundamental problems. The modes of operation of the modern state have become so entangled with the presuppositions of liberalism that it is 'governed through a series of compromises between a range of more or less conflicting economic and social interests' as a range of political and economic pressures are brought to bear. 'The outcome is that although most citizens share, although to varying extents, in such public goods as those of a minimally secure order, the distribution of goods by government is no way reflects a common mind arrived at through widespread shared deliberation governed by norms of rational enquiry.'³⁵³

This claim, that the modern nation state as constituted, not only does not, but cannot, be a vehicle for widespread shared deliberation about the common good, governed by norms of rational enquiry, if correct, has far-reaching implications for such aspirations as of the Anglican Bishops to engage in effective advocacy within the public sphere. It is therefore necessary to consider further what he sees as the fatal flaws of contemporary government. To do this, I turn to the particularly comprehensive analysis of the contemporary western nation state which MacIntyre gave when writing on 'Toleration and the Goods of Conflict'.³⁵⁴

State Neutrality and its Problems

MacIntyre begins with the crucial development of the concept and exercise of tolerance, not least religious tolerance, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He highlights Locke's assertion that it was 'the function and duty of the magistrate to promote the security, order, and harmony of a people, but not to attempt to regulate or even to influence their beliefs ... except when ... belief itself or the lack of it threatens

³⁵³ DRA, 131.

³⁵⁴ MacIntyre, 'Toleration'.

security, order, and harmony.’³⁵⁵ Thus he sees Locke as advocating the essentially liberal position of ‘the legislative enforcement of toleration’, with the state being ‘as neutral as possible between different points of view’ ... ‘on questions of religion and more generally on questions concerning the human good.’ Neither state nor anyone else may coercively impose any one view on others, and, provided the ‘security, order, and harmony of society’ are not threatened, ‘almost no limit is placed on the means of persuasion that are otherwise allowed.’³⁵⁶

On the face of it, a neutral state so constituted might be thought to offer a constructive context in which rival traditions of enquiry can debate the common good. Mendus interprets MacIntyre’s starting point as being one that ‘endorses many of the conclusions of liberalism’,³⁵⁷ and in particular that he ‘agrees that the state ought not to impose any conception of the good on those who live under it’. But, she points out, ‘he denies that this refusal to impose is a manifestation of neutrality. On the contrary, he argues, the vocabulary of the modern liberal state is the vocabulary of rights and utility, and thus the liberal state, far from being neutral, is committed to certain sorts of values.’ It is these that the state promotes – as I shall go on to recount below. As Mendus puts it, ‘MacIntyre does not construe this failure of neutrality as simply a facet of the state’s role in encouraging individual autonomy, for “the state cannot be trusted to promote any worthwhile set of values” ... in his eyes, then, the alleged neutrality of the state is simply a charade – and a dangerous charade, when it takes upon itself a role it can never fulfil, the role of promoting autonomy.’

Mendus has highlighted a vitally important ambiguity in a state’s claims to promote neutrality. For it is one thing to create a climate in which competing traditions, including religious traditions, can engage together in debating the common good on a level playing field. It is quite another to pretend to neutrality between ethical, particularly religious, perspectives, while imposing a value structure ostensibly based in objective technical considerations, in which a raft of presuppositions and assumed evaluative criteria are in fact implicit but unacknowledged.

One concrete way in which these tensions play out is in relation to the neutrality often claimed by secular society in respect of religious belief. Rowan Williams contrasts ‘the distinction between the empty public square of a merely

³⁵⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’, 136.

³⁵⁶ MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’, 138.

³⁵⁷ Susan Mendus, ‘My Brother’s Keeper’, in Mendus, *Politics of Toleration*, 9-10.

instrumental liberalism, which allows maximal private license, and a crowded and argumentative public square which acknowledges the authority of a legal mediator or broker whose job it is to balance and manage real difference.³⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, he favours the latter, a public space where each can argue their own position on the basis of their own convictions, with no exclusion of religious justifications in favour of some ‘public reason’. He provides a helpful distinction, to which we shall return in later chapters, when he warns that ‘we in England need to be much more careful distinguishing between what I sometimes call Procedural Secularism, which is, the state steps back but allows debate to go on and the state itself stays neutral, and Programmatic Secularism, where the state drives an agenda to push religion out of the public sphere.’³⁵⁹ From an American perspective, Nicholas Wolterstorff similarly argues for a form of secularism that is neutral in the sense of being impartial between the different faiths, as well as between those with and without religious convictions; but says that in practice the interpretation of neutrality as separation of state and religion, rather than as some form of impartiality, discriminates against people of faith and undermines the principles of equality to which liberalism is committed.³⁶⁰ Stout likewise argues that a Rawlsian ‘neutrality’ which excludes religious reasoning is unrealistic, irrational, and diminishing to all, in expecting citizens to ‘bracket’ ‘whatever premises actually serve as reasons’ for their commitments, and the claims they make in public debate.³⁶¹ I shall return to these discussions of the possibilities for promoting constructive forms of such neutral secularism, with specific reference to secularism and the place of religion in public debate, along with a Thomistic understanding of secular governance on the basis of natural law, in chapters 6 and 7.

The Expanding State

The ambiguities of so-called neutrality become evident when we look at a state’s wider responsibilities for policy making, beyond those of upholding a context of security, order and harmony in which various communities can debate their perspectives on an equal footing. Regulation of various aspects of life inevitably reflects presuppositions about how life should be led which in practice are far from neutral – and, worse, may not admit this is so, instead taking refuge in language that pretends to some objective neutrality. Thus MacIntyre claims that, in practice, the

³⁵⁸ Williams, ‘Rome Lecture’

³⁵⁹ Rowan Williams, ‘The Hindu interview: Dialogue for me is recognition of the serious’, 18 October 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/553/the-hindu-interview-dialogue-for-me-is-recognition-of-the-serious.

³⁶⁰ Audi and Wolterstorff, Religion.

³⁶¹ DaT, 10.

modern state as it emerged ‘was never itself neutral in the conflicts that continued to divide the society over which it presided. Here we need only note that the conceptions which the state principally championed were particular and highly contestable conceptions of liberty and of property and of the relationship between them ... and it systematically favoured those groups and parties whose understanding of the human good was consistent with the state’s own conceptions of liberty and property.’³⁶²

In the centuries since Locke, not only has politics has become increasingly secularised, as MacIntyre notes, but the scope of the state’s activities ‘has been greatly enlarged as has the effect of those activities on the economy.’ Through the burgeoning of state agencies and complex legislation ‘its administrative regulations are such that to grasp their detail is now generally beyond the reach of ordinary citizens’ he claims, ‘a fact whose significance it is difficult to over-rate.’ For MacIntyre, the ominous consequence is that the state ‘has become more and more a set of institutions that have their own values’ – by implication these ‘values’ reflect neither the virtues nor the common good. In addition, ‘the contemporary state is to a remarkable degree united in an indissoluble partnership with the national and international market.’ While there may be ‘ongoing ideological debates about where the boundaries between public and government corporate activity and private corporate activity are to be drawn ... the agreements underlying those conflicts and the shared presuppositions of those debates reflect the common needs of state and market for capital formation, for economic growth, and for an adequately trained by disposable labor force, whose members are also compliant consumers and law-abiding citizens.’³⁶³

From this sweeping and negative description, MacIntyre concludes that we should think of ‘the contemporary state and the contemporary national economy as a huge, single, complex, heterogeneous, immensely powerful something or other’. What is particularly troubling for him is that this state ‘gives expression to both its power and its values in two very different ways’ – ways he sees as ultimately duplicitous, which he proceeds to spell out in detail: ‘On the one hand there is the mask that it wears in all those everyday transactions in which individuals and groups are compelled to deal with a heterogeneous range of public and private corporate agencies’ (some of which he lists). These transactions are governed by administrative regulations, the complexity of which means that they too often have to be left to

³⁶² MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’, 138.

³⁶³ MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’, 139-40.

‘experts’ to handle, interpret and apply, and which can generally only be put in question by engaging with them through the ‘same idioms and types of argument’ with which they are justified in the first place – this is the realm ‘of utility and of rights’ and of cost-benefit analyses. It is those who hold power who decide how costs and benefits are to be measured, and weighed against various rights of individuals and groups that may be concerned. The key point to note is that, in such processes of measuring, weighing, and balancing interests and utilities, ‘there are no scales ... not only is there no rationally justifiable general rule by which claims about utilities can be evaluated as over-riding or as failing to over-ride claims about rights, but in each particular context what decides how such claims will be adjudicated will always depend upon who it is that in that particular context has the power to adjudicate, and how this power to adjudicate is related to distribution of economic, political and social power more generally.’³⁶⁴

MacIntyre’s criticisms go further. Alongside this, states ‘wear quite another mask and speak with quite another voice when they justify their policies and actions in their role as custodians of society’s values.’ In doing so, they present ‘the state as guardian of the nation’s ideals and the caretaker of its heritage, and the market as the institutionalized expression of its liberties. It is in this guise that the state from time to time invites us to die on its behalf and that the market fosters through its advertising agencies fantasies about well-being. This type of rhetoric relies not on the idioms of utilities and rights, but on the persuasive definition and redefinition of such terms as “liberty”, “democracy”, “free market,” and the like.’ He adds ‘it is a prerequisite for achieving certain kinds of status within the apparatus of state and market that one should be able to move effectively between the one rhetorical mode and the other’³⁶⁵ – in other words, one should be adept at wearing both ‘masks’ as he calls them, and swapping between them. Yet however fluent one may be in these modes of rhetoric, says MacIntyre,

... what the modes of justification employed in and on behalf of the activities of the state and market cannot give expression to are the values that inform just those ongoing argumentative conversations through which members of local communities try to achieve their goods and their good. The values of state and market are not only different from, but on many types of occasion incompatible with, the values of such local community. For the former,

³⁶⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’, 140-1.

³⁶⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’, 141-2.

decision-making is arrived at by a summing of preferences and by a series of trade-offs, in which whose preferences are summed and what is traded off against what depends upon the political and economic bargaining power of the representatives of contending interests. For the latter, a shared understanding of the common good of the relevant type of activity or sets of activities provides a standard independent of preferences and interests, one by reference to which individual preferences and group interests are to be evaluated. For the former there is no consideration that may not under certain circumstances be outweighed by some other consideration. For the latter there are conclusive considerations, those that refer us to goods that cannot be sacrificed or foregone without rendering the activity in which the community is engaged pointless. For the former, a gift for flexibility and compromise, for knowing when and how to exchange one set of principles for another, is accounted a central political virtue. For the latter, a certain moral intransigence of a kind that is apt to prevent success in the larger worlds of the state and the market is accounted among the political virtues.³⁶⁶

This lengthy quote serves to illustrate how adamantly MacIntyre believes that the workings of the contemporary state are irretrievably caught up with the external goods of power, wealth, and status, together with instrumentalist criteria, the predominating pursuit of which inevitably is at odds with the furtherance of the internal goods of excellence which rational morality demands. On his account, rationality, morality, ethics, and the virtues, all as properly understood and contextualised within the social practices and language-in-use of a community of tradition are entirely alien, even incomprehensible, to the rhetoric of the state, whichever ‘mask’ it wears. From this perspective, it is unsurprising that MacIntyre draws the following stark conclusion:

It is a consequence of these features of the social life of advanced modernity that there is always tension and sometimes conflict between the demands of state and market on the one hand and the requirements of rational local community on the other. Those who value rational local communal enterprise are therefore wise to order their relationships with state and market so that, as far as possible, they remain able to draw upon those resources that can only be secured from state and market, while preserving their own sufficiency, their

³⁶⁶ MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’, 142.

self-reliance, and their freedom from constraint by either. They must treat the agencies of the state with unremitting suspicion.³⁶⁷

As Fergusson puts it, MacIntyre's 'fundamental objection is that the modern nation state cannot sustain the common good. By virtue of its presumed neutrality and its attempt to mediate between irreconcilables, the state lacks the moral commitment and resources to facilitate the common good.'³⁶⁸

MacIntyre's pessimism is not confined to purely political debate. He sees all institutions of the contemporary state as likely to be fatally flawed in the same way. Thus, for example, he devotes the final chapter of *Three Rival Versions* to the failings of contemporary academia (and writes similarly elsewhere). In similar vein, Hauerwas (who, as Stout considers in some detail,³⁶⁹ draws heavily on MacIntyre) frequently brings a very similar critique to bear particularly upon the field of medicine.³⁷⁰

An Alternative Account

If justified, this pessimism seems to offer little promise to the Anglican Bishops in their attempts to promote social justice through advocacy in the public sphere. But it is my view that the situation is far less dire than it is presented. With Stout, I contend that though the concerns MacIntyre raises are valid, and significant, they are not the whole story. I share Stout's view that there is more than enough evidence to support the argument that:

- the contemporary nation state is not so wholly in the thrall of external goods of power, status and wealth that all understanding of the virtues and of internal goods of excellence has been lost;
- nor is it so atomised that individualism has destroyed the capacity of various networks and relationships to play a genuine and constructive role in shaping our common life;
- concepts of the common good, human flourishing and our appropriate telos still retain some currency; and
- to a considerable extent, democratic debate functions as a social practice sufficiently well to allow some degree of substantive moral debate.

³⁶⁷ MacIntyre, 'Toleration', 142-3.

³⁶⁸ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism*, 152, quoting MacIntyre, 'Partial Response', 303.

³⁶⁹ For example, see *DaT*, Chapter 6.

³⁷⁰ For example, see the extensive references in the index of John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, eds, *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

Many of the essential building blocks of traditions of enquiry are to be found, even if in rough and ready form. So the question is how, and how far, we can utilise them in pursuit of ethical living.

I shall now consider Stout's approach in fuller detail, and discuss his reasons for drawing these conclusions; and then, in the following chapter, explore some of the ways these may make a concrete difference in practice. As in the previous chapter, I shall argue that we need to work not with the utopianism of theory (though here MacIntyre paints a dystopian picture), but in pursuit of a 'good enough' practical instantiation, which we discover, and indeed promote, through applying ourselves as best we can to 'going on and going further'. It is only by attempting to do this that we find the limits of what can be achieved – and we may often find we can achieve far more than we had anticipated.

As has been previously noted, MacIntyre's own practice indicates that he believes that this is an effort worth making, and worth persevering with, in the way he persists in engaging in debate within the context of the academy in particular.³⁷¹ The same is true of Hauerwas, who is generally characterised as being similarly negative, for example, when he makes such statements as 'at times and in some circumstances Christians will find it impossible to participate in government, in aspects of the economy, or in the educational system'.³⁷² Yet he too is a prolific speaker and writer, often engaging more directly in the political arena.

Going on and Going Further with Stout

Writing as 'an ethicist and a philosopher of religion by training', Stout's primary concern is to address 'discontents about objectivity and relativity in ethics, about the possibility of understanding or criticizing culture unlike our own, about how secular morality relates to the religious traditions concerning which philosophers nowadays say so little, and about the health of a culture like our own, in which we seem at times to have too many moral languages for coherent public discourse.'³⁷³ Though he rejects much of MacIntyre's 'story of decline and fall' in ethical debate, in other areas (not only criticism of the Enlightenment) he shares many of MacIntyre's fundamental assumptions, from the importance of a telos grounded in the reality of

³⁷¹ See also EaB, 342.

³⁷² Stanley Hauerwas, 'Why the "Sectarian Temptation" is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson', in Berkman and Cartwright, *Hauerwas Reader*, 106.

³⁷³ EaB, xi.

what it is to be human (including both our finitude and fallibility)³⁷⁴ through to the contextual nature of all moral reasoning. There are parallels between his concept of ‘moral languages’, found within some sort of relational structure or practice, and MacIntyre’s languages-in-use of communities of tradition – though the latter are more narrowly defined through stricter criteria. Like MacIntyre, he believes that, appropriately pursued, rational morality can be asserted that overcomes accusations of relativism.³⁷⁵ Though not a theist, he believes there is a necessary place for religious perspectives to be voiced within public discourse, and that this should be done on their own terms – since it is the attempt of faith communities to speak in the moral languages of secularisation (which suffer from all the failings associated with the enlightenment project’s attempt at context neutral objective discourse) which has been the major factor in their marginalisation in recent decades.³⁷⁶ He sums up his reasons:

My own argument for putting the critical study of religious ethics back on the intellectual agenda is threefold. First ... we cannot understand even the most secularized forms of moral discourse in contemporary society without understanding how the fate of religious ethics has played a role in their formation. Second, even if we are not persuaded to accept theological conclusions, the study of religious traditions may still teach us something of moral importance ... and finally, the secularization of public moral discourse – which has meant that most attempts at moral persuasion presented under the aegis of certain public institutions do not presuppose the truth of specific theological beliefs, given the religiously plural nature of the audience being addressed – does not mean that religious assumptions and categories play no essential role either in what people actually say as participants in public discourse or in the moral deliberations of many people in our society. If we want to understand our fellow citizens ... we had better develop the means for understanding the moral languages, including the theological ones, in which they occasionally address us and in which their deliberation is couched.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁴ EaB, 59, 226.

³⁷⁵ ‘As for moral relativism ... my strategy will be to divide and conquer. I’ll try to show that many things might be meant by the claim that morals are relative, that these various things need to be meticulously disentangled from one another, and once they are separated and examined with care we are not left with any compelling threat to the possibility of moral judgment per se in cross-cultural settings.’ EaB, 15.

³⁷⁶ EaB, 164-5.

³⁷⁷ EaB, 187-8.

To put it in MacIntyrean terms, Stout is arguing that to assert moral rationality requires those of no faith to engage with the faith communities, including on their terms. In doing this himself, Stout reaches some important – even if, for a non-theist, rather startling – conclusions:

... people can be justified in believing something even if they are unable to produce positive justifying arguments for believing it or arguments that can justify that belief to others. It also follows that two people can be justified in believing quite different sets of propositions. So if I am right about such matters, the problem of public theology in our day should not be conflated with problems pertaining to the rationality of religious individuals or the justification of particular beliefs they hold. I have been addressing the problem of public theology.³⁷⁸

Furthermore, while he says that ‘I have not been trying to demonstrate that theologians are irrational or that they are unjustified in believing what they believe about God,’ within a footnote he goes far further, in concurring that ‘The extent of my agreement with Wolterstorff in epistemological matters allows me to accept most of what the best proponents of [this particular reformed theological approach to faith and truth] have been saying recently about the rationality of religious belief (for some people) without accepting their religious assumptions.’³⁷⁹

In summary, therefore, Stout’s objective, and the context in and reasons for which he pursues it, align closely with mine, of enunciating philosophical resources to assist those such as the Anglican Bishops in promoting, and participating fully in, just such public moral discourse.

Stout’s Pragmatism

As with MacIntyre’s insistence that we take time to ‘sing the blues’, though Stout calls for us to do our best in ensuring we hold justified moral beliefs, ‘applying the standards we’ve got as rigorously as we can, all the while trying to improve them as we go’, he also is clear that the standards of our practices ‘cannot be impossibly utopian or unconnected with ordinary belief without becoming irrelevant.’³⁸⁰ His answer to this tension between ideal and practice is to take a much more ‘pragmatic’ approach – one that deems *phronesis*, practical wisdom, as a, even the, ‘cardinal moral

³⁷⁸ EaB, 187.

³⁷⁹ EaB, n.35, 319.

³⁸⁰ EaB, 59.

virtue', which, when it comes to matters of fact and truth, is 'as important to science as it is to textual interpretation or to ethical discernment'.³⁸¹

MacIntyre accords a similarly central place to phronesis, using Aristotle's term in his contemporary account of ethical, moral living, though tending towards the utopian ideal in the way that he presents his arguments. In contrast, Stout grapples with the messy complexities of actual contemporary society, an approach he describes as bricolage. By this, he – approvingly – means 'every moralist's need to engage in selective retrieval and eclectic reconfiguration of traditional linguistic elements in hope of solving problems at hand' and, in doing so, developing a moral language that finds expression within a community.³⁸² It is thus a much more ragged bottom-up undertaking than what we might call MacIntyre's top-down approach, and therefore might be seen as falling far short of the sort of criteria and standards to which MacIntyre points.

But Stout's insistence on, within reason, always working from where one finds oneself towards a higher degree of morality, rationality, and effective action, brings him onto a convergent path with MacIntyre's approach when practically instantiated. Indeed, he describes both Aquinas and MacIntyre as, in their own ways, effectively bricoleurs.³⁸³ And though MacIntyre may set out a systematic method for engaging with alternative perspectives and changing context and taking account of what is pertinent to our circumstances, his requirement that we do so comprehensively – testing our convictions against all possible alternatives – is little different in substance from Stout's bricoleur who sifts through anything and everything that can come to hand with considerable thoroughness so that whatever is useful may be identified and incorporated. Though Stout insists that bricolage is the work of an individual, while MacIntyre requires critical evaluation and revision to be conducted within a community of tradition, Stout makes it clear that bricolage does not take the place of the development of moral languages in a community (however loosely that community accords with MacIntyre's 'community of tradition'). Rather, 'acts of bricolage' can 'nudge the common moral language'. These are the contributions that individuals can make to the wider pursuit of moral rationality within the community,

³⁸¹ EaB, 296-7.

³⁸² EaB, 293-4.

³⁸³ EaB, 76, 211. See also DaT, 126, where Stout says that MacIntyre's fuller consideration of Aquinas' processes and objectives in WJWR reflects more accurately this bricolage approach than the 'highly misleading picture of Aquinas as a rigid system-builder' in AV. Bricolage also reflects Aquinas' far wider range of sources than initially acknowledged by MacIntyre, as noted in chapter 2, which Stout affirms in EaB, 75.

even loosely defined, to which they belong.³⁸⁴ (Indeed, this account is valuable in addressing criticisms of MacIntyre’s appropriation of Aquinas, who worked largely alone, though within the wider context of a religious community of tradition.)

Given this degree of coherence between the two approaches, I shall consider Stout’s ‘selective retrieval’ of MacIntyre’s work from the perspective of assessing whether it provides a ‘good enough’ basis for those such as the Anglican Bishops effectively to attempt to ‘go on and go further’ in public debate within liberal democratic society.

Stout’s Practical Optimism

Despite Stout’s considerable sympathy with the analysis of the Enlightenment project offered by MacIntyre, he believes this does not automatically lead to the pessimistic conclusion that ‘modern moral discourse has suffered a great catastrophe, leaving us in conceptual disarray’. He takes issue with MacIntyre’s claim that ‘the “new dark ages” have come to pass, that the only way to restore the common good and the virtues to their proper place is to withdraw into small communities not divided by fundamental moral disagreements and competing moral concepts’.³⁸⁵

Stout challenges MacIntyre’s negativity on the basis of MacIntyre’s own arguments, pointing out that while he bewails the current lack of a ‘shared, public rational justification for morality’, he does not conclude from this that ‘there can be no such thing as moral knowledge.’ For the fact that, in earlier periods of history, there has been considerable agreement on, as MacIntyre puts it, ‘man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos’, demonstrates that it has been possible to sustain rational discourse ‘on conduct, character and community’ in the public arena. It is because it has been possible in the past, says Stout, that MacIntyre aims at ‘recovering something like an Aristotelian teleological framework and tailoring our inherited moral languages to fit’ in order to ‘render moral discourse rational again’.³⁸⁶

Stout is prepared to agree that questions of humanity’s telos or common good are central to moral debate, and that these are not merely for philosophical deliberation, but are best ‘embodied in the habits, dispositions, shared assumptions and goals of a living community dedicated to the common good’ – which is a far cry

³⁸⁴ EaB, 338. The significance of bricolage is stressed in an extended section within this Postscript addition to the second edition.

³⁸⁵ EaB, 6.

³⁸⁶ EaB, 211.

from contemporary society at large. However, he believes that MacIntyre's criteria for communities of tradition, and requirement for a high degree of commensurability in relation to telos and evaluative practices, are far more stringent than necessary for substantial and effective dialogue to take place. In a key passage, he writes:

I am prepared to agree that complete absence of agreement on the good would render rational moral discourse impossible. I am also prepared to grant that our agreement on the good falls well short of perfect harmony. Furthermore, liberal institutions are plausibly viewed as an attempt to manage collective life in the absence of perfect agreement on "man-as-he-would-be-if-he-realized-his-telos." But MacIntyre does not exclude, it seems to me, the possibility that moral discourse in our society can itself be understood as held together by a relatively limited but nonetheless real and significant agreement on the good.³⁸⁷

For, Stout goes on to argue, while 'we are not united in consensus around a particular theory of human nature or man's ultimate telos, and so our disagreements about certain moral issues have proved especially difficult to resolve' it must nonetheless also be recognised that 'our disagreement about what human beings are like and what is good for us does not go all the way down.'³⁸⁸

His reasons for this echo the arguments recounted in the last chapter, that to disagree about something entails at least a degree of agreement about the contested subject: 'Complete disagreement about something leaves us unable to identify a common matter to disagree over. It therefore makes sense to speak of disagreement, in morals as much as elsewhere, only if we are prepared to recognize a background of agreement. It would be a mistake, then, to think that our disagreement on the good is total or that the areas of apparently intractable moral disagreement to which MacIntyre calls attention could be the whole story.'³⁸⁹ In his Postscript to the second edition of *Ethics after Babel*, Stout defends himself against Hauerwas' charge that here he 'leans too heavily on Donald Davidson's philosophy of language'.³⁹⁰ While to some degree

³⁸⁷ EaB, 211-2.

³⁸⁸ EaB, 212.

³⁸⁹ EaB, 212.

³⁹⁰ The question of disagreement between MacIntyre, Stout and Hauerwas rests not so much on how accurate or otherwise their various appropriations of Davidson's writings (which have been described as susceptible to 'a range of interpretations and assessments' – see 'Donald Davidson', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 29 June 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/davidson/>) but rather the implications of those views which they ascribe to Davidson for the wider argument each offers. Stout, in responding to

accepting the criticism, he stresses that his underlying concern is to bring the focus onto the point at which incommensurability occurs (in other words, to serve as a diagnostic tool, much as I proposed in the previous chapter). He is well aware that disagreements can arise in different ways, because of different propositions, different perspectives, or different cultures, and that often debate can be about the criteria for making moral judgements.³⁹¹ In response to Hauerwas he says ‘If disagreement is the key concern, then it falls to MacIntyre to say how much and what kind of disagreement it takes to make a discursive practice hopelessly unstable or unsustainable.’³⁹² His concern is that MacIntyre ‘shares the skeptics’ tendency to move too quickly from specific instances of disagreement to the conclusion that all is lost’³⁹³ and so fails to grasp – and indeed deters others from grasping – the very real opportunities that exist for taking debate forward.

And so Stout offers evidence for sufficient common ground for some degree of effective debate over differences on moral questions having historically existed, and been sustained. This is certainly true of Western European history over recent centuries and the context of evolving liberal society. While the extent of debate and depth of agreement reached through it may have been very limited, it has proved itself to be ‘good enough’:

... even though we no longer share a single theory of human nature (when did we exactly?) ... most of us do agree on what might be called the provisional telos of our society. What made the creation of liberal institutions necessary, in large part, was the manifest failure of religious groups of various sorts to establish rational agreement on their competing detailed visions of the good. It was partly because people recognized putting an end to religious warfare and intolerance as a moral good – as rationally preferable to continued attempts at imposing a more nearly complete vision of the good by force – that

Hauerwas, asserts that he merely attributes to Davidson a claim (that ‘disagreement on any topic cannot go too far down without becoming merely verbal’) that is widely held within the philosophy of language and uncontroversial; and that he is not reliant on Davidson’s ‘more controversial claims’ such as in Donald Davidson, ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, in Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). That said, it was to this work that he referred in the first edition of *EaB*, and therefore Hauerwas has some justification for pressing Stout on his usage of Davidson. *EaB*, 344 and n.18, 357; with prior references at 19, n.4, 306.

³⁹¹ *EaB*, 3.

³⁹² *EaB*, 345.

³⁹³ *EaB*, 45.

liberal institutions have been able to get a foothold here and there around the globe.³⁹⁴

He goes on to say that at the broad level of society, we may well have managed better through having only a loosely defined shared view of the good, recognising that to attempt too tight a definition might actually have been detrimental to stable society. ‘We can define our shared conception of the good as the set of all platitudinous judgments employing such terms as good, better than, and the like.’³⁹⁵

It is thus characteristic of Stout’s approach to grasp whatever is offered with both hands, and to see what can be made from it. Even agreement over platitudes can become an effective basis for then tackling sharper questions: ‘Admittedly, it does not extend far enough to eliminate disagreement on many matters of importance. Where we do disagree on such matters, that is where we should expect the complexity of our conceptual heritage to show itself, both as a resource and as a problem.’³⁹⁶ Stout thus challenges the faith communities to resource ethical debate, through, in MacIntyrean terms, giving as good account of ourselves as we can, on our own terms – but also (employing ‘bilingualism’ as far as we can) in terms that our interlocutors can grasp.

Stout is also prepared to work with agreements on humanity’s good, or other moral questions, that are reached for differing reasons: ‘clearly, not everyone who participates in the consensus would offer the same sorts of reasons for the particular judgments we in fact share. But that does not make the consensus ineffective or insignificant.’ And it may not even be necessary for us to give the reasons for our conclusions, when we reach agreement: ‘Furthermore, while there are times when, in response to Socratic questioning or an especially knotty dilemma, we’re unsure how to carry on with our reason-giving, there are vast regions of moral terrain in which we carry on perfectly well.’

Where there is some degree of agreement, for whatever reasons, it offers us the chance to go forward together in pursuing this shared practical goal for living, and to do so with a degree of confidence about our way of living harmoniously through our diversity: ‘If something like this alternative picture could be sustained, we should be less tempted to see moral discourse in our culture as simply incapable of supporting rational argumentation.’³⁹⁷ Our confidence in working with what

³⁹⁴ EaB, 212.

³⁹⁵ EaB, 212.

³⁹⁶ EaB, 213.

³⁹⁷ EaB, 213.

agreement we can muster, for whatever reasons, should not be undermined by differences of fundamental approach. For we must recognise that these are likely to exist, especially in relation to longstanding conflicts, and are not easily reconcilable or we would have solved them. ‘Strict consensus on the good would, in some respects, be very good to have,’ he admits, but even without it, ‘overlapping consensus, however, remains substantial enough to do a lot of ordinary justificatory work that MacIntyre tends not to mention – the sort of work we tend to undervalue precisely because it provides a background against which our disagreements occur.’

Stout therefore warns against setting too stringent conditions for commensurability, and stresses that though ‘only very rarely, if ever, are human societies of any size and complexity united in perfect agreement on the common good’, nonetheless, we have still managed to sustain considerable agreement over how we handle fundamental differences, especially in the religious arena, where ‘most of us agree that extending legal protection to peaceful fellow citizens who disagree with us religiously is better than starting the religious wars up again.’³⁹⁸

Stout concedes that at a philosophical level it could be argued that agreement at this level of ‘platitudes’ might not amount to very much. But in practice it is hugely significant that we can in this way step back from such potential conflict. Thus he concludes that, when it comes to agreements based on such platitudes, ‘we have no choice but to treat them as justified, as ways in which we construe ourselves and our world, at least until we come up with something clearly better. Without some such platitudes in place, we could not even make sense of the doubts we have about this or that detail.’ In concrete terms, we should not despise the effect of even these limited levels of agreement. And while he nonetheless calls on competent philosophers and theologians to work at deepening and broadening the basis of our mutual understanding, he insists that we should not deride less than perfect attempts to tackle issues of disagreement.

Democracy Viewed as a Tradition

Therefore, Stout’s underlying conclusion from *Ethics After Babel* is that, while MacIntyre is by no means wrong in his negative account of ‘the Enlightenment Project’, he goes too far in his sweeping condemnation of the contemporary nation state as a locus for pursuing ethical debate and human flourishing. Not all present day

³⁹⁸ EaB, 214.

liberalism reflects a fully-blown Rawlsian social-contract position³⁹⁹ (and Stout criticises both liberal and communitarian or traditionalist theorists for feeding off exaggerated versions of each other's positions⁴⁰⁰). A pragmatic approach, rooted in careful reflection on how contemporary western societies largely do manage to operate, should, says Stout, lead us to conclude that to a considerable degree, contemporary liberalism when expressed through this sort of democracy is indeed a tradition in the best of MacIntyre's senses, for democratic debate operates as an effective enough social practice through which we can, rather more than cannot, debate and pursue what it means for human beings to flourish. And within such a context – a context that is pluralist in nature – there is a necessary place for the contribution of self-aware, well-considered, religious perspectives.

Stout is therefore committed to 'the role of free public reason in a political culture that includes conflicting religious conceptions of the good' as he puts it, in what he calls 'Rawlsian terms'. This is at the heart of his second book, *Democracy and Tradition*. He offers the following useful summary:

Democracy, I shall argue, is a tradition. It inculcates certain habits of reasoning, certain attitudes towards defence and authority in political discussion, and love for certain goods and virtues, as well as a disposition to respond to certain types of actions, events, or persons with admiration, pity or horror. This tradition is anything but empty. Its ethical substance, however, is more a matter of enduring attitudes, concerns, dispositions, and patterns of conduct than it is a matter of agreement on a conception of justice in Rawls' sense. The notion of state neutrality and the reason-tradition dichotomy should not be seen as its defining marks. Rawlsian liberalism should not be seen as its official mouthpiece.⁴⁰¹

Alongside the various MacIntyrean fundamental building blocks listed here, Stout adds the need for debate to be matched with action; for mutual holding to account, particularly of those in leadership roles; for all citizens to 'accept some measure of responsibility for the condition of society' including on 'the political arrangements it makes for itself' and to 'reflect philosophically on their common life'; and for normative commitments to be 'constantly in dispute, subject to revision, and not fully determinate'.

³⁹⁹ DaT, 2.

⁴⁰⁰ DaT, 75-6.

⁴⁰¹ DaT, 3.

He points also to the capacity of contemporary discourse to speak out against the dominance of self-serving ‘external goods’ of which MacIntyre warns – the undue influence of money, power and the narrow interests of institutions and interest groups, and adds ‘The democratic practice of giving and asking for ethical reasons, I argue, is where the life of democracy principally resides.’⁴⁰² The parallels with MacIntyre’s moral rationality are extensive, and on this basis Stout asserts that ‘Public philosophy as I conceive of it is an exercise in expressive rationality.’

Stout sums up ‘the political vision’ in this volume by pointing to ‘two thoughts’ from the writings of John Dewey. The first is found in the following quote:

The old saying that the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy is not apt if it means that the evils may be remedied by introducing more machinery of the same kind as that which already exists, or by refining and perfecting that machinery. But the phrase may also indicate the need of returning to the idea itself, of clarifying and deepening our apprehension of it, and of employing our sense of its meaning to criticize and remake its political manifestations ... the prime difficulty ... is that of discovering the means by which a scattered, mobile and manifold public may so recognize itself as to define and express its interests. This discovery is necessarily precedent to any fundamental change in the machinery.⁴⁰³

In this way, Stout affirms the prime role, as identified by MacIntyre, played by humanity’s common good (for it is in this sense that Dewey speaks of the public’s ‘interests’). This is reflected in his second ‘thought’ from Dewey, that ‘democracy is a “social idea” as well as a system of government. “The idea remains barren save as it is incarnated in human relationships”’.⁴⁰⁴

That evaluation of humanity’s good, and of our evaluative processes for refining our understanding of this, is the second anchoring concern for Stout, again as for MacIntyre, is reflected in a quote from Rebecca Chop:

... democracy is never just a set of laws about equal and fair treatment. Rather, it is an ongoing interpretation of itself, an ongoing production of new

⁴⁰² DaT, 4-6.

⁴⁰³ DaT, 6, citing J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, Ohio, Swallow Press, 1927) 144.

⁴⁰⁴ DaT, 6, citing Dewey, *The Public*, 146, 143.

practices and narratives, of new values and forms of social and personal life that constitute a democracy.⁴⁰⁵

Stout pulls these thoughts together with a further quote from Dewey that roots democracy within community life and its lived realities, in order to ‘reach an idea of democracy which is not utopian’.⁴⁰⁶

Stout concludes his argument with the assertion ‘Democracy is a culture, a tradition, in its own right’ and sums up his own practically based approach by adding ‘Pragmatism is best viewed as an attempt to bring the notions of democratic deliberation and tradition together in a single philosophical vision. To put the point aphoristically and paradoxically, pragmatism is democratic traditionalism. Less paradoxically, one could say that pragmatism is the philosophical space in which democratic rebellion against hierarchy combines with traditionalist love of virtue to form a new intellectual tradition that is indebted to both.’⁴⁰⁷

In his later volume, Stout finds MacIntyre’s account of moral rationality rooted in communities of tradition, as expounded in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* rather more satisfying than that in *After Virtue* alone, and to a significant degree affirms what MacIntyre affirms. But he takes issue, as before, with much of what MacIntyre denies, in relation to the possibility of substantive moral rational discourse within the public arena. My contention is that, as before, we have misunderstood what MacIntyre is asking of us, if we try to apply his ‘utopian’ theory, in all its absoluteness, to practical situations. Stout’s ‘hands-on’ approach is in practice building on precisely what MacIntyre advocates – as is reflected in how the essential elements MacIntyre promotes are all incorporated, in much the ways that MacIntyre outlines. As I shall describe further in the following chapter, such flexibility in interpretation is rather more implicit within MacIntyre’s account than Stout seems to have recognised (though he is right to have serious misgivings over the potential of MacIntyre’s sweepingly dismissive rhetoric to undermine the committed practice of democratic debate).

Thus, in contrast to the apparent pessimism that comes from viewing MacIntyre’s methodology from the perspective of idealised theory, we find Stout’s

⁴⁰⁵ DaT, 6, quoting Rebecca S. Chopp, ‘From Patriarchy into Freedom: A Conversation between American Feminist Theology and French Feminism’, in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, edited by Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 237.

⁴⁰⁶ DaT, 6, quoting Dewey, *The Public*, 149

⁴⁰⁷ DaT, 13 – emphases in original.

pragmatic, practically based, approach prepared to work with, and build on, even the most slender grounds for agreement and commensurability – grounds that he nonetheless defines in terms comparable with MacIntyre’s. This, he says, can have significant tangible results. The lesson he advances is that one should always attempt ‘to go on and go further’ in practice, because it is only then one finds out what is possible and what is not. Often we will find that live options are far more extensive than we might have imagined. Further, he points to the resources that are offered by those who are prepared to engage in such debates – that through engaging, especially where we are able to give a good account of our own perspectives, we make a concrete contribution to both the conduct and content of debate, and can potentially enrich the substance of what is agreed, including through promoting better evaluative practices. In this way, he is advocating we treat the practice of democracy as potentially able to operate as a ‘good enough’ tradition, by MacIntyre’s definition, for sustaining substantive debate about and promotion of the common good – something that neither he nor MacIntyre appear to have explicitly in these clear terms.

In the next chapter I turn to consider what this means in practice, and shall argue at greater length for proceeding on a basis of always engaging optimistically (all other considerations being equal), as the best means of promoting the greatest, and the most justifiable, agreement on the common good, and, in addition, as the best means of contributing to the development of a context in which ethical and moral debate can most fruitfully taken forward. Specifically, I shall look at the implications of Stout’s ‘selective retrieval’ of MacIntyre’s work, in the ways he says ‘we can benefit greatly from his concept of social practices, his understanding of their relation to institution, and his distinction between internal and external goods.’⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ EaB, 1.

Chapter 5 – MacIntyre against MacIntyre

In chapters 2 and 3, I made the case that there needs only to be ‘good enough’ commensurability for communities of tradition to pursue substantive ethical deliberations. When it comes to meeting MacIntyre’s apparently stringent criteria for a high degree of compatibility between conceptions of telos and evaluative practices, we⁴⁰⁹ will find in practice that to be ‘good enough’ is quite sufficient. What precisely ‘good enough’ means can, I argued, only be identified through attempting to ‘go on and go further’ until we encounter its limits. And I asserted that, furthermore, through attempting to ‘go on and go further’ together, the two communities concerned not only discover how great their capacity is for mutual engagement, they also contribute to broadening and deepening both the moral rationality of each and the scope of what it is possible for them to agree upon. The corollary also holds: to refrain from making an attempt at dialogue (unless there are good reasons to do so on other grounds) undermines our assertion of moral rationality. For this excludes alternative perspectives of which we ought to take account, and impedes the potential of the parties concerned to go forward into greater understanding of each other, and of what it means to live well.

The task of this chapter is to explore parallel practical possibilities for ethical debate and democratic discourse, where one or all of the parties are not members of fully fledged communities of tradition. I do so against the background of the more theoretical considerations explored in the previous chapter. What is at issue is the extent to which, even though they fall short of MacIntyre’s descriptions of what is required to pursue the moral rational life, ‘good enough’ approximations to communities of tradition and all that they embody are readily to be found throughout contemporary Western society – contrary to what he appears to assert, particularly in his major volumes. This is so because within contemporary society, in various ways, people can, and many do, enjoy a degree of appreciation of the virtues, excellence and the distinction between internal and external goods, and share some understanding of genuine human flourishing. This provides a context for sufficiently developed conceptually-rooted languages-in-use that are capable of sustaining an effective level of moral debate, through habits of democratic discourse that reflect a MacIntyrean social practice to at least some adequate degree. Through positive engagement, I shall

⁴⁰⁹ In this and subsequent chapters, I shall tend to refer to members of communities of tradition as ‘we’, believing that Anglicanism fulfils MacIntyre’s criteria well enough to be considered as such; and mindful also of his insistence that there is no neutral place from which I can aspire to write.

argue, we shall find that we can ‘go on and go further’ in ethical debate than MacIntyre suggests is possible. More than this, in doing so we can contribute to enhancing the ability of other members of our societies, and the institutions through which they operate, better to understand what it means to live with moral rationality and promote the common good. Furthermore, particularly through the application of Stout’s ‘stereoscopic social criticism’, in which he advocates particular application of the concepts of internal and external goods, we can help guard ourselves and warn others against the traps which come with the institutionalisation that is (as MacIntyre acknowledges) an inevitable part of the ordering of society and nation.⁴¹⁰

There is much at stake. As Stout puts it, ‘human societies have always shown great diversity in moral belief, language and practice. Whatever the extent of present-day diversity, however, modern conditions confront us with it close up every day. We must either devise means for living with this fact of modern life or be at each other’s throats.’⁴¹¹ For such as the Anglican Bishops, it is not good enough merely to live with the facts of religious pluralism and multiculturalism. Their commitment is to engage in public discourse as fully as possible, by the most appropriate means, in order to pursue not only peaceful coexistence, but also communication of their own beliefs and their reasons for them, and, in addition, to promote social justice and in other ways contribute to human flourishing across the whole of society as best they can.

This is no easy task. Neither effective communication nor fundamental agreement on heartfelt issues is guaranteed, no matter how hard we try. To quote Stout again, ‘We don’t always know what to say next to each other, how to keep the argument going in the face of someone else’s bewildered state or persistent objections. At times, there seems no alternative to coercion. All this seems clear.’⁴¹² But, like Stout, I am concerned that we should not lose heart, when faced with MacIntyre’s dispiriting account of contemporary society: ‘I worry that MacIntyre, although no skeptic himself, mirrors the skeptic’s hasty passage from examples of protracted disagreement to an excessively bleak prognosis concerning the possibility of rational moral discourse. I suspect that, in reaching his conclusions, he both underestimates the level of agreement on the good actually exhibited by our society and overestimates the level required for us to reason coherently with each other on most matters of common concern.’

⁴¹⁰ AV, 194.

⁴¹¹ EaB, 212.

⁴¹² EaB, 212.

I turn now to consider not just the levels of agreement required for, and found in, society's ethical discourse, but also the characteristics of MacIntyre's other criteria for functioning communities of tradition and the moral rationality they support. As has been noted before, there are several strands that are intimately interrelated, which is reflected in the interwoven account that follows. My general approach is to use MacIntyre against himself, through pointing up unacknowledged implications of his descriptions of moral deliberation or setting the more subtle and textured accounts that are to be found within his writings against the starker assertions for which he is better known. In more recent articles he largely takes up his own repeated challenge that there is 'work yet to be done'⁴¹³, and, through providing more detailed arguments and explanations (often in response to the critiques of others – and in this, he is modelling the processes he advocates), he gives grounds for a more nuanced interpretation and application of his theory.

Good Enough Communities

I shall begin by reviewing in more detail at what it means in practice to belong to a community of tradition, before moving to consider associations that are not fully-fledged communities in MacIntyre's strict sense, and the possibilities for substantive ethical discourse with, or between, these. As we have seen, his position, broadly stated, is that to be truly rational and moral, an individual must belong to a 'community of tradition' and pursue a life through which run overarching coherence and singleness of purpose, directed towards an appropriate telos. However, the detailed picture he presents provides a rather more complex and finely-tuned account.

In chapter 2, I recorded how MacIntyre argues that it is our all-encompassing teleology that allows us to reach such coherence in the complexities of life. MacIntyre cites Aquinas' description of how we inevitably live by juggling various limited or short-term goals within the wider goal of our lives. We manage, with greater or lesser success, to perform a balancing act of pursuing multiple goods, multiple ends, within the multiplicity of the contexts and opportunities available to us. Our ability to organise our priorities is conditioned, Aquinas says, by our overarching end, and it is in the light of this that we are able to order our concerns.⁴¹⁴ This underlines the fundamental importance of discerning the truth of our telos as far as we are reasonably able, since it is to such a significant degree the touchstone of whether or not we do live

⁴¹³ For example, Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Poetry as Political Philosophy', in MacIntyre, *Ethics and Politics*, 171; and MacIntyre, 'Philosophy Recalled', 196.

⁴¹⁴ MacIntyre, 'Aquinas and the Extent of Moral Disagreement', 71.

‘well’. Furthermore, as Aristotle had earlier argued, such a ranking of goods is not done by individuals apart from the wider community, and though the particular goods of particular individuals will differ according to their circumstances, they are to be discovered alongside the process of identifying and pursuing the good of the overall community.⁴¹⁵ In this way, sub-narratives are integrated into fuller narratives, as we continue to ask ourselves ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’⁴¹⁶

In practice this means that we are likely to find ourselves members of various different, often overlapping, groupings or sub-groupings devoted to the furtherance of some or other genuine good – since it is through such sustained relationships that these internal goods of excellence, and the social practices that support them, are predominantly to be found. Both MacIntyre and Stout see some sort of intermediate structure lying between family and nation-state in size as the best locus for this. MacIntyre considers at some length⁴¹⁷ the importance of various types of local communities as the vehicles for ‘shared deliberative rationality,’ even though, given the realities of humanity, this will inevitably be less than wholly perfect (and he warns against assuming that community-level organisations are automatically directed towards the genuine good). Nonetheless, at their best they are ‘moving in the right direction’ in their ability to conceive of, and pursue, a common good in which individual and corporate life can thrive with an expectation of both giving and receiving. And they are able to make provision for their vulnerable members – also a prerequisite of fully rational and moral life. They are sufficiently small-scale to allow effective networks of ‘face-to-face encounters and conversations’ yet sufficiently large to allow a certain degree of self-sufficiency. This is the context in which individuals and the community are to work out the precise form of Thomistic Aristotelianism appropriate to their historical and geographical situation – even though they remain in touch with the broader tradition through time and space.

In this way we may find ourselves members of chess clubs, music societies or sports teams, of volunteer groups and parent-teacher associations, of trade unions or professional organisations; we may be members of civil society bodies or local activist networks, and we may belong to our local church or another faith community.⁴¹⁸ On MacIntyre’s account, the last of these is likely to be the community within which we can most fully find our overall telos and which provides us with an overarching

⁴¹⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians’, 33-5.

⁴¹⁶ AV, 216.

⁴¹⁷ DRA, Chapter 11; see also AV, Chapter 14.

⁴¹⁸ AV, Chapter 14.

narrative for the ordering of our lives. Insofar as we allow ourselves to be guided by the best practices of such a community of tradition, we can and should judge between the various ‘goods’ that are available to us in this way. We are thus, he says, able both to make choices between what might appear to be competing goods, and to integrate our various different allegiances within a coherent whole.⁴¹⁹

This is easier said than done. Stout doubts that, in practice, ordering among rival goods is straightforward, citing Martha Nussbaum on the all too often competing demands of professional and family life.⁴²⁰ Clergy, who ought, on MacIntyre’s analysis, to be better than most at weighing proximate options against ultimate ends, are notoriously bad at balancing church and domestic commitments! The situation is further complicated by the lack of homogeneity even within well-articulated and mature traditions, since every individual member brings their own particularities, such as age, ability, experience, and character, as well as through differing roles in public and private, such as parent / spouse, our profession, our hobbies and so forth. Each must find their own path, since there are no ‘one-size fits all’ answers – though there may well be considerable consensus in many areas that not everything that is permissible is necessarily wise (for example, the risks that come with pursuing a genuine skill in playing poker). We need to keep our choices under review, and allow ourselves to be held accountable by others (particularly those skilled members of our communities who, while sharing our overarching goals, live them out in different ways – and this points to the inevitability of some level of ongoing debate over limits of acceptable diversity within the community).

But it seems that most of us, whether members of communities of tradition (and thus trained in the practices of how best to orient our lives) or not, most of the time, are ‘good enough’ at this balancing act. Our frustrations when we cannot manage to do so reflect some apprehension that it is worth striving to find such coherence, and that this is preferable to the disjunctions of the ‘compartmentalization’ of ‘role-structured activity’, which, says MacIntyre disparagingly, increasingly proliferate in ‘modern’ Western society. In this scenario, the virtues and all that follow from them are replaced by arbitrary ‘cost-benefit analysis’ standards of

⁴¹⁹ AV, Chapter 15.

⁴²⁰ EaB, 289 and n.18, 330.

evaluation which differ between discrete roles, and also leave us with no rational means of judging between the various demands on our time or options open to us.⁴²¹

But the reality is nowhere near so bleak. For, as MacIntyre has himself insisted, within contemporary society we find many activities and groupings which do deliver internal goods of excellence through well-developed social practices. They are able to train young people, or other new members, and promote their primary purposes. In order to do this, they must have developed some practice-embedded language-in-use, to articulate and communicate such matters. Though these languages-in-use are underdeveloped in relation to those of fully-fledged communities of tradition, the continuance of the grouping indicates that they must nonetheless be ‘good enough’ to sustain social practices and internal goods, and thus also some sense of the virtues and moral perspectives that underlie these.

In this respect they are close to what Stout describes as the ‘moral languages’ of ‘sub-cultures’, which may begin as ‘moral pidgin’ but become sufficiently enriched to be able to sustain some degree of moral reflection.⁴²² Writing when only *After Virtue* of MacIntyre’s trilogy was published, Stout described his moral languages as lying between the two poles MacIntyre appeared to offer, of, on the one hand, the fully-fledge ‘language-in-use’ of a community of tradition, with its speakers sharing an extensive common outlook, or, on the other, the sort of largely deracinated speech of the public space which, he held, was unable to sustain substantive moral discourse.⁴²³ Once again, MacIntyre’s stark dichotomy must be taken with a pinch of salt. For while Stout accepts MacIntyre’s assertion that the language of, say, playing the violin, or medicine, or education, is nobody’s ‘first language’⁴²⁴ with all the consequent inadequacies for addressing the whole of life, nonetheless, competence in a social practice – of which MacIntyre gives many examples – requires there to be an adequate language-in-use with adequately fluent speakers within the ambit of the practice in question. Indeed, where people are members of a number of such organisations, they will learn to speak a number of moral languages.

Among the members of a fully-fledged community of tradition, at least some will be able to develop translational fluency between the well-developed language-in-

⁴²¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Moral philosophy and contemporary social practice: what holds them apart?’ in MacIntyre, *Tasks of Philosophy*, 114-20.

⁴²² EaB, Chapter 3, also 294.

⁴²³ EaB, 216-7.

⁴²⁴ EaB, 270.

use of the community, and various less-developed moral languages.⁴²⁵ The former – with its implicit comprehensive telos – provides us with our touchstone for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the sub-cultures as expressed on their own terms. In this way it is open to us to weigh their various merits, and decide on our priorities and commitments in a more fully rational way than those who do not have such a single appropriate telos to guide them. (This includes our judgements about which groups we shall not join.) Nonetheless, even the partial appreciation of genuine goods of excellence and so forth that such people enjoy means that they will have some basis for appropriately judging between various groupings, that is far from the ‘arbitrary’, ‘costs-benefit analyses’ that MacIntyre suggested.

Of course, though it is morally rational to give our loyalty to those groupings which contribute to a more adequate answer to ‘How then shall we live?’ all of us sometimes make poor choices, or deliberately decide to become involved in activities and groups that are not actually in our, or others, best interests. This may be, so to speak, the result of ignorance, weakness or deliberate fault. It is part of the fallibility and moral irrationality that are an inevitable part of our human make up.

Nonetheless, from the foregoing we can conclude that there are far wider possibilities in practice for some who are members of communities of tradition to engaging in various ways with organisations that are less than fully realised communities of tradition than an initial reading of MacIntyre’s approach might suggest. It will not always be easy, and the conclusions we should draw may sometimes be ambiguous at best. But, once again, there is far greater scope for ‘going on and going further’ than merely two starkly drawn options.

Engaging with Sub-Cultures

Important corollaries follow from the preparedness of those of us who have some training in the conduct of some community of tradition to engage with these organisations and activities. For we are able to contribute from across the breadth of our skills to help other members of these organisations improve everything from their abilities to grasp more fully what constitutes true human flourishing and to refine their goals in this light, through to identifying genuine internal goods and unmasking external goods and other risks from over-institutionalisation; from enriching the moral

⁴²⁵ In chapter 7 I shall go on to argue that this is a skill that communities of tradition such as the churches ought to develop more intentionally among their members.

language as a vehicle for moral debate through to promoting associated practices of ethical rational enquiry.

For it cannot be the case that those who are not members of fully-fledged communities of tradition, but who participate in such activities, are incapable of some recognition of genuine goods, and how to maintain them through social practices embedded in human associations. If that were so, then such associations and activities could not be sustained – as they clearly are, in all manner of ways in our societies. Even if their abilities are underdeveloped, they already have some awareness of moral language, and what it is to be moral and rational, according to MacIntyre's criteria. They are not the wholly alienated individuals who, according to MacIntyre, would have to undergo radical conversion in order to be able to grasp the moral rationality of a community of tradition (as described above in chapter 3). Indeed, given the widespread nature of bodies that promote social practices, the number of such people who exist in practice is likely to be very small indeed. (I discuss how we conduct debate with such people in the following chapter.)

The contribution that we can make in many respects parallels bringing up young people within communities of tradition. Through the clear teaching of parents and other skilled practitioners, but also through example and through being drawn in to participate ever more fully in the rational moral life, children of a community grow in understanding and ability. Generous engagement with associations promoting social practices can offer similar training opportunities, through exposure to best practice.

In the previous chapter I noted Stout's conclusion that it is possible for two people to be justified in believing quite different sets of propositions, a view which elsewhere he recalls that Hauerwas also espouses.⁴²⁶ It is thus possible for others to accept that a religious perspective is rational, without being required to accept the underlying religious assumptions. Christians such as the Anglican Bishops should therefore not feel inhibited in communicating their beliefs explicitly on their own terms, for fear this is inevitably 'imposing' their convictions on others. Rather, they should see, and explicitly present, this as the best way of demonstrating what it means to have justifiable convictions, and of encouraging others to aspire to moral rational living through similar processes. Of course, the ultimate objective of the Churches is that others should also come to share the Christian faith, but within mainstream

⁴²⁶ DaT, 177.

Anglican tradition ‘seeking to transform unjust structures of society’⁴²⁷ through effective argument is itself regarded as a valuable achievement.

Yet to communicate what we believe and how, the most effective way is the dual approach of both speaking in our own language-in-use, and also using our translational skills to engage others on their own terms, through the moral language of their grouping (which of course also encompasses the whole conceptual framework in which it is embedded). In order to express more fully the breadth and depth of moral rationality, we are likely to have to provide ‘enrichment’ of the moral language in much the same ways that MacIntyre has described for exchanges between traditions. (And, as before, this may be a task for particular individuals in relation to particular moral languages.) Whatever level of awareness, ability and fluency we find, we can work with it to enhance it. In this way, we are able to help others ‘go on and go forward’ towards a fuller realisation of all that human flourishing means, in both theory and experience. Furthermore, these are transferrable skills, in that abilities developed within one sub-culture – for example, having increased clarity about how to identify internal and external goods of excellence – can find application in other areas of those individuals’ lives. This extends both towards having a fuller apprehension of an overarching telos and so finding a greater narrative unity in the ordering and prioritising of one’s own life, through to the critique one is able to make of other spheres of society, including the conduct of politics, business and so forth.

The other side of the coin is that to decline to engage in this way leaves the grouping and its members where they are, and deprives them of opportunities to develop their moral rationality. Indeed, it effectively withholds vital and necessary resources for resisting the growing tendencies in Western society towards promoting external goods and instrumentalism which MacIntyre is right to identify, even if wrong in his assessment of its current pervasiveness. Insofar as moral rationality requires us to pursue genuine flourishing not only for ourselves but for all humanity, it is my contention therefore that for communities of tradition to fail to encourage at least some of their members to engage in this way is actually a failing in their own moral rationality. To use more biblical language, there is an obligation on Christians to act in ways that enable us to be salt and light in the world. It is of course the decision of others whether they heed us, but that is a separate matter from it being incumbent upon us to shoulder this responsibility. This is the task of both individuals,

⁴²⁷ The fourth Anglican ‘Mark of Mission’ referred to in chapter 1.

and the churches as institutions, in collaborating with other bodies, appropriately chosen within society.

A Pragmatic Approach

We find many different forms of human association proliferate across contemporary society, promoting social practices and internal goods to a greater or lesser extent. This is a very different situation from merely a choice between so-called ‘communitarian’ and ‘libertarian’ positions which, says Stout, particularly as enunciated at academic and theoretical levels, are mutually-fuelling polarised exaggerations of what actually happens today. On this basis he argues that while contemporary western democratic tradition entails a pluralism within which we experience considerable diversity and disagreement, such disagreement is by no means as far reaching or insuperable as MacIntyre tends to assert.

For though Stout accepts MacIntyre’s analysis of the flaws of liberalism, his claim is that it does not so wholly dominate our lives that we are left with rational and moral incoherence, and no alternative but to withdraw into our ghettos. Rather, in the way we order our lives and in our democratic practices, we are able to engage in effective ethical debate. To achieve this Stout advocates a more ‘pragmatic’ approach (which draws on, but in important ways differs from, his understanding of the pragmatism espoused by Rorty⁴²⁸), which sits between the two extremes. This however, should not be seen as merely trying to draw some median compromise, but rather as moving away from the language and concepts that sustain this binary opposition, and instead building on the ways that in practice we can and do use various moral languages in varying circumstances – and particularly those which have, even if in some partially realised form, the key elements of communities of tradition, as described by MacIntyre.

Stout’s Stereoscopic Criticism

There are, as we have seen, many associations that, though they may not be sufficiently developed to be regarded as a community in MacIntyre’s terms (or perhaps are too narrowly drawn or too loosely held together), nonetheless have the ability to recognise and promote internal goods over external goods, and to some degree resist the pressures of external goods, bureaucratisation and financial dominance which they risk facing as a consequence of necessary institutionalisation. This they do through discussion in their own moral language – Stout gives as an

⁴²⁸ EaB, Chapter 11, summed up at 265.

example medical ethics, and the tensions that arise between treatment options and managerial and financial concerns.⁴²⁹ Another example might be the debate around whether the vast salaries, and lucrative sponsorship and advertising deals, available to some Premiership footballers actually undermine their ability to play ‘the beautiful game’ for its own sake.

It is this ability to recognise internal and external goods – an ability which, I argue, engagement by members of communities of tradition can help enhance – on which Stout builds in his selective retrieval from MacIntyre. Stout fully concurs on the corrosive effect of the pursuit of the external goods for their own ends, and sees invaluable resources for countering this tendency in the concept of social practices, and in the distinction between goods internal and external to a practice to which it gives rise. From this he develops his concept of ‘stereoscopic social criticism’.⁴³⁰

Stout’s ‘stereoscopic social criticism’ is, I contend, a powerful tool with wide application across all manner of bodies and activities, that range from helping the church face its own institutional pressures, through to promoting the best of public and political democratic debate.

Stout proposes that we develop practices of analysis that look from both perspectives: from that of internal goods, and from that of external goods (though here he tends to conflate MacIntyre’s definition of external goods, which, it should be remembered, are genuine goods – even if prioritising their pursuit can bring destructive distortions – with the rather more dubious objectives of bureaucracy and market and other forms of instrumentalism). ‘The advantage of MacIntyre’s distinctions’ he says, ‘is that they make possible a stereoscopic social criticism, one which brings social practices and institutions, internal and external goods, in to focus at the same time.’⁴³¹ Considering how both factors are at play in whatever situation, allows for a realistic apprehension of the necessary aspects of institutionalisation, rather than either providing an overly romanticised and impractical ideal or falling into cynicism and disillusionment at the inescapability of some organisational burden. This ‘affords a vantage point from which the strengths and weaknesses of each approach can be explained, and it enables us to enjoy the benefits of each approach without simply switching back and forth from one to the other. It brings social practices and institutions, internal and external goods, into a single frame rather than

⁴²⁹ EaB, 270.

⁴³⁰ EaB, 279ff.

⁴³¹ EaB, 279.

relying on a montage to create an overall effect of unity.⁴³² From this we can engage constructively with the institutional bureaucratic and market-driven components of organisations supporting social practices, so working to keep in check their inherent propensities towards the pursuit of external goods and other distortions, and to ensure that structures and procedures are shaped in the service of internal goods.

More than this, Stout advocates applying this approach across all areas of the public sphere. He believes this is possible, through building on the skills most people acquire to some degree or other through their involvement with the various groupings, pervasive through society, that support social practices. He describes these as ‘features of our society ... that hold out some hope of transformation from within.’⁴³³ It is, he says, possible to learn how appropriately to apply the skills they provide in other forums.

In the final chapter of *Ethics after Babel*, Stout summarises his conclusions in this area as follows:

A stereoscopic social critic would be inclined to concentrate on factors like these: the tendency of the capitalist marketplace and large-scale bureaucracies to provide material conditions that permit social practices to flourish, while at the same time they undermine the moral conditions needed to achieve goods internal to such practices; the tendency of professionalisation and bureaucratic enforcement of rights, in some instances, to mitigate the bad effects of the market place on specific social practices and the people participating in them; the tendency of particular social practices, especially within the professions, to become all-consuming, thus making it increasingly difficult to be both a full-fledged participant in the practice and good at anything else; the partial and ever-vulnerable secularization of linguistic transactions taking place under the aegis of certain institutions; and the inability of religious practices to serve as a unifying ideological center around which whole societies could order various goods, practices, and institutions.⁴³⁴

Stout believes that we will find that the general abilities within society are, more often than not, ‘good enough’ to warrant the effort of attempting such analysis, with a fair expectation that others will share our identification of the influences at work. Through opening up such areas of debate, we will find fertile ground for working to

⁴³² EaB, 280.

⁴³³ EaB, 281.

⁴³⁴ EaB, 289.

promote genuine internal goods, and therefore also the common good that is implicit within them. In effect, he is arguing for us to make what attempts we can to ‘go on and go further’ in this way.

Stout believes this is not only possible but necessary. We have no alternative, he says, but to develop these tools of immanent, realist, criticism for the pursuit of such constructive engagement across all levels of society. For the alternative of withdrawal (which MacIntyre too often appears to espouse⁴³⁵), is to acquiesce in the increasingly untrammelled dominance of external goods and instrumentalism even where we seek to pursue social practices and their genuine goods. The churches, which share his objectives, should take heart from his analysis, and deploy his approach.

The Church and Stereoscopic Social Criticism

The first area where the Churches must apply stereoscopic social criticism is within their own structures, where, as previously noted, the pressures of institutionalisation inevitably arise (as of course, do the temptations from external goods). This might afford illumination from the level of parishes (where it could offer insights into the dynamics of church councils, for example through opening up honest debate around instrumentalist pressures, often felt in ‘money versus vision’ frictions), through to the operation of national and global ecclesial bodies. Theo Hobson has highlighted the tensions within Rowan Williams’ own ministry that arise from his personal, more apophatic and kenotic theology and ecclesiology, and his responsibilities for a weighty institution, as Bishop of Monmouth, Archbishop of Wales, and most of all as Archbishop of Canterbury. Hobson describes this as ‘the central problem of Williams’ theology, the one he returns to in almost everything he writes.’ In essence, ‘every institutional church not only expresses every Christian vision, but also obscures and distorts it. Every institutional church not only serves Christ, but, in one of his most vivid phrases, “deserves to be broken on the rock of Christ”.’⁴³⁶ While there is something of an insoluble inevitability at the heart of this, my proposal would be that conscious application of stereoscopic social criticism

⁴³⁵ ‘Neither [MacIntyre nor Hauerwas] breaks off the public discussion in practice. Each is a splendid example of individuality, forged in the crucible of democratic exchange. What they preach, however, may well be contributing to the erosion of habits and virtues essential to democracy’ EaB, 342.

⁴³⁶ Theo Hobson, *Anarchy, Church and Utopia: Rowan Williams and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005) 100 – this tension is the primary theme of the whole book.

could, through bringing greater clarity to the factors at play, at least assist with the practicalities of living within this paradox.

Turning to the church's role in the wider world, an illuminating example of this stereoscopic social criticism, and of 'bilingual' engagement with a sub-culture in order to promote valuable social practices and their sustaining in the face of other pressures, is offered by the sermon preached by Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury at a service to mark the 400th anniversary of the granting of the Royal Charter to the Inns of Court, on 24 June 2008.⁴³⁷ Dr Williams told me in private conversation that he was not consciously pursuing a MacIntyrean approach. That he does so, and with, in my view, such success, illustrates, and reinforces, my contention that such an approach is entirely feasible in practice.

Williams begins by stressing that the law (a social practice by MacIntyre's definition) cannot be understood in terms of 'the mere management of rules', but rather 'exists that power shall not be everything in human society' – thus bureaucratisation and external goods are named and given explicit secondary importance. He quotes Plato's concern for 'a training in disinterested vision and virtue for all lawmakers and law practitioners' – values that MacIntyre's social practices equally require. Law, says the Archbishop, reflects 'some order of reality in which the worth of persons is established in terms that aren't vulnerable to ... struggling rivalries' – and so he places law at the service of a common good in which all humanity is valued over narrow interest-groups.

Williams then turns to understandings of law drawn from the Old Testament, beginning with Solomon's Temple, so moving from speaking the moral language of the legal sphere to the language-in-use of Christian tradition. He 'anchors' humanity's nature and worth – our common good – in the ultimate good of a 'transcendent dimension' that lies in finding how 'all things existed first in relation to their Creator, in whose will lay their peace'. This 'animates alike law, mathematics, art and music' – all examples of social practices with internal goods of excellence. This 'is the foundation of a truly shared human joy and fulfilment', while the earlier picture of flourishing law 'offers a faint echo of the promise of universal joyful interdependence that is the vision of the Jewish and Christian heavens' – human flourishing is thus to

⁴³⁷ Rowan Williams, 'Archbishop preaches at 400th Anniversary of the Granting of the Royal Charter', 24 June 2008, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1258/archbishop-preaches-at-400th-anniversary-of-the-granting-of-the-royal-charter.

be found by individuals-in-community, in the promise of this fully comprehensive telos, towards the achievement of which more immediate genuine goods contribute.

Extrapolating from a parable of Jesus, the Archbishop then challenges the assembled lawyers to move from asking the managerial-based question of ‘what are the limits of my duty?’ to the broader and deeper issue of ‘to whom do I have an obligation?’ Jesus’ answer, he says, is that ‘there is no limit to the obligation of compassion’; and he seeks to subvert the idea of mercy being opposed to justice by arguing that ‘mercy, the passionate care for ... even ... the least deserving, is a universal summons.’ He thus prioritises genuine human well-being of all, no matter how vulnerable or excluded, as the law’s ultimate goal, over instrumentalist implementation of legislation, arguing ‘to use the law for the wellbeing of all, to use even its penal provisions for the general good and for the restoring of shattered relations, is to acknowledge that what law is about is simply the securing of people’s dignity, not because they have earned it but because their humanity is valued by God.’ The proximate goals of law are only morally rational insofar as they are directed towards humanity’s ultimate telos.

Williams returns to stereoscopic social criticism in his penultimate paragraph, advising that assiduous attention be paid to recognising the inevitable influences of external goods and according them an appropriately limited role, in order to ensure that internal goods are prioritised: ‘The sacrificed Lamb of God reminds us that in this world truth and thus lawfulness may be vulnerable. The challenge is to hold the eyes of violence without flinching, even to humiliation and death, and not to surrender to naked power.’ He concludes by again providing the comprehensive context for being able to conduct such criticism and then having the courage to live by it, saying ‘we learn to hold the eye of violence, to keep your vision steady, if we indeed remember that the foundation of law is where Solomon sought it, in the contemplation of God’s faithful self-consistency ...’ It is God who enables us to live as those who (and he ends by quoting Scripture) ‘judge the people righteously.’

Thus Williams moves between speaking on his own terms and those of his listeners, encouraging them in various ways to make connections between their own understanding of the social practices and ‘goods’ of law and the far fuller picture of the common good and its pursuit through the virtues of a community of tradition directed towards humanity’s ultimate telos. It is additionally noteworthy that he has tackled a particular concern of MacIntyre, that liberalism disconnects rationality from justice, with justice reduced to a matter of conformity with the legal preferences of the

system.⁴³⁸ Williams has argued that, contrary to this, justice can only be properly understood from the perspective of the virtues and genuine human flourishing.

Diversity, Pluralism and their Limits

Stout contends that we must apply such stereoscopic social criticism across all public discourse (and, while law may be seen as a social practice, the judiciary is, of course, one of the pillars of the contemporary democratic state, alongside legislature and executive). It allows us to work for a world in which ‘the proliferation, distribution, and merchandizing of external goods is subject to political control and in which goods internal to worthy social practices, including the practice of self-government, are granted the right to life and given room to flourish.’⁴³⁹ In this way, authentic and hopeful discourse of substance on moral questions can be, and indeed is, pursued, says Stout, on the basis of shared conceptions of the common good that may be thin by MacIntyre’s standards, but which nonetheless prove ‘good enough’ in practice.

But before moving to consider how democratic debate can be seen, as Stout claims, as a form of social practice to be upheld through stereoscopic social criticism, I want first to comment further on the extent to which, even within communities of tradition, we learn how to live comfortably with a far greater degree of diversity than may seem apparent from MacIntyre’s initial descriptions. I noted earlier the lack of homogeneity, and of one-size-fits-all answers to many of the choices individuals must make about their lives. Additionally, a community needs a breadth of capacities in order to be able to self-sustaining.⁴⁴⁰

In our discourse with one another, diversity is a given – that we require one another to give an account of how we live implies a range of perspectives. We improve our rationality by honing our understanding against that of others. Alongside those inclined to orthodoxy and conformism, we also need some mavericks within, with MacIntyre saying that ‘bards, priests, prophets, kings, and, on occasion, fools and jesters will all be heard.’⁴⁴¹ Further, as described in chapter 2, rationality that aspires to overcome relativist or perspectivist criticisms demands we engage with standpoints from outside our community. When there is substantive debate between communities, the moral rationality of both is likely to be improved. Chapter 3 showed how the

⁴³⁸ WJWR, 342.

⁴³⁹ EaB, 290.

⁴⁴⁰ DRA, 134.

⁴⁴¹ WJWR, 354.

opportunities for this are far greater than might initially be anticipated, and are enhanced by making the effort even where at first the potential for commensurability seems too limited.

Within our multiple sub-cultures we similarly stand to learn from one another, especially through inviting one another to give account of how we answer within any particular context questions that reflect the ultimate question of ‘How, then, shall we live?’ Those of us who are more skilled in such matters can offer critique in ways that enhance the capacities of those involved to learn from one another – ourselves included. This will include sharing what we have learnt, as members of a community, of how to pursue a suitable balance that best delivers the unfolding good of both individuals and the community as a whole.⁴⁴² This is one aspect of living well with appropriate diversity.

Considering groupings which acculturate young people into their social practices and so to some degree operate as traditions in the MacIntyrean sense, Stout not only concludes that ‘such acculturation does, I think, often succeed in bringing it about that particular groups of individuals are justified in believing things that their neighbors either justifiably disbelieve or justifiably ignore’ (as previously noted) but goes on to note ‘The relevant epistemic situation for such selves, in other words, turns out to be much more specific and variable than the hypercontext, modernity, allows us to account for.’⁴⁴³ Recognising explicitly that this is so is an important aspect of our ability to live with diversity outside our communities of tradition and sub-cultures. As Stout says, ‘it is precisely the coexistence of multiple sub-cultures, all of which succeed at some level in acculturating the young, that constitutes the all-important fact of pluralism in modern democratic societies.’⁴⁴⁴

But none of this is to say that anything goes. We can and should still demand of others, whether or not members of a community of tradition, their best possible account of their position – which we can critique, particularly using the approach of stereoscopic social criticism. And we should be open to similar critique from others. This can help us all in identifying both positive and negative factors at play. It can assist us in understanding our various conceptions of human well-being, and the grounds on which we hold them; or clarify our shared concerns over particular moral

⁴⁴² On the similarities of these balancing acts, MacIntyre writes ‘The virtues which conjointly inform the actions of an integrated self are also the virtues of a well-integrated political community’ – TRV, 143.

⁴⁴³ DaT, 177.

⁴⁴⁴ DaT, 177.

problems and the reasons we hold in common or otherwise for taking such stances. These highlight the grounds on which we will want to take decisions, as individuals and as churches, about how closely to collaborate with other groups. We shall also want to take into account the way that stereoscopic social criticism can also unmask both the distortions that can come with institutionalization, and suspect motivations that are at play, perhaps even deliberately so.

Precisely in such areas, MacIntyre argues, it can become a virtue to exercise intolerance, and to exclude individuals or perspectives from moral rational discourse, silencing their voice. This might range from ‘threatening and insulting utterance’ through to promoting views which reflect, or are rooted in, a morally rational unacceptable view of ‘human flourishing’ (for example, anti-Semitism), or who deny clear facts (Holocaust deniers).⁴⁴⁵

But when, and how, to exercise a virtuous intolerance is not easy. Freedom of speech is generally a genuine good, and so MacIntyre admits that though he believes Holocaust denial should not be tolerated, he is uneasy with legislation that makes its public assertion a criminal offence. Such matters take us from the realm of sub-cultures and community-level organisations through to the level of the state, and wider and more formal public discourse. They raise questions about how nation states shape the public space and control what may or may not be said, and the ways in which debate itself is conducted. Some of these implications I will address in the next chapter, but I now turn to consider in what ways democratic reasoning can be considered a ‘social practice’ in the MacIntyrean sense, as Stout contends, and the appropriate place of the voices of faith communities within this.

The Practice of Democracy

As described in the previous chapter, in espousing ‘a tradition of democratic reasoning, dispositions and attitudes’, Stout argues that it is the holding of such ‘activities in common’ that is ‘constitutive of the political community.’⁴⁴⁶ Using language which is redolent of MacIntyre’s descriptions of the practices necessary for rational enquiry within traditions,⁴⁴⁷ Stout says these processes of reasoning not only guide discussion, but are themselves ‘constantly in dispute, subject to revision, and not

⁴⁴⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Toleration’, particularly 216, 220.

⁴⁴⁶ DaT, 4-5 – emphasis in the original, stressing his privileging of praxis over theory.

⁴⁴⁷ WJWR, notably Chapter XVIII, and as reviewed in chapter 2 above.

fully determinate'. Therefore, he says, they are best understood within the 'historic category of "tradition"'.⁴⁴⁸

The practical approach that he proposes builds on the application to the broader public canvas of the moral languages and the developing skills in using them which he describes in relation to sub-cultures. In this way Stout speaks of a public philosophy that is 'an exercise in expressive rationality'⁴⁴⁹ transcending the impasse 'between secular liberals and the new traditionalists'⁴⁵⁰ while borrowing from both. He upholds the acquisition of virtues through participation in social practices which pursue excellence and intrinsically valuable internal goods. He describes the 'discursive practices of ethical deliberation and political debate' as 'the social practices that matter most directly to democracy'.⁴⁵¹ Evoking MacIntyrean arguments, Stout says 'democratic questioning and reason-giving are a sort of practice, one that involves and inculcates virtues including justice, and that becomes tradition, like any social practice, when it manages to sustain itself across generations.'⁴⁵² On these grounds he concludes that 'commitment to democracy does not entail the rejection of tradition. It requires jointly taking responsibility for the criticism and renewal of tradition and for the justice of our social and political arrangements.'⁴⁵³

Given these conclusions – which draw so heavily, even if selectively, on MacIntyre's work – Stout argues at some length that 'new traditionalists' such as MacIntyre and Hauerwas, as well as others like John Milbank, are 'wrong ... when they imagine modern democracy as the antithesis of tradition, as an inherently destructive, atomizing social force.'⁴⁵⁴ His fear is that their 'traditionalist program' contributes to a weakening in 'commitment to democracy in the public at large', which has the potential to 'spell trouble'.⁴⁵⁵ He contrasts their position with that of

⁴⁴⁸ DaT, 5.

⁴⁴⁹ DaT, 12.

⁴⁵⁰ DaT, 13.

⁴⁵¹ DaT, 293.

⁴⁵² DaT, 152.

⁴⁵³ DaT, 152, emphasis in original.

⁴⁵⁴ DaT, 11. In Chapter 4 Stout takes particular issue with what he sees as the 'theological resentment of the secular' (92) promoted in John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); and also espoused by the 'Radical Orthodoxy' movement – for example, in the Introduction to John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds, *Radical Orthodoxy* (London: Routledge 1999).

⁴⁵⁵ DaT, 303. The issue at stake here is not that 'traditionalists' are wedded to the past – indeed, MacIntyre insists that openness to development is a necessary part of rationality – but rather that, as in the previous quote, they too often present liberal democratic society as incompatible with tradition-based reasoning and living, and essentially malign.

theologians such as Wolterstorff who espouse far greater engagement within the public sphere, and explicit commitment towards democracy.⁴⁵⁶ He underlines his belief that secularised, modern democracy ‘is not essentially an expression of secularism’, and, in the form for which he argues, certainly does not rule out the ‘expression of religious premises or the entitlement of individuals to accept religious assumptions’.⁴⁵⁷

I shall return to questions of secularism in the next chapter, but here we should note that Stout is again attempting to separate what he sees as MacIntyre’s exaggerated and untenable critique of ‘liberal democracy’ and the concomitant collapse of moral discourse, from what, in his own view, is a more constructive consideration of the nature of tradition, and of values within it. This analysis can contribute to the understanding and strengthening of a pragmatic practice of democracy, as it is actually grounded in the realities of contemporary western nations.

All traditions, faith communities included, need to take their place within democratic discourse if it is to be conducted, as it ought, through marshalling the widest resources across our complex society in support of maintaining and developing a public space which promotes the best understanding and pursuit of human flourishing, in all its legitimate variety. Given Stout’s earlier assertions on the possibilities of different convictions being legitimately held alongside one another, it is unsurprising that he includes an explicit place for those with religious commitments. In place of the standoff that there can often be between believers and non-believers (especially when, as with the stalemate between ‘liberals’ and ‘communitarians’ or ‘traditionalists’, it collapses into mutually exclusive caricaturing and polarising), he argues for ongoing ‘conversation ... in which the respective parties express their premises in as much detail as they see fit and in whatever idiom they wish, try to make sense of each other’s perspectives, and expose their own commitments to the possibility of criticism.’⁴⁵⁸ This parallels, even if in thinner form, MacIntyre’s descriptions of how different communities of tradition engage with one another, with the expectation that parties speak, and be heard, in their own language-in-use or moral language – that is, on their own terms – being particularly important. In this way, Stout promotes the ‘value of carrying on a public conversation of this kind with religious traditionalists.’⁴⁵⁹ It is an approach that applies comprehensively, since, he

⁴⁵⁶ DaT, 298.

⁴⁵⁷ DaT, 11.

⁴⁵⁸ DaT, 10-11.

⁴⁵⁹ DaT, 11.

contends, ‘all democratic citizens should feel free, in my view, to express whatever premises actually serve as reasons for their claims ... in the kind of exchange where each person’s deepest commitments can be recognized for what they are and assessed accordingly.’⁴⁶⁰

Just as I have argued that the generous participation of members of communities of tradition can enhance and enrich the capacity for morally rational debate and all that it entails (including mature process for just such assessment of commitments) within sub-cultures, so I now argue that a similar commitment to engagement can enhance public discourse and the practice of democracy. On the same grounds as before, it is both possible and necessary to grasp opportunities to promote the realisation of human well-being, and in particular by helping foreground the common good and its achievement within society. This focus – which echoes MacIntyre’s own ‘central deliberative question’ – is one to which Stout also points, advising that we need to ask ‘how to live here and now under the circumstances in which we actually find ourselves’,⁴⁶¹ warning that ‘if we fail to protect’ social practices directed towards excellence, democracy included, ‘it is foolhardy to expect concerted democratic action to remain possible for long’.⁴⁶²

Democracy, the Church and Human Flourishing

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu used to remind his clergy – particularly when exercising his episcopal authority, and so not entirely in jest – the Anglican Church does not operate as a democracy.⁴⁶³ Nonetheless, the Anglican Church in Southern Africa,⁴⁶⁴ though not the largest denomination in South Africa, has long provided a voice of faith in public discourse, and particularly through the Archbishop of Cape Town. Archbishop Geoffrey Clayton, Primate when the Nationalist government took power, is famous for signing a letter in 1957 opposing draft legislation to segregate congregations – he dropped dead the following day. His successor, Archbishop Joost de Blank, was known as the ‘scourge of apartheid’, and subsequently then Bishop Tutu was awarded the Nobel peace prize two years before becoming Primate.

⁴⁶⁰ DaT, 10.

⁴⁶¹ DaT, 291.

⁴⁶² DaT, 293.

⁴⁶³ Personal conversations. See also comments on his ‘notoriously self-willed and directive’ style in Njongonkulu Ndungane, ‘Reckless Courage’, in Tutu as I Know Him: On a Personal Note, edited by Lavinia Crawford-Browne (Roggebaai: Umuzi) 146. That said, synodical governance as varyingly practiced across the Anglican world offers a fair degree of ‘democratic discourse’.

⁴⁶⁴ Until 2006 known as the Church of the Province of Southern Africa.

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, there has remained an expectation that Archbishops of Cape Town will play a significant role in national discourse, which is now often directed at promoting democratic practices. Njongonkulu Ndungane, Archbishop from 1996 to 2007, frequently argued that the churches, and other religious traditions, have a key role to play in helping strengthen democracy, not only in South Africa, but across the young democracies of the continent. Thus, for example, in a speech at an Inter-Faith Summit in Washington, in 2006, he directed his words not only to the public sphere,⁴⁶⁵ but also to educating faith communities as to why he believed this was so.⁴⁶⁶ In citing Reinhold Niebuhr's maxim 'Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary,'⁴⁶⁷ he argues that 'faith communities must be at the heart of ...debate on the goals of society' and that 'our contribution includes arguing for the appropriate flourishing of each individual, each human person.' Thus he puts humanity's telos at the centre. He asserts that democracy has the capacity to offer 'constructive dialogue around moral issues' in which 'the strengths of religious traditions offer checks against unfettered relativism, and against the blind imperatives of unbridled capitalism.' Here we find echoes of stereoscopic criticism. Among the eight areas he highlights where he believes a particular contribution can be made are promoting good governance and reconciliation, combatting corruption, modelling 'servant' rather than self-serving exercise of power, and equality for women.⁴⁶⁸ Within these we find elements of the good social practices which should be found within effective democracy.

Of particular importance to note is another of Ndungane's eight areas, that of strengthening civil society in its dialogue with government. In retirement he heads 'African Monitor', an NGO intended to ensure African civil society and grass-roots voices are adequately heard in national and international debate around poverty alleviation.⁴⁶⁹ Effective civil society bodies are vital to fully functioning democracy. For though, with Stout, I have argued that democracy has the capacity to operate as a tradition, what I have not considered is the extent to which it is sustained – as is intrinsic to MacIntyre's account of rationality – by its own tradition-bearing

⁴⁶⁵ For example, Njongonkulu Ndungane, 'Culture, Reconciliation and Community Building: Lessons from South Africa', in *Cultural Politics in a Global Age: Uncertainty, Solidarity and Innovation*, edited by David Held and Henrietta L. Moore (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).

⁴⁶⁶ For example, Njongonkulu Ndungane, 'The Roles of Religion in Public Life', in Rowland Jones, *Faith in Action*.

⁴⁶⁷ Ndungane, 'Roles of Religion', 146.

⁴⁶⁸ Ndungane, 'Roles of Religion', 149-152.

⁴⁶⁹ Ndungane, 'Roles of Religion', 153. See also www.africanmonitor.org.

‘community’. And, as MacIntyre rightly points out, the scale at which democracy is practiced makes participation by all in rational deliberation exceedingly difficult at best:

Consider first the absence from contemporary political society of arenas of rational debate and deliberation which are open to everyone in the course of their everyday lives. That absence is the counterpart to the restriction of effective political debate to privileged elites. Every citizen does indeed get to vote at periodic intervals. But the vast majority have no say as to the alternatives between which they are permitted to choose. And there is no way in which the elites that determine those alternatives can be effectively challenged or called to account. So the ordinary citizen rarely becomes more than a political spectator.⁴⁷⁰

But in drawing these stark conclusions, MacIntyre is, in my view, excessively – and dangerously – pessimistic. Fostering civil society bodies – as particular examples of the ‘sub-cultures’ with ‘moral languages’ and latent capacities for developing genuine social practices, promoting internal goods, and building on stereoscopic social criticism, all as outlined earlier in this chapter – provides contexts in which individuals can develop precisely the skills required for pursuing genuine democracy. These bodies can also offer public platforms for airing important issues, for example, leveraging space within the media for their perspectives. Individually, and together – especially where they are able to act as ‘communities of communities’ through sufficiently shared concepts of the centrality of human flourishing, the virtues, and so forth – they can have significant impact in debate with government. The Jubilee 2000 and Make Poverty History campaigns, both church-led initiatives which drew in other faiths and also non-religious bodies and individuals, illustrate what can be achieved in changing policies within the G8 and Bretton Woods institutions. The alternative – to adopt MacIntyre’s negativity and withdraw resources of time and energy from democratic discourse – is to leave the lobbying of governments to narrowly drawn interest groups, such as those promoting financial gain of the few over the common good.

In the same speech, directed towards faith communities, Ndungane offers only limited examples of the ‘bilingualism’ demonstrated by Williams earlier in this chapter, speaking in more theoretical terms. Ndungane’s successor, the current

⁴⁷⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘What More Needs to Be Said? A Beginning, Although Only a Beginning, at Saying It’, *Analyse & Kritik*, 30(2008), 263.

Archbishop, Thabo Makgoba, makes a far more concrete contribution to promoting effective civil society participation in democracy in, for example, a speech given as part of a lecture series aimed at improving communications between government and communities – which is of course indispensable for effective democracy.⁴⁷¹ This reflects many aspects of Stout’s constructive practical reworking of MacIntyrean principles. The Archbishop directs his speech towards democratic processes that deliver the provisions of the Constitution, which he sees as ‘grounded in the fundamental essence of what it is to be a human being’ – the common good of all, as we were created to be. He allies his theological understanding of human flourishing with constitutional human rights, which might seem unexpected, given Murphy’s description of MacIntyre’s view of human rights as ‘nonsense on stilts’.⁴⁷² But, while acknowledging that ‘contemporary human rights theories are often grounded in ... a concept of what it is to be human that is greatly at odds with the understandings of the major religions’ he nonetheless argues that society, religious or otherwise, can ‘agree on these end goals of human well-being’. This reflects Stout’s assertion that it is possible for ‘people with diverging conceptions of the good to identify the same moral problems and collaborate in common concern’.⁴⁷³

Having drawn this parallel, Makgoba puts flesh on it through ‘bilingualism’ across a range of understandings of the common good, beginning with the Christian community. He cites Jesus’ promise of ‘life in abundance’, which ‘spans our emotional, spiritual, mental or intellectual, physical and material needs, as well as our thriving both as individuals and members of society’. In alluding to the two Great Commandments he provides a comprehensive picture of human flourishing, including a right balance of individual and community. He then aligns himself with other faith

⁴⁷¹ Thabo Makgoba, ‘Honesty is the Best Policy and the Truth will Set us Free - Grootboom Lecture’, 25 October 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2010/10/honesty-is-best-policy-and-truth-will.html>.

⁴⁷² Mark C. Murphy, ‘MacIntyre’s Political Philosophy’, in Murphy, Alasdair MacIntyre, 169. It is worth noting that Williams explicitly takes up MacIntyre’s challenge to ‘find a language, or ethics, for human rights which is robust enough to resist moral relativism on the one hand and political utility on the other’ and does so drawing, inter alia, on Aquinas’ writings on the human body and bodily freedom in speech specifically dedicated to ‘Religious Faith and Human Rights’ – Rowan Williams, ‘Religious Faith and Human Rights’, 1 May 2008, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1161/archbishop-religious-faith-and-human-rights. The arguments are more subtle, and less readily accessible, than the broader ‘human flourishing’ language of past and present Archbishops of Cape Town, which I have therefore used as my illustration in this and the following chapter.

⁴⁷³ EaB, 284. Stout, while sharing MacIntyre’s ‘desire to rehabilitate talk about the virtues and the common good’, declares he is ‘far less suspicious’ than MacIntyre over language around human rights and respect, seeing the two discourses as capable of ‘living in harmony’ – see EaB, 225.

communities, speaking as the chair of the Western Cape Religious Leaders' Forum, on whose behalf he challenges government to improve their delivery of basic services: that is, provide the common good. He then places the faith communities' support for the South African Constitution and its description of human well-being – to which he holds the government accountable – in the wider context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He notes its specific provisions (in Article 25) include such essentials as 'adequate food and clean water, housing, clothing, health care and so forth' all of which, he says, are found in, but not exhausted by, the faith communities' and specifically Christian, views of the common good – and, in a passage devoted to Biblical views on human flourishing, he provides this fullest picture of our right telos, on his own terms, offering it for others to draw on. He argues that the common good must be the touchstone of government and citizenry, for 'to be a responsible citizen is to orient one's life in alignment with [these] provisions of the Constitution'.⁴⁷⁴

Makgoba also employs stereoscopic social criticism. He stresses the virtues and internal goods which democracy ought to demonstrate – good governance through 'openness, transparency, honesty and the highest ethical standards from every sector of society' with 'respectful, transparent, speaking and listening' where everyone is given opportunity to voice their perspectives, and on their own terms (for, though he encourages faith communities and civil society organisations to help give the most disadvantaged a voice, he stresses 'it is not our job to speak for them'). He argues that these practices are not only right in themselves, but the only way 'to make the difficult journey ... towards human flourishing'. And while he acknowledges the inevitable and legitimate difficulties that government faces from the legacies of the past and limited resources, he warns against allowing other goals to detract from pursuing human flourishing:

In our choices, in our decision-making, in the way we conduct our daily business, we must ask what promotes the greater fulfilment of these principles ... We must also be alert to, and reject, options that undermine or distort the delivery of Constitutional provisions – no matter how expedient, or how far they further our own narrowly defined and short term interests ... it will not do ... to respond that the task is "too difficult", and can therefore be set a little to one side and dealt with on the margins, while we focus on matters closer to our own interests. We must get our priorities right.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁴ Makgoba, 'Honesty'.

⁴⁷⁵ Makgoba, 'Honesty'.

The risks of bureaucratic expediencies are thus highlighted. He also warns against more malicious distortions, though acknowledging the complexities of the situation, ‘... there tend to be many competing interests at play ... frankly, some individuals and groups have destructive objectives, including personal or political power for its own sake, economic exploitation, and even competing criminal interests.’ He implicitly invites civil society groups to join faith communities as he says ‘our role should also be to help unmask these factors.’

Elsewhere, Makgoba calls for Christians’ participation in democratic processes on the basis of St Paul’s admonition: ‘let every person be subject to the governing authority’ (Rom 13:1), arguing that ‘when our governing authority is participative democracy, to be subject means to promote the effective participation of all, at every level.’⁴⁷⁶ He specifically points to the need for participation ‘between elections’ – one of MacIntyre’s concerns. His answer is ongoing ‘accountability’ – one of the touchstones of the life of a community of tradition, for, as he says ‘accountability not only comes through the ballot box – though it certainly comes here. Accountability also comes through continuing open debate, and through strengthening the effective functioning of robust and independent civil society and private sectors.’

In such way, Makgoba gives reasons to those of his own and other faith communities to have confidence that their own more fully drawn understandings of humanity’s telos are to be furthered through supporting constitutional democracy, and indicates ways they can do this. He also offers the ‘sub-cultures’ of civil society organisations a wider appreciation of moral rationality directed towards human flourishing as understood by the faith communities and specifically his own: a goal they can share even if construed on different grounds. He highlights ways of promoting the ‘social practice’ of democratic debate, including going some way towards what Stout sees as the possibility of ‘reconceiving the virtues in democratic terms’.⁴⁷⁷ He indicates ways for constructive collaboration across civil society groups, in holding the government and other bodies to account, another aspect of ethical debate. And he explains the need for stereoscopic social criticism that acknowledges the proper role of state and its difficulties, while being alert to the dominance of external goods or other distortions. In all these ways he offers resources to other

⁴⁷⁶ Thabo Makgoba, ‘Harold Wolpe Memorial Lecture: ‘Constitution and Covenant’, 7 November 2008, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2008/11/harold-wolpe-memorial-lecture.html>.

⁴⁷⁷ DaT, 119.

Christians, faith communities, civil society sub-cultures, and even those in government, to draw on, in order to work more effectively together so that the question of ‘how then shall we live?’ might more justly be realised for all citizens.

Lessons for the Church in the World

Let me sum up some key elements by which the churches may be guided. Their starting point should be to have confidence that, as communities of tradition, they have the capacity to pursue a high degree of moral rationality, and to communicate clearly their processes for pursuing this and the conclusions that they draw. Not only should they assume a greater potential for substantive dialogue which ‘goes on and goes further’ with other communities of tradition, but beyond such communities they can also engage meaningfully with a wide range of groupings or sub-cultures, which, to a greater or lesser degree provide their members with some apprehension of social practices and genuine internal goods of excellence, and some level of moral language through which to pursue such ends. From the perspective purely of moral rationality (though recognising other considerations will need to be taken into account), through generous engagement with such groups and their members, churches and Christian individuals will be able to discover, through attempting to go on and go further, how developed such moral rationality is. Further, through communicating not only on their own terms in their own language-in-use, that is, in theological terms, but also through bilingualism, in the moral languages and from the perspectives of those with whom they engage, those who are suited to taking up this task can help such groups and their members enrich these moral languages and develop their abilities both in practical rationality and rational enquiry; and in how to engage with and learn from others through the growing bilingual fluency of some of their own members.

It is particularly valuable to employ, and to help others to learn how to employ, Stout’s stereoscopic social criticism, and so explore a textured understanding of the interplay of both internal goods of excellence and external goods together with the bureaucratic and economic pressures that are an inescapable part of the institutionalisation necessary to sustain social practices. Such awareness can help promote and sustain social practices, and the internal goods of excellence which are so vital to human flourishing, in the face of the destructive forces within contemporary society. This can be complemented by focussing debate around central questions of the common good, human flourishing and what it means to live well. For churches can contribute a fuller understanding of humanity’s ultimate telos, and the way in

which it can become a touchstone for the ordering of goods of more limited scope within the lives of individuals and the organisations in which they participate. Given that to fail to engage in such a way is to deprive others of such resources for improving their ability to live moral rational lives and to resist the pressures to do otherwise, it is the case that, other considerations being equal, it is therefore the morally rational obligation of the churches to devote ‘good enough’ resources of personnel, time and energy to such engagement.

Of course, it is up to others whether, and how far, they are prepared to receive these contributions. But if they too are committed to pursuing the best possible answers to questions of how humanity should live, we should expect an openness to our arguments, given the fact that it is possible to recognise the justification of another’s perspective without being required to adopt it oneself – and, specifically, to acknowledge the moral rationality of faith communities without being required also to acknowledge for oneself their religious assumptions.

This last conclusion is one of the starting points for the churches engagement in the practices of democratic debate. It gives us justifiable grounds for arguing that we can step aside from sterile arguments about whether, for example, the existence or otherwise of God has first to be settled before anything else can be said. The ability of democracy to function as a tradition lies in the capacity to build on the experiences of moral rationality, even in limited form, that comes from participation in bodies promoting social practices and internal goods and employing moral languages to do so. That so many people are members of a number of such bodies, alongside others who share some but not all of their allegiances and commitments, also enhances our ability to live comfortably with pluralism.

With one mark of the rationality of a tradition being its ability to muster all available evidence and take account of all possible alternative perspectives requires that well-functioning democratic processes ensure that all voices are adequately heard in public debate. This also provides good reason for churches to ensure they contribute their views, and give good account of them. Indeed, the churches benefit from the expectation that each should be able to give an account of why it is they hold their convictions, for they have a ‘good story’ to tell. Promoting habits of holding one another to account in this way provides the churches with increased opportunities to expound their convictions. Doing so ‘bilingually’, both in their own terms and language-in-use and through bilingualism in the moral language of that particular democratic context, offering enrichment as appropriate, can help others in two ways.

First, it enhances their own capacity for moral rationality within the public space, and second it increases their understanding of the specific beliefs of Christian faith which, as we believe and MacIntyre argues in relation to Thomistic Aristotelianism, actually provide the best possible way to live.

In short, the practical consequence of what has been said previously in this chapter and in the previous chapter is that, contrary to what might be expected, a MacIntyrean approach to moral rational living offers an invitation to faith communities to play a full part in public discourse, participating on their own terms within democratic processes which operate as a tradition, in order to contribute to the necessary tasks of furthering practices which promote virtues and the good of excellence and all that contributes to human flourishing, and of limiting the influence of all that diminish these.

But we will find limits on what we can achieve using this approach. We will not always be able to 'go on and go further', for there will be some people whose capacity for moral language is too limited to be able to grasp the account we give of ourselves either on our own terms or through attempting to communicate on their terms through enrichment. Or we may find ourselves speaking in contexts where bureaucratic and market considerations dominate, or where there are assumptions of a secularism that does not acknowledge religious commitments. We will then have to resort to different means for promoting effective moral debate. These are the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 6 – MacIntyre beyond MacIntyre

In earlier chapters, I argued that it was only by trying to ‘go on and go further’ that we would discover where the limitations lie in our efforts to engage in various levels of rational moral debate with others. On encountering such limits we should then adopt alternative approaches to discussion. Thus, where with those we had assumed to be members of communities of tradition we find insufficient commensurability in our understandings of humanity’s right telos and the evaluative standards we use in pursuing it through moral rational living, as in chapters 2 and 3, we can instead attempt to move the exchange forward through employing the methods outlined in chapter 5. But here too, in engaging with more limited moral languages and social practices, we may find ourselves unable to ‘go on and go further’. It may be that we are engaging with individuals whose understanding of social practices and genuine goods that contribute to human flourishing, and how they are sustained through shared moral languages, is so limited that they cannot grasp the rationality of a community of tradition. It may be their conceptual language is so far from that of a community of tradition that no matter how extensive our attempts to communicate through enrichment, it cannot convey moral rationality. Or it may be that we find ourselves speaking within arenas – increasingly pervasive within contemporary society, as MacIntyre is right to argue – where acceptable discourse is couched in solely managerial and economic terms, with as good as no acknowledgement of the validity of other perspectives, religious commitments among them.

As noted in chapter 2, the account given by MacIntyre in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*⁴⁷⁸ seems to insist that since such people or contexts are so wholly cut off from, or exclude, the practices and languages in which his tradition-based morality is couched, all attempts at genuine rational ethical discourse are impossible. Concepts of human worth and ethical evaluation that can only be expressed in terms of the market or bureaucratic efficiency are likely to be so far from Christian understandings of our right telos, and so utterly flawed, that some might be tempted to draw the conclusion that there is little purpose in people of faith engaging directly. Such interlocutors and decision-making processes are likely to be incapable of comprehending Christian arguments and perspectives as voiced on our own terms: they have no means of grasping them since their languages are unable to support such concepts. The possibility of agreeing any starting point from which discussion can proceed is so slender as to be not worth making the effort. Time and energy would be

⁴⁷⁸ See particularly Chapters XVIII and XIX.

better spent in solely pursuing the sort of stark evangelism that works for the ‘ahah’ moment of radical conversion brought about by the Holy Spirit, without recourse to logical persuasion.

But this would, I contend, be to misread MacIntyre’s analysis, drawing false implications from what he has argued. Certainly, he maintains in *WJWR* that it is futile to attempt substantive moral debate through attempting bilingualism with, and enrichment of, a language that does not of itself have the capacity to encapsulate concepts like the virtues, internal goods of excellence, a human telos and so forth. He equally argues that we cannot pursue such debate on the basis of accepting the possibility of a neutral, objective, perspective on ethical questions. But this does not mean that we are left entirely resourceless in our attempts to engage on moral questions, where we cannot go on and go further using the approach of the previous chapter.

And though this may appear strongly counter what we might expect from reading his major volumes, it is MacIntyre himself who provides the resources to which we should look. These are to be found in his considerations of Aquinas’ writings on natural law, particularly its primary precepts, and how these relate to our understanding of the common good. These provide the focus for ‘dropping down another gear’ while nonetheless continuing to engage on moral questions and to attempt to move debate forward. This chapter considers how this might be so, building on MacIntyre’s assertion that plain persons, by virtue of their humanity, retain a capacity to recognise the primary precepts and, on the basis of these, what it is to pursue truth, including what constitutes a right understanding of the common good. Thus all are potentially able to hold to account their rulers – whether rule is vested in individuals or some system of governance – over the content and conduct of the rule they exercise. This provides, at the very least, the legitimation of debate around a Thomistic basis of morality within public discourse, and, further, as I go on to show, offers far more specific resources for engaging with ethical questions in national and international forums. It also points to ways for working to shape the nature of such discourse so that we are better able to speak about and pursue the common good, significant though the obstacles are.

Natural Law and the Common Good

It is MacIntyre’s contention that the precepts of natural law are implicitly upheld far more widely than is generally acknowledged. His starting point for this is to look to philosophical debate around the human good. Here he notes that amongst

Thomists who may differ greatly on other questions there is nonetheless general agreement that ‘human good can be achieved only through a form of life in which the positive and negative precepts of the natural law are the norms governing our relationships’.⁴⁷⁹ Such a contention can not only be supported by arguments drawn from Aristotle, Aquinas and others, but, more importantly and also more surprisingly, can be reinforced by a second set of considerations, ‘which concern not so much the theories, but rather the practices of their anti-Thomistic philosophical critics’. For, he claims, ‘such anti-Thomistic philosophers inadvertently give evidence by and in their activities of the truth of just that Thomist view of the practical life which as theorists they suppose themselves able to regulate.’

His grounds for asserting this are to argue that it can be observed that these philosophers ‘generally and characteristically pursue the truth about moral and philosophical matters in a way and with a dedication that acknowledges the achievement of that truth as one aspect at least of what seems to be being treated as a final and unconditional end. They do so moreover generally and characteristically under constraints imposed by rules which prescribe unqualified respect for those with whom they enter into debate, precisely as enjoined by the primary precepts of the natural law.’⁴⁸⁰ Thus, he says, ‘we find that relationships within philosophical debate about morality are themselves governed to a surprising extent among a variety of non-Thomists and anti-Thomists by a practical recognition of exceptionless norms whose point and purpose is the achievement of the final end of that activity, thus exemplifying something that Thomists take to be characteristic of well-ordered human activity in general.’ This is so, since ‘it is indeed a Thomist thesis that all practical reasoners, often unwittingly, and often very imperfectly, exhibit in significant ways the truth of the Thomist account of practical reasoning by how they act, even when, as in this case, they are engaged in an enterprise of constructing anti-Thomistic philosophical theories.’

In this way MacIntyre argues that among moral philosophers, despite thorough-going disagreement over the relationship between humanity and morality, there is nonetheless considerable accord over the conduct of these debates. Such agreement has two particular elements. The first is that they are united in a common telos, which is the search for the untrammelled truth, as the goal of their processes of enquiry. The second is their mode of engaging with one another. Despite all their

⁴⁷⁹ MacIntyre, ‘How can we learn’, 173.

⁴⁸⁰ MacIntyre, ‘How can we learn’, 173-4.

disagreements on substance, they nonetheless interact in ways that demonstrate mutual ‘unqualified respect’.⁴⁸¹ This encompasses the honesty, truthfulness, generosity of spirit, freedom from victimisation and so forth, which he cites as, first, ‘the requirements imposed by the precepts of natural law’ (to which I return in the next section) and characteristic of a culture or community of tradition, and, second, the precondition of all rational conversation.

But this is a long way from saying that the company of those engaged in moral philosophy equates to a community of tradition, or even a sub-culture with a ‘good enough’ moral language. They may share an implicit common goal (the pursuit of ‘truth’), and share standards for guiding their deliberations, both of which, as we have previously noted, MacIntyre sees as being at the heart of substantive ethical debate. But the extent of the agreement is far too thin for ‘going on and going forward’ on this basis. For some implicit agreement with each other, and, indeed, Aristotle⁴⁸² and Aquinas, that truth is the proper goal of rational enquiry, does not inevitably lead to agreement on what constitutes truth and how it is to be conceptualised, let alone agreement on the proper telos of humankind; nor on the nature of what it is to be human and to flourish (or even on what constitutes the virtues and internal goods of excellence of human practices); nor on the pursuit of life as a teleologically ordered unity. Second, though they may agree on guiding principles for their relationships within debate, they have neither shared evaluative standards, nor shared concepts of rationality, when it comes to the substance of the debate. And so MacIntyre enumerates various errors into which these anti-Thomistic philosophers fall, through espousing utilitarian approaches and failing to grasp that ‘the conception of a final good of human beings is that of a good that cannot be weighed against any other ...’⁴⁸³

MacIntyre subsequently lists other ways in which, particularly in Western society, natural law and its relationship with human good can be misunderstood not only in philosophical debate but in wider moral and ethical argument.⁴⁸⁴ But this does not detract from his description of the thin sort of commonality that does exist within the very limited social practice that is this particular area of philosophical enquiry. And this he presents as evidence in support of his contention that these fundamental precepts of natural law are those to which not only anti-Thomistic philosophers, but

⁴⁸¹ MacIntyre, ‘How can we learn’, 184.

⁴⁸² MacIntyre, ‘Moral Relativism’, 11.

⁴⁸³ MacIntyre, ‘How can we learn’, 178, and see 182-3 for similar considerations in relation to misconceiving ‘freedom of choice’.

⁴⁸⁴ MacIntyre, ‘How can we learn’, 190ff.

indeed all rational persons will assent, subject to the constraints of humanity's inevitable cultural, intellectual, and moral errors and our distortions of understanding.⁴⁸⁵

Let me now turn to a more detailed account of what precisely constitute the fundamental – or primary – precepts of natural law, and their significance for moral debate.

The Primary Precepts of Natural Law

As MacIntyre acknowledges, to assert that the primary precepts of natural law are eminently knowable by all rational persons gives direct rise to the question of why it is that such extensive moral disagreements nonetheless persist.⁴⁸⁶

The starting point for answering this question is, says MacIntyre, to recognise that the primary precepts of natural law are what give direct 'expression to the first principle of practical reason', which is 'that good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided.'⁴⁸⁷ It is open to humans to pursue such good in three areas: the goods that relate to our physical, animal and rational natures, the last including the goods of knowledge. Of these we can assert with Aquinas that they are not derived from any more ultimate precept, that they are known inferentially, and that it is characteristic of them that they are one and the same for everyone; that they are unchanging and unchangeable; that they are known to be what they are by all rational human beings; and that knowledge of them cannot be abolished from the human heart.⁴⁸⁸

The primary precepts find differentiated expression according to context, through secondary precepts. So though we may agree that taking innocent life or inflicting gratuitous harm is wrong, and that property should be respected, ignorance shunned, and understanding cultivated, how precisely we interpret these tenets in practice may in some circumstances be open to debate.⁴⁸⁹ Further, such debate often reduces to the sterility of competing incommensurable claims over some conceptions of what exactly are the 'first principles' that might apply. But does this mean, MacIntyre asks, that Aquinas' account of natural law as the guide for rational enquiry is inadequate? His answer is that this is not the case, if one confines one's claims about natural law, as he does, to the primary precepts as understood above, rather than

⁴⁸⁵ MacIntyre, 'How can we learn'. 175.

⁴⁸⁶ This is the issue at the heart of MacIntyre, 'Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement'.

⁴⁸⁷ MacIntyre, 'Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement', 64.

⁴⁸⁸ MacIntyre, 'Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement', 65.

⁴⁸⁹ MacIntyre, 'Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement', 65.

considering the broader scope which natural law is sometimes understood to encompass.⁴⁹⁰

Even on this basis, says MacIntyre, Aquinas expects disagreement to arise.⁴⁹¹ Since the primary precepts are rooted in the first principle of good being done and evil being avoided, we must understand that the questions answered by these precepts, at the most fundamental level, relate to the ultimate good of humankind. Therefore, unless we share a right understanding of our telos, then it is more than likely that we will disagree on specific practical questions.⁴⁹² And it is indeed the case, says Aquinas (according to MacIntyre), that humanity has a general tendency to disagree over our ultimate human end.⁴⁹³

However, we cannot debate ultimate ends as we might a practical ethical question, says MacIntyre. A different approach is required. For when we address practical ethical issues, we engage on questions about means, and this presupposes that we are in agreement over the particular ends that relate to the subject under debate. And so, where we find sustained disagreement on practical matters, i.e. about ‘means’, we should expect to find that this is, far more often than not, a consequence of underlying disagreement about ends.⁴⁹⁴ Therefore, if we want to engage with those of differing views on questions about ultimate ends, we cannot use the ‘practical reasoning’ that is conducted between those who share agreement on standards of

⁴⁹⁰ For example ‘the term has been used for a variety of positions in ethics and jurisprudence. Sometimes natural law means that part of God’s eternal law which governs the free actions of men; in another usage it designates those rules of justice which may be found written in the hearts or consciences of men; and thirdly, it describes a set of ethical judgments obtained by reflection on man’s ordinary experience, as contrasted with the divine laws that may be supernaturally revealed’, John Macquarrie, ed., *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, (London: SCM Press, 1967) 224. Stout also warns against taking too broad a view of Aquinas’ account of natural law: ‘Take Aquinas, whom we too often remember, misleadingly, as the author of a great system of natural law. This makes him look too much like a precursor of the Esperantists. His real accomplishment was to bring together into a single whole a wide assortment of fragments – Platonic, Stoic, Pauline, Jewish, Islamic, Augustinian, and Aristotelian. He ordered them in such a way that an Aristotelian language of the virtues transmitted largely by Islamic sources becomes the locus of most moral reflection, Platonic-Augustinian themes set a framework for thinking about creation as a whole, and the language of natural law is confined to quite limited tasks’, *EaB*, 75.

⁴⁹¹ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 69, 71-2.

⁴⁹² Thus, once again, telos and the ultimate nature of humanity are returned to the centre stage of moral discourse.

⁴⁹³ As previously noted, in the *Summa* Aquinas gives twelve different understandings of the human good, and proclaims eleven in error! See MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 71-2. Our view of the good may also be distorted by social/cultural, intellectual, and moral errors and our distortions of understanding, 80-1.

⁴⁹⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 74-5.

evaluation and the common good, but must proceed by a different course that focuses on what MacIntyre, in this particular article, terms ‘theoretical enquiry.’⁴⁹⁵

This is the same distinction that MacIntyre has previously drawn between debate as ‘practical reasoning’ – as conducted within communities of tradition, and between communities of tradition with sufficiently commensurable conceptions of telos and standards of rational evaluation – and debate as ‘theoretical enquiry’ – conducted by members of a tradition with those of other traditions where there is insufficient commensurability in these two areas, as first outlined in chapter 2. And while, as I argued in subsequent chapters, the possibilities for practical rationality are likely to be far more extensive than at first appears, situations will nonetheless arise where we have effectively no shared telos or shared standards of rational enquiry and evaluation. MacIntyre asks, to what then, do we resort, as resources for theoretical enquiry, and his answer is the precepts and norms arising from natural law.

He reaches this position by arguing that the first plank for dialogue of any sort between those of contesting views must be shared agreement that we are each singly and together in pursuit of the truth. For, MacIntyre asserts, ‘no account of the human good can be adequate that is not vindicated and sustained by continuing enquiry that takes truth to be its end and good, and ... therefore the good of truth must be a constitutive part of the human good.’⁴⁹⁶ Ultimate truth and humanity’s final end are thus inextricably interwoven. He concludes that ‘shared participation in the practice of enquiry presupposes at least this measure of agreement about the human good.’ As for what might be meant by truth, he points to Aquinas’ expression *adequatio rei et intellectus*, which he interprets as ‘the adequacy of a mind to a subject matter about which it enquires and of that subject matter to that mind.’⁴⁹⁷

The pursuit of truth requires various conditions to be satisfied. First, we are required to ‘accord to the good of truth a place that does not allow it to be overridden by other goods’, says MacIntyre, while at once qualifying this bald assertion with the recognition that it would be ‘absurd’ to mean that ‘the pursuit of truth always takes precedence over all other types of activity.’ Nonetheless, to address questions of

⁴⁹⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 76.

⁴⁹⁶ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 77.

⁴⁹⁷ I am taking it that this very broad correspondence theory of truth is sufficiently wide to encompass various views on how to articulate what this might mean with more precision – such debate would fall within the processes MacIntyre describes. See e.g. ‘truth, theories of’ in Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa, eds, *A Companion to Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 509ff.

disagreement with any degree of seriousness, ‘enquiry has to find some continuing and significant place in our lives.’⁴⁹⁸ Second, all those who commit to pursuing truth together must also agree to set aside any distorting influences such as particular ‘material and psychological interests that ... are nourished by our desires for pleasure, money and power’.⁴⁹⁹ Third, we must be able to trust one another, through respecting each other’s lives, liberty and property, and making arrangements for communal security. Furthermore, in the conduct of our discussions, we must also expect one another to speak the truth; to avoid deceptive or intentionally misleading speech; and to keep all commitments and promises made.⁵⁰⁰

All of these, says MacIntyre, are the preconditions for shared rational enquiry of every sort. They are precisely the same as those outlined above in his reflection on *Veritatis Splendor* for enquiry as conducted both within traditions, and also between, for example, moral philosophers of widely differing perspectives. Furthermore, he argues, they also conform to Aquinas’ primary precepts of natural law, having the same four characteristics as listed above: they are of universal application, exceptionlessness, self-evident for everyone, and presupposed rather than derived from enquiry.⁵⁰¹ As he puts it, ‘it is a condition of the rationality of shared enquiry that the social relationships of those engaged in it should be structured by certain norms, norms that find their expression in the primary precepts of the natural law.’⁵⁰²

The important conclusion to be drawn here is that these conditions hold for all able adults, regardless of whether they belong to any or no community of tradition.

Here it is worth underlining what MacIntyre claimed at the beginning – that the good that we are to pursue includes the goods of our rational nature. Therefore the pursuit of truth, though not human good in all its fullness, is intrinsic to the ultimate telos to which natural law directs us.

Thus, when we fail to find agreement, in diagnosing why this is so, alongside considering such questions as whether our conception of telos differs too radically, we can also ask whether we are falling short in any of the necessary conditions outlined above: one or other of the participants in enquiry may not be wholly dedicated to truth, there may be unacknowledged ulterior motives at play, we may be unwilling to

⁴⁹⁸ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 77, MacIntyre’s emphasis.

⁴⁹⁹ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 77-8.

⁵⁰⁰ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 79.

⁵⁰¹ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 79-80.

⁵⁰² MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 80.

be wholly honest, perhaps through lack of trust since we together have failed to provide a context of sufficient respect and security. Failure to abide by the primary precepts is likely to lead to failure to pursue truth in relation to whatever issue is at stake between us, and so MacIntyre concludes ‘Aquinas’s account of the precepts of natural law, far from being inconsistent with the facts of moral disagreement provides the best starting point for the explanation of these facts.’⁵⁰³

It may seem that MacIntyre began by making quite a limited claim for the scope of natural law and its primary precepts, and now his conclusion is also modest – that they explain moral disagreement. This nonetheless has a number of significant implications for the ability of members of a community of tradition to assert rationality and pursue moral debate within pluralist or secular contexts, within which, all too often, moral disagreement abounds.

First, let me recall that one of the marks of the rational superiority of a community of tradition is that when it encounters alternative perspectives, it should be able to give an account, from within its own resources, of why such differing views arise, and should then go on to offer remedies for overcoming disagreements. MacIntyre has hereby shown that his Thomistic-Aristotelianism, in which this conception of natural law is an intrinsic element, fulfils the demand for explaining moral disagreement in whatever context we find it. He also shows that the means for addressing disagreement on moral questions (though without offering any guarantees that it will be overcome), lies in following these ‘enabling’⁵⁰⁴ rules or norms that reflect the primary precepts. Further, where progress is difficult, he points to the need for parties to the disagreement to consider in what ways these norms might not be being upheld. And he implicitly directs the focus of debate according to these norms towards the question of what is the good for humanity, as the first step on the journey towards wider agreement – for, I would argue, as common ground begins to be established around the issue of humanity’s good, so dialogue can begin to move from ‘theoretical enquiry’ towards questions of ‘practical reasoning’ of how such good might be pursued in concrete terms within the given context. For here too, we can apply the approach of attempting to ‘go on and go further’ using whatever options are available to us – and through these attempts, actually contribute to being able to achieve far more than if we had not done so, by bringing clarity to the central issues at

⁵⁰³ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 81-82.

⁵⁰⁴ MacIntyre, ‘What can we learn’, 177.

stake and providing constructive means for ourselves and others with whom we engage to address them.

Natural Law, Plain Persons and Governance

It is not only the case that we can make this contribution to going on and going further in contexts such as the academic philosophy which MacIntyre used as an example. For, he says, we ‘come to know’ the primary precepts ‘practically as precepts whose binding authority is presupposed in any situation in which learning and enquiry between rational individuals about their individual and common goods can be advanced and by any relationship in which individuals can conduct themselves with rational integrity.’⁵⁰⁵ Therefore the same arguments as above also apply not merely at a scale that equates to communities of tradition, but potentially at every level of human interaction from individual relations through to the nation state and international institutions. And where matters of governance are concerned, MacIntyre insists that the primary precepts of natural law are not merely available to the ruling and educated classes, but also to all ‘plain persons, whose capacity for prudence and whose knowledge of the natural law is theirs in virtue of their human nature’.⁵⁰⁶ Thus very much the same considerations apply, when it comes to debating disagreements in the political sphere, particularly those with an ethical or moral dimension, as well as when considering the wider status of the rule of law. In arguing this, MacIntyre begins by remarking that it is at first intriguing, to say the least, to note that Aquinas, in considering the role of the state, concludes in the *Summa Theologiae* that it is not the role of human legislation to ‘supress all vice’. Rather, it is its task to ‘make human beings good, by habituating them in the performance of those types of actions which are required by the virtues’.⁵⁰⁷ But though Aquinas judges that the law should play its part in ‘moral education’, he concludes that ‘too much should not be asked [of them] too soon,’ given that people are generally ‘still deeply imperfect in the virtues’. Further, Aquinas recognises that human nature is often so perverse that legislating in

⁵⁰⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 48.

⁵⁰⁶ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 49. I shall take it that by ‘plain persons’ MacIntyre is intending all sufficiently mature individuals, who suffer no incapacity that prevents them exercising a broad ‘common sense’ reasoning. MacIntyre focus is primarily on the *Summa*, Ia-IIae, particularly (and notably 90-96 – see Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 76-149), though also drawing on IIa-IIae (specific references noted as they arise). Here he follows IIa-IIae, 47, 11 – see St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol 36, edited by Thomas Gilby O.P. (London: Blackfriars, 1974).

47,11 35-39 quote is p.37

⁵⁰⁷ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 46-7. MacIntyre references Ia-IIae 96, 2 and alludes to Ia-IIae 92 and 95 – see Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 139-41, 97-8, 126.

too much detail can also provoke what it aims to prevent! I shall consider how the church can indeed be part of precisely this gradual and careful habituation in chapter 7.

All this is consonant with Aquinas' assertion, as recounted by MacIntyre (and noted previously), that by and large people fail adequately to grasp humanity's ultimate telos, and thus what is their genuine good. Nonetheless, the degree of humanity's capacity for knowledge of the natural law is sufficient for Aquinas to 'appeal to natural reason, not only for his account of the purpose and function of law, but also for the standard to which all positive legal enactments and administrative measures must confirm, if they are to be appropriate law rather than merely an expression of the will and interest of those who act and administer'⁵⁰⁸ it, says MacIntyre.

Concluding that 'human law is from natural law' in this way 'has radical implications'.⁵⁰⁹ The first corollary is that it is not necessary, according to Aquinas' reasoning, for a ruler to be a Christian in order to rule legitimately from a Christian perspective. A second corollary is that the legitimacy of the ruler, and of the legislation of governance, depends on how far these conform to natural law – and, says MacIntyre, the 'knowledge that enables us to [say what the natural law is] is possessed by any person capable of adequate reasoning and, so far as common principles of the natural law are concerned, by every rational being.'⁵¹⁰ (I shall return to the question of the legitimacy of the rule of law later in this chapter, in considering the implications of MacIntyre's interpretation of Aquinas for how the church engages in public moral discourse around the question of the shape of public space.)

MacIntyre reminds his readers 'what the grounds are, on Aquinas' view, for respecting the precepts of the natural law and how it is that, on that view, we come to know those precepts. We come to know them practically as precepts whose binding authority is presupposed in any situation in which learning and enquiry between rational individuals about their individual and common goods can be advanced and by any relationship in which individuals can conduct themselves with rational integrity.'⁵¹¹ The particular circumstances that prevail will influence which of the

⁵⁰⁸ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law', 47. Here and in the following quote he draws on *Ia-IIae* 10,10 – see St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol 32, edited by Thomas Gilby O.P. (London: Blackfriars, 1975), 67-71.

⁵⁰⁹ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law', 47.

⁵¹⁰ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law', 48, citing *Ia-IIae* 93, 2 – Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 103-5.

⁵¹¹ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law', 48 – with MacIntyre's emphases, in the quotation that follows.

precepts have particular relevance, but it remains the case that ‘the violation of any precept of natural law always constitutes a threat’ to the ‘rational possibilities’ of the situations and relationships in question.

And echoing his comments on the way that anti-Thomistic philosophers abide by this Thomistic understanding in the way that they conduct their academic arguments, MacIntyre here asserts that ‘Just because even in situations in which there is serious, even skeptical enquiry about the precepts of the natural law, willing conformity to those precepts is a precondition of rational and serious enquiry, it turns out that we cannot but presuppose allegiances to them in our activities.’⁵¹² The precepts are primarily known, he says, as ‘presuppositions’ of our activities of learning and enquiry, ‘insofar as those activities are or aspire to rationality’. Applying this to questions of justice means that ‘natural law defines the requirements of justice, and unjust law fails as law.’ Thus, ‘whether a particular positive law has authority over us is therefore something to be discerned by rational persons.’ Our rationality lies in our capacity to recognise that ‘good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided.’ In other words, says MacIntyre, ‘the exceptionless precepts of the natural law are those which, insofar as we are rational, we recognize as indispensable in every society and in every situation for the achievement of our goods and our final good, because they direct us towards and partially define our common good.’⁵¹³

And while it is ‘to rulers that a care for the common good is especially entrusted’,⁵¹⁴ says MacIntyre, and while Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that ‘there is indeed a particular virtue or excellence specific to ruling’, nonetheless, Aquinas also argues that ‘every human being, insofar as rational, has part in ruling according to the judgment of reason.’ For ‘the virtue of a good human being also includes the virtue of a good ruler’, and therefore ‘insofar as human beings have the capacity to become good, they also have the capacity to exercise the prudence of a ruler’.⁵¹⁵ And so MacIntyre concludes that, as referred to at the beginning of this section, it is as a consequence of our being human – our being ‘plain persons’ – that all able adults have such a capacity for knowledge of natural law, for rationality and for prudence.

Natural law, therefore, says MacIntyre, provides the justification for, and the basis upon which, citizens hold their rulers to account – over the legitimacy of their

⁵¹² MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 48.

⁵¹³ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 49, citing Ia-IIae 94, 2 – see Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 116-8.

⁵¹⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 49.

⁵¹⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 49, citing IIa-IIae 47, 11 and 12, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol 36., 37, 39.

rule; and over whether their laws are ‘conducive to the common good’ or whether, though ostensibly promoting the common good, ‘they place a disproportionate burden on some for the benefit of others’.⁵¹⁶ Thus, the ‘knowledge of the natural law which plain persons possess provides them with the grounds to which they need to appeal in debates with other plain persons about how they should respond to the enactments of positive law.’⁵¹⁷

In other words, MacIntyre has come to the far-reaching conclusion that, regardless of whether or not individuals are members of communities of tradition, and *regardless of the nature of the public space, it is always potentially open to ‘plain persons’ to engage with one another and with whatever is the governing authority on questions around how rule is exercised. And we do so, on the basis of the primary precepts of the natural law, and what constitutes the common good.*

Thus it seems that, in stark contrast to what MacIntyre has argued elsewhere, it is in fact possible to engage on ethical questions even within the worst sorts of liberal systems, as he has described them.

Recognising the Good

However, though the potential for such debate exists in theory, whether it can be conducted with any tangible measure of success remains a fraught question. For humanity’s ability to grasp accurately the primary precepts of natural law, like our capacity to understand rightly what is our common good, can be liable to error in many ways. MacIntyre offers as an example the distortions to both that arise from giving undue authority to administrative or legal considerations, and comments ‘it follows that those who do not recognize what the natural law is and how it functions cannot understand what the common good is either.’⁵¹⁸ How then, are plain persons able to recognise that they have rightly understood both the common good and the right operation of natural law? MacIntyre acknowledges that Aquinas does not explicitly address what seems to be the implication in the *Summa Theologiae* that only those who have been educated to do so, are in practice actually able to ‘judge whether a given precept is or is not a precept of the natural law.’⁵¹⁹ However, this point, says MacIntyre, has been considered by Suarez, who – following Aquinas’ conclusions

⁵¹⁶ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 49.

⁵¹⁷ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 49-50.

⁵¹⁸ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 50.

⁵¹⁹ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 58.

directly, he argues – appears to come to the view that ‘judgements as to morals and law are the preserve of ... a theological elite.’⁵²⁰

But MacIntyre believes this is to draw a too sweeping, and therefore erroneous, view of Suarez’ argument. He first notes that Suarez ‘considers the precepts of the natural law to belong to three different classes.’⁵²¹ First, what MacIntyre describes as the ‘primary and general principles’, namely that good is to be done and evil avoided, and that one should not treat others as one would not wish to be treated;⁵²² second, ‘there are more definite and specific precepts which enjoin a life which embodies justice, the worship of God, temperateness, and the like’; and third, there is a category with two subdivisions. These are the precepts ‘which are not evident without a certain amount of rational reflection and inference, and they are divided into those which are more easily recognised and these less so.’ In the first category are those which are fairly generally and widely recognised, such as prohibitions on theft and so forth. But, says MacIntyre, Suarez also writes of ‘other precepts the apprehension of which is “not easily within the capacity of all”.’ He notes that Suarez gives three examples: ‘that fornication is intrinsically evil, that usury is unjust, and that lying can never be justified.’

MacIntyre argues that what these have in common is that they are all ‘examples of exceptionless precepts to which objection had perennially been made that there occur hard cases in which exceptions to them ought to be excused or permitted or required’ and indeed which are the subject of continuing debate, in which, then as now, ‘plain persons needed to find an answer to sophisticated objections to these exceptionless precepts of the natural law.’⁵²³ MacIntyre draws attention to the fact that Suarez says that these precepts are ‘not easily within the capacity of everyone’ rather than ‘not within the capacity of everyone’, and points to the explanation Suarez subsequently provides. This is to assert that only those ‘who had never been exposed to the relevant counterarguments on behalf of the precepts of natural law, arguments that they would have been incapable of thinking up for themselves’ can be judged to be so ‘unsophisticated’ in their ignorance as to deny the primary precepts ‘without culpability’. And the vital corollary is this: ‘what they would need, in order for their hitherto invincible ignorance to be overcome, is just that

⁵²⁰ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 58, citing Francisco Suarez, *On Law and God the Lawgiver*, trans. G. Williams, A Brown and J Waldron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

⁵²¹ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 58, citing Suarez, *On Law*, 7,8.

⁵²² This is in essence the ‘Golden Rule’, generally articulated in a more positive form as the tenet that one should treat others as one would wish to be treated oneself.

⁵²³ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 58-9.

and no more than that: a sound argument or a set of sound arguments, to whose conclusions they would then be able to give rational assent.’

In this way, says MacIntyre, Suarez is not, as some mistakenly deduce, asserting ‘anything which entails a denial of the capacity and authority of plain persons, as rational beings’ but rather he is clarifying ‘the Thomistic claim’ that ‘all plain person as such have the capacity for recognizing the truth of the premises for which Aquinas argues [in relation to the primary precepts of natural law] and, confronted by these arguments for the conclusions at which Aquinas arrives, plain persons have the capacity for recognizing their soundness.’⁵²⁴ In other words everyone has the latent capacity to recognise a sound explanation if sufficiently clearly made.

From this MacIntyre draws two conclusions. The first is that the ‘role of the philosopher and the theologian in supplying the needed arguments is therefore an important and even in some cases an indispensable one’ and, second, ‘philosophers and theologians are themselves in respect of the natural law no more than unusually reflective plain persons, able to present their reflections to others for the rational verdict of others.’⁵²⁵ It is on these foundations that the faith communities can and should build.

Engaging for Good

These two conclusions are of fundamental importance to my argument that the Anglican Bishops and those they lead can, and furthermore (generally speaking) should, engage in discussing moral issues, even in wholly secular national and international contexts (such as the United Nations). They also indicate how such engagement can be most profitably pursued.

For, first, this means that all plain persons, no matter what their background, no matter how ‘deracinated’ and ‘alienated’ from communities of tradition, have a latent capacity to recognise and grasp the primary precepts of natural law and a concomitant concept of the common good, provided that they are presented with clear arguments and explanations. Armed with such knowledge, they have the capacity to judge how adequately, how justly, and with what authority, the political system in which they find themselves promotes the common good.

⁵²⁴ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 59 – here he gives no specific reference to the *Summa*, but rather seems to allude to the cumulative argument of quotations previously drawn from Ia-IIae 92-96, as above.

⁵²⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 59.

Who is to offer such clear arguments and explanations? They are best made by those who most fully grasp both the primary precepts of natural law and humanity's ultimate telos – in other words, by members of communities of tradition that are oriented towards seeking the fullest answers to questions of 'How then shall we live?' For the answer to this question is always a reflection of the common good as instantiated within the particular context in which the question is posed. All other considerations being equal (for example, political and tactical concerns, as noted in earlier chapters), it is always more morally rational to work for a fuller instantiation of the common good. In the long run this is to be achieved through drawing the greatest possible number of people into the best possible recognition of the common good, and with this the recognition that it is to be sought, at least in the first instance, through the enabling practices of the primary precepts of natural law.

Therefore it must be the task of the Anglican Bishops, in their leadership of the church, to ensure adequate resources are devoted to engaging in this way in all appropriate contexts, as far as is practically possible. This is rooted not only in a general concern to pursue rational morality. For it is also the case that, as MacIntyre points out, theologians (and similarly philosophers) 'have a special interest in, and also a special knowledge of the application of the natural law through its secondary precepts to the areas of their own professional activities'⁵²⁶ which specifically include both teaching (of how to live, alongside academic teaching) and moral enquiry.

In this way, MacIntyre has, contrary to what might have been expected, provided a justification for insisting that debate about what constitutes humanity's good should be returned to the public arena, and a basis for doing so. Further, it seems that we who have the requisite skills, through our own membership of communities of tradition devoted to the pursuit of moral rationality and of human flourishing, have a particular obligation so to engage, even though we do so while realistically recognising that disagreement on the good is to be expected. Our approach should be to focus on the twin issues of the common good and the primary precepts as the necessary starting point for all theoretical enquiry.

Debating the Good

All this returns us to what MacIntyre considers the central deliberative question, namely 'How then shall we live?' My contention is that all that is required for the most basic conversation of any sort to begin, is agreement that this is in some

⁵²⁶ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law', 60.

sense a common question that is open to discussion. This is the starting point from which we can always ‘go on’, even if we may not be able to go very much further, for example, with those like Rawls, who argue (as quoted previously) that the ‘aims of the self are heterogeneous’ and therefore it is ‘irrational or more likely ... mad’, and ‘to violate the principles of rational choice’ to attempt to conceive of any single overarching view of humanity’s telos.⁵²⁷ But, as I have noted that Stout and others argue, Rawlsian liberalism is not how the vast majority of people in western society live, and therefore we can expect at least some possibilities of debate.

That said, to raise the issue in terms of the ‘common good’ may itself be to employ what is seen in some quarters as loaded vocabulary, given its association with, for example, Catholic social teaching. But rephrasing the central question in such catch-all terms as ‘Can or should things be better?’ will almost inevitably bring a positive response. By then asking ‘And if so, how?’ concepts of human flourishing are brought to the surface. For it cannot reasonably be argued that there is no room for warranted improvement in the lot of all citizens of whatever is our nation – and even more so if one considers the entire global community. Here too (as was previously argued by Stout, as noted in chapter 4) we can make significant progress through beginning with what amounts to little more than platitudes.

Of course, some may want to answer that for themselves and those like them, life is pretty good – and that the lot of others is not something for which they have any responsibility. The response to this is to draw on the primary precepts, for example, to ask questions that raise issues of at whose expense – i.e. at the price of whose diminishment – is such a restricted view of human flourishing achieved (are agricultural workers adequately compensated? at what environmental costs is cheap food being produced and transported?).

Questions arising out of the primary precepts can helpfully open up debate in other ways. Thus, MacIntyre’s first concern that the good of truth (not merely propositional truth, but a truth that encompasses ultimate human good) is accorded primary place can point us to questions around the aims of particular structures within society, and whether drawing them too narrowly distorts or undermines more fundamental goals of human flourishing. We can then go on to ask whether the flourishing of some is pursued at the expense of others. We can invite examination of whether the goals and their pursuit are honestly drawn, or whether ulterior motives are concealed. We can query how far the conduct of debate promotes honesty and trust,

⁵²⁷ Quoted in WJWR, 337.

or whether deceptive or misleading speech and actions are present. We can question the degree to which trust is built or undermined, the safety of participants in debate is guaranteed and their dignity respected. We can raise the need for processes of accountability, *inter alia* to ensure that commitments are upheld in both letter and spirit. We can draw attention to the influences of status, money and power.

There is a strong parallel between this approach and Stout's stereoscopic social criticism, though now applied to a far more basic level of discourse. Where Stout directs our attention to internal goods of excellence and all that is associated with them (which of course contribute towards our achieving of our good), here we look to questions of what constitutes the common good itself. And where Stout calls for the unmasking of and honest dialogue around the potentially undue influences of external goods, bureaucratic and economic factors, and more malign factors such as naked pursuit of power, status and wealth, here we bring a focus onto how faithfully the primary precepts of natural law are upheld – including such issues as the honesty which is part of Stout's methodology. Of course, in both cases, the two threads will be inextricably interwoven.

An example of how this might operate in practice is illustrated in the reasoning employed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, in his contribution to the House of Lords debate, on 15 January 2008, on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. Here he raises the concern that legislation 'is gradually but inexorably moving towards a more instrumental view of how we may treat human organisms'. His call for 'clarity in this area' should be seen as a demand for honest and open debate about both what it means to be human, and the tension between 'internal' and 'external' goods, or, in this case, more blatant factors of economic and bureaucratic 'efficiency', that are present and are in danger of distorting our concept of proper human living.⁵²⁸

This approach also allows us – and all plain persons – to engage on the more fundamental question of the legitimacy of an entire system of law. It is this that the former Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane has attempted to do in the

⁵²⁸ Rowan Williams, 'Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill - House of Lords Report Stage', 15 January 2008, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1184/human-fertilisation-and-embryology-bill-house-of-lords-report-stage.

critique he has offered in various forums of the World Trade Organisation.⁵²⁹ The main thrust of his argument is that, in failing to place human rights concerns – which he aligns with humanity’s telos – above particular concepts of market economics which benefit some at the unjust expense of others, the WTO is in breach of even the simplest concepts of justice, and contravenes the spirit, and quite probably also the letter, of customary international law designed to promote human flourishing. In failing rightly to uphold the common good of all, and in its distortions of the primary precepts of natural law, it thus lacks legitimacy.

The linguistic strategies Ndungane employs to convey such concepts in contexts in which commercial criteria dominate, are illuminating. In speaking under the heading, ‘A Question of Values’, at a dinner held for the Motorola Business Leadership Competition in 2006,⁵³⁰ Ndungane began his critique with reference to a widely held concept of basic justice: ‘Take the World Trade Organisation. A simplistic application of the Golden Rule might suggest that market liberalisation across the board is the answer.’ Thus he questioned how widely held, largely incontestable, assumptions of fairness are reflected in practice in a very particular context – the fundamental issue of how primary precepts are appropriately instantiated in secondary principles. His claim is then that when expressed within a framework wholly driven by certain narrowly-drawn politico-economic assumptions, the fundamental tenets of fairness (and by implication, the primary precepts) are in fact not upheld. He argues that, instead, ‘experience shows that this has all too often been a charter for the strong to exploit the weak, the rich to benefit at the expense of the poor.’ The ostensible commitment to fairness is, he says, a smokescreen for the ulterior motives of the powerful in pursuing their own self-interest (a breach of the primary precepts). He then links the concepts of fairness and the common good, through aligning them with human rights. Not unlike his successor as Archbishop of Cape Town (as noted in the previous chapter) he grounds human rights not in a particular form of contestable political theory, but in a second sweeping assertion of ultimate fairness – the equal worth of all humanity, which he depicts as a fundamental assumption of theistic faith communities: ‘God’s perspective says that every human being is of equal value, and so should have equitable access (in achievable practice,

⁵²⁹ This included being the only non-trade expert to speak at the World Trade Organisation’s own symposium on trade liberalisation held in 2004 to mark the organisation’s 40th anniversary, see Rowland Jones, *Faith in Action*, p.54.

⁵³⁰ Njongonkulu Ndungane, ‘A Question of Values’, in Rowland Jones, *Faith in Action*, 218-9.

not in abstract theory) to the fundamental rights of life, for example, those listed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.⁵³¹

Ndungane then offers an alternative approach to instantiating justice that might be taken within the trade context – defining it not in the narrow terms of the trade efficiencies of liberal market economics, but in the wider concepts of human fairness he has referenced, arguing that ‘poor countries should have the chance to develop their own economy for the wellbeing of their population, and not be forced to open up markets for external exploitation.’ By way of offering an example of how a deliberate ‘unfairness’ can actually deliver greater ‘fairness’, in order to provoke consideration of how a similar approach to trade might provide a greater overall justice, he says ‘People often speak of “level playing-fields”. I prefer a golfing metaphor when it comes to the wisest solution for differentiated trade. The handicap system enables a weak golfer to play against a strong opponent, with equal chances for both to win. I want to see global economic systems that allow for such results!’

The Archbishop more directly addressed the same question of competing justices, and the inadmissibility of giving human rights a secondary place to the narrower institutional objectives of the WTO, in an address in St Paul’s Cathedral in 2005 as part of their ‘What can one person do?’ series.⁵³² Here he argued:

All World Trade Organisation member states are obliged to observe and uphold the standards of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, domestically, bilaterally, and in all international organisations in which they participate. Not every country may have signed up, but over half a century it has become part of international customary law. Now, you might say to me that there are some forums which are specifically designed to focus on human rights issues. That is so. But it does not mean that bodies with other primary objectives can ignore or neglect the human rights dimension, as if it were not their concern. Upholding human rights must be integral to all policy making, in every sector, in every organisation, the WTO included.

⁵³¹ On the 60th anniversary of the UDHR, leaders from all the major religions endorsed a wide-ranging statement confirming ‘that our religions recognise and support the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every human person, alone or in community with others’ – see ‘2008 Faith in Human Rights Statement’, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/988/archbishop-gives-support-to-2008-faith-in-human-rights-statement>

⁵³² Njongonkulu Ndungane, ‘Global poverty: the challenge from Africa’, in Rowland Jones, *Faith in Action*, 319-20.

In this way he privileges our ultimate human ends, which are inextricably bound up with ultimate truth, as MacIntyre has argued, citing Aquinas, that we must do, if we are to be morally rational. More than this, he demands, rightly in MacIntyrean terms, that any political or economic institution claiming legitimacy must demonstrate that it adequately gives overriding priority to promoting the genuine common good, through means that reflect the primary precepts of natural law.

Speaking of the Good

But Ndungane's attempts to bring questions of the common good, and aspects of the primary precepts of natural law, into forums which generally recognise only the language of bureaucratic efficiencies, and of treaty law that provides its own authority, indicate the enormity of the challenge of finding appropriate language for engaging deeply on ethical questions. For, as noted earlier in this thesis, MacIntyre is right to assert that there is no universal neutral language which we can employ in such discussions; and that the 'internationalised English' such as is used in global trade and politics is both too rooted in concepts of modernity, and too conceptually thin in relation to internal goods and the social practices that support them, to be able to provide a conceptual framework for sustaining the sort of moral rational debate that is found in communities of tradition. Stout similarly insists that aspiring to some 'moral Esperanto' is futile⁵³³ – indeed, this is 'itself a symptom' of the problems of the worst forms of secular liberalism, and 'invites us all to speak the language of the market place all the time' and in so doing 'aids and abets the tyranny of external goods'.⁵³⁴ Even in a 'more modest and less harmful' Kantian form, 'it still characteristically aims to occupy the entire moral landscape, but it achieves this result by excluding most assessment of conduct, character, and community from view.' In this way it 'provides no means for surveying the dangers that ensue when its central concepts begin to pervade the entire culture, eroding not only the capacity to acquire virtues that go beyond minimal decency but also the ability to understand a kind of justice that does not consist in procedural fairness.'

It is precisely this genuine justice that Ndungane has attempted to describe and promote. But is his effort bound to be futile, given the limitations that MacIntyre and Stout identify in the normative language used in contexts such as the World Trade Organisation? How then can MacIntyre assert that plain persons are not left resourceless in such circumstances? For if it is indeed the case that plain persons have

⁵³³ EaB, 294.

⁵³⁴ EaB, 286.

a knowledge of natural law by ‘virtue of their human nature’, and so ‘can never lose their capacity for judging’ their rulers and the rules they promulgate,⁵³⁵ then there must be some mode of discourse in which these plain persons are able to articulate something of this knowledge and these judgements. And this will be a mode of discourse which those from communities of tradition can employ and build upon in their pursuit of moral rational life for all.

Yet MacIntyre is not wrong to deny the existence of a universalised language for such discourse. For just as the primary precepts of natural law find particular application and expression in the secondary precepts, which differ from context to context, circumstance to circumstance,⁵³⁶ so too, I contend, it must be the case that the discussion of natural law and its application will also differ from context to context, and circumstance to circumstance. Just as each community of tradition has its own conceptual language-in-use (as MacIntyre argues); and, at a less developed level, each social practice its own moral language (Stout’s usage), which is rather thinner, but nonetheless adequate for sustaining the promotion of its associated internal goods of excellence; now we find that each human context has, at an even more basic level, what might be described as the raw materials necessary for constructing the barest skeleton structure to support expression of the primary precepts of natural law as they might there find secondary application, and articulation of associated contextualised aspects of the common good. This seems to me to be implicit in MacIntyre’s arguments, even though I am unaware of any place where he indicates that this is so.

Thus, I propose, each context has the potential for its own specific linguistic expression of natural law and the primary precepts – what we might term an *embryonic ‘communal language’*.

What precisely such a communal language may be will be best understood within any given context by those within it whom MacIntyre has described as ‘philosophers and theologians’ and who so operate as ‘unusually reflective plain persons’. I take it that by this he means members of communities of tradition dedicated to pursuing moral rationality directed towards humanity’s ultimate good, and who find themselves within some wider socio-economic context. It is for those of us who fit this description (or at least some of us – and our communities should ensure that adequate provision is made for this) to make the imaginative connections between

⁵³⁵ MacIntyre, ‘Natural Law’, 49.

⁵³⁶ MacIntyre, ‘Aquinas and the extent of Moral Disagreement’, 65.

the assumptions of the arena in question and the primary precepts, in order find some points of contact with potential expression of the secondary precepts.

In other words, if the primary precepts are inferentially available to all ‘plain persons’, then these ‘plain persons’ must have some means of expressing them. Even if only in embryonic form, there should be a language-in-use for the articulation of the primary precepts of natural law within each specific context – a ‘communal language’ which potentially can find ever fuller expression through the development of the particular ‘communal practices’ structured around these precepts within those circumstances. Such discourse, when in promotion of the instantiation of the first principles of natural law within communal practices appropriate to the context, may be seen as an internal good (as Stout argues). Thus democratic debate of this sort can be considered a social practice embedded in tradition (even if it is to some degree a tradition-in-the-making as we pursue ever more fully realised communal practices), one in which we can pursue as far as possible the latent potential to ‘go on and go forward’ adequately enough.

Optimistic engagement can always potentially strengthen what is present, and promote a continuing dynamic from the less adequate to the more adequate in public debate around moral questions, rooted in concepts of human flourishing. The reverse is also true. Pessimistic disengagement contributes to the undermining of the possibilities and practices of discourse, weakening democratic debate’s ability to function as a tradition, and leaving internal goods unsupported in the unavoidable and unrelenting contest with external goods, and the pressures of market and management.

Therefore, as I argue further below and in the following chapter, within our own public life, those of us who are skilled in the practices of a community of tradition should see it as an obligation to use these skills for promoting the development of communal practices, and of a communal language for expressing them, so that the primary precepts of natural law can indeed thus be increasingly well-instantiated – even though this is likely to be a less fully realised community of tradition than full-blown Thomistic Aristotelianism, or even than the sort of groupings with social practices and moral languages of chapter 5. Those of us who belong to a community of tradition can also work to draw our fellow-citizens into increasing fluency around questions of how we best understand humanity’s ultimate good and its pursuit. From there, we would hope, we can go on to attempt to convince them of our own views on moral reasoning and praxis.

Thus Ndungane, in attempting to introduce a more widely grounded ethical debate into a trade context, was right to start by setting alongside the WTO's ideological commitment to market economics, expressed through the upholding of concomitant legislation, alternative concepts of justice rooted in human well-being that might 'ring bells' with his hearers. These he drew from the Golden Rule, from a different cost-benefit calculation, from notions of humanity's essential equality and value, from the alternative legislative framework of human rights, and even from the subversive 'justice' of golfing handicaps – with which no doubt many senior trade experts are more than familiar! It was an appropriate first step towards supplying the 'clear explanation of sound arguments' which, according to Aquinas, plain persons are capable of grasping.

But the greater goal of Anglican Bishops, in committing themselves to lobbying and advocacy in support of social justice and equitable human flourishing, is to sustain and develop this toe-hold approach, in order to influence, and where necessary change, discourse, policies and programmes. While Ndungane may have planted seeds through largely one-off speaking invitations, these need to be watered and nurtured. The wider strategy of the churches should be that whatever initial points of contact are identified, must be broadened and deepened through persistent engagement. Whatever purchase or traction we can get, we should use, and work to expand the 'thickness' of both the content of our dialogue and the way we frame our discourse, always attempting to move it towards greater moral rationality. In doing this we pursue the twin concerns of, first, asking what constitutes humanity's well-being, and second, raising in parallel broader questions about the conduct of debate and how it can be shaped in ways that better promote the discussion and pursuit of such flourishing (we all want to live with justice, in safety, and so forth).

The object of this will be precisely to lay firm foundations of 'theoretical enquiry' in order then to go on to build 'practical reasoning' upon them – with both being context-appropriate. For where practical reasoning cannot be sustained, we do indeed resort to theoretical enquiry, as MacIntyre says we must – but we do so in order to work with the latent capacity of 'plain persons' to recognise concepts of the common good and of natural law's primary precepts, so that we may then increasingly provide the wherewithal that makes practical reasoning possible within those particular circumstances.

We can do so through employing a similar, but more basic, approach of bilingualism to that commended in chapter 5 for enriching the moral languages of

social practices. Those of us who take on this task will be able, through the skills and insights acquired by virtue of membership of our community of tradition, to analyse the dynamics and influences at work within the milieu with which we are dealing, and from this to develop context-appropriate ways of speaking clearly about our telos and about the primary precepts, and how we can construe and pursue them, and then to promote debate in such terms. We also aim to identify what are, perhaps only in embryonic form, or could potentially become, internal goods and their associated social practices – even if they are not recognisable as such within the conceptual framework of the context on its own terms. (For example, there may be habits of cooperation within fiscally driven environments that go unnoticed as they do not ‘count’ in economic terms.) Around these we aim to enrich the communal language into a moral language which can highlight and promote them. Ultimately, the goal is to work from theoretical enquiry to practical reasoning; and from communal languages and practices to moral languages and social practises, and then through to developing fuller realisation of communities of tradition.

In line with what MacIntyre argues, we will certainly find that the most amenable contexts for pursuing these goals are those which in scale lie between the family and the entire nation state. But, just as I argued in the last chapter that through helping strengthen civil society bodies so that they mature in their use of moral language to something closer to a language-in-use, as the best means of promoting the effective operation of democracy as akin to a tradition, so too, faith communities and other communities of tradition should particularly work with networks or alliances of ‘plain persons’ where appropriate, as potentially the most fertile settings for promoting communal languages that might subsequently be developed to sustain increasing levels of moral rationality. But though it will undoubtedly be harder to do this on a larger scale, the latent capacity of plain persons to comprehend and enunciate concepts of the common good and primary precepts means that we should not be so wholly negative as MacIntyre.⁵³⁷ To write off all hope of rational ethical public discourse at the wider level, such as state or international institution, is to be complicit in its failures.

Pursuit of our goal may thus be seen as part of the responsibility that comes to communities of tradition, and specifically the theologians within faith communities, who have a specialist expertise in teaching, particularly in relation to the instantiation of the primary precepts of natural law through secondary precepts. This task cannot

⁵³⁷ For example, in DRA, Chapter 11.

be shirked by the whole community, without impairing its moral rationality and claim thereto.

Furthermore, MacIntyre draws a specific link between education and the starting point of theoretical enquiry in questions around how rule – or, depending on context, the regulatory structure of the institution in question – is exercised, and how it conforms to natural law and the delivery of the common good. For, having earlier referred to Aquinas' view that the role of law is properly 'moral education' (as noted above), at the conclusion of this essay he reminds us that 'the function of law is primarily to educate, and education is a matter of transformation of the passions, so that the habits through which they receive expression in action are virtues.'⁵³⁸ It is no surprise that he continues 'Such education takes place, on Aquinas' Aristotelian view, in and through ongoing communal practices, and the recognition of natural law is a matter of how such practices are structured.' His conclusion is precisely that which we have sought to provide through the development of the building blocks of a latent moral language, namely that 'The rationality of plain persons is to be elicited by and exhibited in their participation in communal practices, practices which require a shared recognition of their common good as a political bond ...'

Education into communal practices is of course at the heart of how communities of tradition bring up their children – and such teaching is not merely confined to the theologians amongst us.⁵³⁹ Children begin with no relevant prior understanding. It is through exposure to good practices and their language-in-use, and through being drawn to emulate them, that they become able to understand and practice for themselves such ways of reflecting on, and living with, moral rationality. This parallels the way that, as the Church of England's research during the 1990s Decade of Evangelism indicated, many – and probably most – people (in England, at least) come to the Christian faith through a gradual journey rather than an 'ahah' moment of conviction.⁵⁴⁰ Often this begins with deepening friendship with believers, which develops into what has been termed 'belonging, then behaving, then believing'

⁵³⁸ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law', 63.

⁵³⁹ There is not space in this thesis to do more than draw a link with the vital role of Church Schools, in the UK and elsewhere, as places where children can be brought up in the practices of ethical reasoning. Wolterstorff persistently stresses this is both necessary and possible (see e.g. Gloria Goris Stronks, and Clarence W. Joldersma, eds. *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning*: Nicholas P. Wolterstorff (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), in contrast with MacIntyre's again overly negative stance (e.g. MacIntyre, 'What More Needs to be Said', 269).

⁵⁴⁰ See, for example, John Finney, J, *Finding Faith Today: How does it Happen?* (Swindon: The Bible Society, 1992).

as a member of the community of faith. Learning appropriate praxis may well come before a fully enunciated theological justification is grasped and consciously owned – much as with bringing up children within a community of tradition.

Acting to bring people into some level of fluency in our language-in-use (including greater understanding of the praxis of the church, as a community of tradition) should therefore inevitably be part of the wider mission of the church, as part of its evangelistic vocation. For it is a primary goal of churches that others should come to commit to and share fully in what they see as the riches of their faith. But the fact that the rational morality of others can be appreciated without the need to adopt their stance for oneself means that promoting understanding of Christian beliefs and behaviour is also of value (though differently, and perhaps more secondarily, directed) in what it can achieve in terms of advocating a place for Christian engagement in pluralist public discourse – a place which can then be utilised to promote the social justice of moral rational living on a wider scale. Furthermore, the more that others can grasp how our community of tradition operates, even if they do not want to become Christians themselves, the more they nonetheless are likely to enhance their understanding of what it means to pursue tradition-based moral rationality as a contextually rooted practice for living well, and so be encouraged to pursue such living themselves through joining some community of tradition. This will include issues of what it means to pursue ethical questions as best as one is able, that is, through dialectical engagement, recognition of which has significant implications for the shaping of debate in the public arena.

Shaping the Debate

The task of moving from theoretical enquiry to practical reasoning, and of working to establish a communal language, developing this into a moral language and then promoting, as far as possible, a fully-fledged language-in-use (together with associated ways of living through pursuing social practices, internal goods, virtues, the common good and so forth), therefore applies at every level from smaller scale institutions, through to government and international legislative bodies. Inevitably there will be limitations, often severe, on how much can be achieved, not least because some bodies do not have the capacity to operate as communities of tradition (perhaps due to the narrowness of their objectives, or because of their size) but we should nonetheless try to push them as far as they can go.

Thus, in relation to smaller institutions, MacIntyre gave the specific example of the University of Paris in the thirteenth century (this being part of the context in

which he developed his argument about plain persons' capacity to grasp the common good and the primary precepts). This was, by his account, an arena where political tensions played out between the French king, on the one hand, and the Dominicans and Franciscans on the other, and on other occasions between the Dominicans and the Bishop of Paris. In these, conflicts between feudal rights and local customary law, royal sovereignty, and papal authority often threatened to eclipse the ostensible primary aims of the university itself.⁵⁴¹ Nonetheless, it was possible to recall the university to its proper priorities, since, MacIntyre argues, 'it was generally, if not always, recognized by the participants in those conflicts that only by appeal to the common good could a standard of law be upheld within the university' even though this was 'something that since the thirteenth century has been perennially forgotten or ignored both by governments and by university administrators.'⁵⁴² That this could be done rested in the university's being a 'community' of 'masters and scholars' which 'not only serves the good of the wider community, but as a community it has its own specific and particular good, the common good of the university.' MacIntyre argues that 'it is this latter good which can be apprehended practically only by those engaged in the relevant set of practices of teaching and enquiry'. And because the University of Paris, he claims, was able to continue to assert these practices and the good end which they serve, 'although passions and interest were, as they always are, apt to distract and corrupt, the subsequent history of the university was marked by continuing debate and conflict over how the common good of the university is to be understood and what its relationship to the larger common good is.'

Returning debates around the larger common good and its right understanding and pursuit to the centre of contemporary university life is a theme to which MacIntyre devotes consideration in the final chapter of each of *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* and, more recently, *God, Philosophy, Universities*. In the former he argues that there must be a return to debate about the nature of enquiry, that honestly lays on the table competing concepts (essentially the 'Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition' which are the subtitle of the volume). He acknowledges that 'pre-liberal' universities were in the past guilty of injustices against certain groups and perspectives, but argues that the response has been to turn to a flawed version of liberalism with a false concept of a religious and moral neutrality, in which both sciences and humanities have 'conferred prestige' on 'what can be reduced to

⁵⁴¹ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law', 44f.

⁵⁴² MacIntyre, 'Natural Law', 61.

technique and procedure',⁵⁴³ and in which subjects are taught in unconnected departments with their own arbitrary standards and ethics, abstracted from more fundamental and overarching questions. He proposes that 'the contemporary university can perhaps only defend that in itself which makes it genuinely a university by admitting these conflicts to a central place both in its enquiries and in its teaching curriculum.'⁵⁴⁴ In other words, he calls for open debate around both what constitutes humanity's ultimate good and how it is best construed and pursued, as well as around how such enquiry is conducted. Controversy would be deliberately explored, with protagonists expected to argue on their own terms, as the means of presenting each perspective. He even speculates that rival traditions should set up their own universities,⁵⁴⁵ and suggests that:

wider society would be confronted with the claims of rival universities, each advancing its own enquiries in its own terms and each securing the type of agreement necessary to ensure the progress and flourishing of its enquiries by its own set of exclusions and prohibitions, formal and informal. But then also required would be a set of institutionalized forums in which the debate between rival types of enquiry was afforded rhetorical expression.⁵⁴⁶

Within these 'institutionalised forums', he says that it is the task of Catholic philosophers (for whom specifically he is writing here – though the same is largely true for philosophers and also theologians of other Christian traditions including Anglicanism) to be ready to give a good account of what it means to be fully human and of what the implications of this are in metaphysical, ethical and, indeed, all other fields of human enquiry and endeavour. This must include understanding the arguments of other perspectives, and how these can be overcome. A more theological account of what this might mean, in the specific context of Christian universities of the United States, is given by Nicholas Wolterstorff, who has drawn consistently on MacIntyre's concept of social practices in his writings on education. So, for example, he calls for training students for 'critical involvement' in wider society – avoiding the twin pitfalls of either non-involvement with contemporary culture or non-critical

⁵⁴³ TRV, 225.

⁵⁴⁴ TRV, 230.

⁵⁴⁵ MacIntyre's suggestions for how such a Catholic university might operate, with a very conscious commitment to understanding humanity as directed towards God as the central guiding principle, are addressed in the final chapter of GPU.

⁵⁴⁶ TRV, 234.

involvement.⁵⁴⁷ He similarly argues that in place of the compartmentalising of disciplines, each with their internal professionalised ethics, Christians should work for broader integration of life through considering the touchstone of what norms of modern human life apply in each area. As part of this he calls for justice, peace (specifically shalom), and even such things as empathy and delight as intrinsic to human living, and to the training of young people, that is pursued through praxis-oriented theory – all of which echo MacIntyre’s underlying emphases.

But what of the ‘institutionalised forums’ to which MacIntyre has referred? While making no further direct comment upon them, he does note there is ‘inescapably a political dimension’ in any debate between traditions, and asserts that ‘the degree to which it is difficult to envisage the restructuring of the university so as to make systematic debate concerning standards of rational justification between such points of view as the genealogical and the Thomistic a central preoccupation of our shared cultural and social life, is also the degree to which the structures of present society have exempted themselves from and protected themselves against being put in question by such systematic and moral enquiry.’⁵⁴⁸ Yet despite his pessimism about both academia and wider society, he sees the student protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s as a ‘rejection of the liberal university’ and the ‘barrenness’ of its ‘substantive moral enquiry’ which fails to allow a voice either for the successors of Nietzsche or for ‘thinkers of the Thomistic revival’. And so he ends with a rallying cry: ‘that such philosophical critics still cannot be heard in any authentic and systematic way in the central forums of our cultural and social order is a mark, not of their irrelevance, but rather of the importance of the task now imposed upon us, of continually trying to devise new ways to allow these voices to be heard.’⁵⁴⁹

What sort of forum might provide a context in which we can devise ways for all such voices to be properly heard?

Earlier consideration in this chapter of the conduct of academic debate between philosophers pointed to the centrality of the primary precepts of natural law. To recap, there must be agreement that we are each and together in pursuit of the truth – that we are fully committed to this end, and to setting aside any distorting influences

⁵⁴⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix? Another Look at the Integration of Faith and Learning’ in Clarence W. Joldersma and Gloria Goris Stronks, eds, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*: Nicholas Wolterstorff (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 97ff.

⁵⁴⁸ TRV, 235.

⁵⁴⁹ TRV, 236.

such as particular psychological or material interests. We must establish grounds for mutual trust, through respect for one another's lives, liberty and property, and freedom of speech⁵⁵⁰; and through providing a context that guarantees communal security. Furthermore, in discussion all parties must be able to expect of one another that we speak openly and honestly; that we avoid deceptive or deliberately misleading speech, and do not withhold anything pertinent; and that we keep our word and uphold any and all commitments that we might make.

Where these conditions are genuinely applied, not only within academia but in wider socio-political forums, such mutual respect can be expected to promote the sort of democratic discourse which allows for all participants not only to bring their own perspectives, but also to be able to do so on their own terms. It is not just that each should in this way provide their best arguments for their own convictions, but also that there should be proper understanding of the genuine grounds on which people base their beliefs and practices (a concern particularly voiced by Stout, as noted in chapter 4). For these are the grounds which debate between differing perspectives must address if there is to be substantive weighing of convictions and authentic theoretical enquiry and practical reasoning. (It should hardly be surprising that Christian beliefs, when presented in the ill-fitting clothes of secular humanist liberal discourse, are found wanting – and that the fact of their being found wanting on such a basis has so little impact on the convictions of believers themselves.) Pursuing debate in this way will of course require that at least some participants are able to act bilingually, in being able to express their own convictions in the language-in-use (or moral language) of certain others, and to translate so that others' perspectives can be understood by members of their own community or group. Doing this will also help train others whose backgrounds have less capacity for developing such skills.

Further, those of us who are members of communities of tradition, who are competent in bilingualism, will also be able to share this skill of what it means to understand others on their own terms. This too can be considered as a social practice delivering an internal good: one which assists in the pursuit of moral rationality which itself promotes humanity's greater good. It is one to which church leaders are often particularly called. Anglican Bishops, and particularly Archbishops, are often expected and encouraged to take a fuller role in engaging within the public sphere.

⁵⁵⁰ There may nonetheless be justifiable limitations on tolerance on free speech, as discussed earlier. These largely arise where others of the listed elements, such as that of respect, are breached.

The role of certain Church of England Bishops within the House of Lords is a particular case in point.

Importantly, there is also some acknowledgement and expectation from those of other traditions, and even from those of no tradition, that Church leaders should take on such roles, as illustrated in the wide-ranging and frequent invitations to address events or speak at conferences, that are received by those such as the Archbishops of Canterbury and Cape Town. To some degree it is the office rather than the individual who draws the invitation, but where the incumbents are recognised as effective ‘translators’ between thought worlds, further doors continue to open. As I shall consider in greater detail in the final chapter, these provide valuable opportunities for expanding the capacity for substantive rational ethical exchange.

But all this raises the greater question of the nature of neutrality within the public sphere. For what I have described as following from MacIntyre’s desire for a context in which all voices can be properly heard on an equal basis is very different from the sort of neutrality as it is understood, according to MacIntyre, by modernity’s liberal society. This is the neutrality which would be delivered if it were possible to adopt an objective, context-free, presupposition-free, stance – which is of course not the case. Too often, in the public arena as within the university, there are expectations that all must operate within the language and thought-world of the ‘encyclopaedia’ (with its belief in neutral objectivity), in which *inter alia* the rationality found in communities of tradition and the language of faith is effectively discounted. And this returns us to a concept of the nation state which MacIntyre has declared is incapable of orienting itself towards delivering the common good to its citizenry.

However, this is not an inevitable state of affairs, even by MacIntyre’s own account. Certainly, it is the case that governments will suffer the same tensions between internal and external goods, together with the pressures of bureaucratic and economic efficiencies, which are an unavoidable part of all institutional life. States will also have to face the additional distortions that come from their size, ranging from the distancing of the individual from the processes of discourse and decision-making through to the necessity of upholding security and defence. MacIntyre caricatures them at their worst thus:

... modern nation-states which masquerade as embodiments of community are always to be resisted. The modern nation-state, in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services, which is always about to, but

never actually does, give its clients value for money, and on the other as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one's life on its behalf. As I have remarked elsewhere ... it is like being asked to die for the telephone company.⁵⁵¹

But it does not follow that all nation states inevitably exhibit these traits over all others. If that were so, what would be the point of MacIntyre's careful arguments that plain persons can always hold their rulers to account over the delivery of the common good and the upholding of the primary precepts of natural law in the way that they operate and relate to their citizens? For if it were the case that all nation states are inexorably and irredeemably flawed, then all that plain persons could do would be always and everywhere to give the judgement of failure and illegitimacy, and with no expectation that doing this would have any impact whatsoever. MacIntyre says this is not so.

So then, the task of those of us who are 'unusually reflective plain persons' is to contribute what we can to helping the state become a place which is not inimical to sustaining the common good. Our responsibility is to promote forms of political engagement that operate as a context for constructive and respectful engagement between differing perspectives on the essential questions of what it is to be human and to flourish, and for policy formulation and implementation that delivers these goals effectively and justly.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I turn to consider what this might mean in practical terms within some contemporary political contexts.

⁵⁵¹ MacIntyre, 'Partial Response', 303.

Chapter 7 – After MacIntyre

The previous chapter asked, with MacIntyre, the question of how, within public discourse, we can ‘devise new ways to allow [all] voices to be heard’. Alongside raising the question of the language in which such voices might pursue dialogue – for which I postulated the development of appropriate ‘communal language’ – this also highlighted the issue of how public discourse is currently structured, and the nature of secularism and of state ‘neutrality’, particularly in relation to the expression of religious beliefs and practices. It is with a discussion of different forms of neutrality that I begin this chapter, looking at both theory and specific examples, particularly the very different contexts offered by the United States, South Africa and the United Kingdom. I then turn to the question of how Christian leaders can in practice engage in developing and strengthening a conceptual ‘communal language’ within their own context, drawing on the approaches to theoretical enquiry based in the primary precepts of natural law and the pursuit of the common good, as explored in the previous chapter. In doing this, I consider in some detail several speeches by Rowan Williams, who has made a number of contributions specifically addressing pluralist secularism both within the public sphere and within the Christian community. I argue that though he may do so unconsciously, he reflects to a considerable extent the sort of approach which can be developed from my MacIntyrean analysis, and I go on to suggest ways in which his way of tackling both the nature of secularism and how to address specific issues within its structures might be further strengthened and / or broadened. Though the praxis I propose is rooted in MacIntyre’s own analyses, its applicability therefore goes far beyond the contexts for which he allows. This is not to say that results will easily be achieved – but progress is feasible, whereas to fail to engage is to be complicit in the failures of public moral rationality. In addition, I indicate some further areas of potential, and necessary, study which, for reasons of space, lie outside the scope of this thesis, before offering a summary of my conclusions.

Secularism and Neutrality

The term secularism is hard to pin down. MacIntyre himself appears to use it in a breadth of ways. Thus, for example, as noted in chapter 2, MacIntyre has described his ‘philosophy, like that of many other Aristotelians’ as ‘theistic’, adding ‘but it is as secular in its content as any other.’⁵⁵² Secularism, in this sense, is not automatically incompatible with holding religious beliefs and engaging in public

⁵⁵² MacIntyre, ‘Interview with Borradori’, 266.

ethical debate from that perspective. This can be said to follow from MacIntyre's own arguments on the primary precepts of natural law, where he writes that 'the violation of any precept of the natural law always constitutes a threat [to the rational possibilities of each situation]: for example ... the unqualified respect for the boundaries between the sacred and the secular which is so necessary for rational integrity in relationship to either [is] to be understood as also involving respect for the natural law as such.'⁵⁵³ This also aligns with Aquinas conclusion from the primary precepts that a ruler does not have to be Christian to be legitimate.

But where secularism is allied with modernity, MacIntyre adopts a far more negative usage: 'to a remarkable extent the norms of our secularized culture not only exclude any serious and systematic questioning of oneself and others about the nature of the human good and the order of things, but they also exclude questioning those dominant cultural norms that make it so difficult to pose these philosophical questions outside academic contexts in any serious and systematic way.'⁵⁵⁴ Worse, he claims, 'in secularized societies, such as those of modern Europe, where the religious context has been largely removed, it is unsurprising that the asking of questions about the end of life should have become so often something of an embarrassment something even sometimes taken as a sign of psychiatric disorder.'⁵⁵⁵

The breadth of understandings of what is meant by secular, secularism and secularisation, led Stout, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, to offer the following definitions:

Secularization (dubious sense): The irreversible tendency of modern societies to produce atheists, make religion utterly irrelevant, and cause existential despair; what Harvey Cox used to believe in.

Secularization (sense discussed in this book): What happens to the discourse produced under the aegis of an institution when speakers no longer presuppose the existence of a specific sort of divinity; not something that happens in the heads and hearts of individuals but rather something that happens in some of the linguistic transactions taking place between them; a phenomenon compatible with increases in levels of religious belief and feeling.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵³ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law', 48.

⁵⁵⁴ MacIntyre, 'Philosophy Recalled', 181-2.

⁵⁵⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'The Ends of Life and of Philosophical Writing', in MacIntyre, *Tasks of Philosophy*, 126.

⁵⁵⁶ EaB, 301.

Even given these distinctions, Stout still tends to use the terms fairly negatively, to describe a polarisation over and against faith, for example writing of ‘nearly complete breakdown of fruitful dialogue between secular philosophical thought and the religious traditions’.⁵⁵⁷ Nonetheless, as noted in chapters 4 and 5, he argues for all participants in public discourse to be able to express freely the premises that underlie their convictions, including religious premises, and believes that contemporary political life can and does offer such possibilities. Thus, he writes, ‘One of my central claims is that modern democracy is not essentially an expression of secularism, as some philosophers have claimed and many theologians have feared. Modern democratic reasoning is secularized, but not in a sense that rules out the expression of religious premises or the entitlement of individuals to accept religious assumptions.’⁵⁵⁸

But when one looks at the international political landscape, it is hard not to suspect Stout is rather too optimistic, given the continuing contestation, particularly in much of the Western world, over how religion should be treated in public discourse. The recent launch of the world’s first degree in secularism – and the commenting it provoked on line – illustrate the importance of understanding this aspect of how we conduct our national life, the level of the confusion around the term, and the antagonism in some quarters towards any sort of religious perspective beyond a very narrowly drawn private sphere.⁵⁵⁹

In contrast, I see Williams’ defining of procedural, as distinct from programmatic, secularism (chapter 4), with its provision for extensive possibilities for the voice of faith communities to engage in public discourse on their own terms, as indicating the form of secularism that is justified in Thomistic-Aristotelian terms. Nicholas Wolterstorff proposes a very similar approach, in an exchange of essays with Robert Audi, on ‘The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate’.⁵⁶⁰ Here, importantly, he argues (on grounds echoing both MacIntyre and Stout) that the ‘liberal’ tendency to exclude religious reasoning is incompatible with liberalism’s own claims to freedom and justice. Though he addresses (as primarily does Stout) the very specific case of the US, the principles at stake have far wider application.

⁵⁵⁷ EaB, 187.

⁵⁵⁸ DaT, 11.

⁵⁵⁹ Phil Zuckerman ‘Majoring in Secular Studies’, *The Guardian*, 13 May 2011, accessed 13 May 2011, www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/may/13/secular-studies-pitzer-zuckerman

⁵⁶⁰ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion* – see chapter 1.

Audi's and Wolterstorff's contrasting positions are respectively summarised as, 'the liberal view [which] argues that government should be neutral towards religion and that religion and politics should be – in certain ways – separate both at the level of church and state and in the political conduct of individuals' and 'the theologically oriented position ... that government need only be impartial towards the plurality of religions and that religion and politics should not be separated either at the church-state level or in political interactions among individuals.'⁵⁶¹ In describing his broad position, Wolterstorff says 'the Idea of liberal democracy' is one that 'I firmly embrace.'⁵⁶² By this he understands 'a mode of governance that grants to all people within the territory of its governance equal protection under law, that grants to its citizens equal freedom in law to live out their lives as they see fit, and that requires of the state that it be neutral among all the religions and comprehensive perspectives represented within society.' In other words 'equal protection under the law for all people, equal freedom in law for all citizens, and neutrality on the part of the state with respect to the diversity of religions and comprehensive perspectives – those are the core ideas.'⁵⁶³ However, in practice these principles are interpreted – in his view both wrongly and unnecessarily – in ways that, through insisting on a specific sort of neutrality in relation to religion, actually limit the freedom of people with faith. Thus they lead to unequal treatment of people of faith and so contradict that to which they claim to aspire. Such limitations are particularly discriminatory as they do not equally apply to those holding other 'comprehensive perspectives' such as, for example, nationalism or utilitarianism.

These limitations on equality and freedom may be construed in different ways. So, for example, neutrality, rather than being interpreted as impartiality between different faiths, as well as between those of faith and those of no faith – the practical application for which Wolterstorff argues – has instead been given what he calls the separation interpretation, 'which says that the state shall do nothing to advance or hinder any or all religions'. This leads, in the US, to the anomalous position where the state aids no school whose orientation is religious – whereas an 'impartiality' interpretation would, he asserts, 'say that if the state is to aid any school, then it must aid all schools, and aid them equitably – no matter what their religious orientation, if any'.⁵⁶⁴ This, says Wolterstorff, reflects the ambiguity implicit within the First Amendment in the US Bill of Rights, which 'specifies that the government shall

⁵⁶¹ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, ix-x.

⁵⁶² Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 81.

⁵⁶³ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 70 – his emphases.

⁵⁶⁴ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 76.

neither establish any religion, nor infringe on the free exercise of any.’ This is of course a very particular American example, though it illustrates a position advocated by some in the UK who oppose state funding of faith schools.⁵⁶⁵ But the question of what we mean by state neutrality in relation to matters of faith has far wider application, to which I return later in this chapter.

Wolterstorff also argues that contemporary expressions of liberalism fall short of their own ideal, in discriminating specifically against people of faith, in the limitations imposed upon them in public debate, particularly in North America and Europe and in international organisations. The precise nature of the limitations may differ, but the broad position is one of expecting religious participants ‘not to base their decisions and / or debates concerning political issues on their religious convictions.’⁵⁶⁶

As Wolterstorff points out, this expectation of ‘restraint’, as he terms it, encompasses a great range of specific stances. Thus some:

impose the same restraint on personal decision and public debate alike, others allow a person to decide issues for himself as he wishes, and impose the restraint only on the reasons one offers in public debate. Again, the restraints that some propose are meant for all political issues, whereas others ... intend their restraints only for “constitutional issues” and “matters of basic justice”. And yet again, the proposals differ with respect to how one’s non-religious reasons for or against some political position are to be related to one’s religious reasons, should one have religious reasons. Some say that it is acceptable for one’s religious reasons to motivate one’s decision or action, provided that one also has a non-religious reason that would be sufficient, by itself, as a motive; others insist that whatever religious reasons one may have ought not to play any motivating role at all. Some insist that one should never use religious reasons in public debate; others hold that it is acceptable to do so, provided one is both able and ready to offer non-religious reasons. Lastly, there is, as one would expect, considerable divergence ... as to how religious reasons are to be identified, with the consequence that a reason that is

⁵⁶⁵ Thus, for example, the British Humanist Association argues ‘We recognise the right of others to practise their own beliefs, but not to have their own schools at public expense,’ in its briefing ‘Faith Schools’, British Humanist Association, accessed 15 May 2011, www.humanism.org.uk/campaigns/religion-and-schools/faith-schools.

⁵⁶⁶ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, – emphasis in the original.

disallowed as religious on one proposal is permitted as non-religious on another.⁵⁶⁷

The bottom line of all these stances is that one must offer at least some arguments rooted in some universally accepted ‘independent source’. To debate on religious grounds alone, even if these are the grounds on which one holds a particular perspective, though arguably valid in terms of free speech, is viewed by all as breaching the ethical standards of good democratic citizenry (which Wolterstorff is at pains to pursue), and is to argue on grounds that are held not to count in public decision-making.

The question then arises of what grounds do count. Wolterstorff argues that the grounds proposed by liberal theorists all fail on their own terms: ‘the liberal position is unacceptable in all its versions. It is unacceptable not because none of the extant versions happens to get all the details right, but unacceptable because no rationale offered for the restraint is cogent, and no independent source meets the demands.’⁵⁶⁸ In the first instance, this is an epistemological question about ‘acceptable versus non-acceptable reasons’ for holding beliefs.⁵⁶⁹ But not only have the ‘Reformed epistemologists’ argued (to the satisfaction of such non-theists as Stout) that religious beliefs can be entitled without having to provide non-religious grounds. It is also the case, argues Wolterstorff – on grounds that are consonant with, though expressed in rather different terms from, those of MacIntyre in relation to the Enlightenment project – that there are no independent, universally agreed, sources on which to draw, for secular reasoning and morality.

But attempts to find even a more limited consensus basis for public discourse are also flawed. Wolterstorff particularly takes issue with Rawls’ aim of finding ‘a source that will yield principles of justice which it is reasonable to expect all one’s reasonable and rational fellow citizens to share.’⁵⁷⁰ This is a considerably narrower goal, as Wolterstorff stresses: ‘the source Rawls proposes is itself something shared – not those principles themselves, but the shared political culture of an extant liberal democracy.’ However, there is no such universally shared political culture within the US (or indeed anywhere else), and it is unrealistic to expect it, or agreement over any other ‘comprehensive philosophical or religious doctrine’ such as the ‘principles of

⁵⁶⁷ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 75.

⁵⁶⁸ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 81.

⁵⁶⁹ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 87.

⁵⁷⁰ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 96.

justice' in our complex and varied societies. Therefore Rawl's 'extraordinarily idealised' aspiration is 'hopeless'.⁵⁷¹

Wolterstorff's conclusion is that 'we must learn to live with multiple communities', and that Rawlsian liberalism, as indeed all other forms of contemporary liberalism, does not provide a coherent way for us to do this.⁵⁷² Instead, we 'need a politics that not only honours us in our similarities as free and equal, but in our particularities.'⁵⁷³ In words that resonate with MacIntyre's, he adds 'For our particularities – some of them – are constitutive of who we are, constitutive of our narrative identities.' He also underlines the need for the enrichment of societies and of political debate that can only come from the interaction of differing perspectives, understandings and reasonings. This is in stark contrast with the flawed stance of 'regarding the felt need to appeal to [diverse perspectives] here and there as simply a lamentable deficiency in the scope and power of public reason – a deficiency whose overcoming we had hoped for.'

Wolterstorff echoes Stout's conviction that participants in debate should be free to offer their genuine convictions, and offer them on the grounds of their genuine reasons for reaching these convictions. As Wolterstorff puts it, 'If the position adopted, and the manner in which it is acted on, are compatible with the concept of liberal democracy, and if the discussion concerning the issue is conducted with civility, then citizens are free to offer and act on whatever reasons they find compelling ... Liberal democracy implies, as I see it, that there should be no censorship in this regard.' But this is not merely a matter of whether a form of 'censorship' is being imposed on religious convictions. Stout's deeper concern is that true mutual understanding, and rational debate of differing perspectives, can only occur where authentic convictions and their justifications are freely presented (a view also implicit in Wolterstorff's arguments⁵⁷⁴). And, on MacIntyre's account, it further follows that where genuine views and their justifications are open to debate, the strength of all, especially those which are not well-based – not least, through attempting the sort of context-neutral justification to which liberalism often turns – can be properly critiqued, not least by those with greater moral rationality.

Wolterstorff therefore proposes an alternative form of liberal democracy in which 'citizens use whatever reasons they find appropriate – including, then, religious

⁵⁷¹ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 97-99.

⁵⁷² Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 109.

⁵⁷³ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 111.

⁵⁷⁴ For example, see Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 81, 84-89.

reasons.⁵⁷⁵ However he stresses that he is not ‘implying that no restraints whatsoever are appropriate on a person’s reasoning from his or her religion. Restraints of three sorts pertain to the citizen of a liberal democracy.’ These he lists as follows:

In the first place, restraints are needed on the manner of debate and discussion in the public square ... we ought to show respect ... Our discussions ought to be conducted with civility. The virtues of civility belong to the ethic of the citizen.

There will be disputes as to what those virtues are. What does respect for the freedom and equality of the other person ... [and] for that which is of worth in the particularity of the other person require? My own view is that those virtues prove considerably thicker than the word ‘civility’ would naturally suggest. They require listening to the other person with a willingness to learn and to let one’s mind be changed. In some cases they require repentance and forgiveness.

Second, the debates, except in extreme circumstances, are to be conducted and resolved in accord with the rules provided by the laws of the land and the provisions of the Constitution. It is certainly not out of place to argue for changes in those laws and in those provisions, but, except for extreme circumstances, that argumentation is itself to be conducted in accord with the extant laws and provisions.

Third, there is restraint on the overall goal of the debates and discussions. The goal is political justice, not the achievement of one’s own interests. Here I side with the liberal position, against the competition-of-interests position.⁵⁷⁶

This description reflects many of the characteristics of MacIntyre’s account of debate conducted according to the primary precepts of natural law, as set out in the previous chapter. These include mutual respect and openness to learn, with the implication that the anticipated ‘thick’ understanding of the virtues can open the way to promoting fuller instantiation of the primary precepts. Justice is to be promoted, though how this is understood and pursued is, rightly, also open to further debate and refining. The rejection of narrowly construed interests further underlines the concerns of MacIntyre and Stout for promoting internal goods of genuine excellence.

⁵⁷⁵ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 112.

⁵⁷⁶ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 112-3 – emphases in original.

In his response, Audi asserts that Wolterstorff, in pursuing ‘a conception of political justice that citizens can appropriately rely on independently of its endorsement by a religious view’ is ‘close to implying that at least our main reasons for socio-political decisions (particularly concerning the legal structure of society) should be secular and presumably in some sense public.’⁵⁷⁷ But it is not so much that Wolterstorff, in looking to ‘justice’ has managed to identify the sort of universal ‘independent source’ to which Rawls and others have pointed, but rather that he has enunciated the justification of a form of secular liberal democracy that closely accords with MacIntyre’s account of the Thomistic view of how rule ought to be exercised. It is thus ‘secular’ in the best sense, and entirely compatible with rationally held religious and moral convictions. Indeed, Audi himself acknowledges that ‘some plausible conception of the common good’ can provide, alongside political justice, a source of criteria for implementing governance within such a form of secular liberal democracy,⁵⁷⁸ which is what we would expect.

Impartiality, Diversity, and the Common Good

The above constitutional concerns over separation of church and state notwithstanding, the Pledge of Allegiance has, since 1954, spoken of the United States of America as ‘one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all’; and ‘In God we trust’ was adopted as the country’s official motto in 1956 after long usage, for example, on coinage. When legally challenged, such phrases have generally been adjudged to refer to, at most, ‘ceremonial deism’ of a patriotic nature and certainly not to uphold any specific religious content. In contrast, South Africa, while also choosing to conclude the Preamble to its post-apartheid Constitution with the words ‘May God protect our people’, followed by ‘God bless South Africa’ repeated in six different languages, adopted, in the constitutional provisions which follow, a very different attitude to the place of religious convictions within the life of the nation from that of the US.⁵⁷⁹ It is this form of secularism which I now consider.

The Founding Provisions of Chapter 1 build on the Preamble’s commitment to a nation ‘united in diversity’ and ‘a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights’ through the ‘achievement of equality’ with citizens ‘equally entitled to rights, privileges and benefits’ as well as ‘duties and

⁵⁷⁷ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 139-40.

⁵⁷⁸ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 142.

⁵⁷⁹ See Preamble, at www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96preamble.htm (for the entire South African Constitution, see <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/index.htm>, accessed 15 May 2011, and linked pages).

responsibilities'. In the tangible pursuit of this vision it stipulates provisions not only to promote the state's official languages and those of other domestic communities, but also 'to promote and ensure respect for' the 'languages commonly used' by immigrant groups, together with 'Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes'.⁵⁸⁰ This is an unusual level of protection for an aspect of religious life.

Chapter 2, the Bill of Rights, requires that neither state or anyone else may 'unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth'.⁵⁸¹ Further, it guarantees the right to 'freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion', and allows for 'religious observances [to] be conducted at state or state-aided institutions' subject to certain conditions, including that 'they are conducted on an equitable basis' – a specific form of neutrality between those of different faiths and none.

The Constitution also provides for the regulation of both private and public life through traditional,⁵⁸² community and religious laws, alongside more general legislation, insofar as they are compatible with wider provisions of the constitution (so, for example, customary or religious traditions in which the nearest male heir inherits are trumped by gender-equality, so female relatives may equally inherit). Religious convictions are treated much as any other facet of human identity, such as language and culture. There is thus an implicit assumption that citizens can and will conduct their life in accordance with their particularities of background, belief and opinion, across all aspects of life, both public and private, so long as these do not contradict other constitutional stipulations.

Former Archbishop Ndungane has pointed out that this offers a very differently shaped public space to that of most western liberal democracies. It is well-suited to the democratic engagement in debate of all participants speaking from their own particular context and perspective: 'It is noteworthy that the constitutional provision for diverse community, cultural, linguistic and religious expression does not confine these to the private realm, but ensures a full place within the public arena. This contrasts with the widespread assumption that seems to dominate in many liberal democracies - that within the public sphere, there exists some shared, normative, secular, stance that all players

⁵⁸⁰ See Chapter 1, Founding Provisions, at www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96cons1.htm.

⁵⁸¹ See Chapter 2, Bill of Rights, at www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96cons2.htm.

⁵⁸² See Chapter 12, Traditional Leaders, www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96cons12.htm.

should adopt, with faith perspectives having relevance only on narrowly circumscribed faith-related issues.⁵⁸³ He distinguishes the South African approach from the epistemologically flawed assumptions of those forms of liberalism that assume some ‘objective’ basis for public discourse, arguing that ‘there is no Archimedean socio-political fixed neutral place where we can stand, for every starting point comes laden with its own ideological baggage and unacknowledged assumptions’. Given the critical analysis of MacIntyre, Stout, Wolterstorff and others of such a perspective, it is no surprise that Ndungane also warns that attempting to seek such criteria can result in the substitution of true measures of human well-being by merely fiscal calculations: ‘To pretend to this sort of secular objectivity also leaves us dangerously susceptible to dominance by market forces rather than human realities and needs.’

It is not just that all voices can thus be heard largely on their own terms – MacIntyre’s goal with which this chapter began. The Constitution, in its Preamble, commits South Africa to the pursuit of ‘democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights’ through a ‘democratic and open society’ and so to ‘improve the quality of life and free the potential of each person’, thus providing a very broadly drawn concept of the common good as one of the primary touchstones against which all other provisions and their instantiation can be weighed. This gives the focus to which MacIntyre’s appropriation of Aquinas also directs us. That this is a potentially fertile point of departure for the Church’s engagement in the public arena is not lost on Ndungane: ‘Public affirmation of diversity allows for a far broader, more textured, debate on the goals of society – the appropriate flourishing of each individual, as part of the wider human family, in harmony with creation. It offers possibilities of constructive dialogue around moral issues, without any community feeling under threat or in competition. The strengths of traditions offer checks against unfettered relativism, and the blind imperatives of unbridled economics. Those of us who believe in the revelation of a God who is absolute, can in turn stand firm in our faith, while acknowledging that finite human comprehension is always challenged to fuller understanding and expression, and is best explored in the dialogues of the whole human family.’⁵⁸⁴

Ndungane’s approach illustrates how public conversation on human flourishing can be a vehicle not only for furthering the common good of citizens and society, but also for promoting appreciation of a Christian viewpoint, and encouraging substantive exchanges of view on how debate between different perspectives are conducted. Ndungane thus places on faith communities a strong expectation to engage constructively, drawing on the best of their traditions, while encountering others in true

⁵⁸³ Ndungane, ‘Culture, Reconciliation’, 255.

⁵⁸⁴ Ndungane, ‘Culture, Reconciliation’, 255.

dialogue and with humility – acknowledging that there is always the potential to learn from others.

In their sermons, speeches and writing, both Ndungane⁵⁸⁵ and his successor Makgoba⁵⁸⁶ have not been shy to respond to the widely held expectation that, as Archbishops of Cape Town, they can and should address all manner of ‘political’ issues, with questions around the common good (in some guise) more often than not serving as their preferred entry point. So, for example, this was the central argument in Ndungane’s critique of the World Trade Organisation, recorded in the previous chapter. Similarly, Makgoba says ‘I have been constantly called to write and reflect on what might constitute the common good, human flourishing and human dignity and as well as the integrity of God’s creation – or the reign of God in the now and here.’⁵⁸⁷ Such reflections often provide the wider context when he addresses human rights, as referred to in chapter 5.

This persistent engagement of the Archbishops of Cape Town is thus rooted in a number of important convictions, which it is helpful to summarise. First, a public space so constituted will serve Christianity well, in allowing Christians freely to pursue and uphold their faith in both private and public. Further, such a space will benefit Christians’ self-understanding of their faith and how it should be lived within their own context, as this will be enhanced through extensive encounters with others and their perspectives, experiences and expertise (enunciated first on their own terms), so benefiting the broader goal of moral rationality. Beyond this, it provides for Christians, on their own terms, to further their wider objective of promoting the best possible flourishing – the common good – of all humanity (for example, through the lobbying and advocacy to which the Anglican Bishops committed themselves at the Lambeth Conference), in which clear communication of Christian beliefs and their reasons will form an inevitable part.

Before commenting on what might be the most effective language for those such as the Archbishops to employ in such contexts, I first turn to consider how public speaking by Christian leaders not only about the common good and its instantiation, but also about the nature of pluralism and the conduct of pluralist democratic debate, can of itself promote the most constructive forms of impartial secularism.

⁵⁸⁵ For example, see the eight chapters by Ndungane in Rowland Jones, *Faith in Action*.

⁵⁸⁶ For example, see the extensive material on his blog, at <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/>.

⁵⁸⁷ See the text of the Easter Vigil Sermon carried at Thabo Makgoba, ‘A Call for the Return of Police “Services”,’ 25 April 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2011/04/call-for-return-of-police-services.html>.

By the most constructive forms, I mean – in accordance with the theories of MacIntyre and their further development by Stout and Wolterstorff – practices of public discourse which provide for the fullest possible exchange of genuinely held convictions and their reasons, in an atmosphere that ensures such conditions as honesty, mutual respect, a voice for all, and a shared desire for the truth that is found in moral rationality unconstrained by hidden ulterior motives or narrow interests drawn at the expense of others. These are the practices which are best able to promote moral rationality – reflecting the second aspect of MacIntyre’s account of plain persons’ engagement in the public sphere, namely conformity in the conduct of governance and public discourse to the primary precepts of natural law. My contention is that to encourage debate around these ‘best practices’ of pluralism is in itself a means of educating others about these, and of promoting adherence to them. It is thus morally rational for the churches to ensure that adequate resources are devoted to this course of action. Thus, for example, Archbishops of Cape Town are justified in deliberately and consciously devoting particular time and effort to taking up the opportunities offered them to participate in public debate in this way.

Pluralism and the Primary Precepts of Natural Law

The provisions of the South African Constitution exhibit many of the characteristics of Wolterstorff’s alternative formulation of liberal democracy, which he terms his ‘consocial position’.⁵⁸⁸ This, he says, ‘departs from the liberal position on two defining issues. First, it repudiates the quest for an independent source and imposes no moral restraint on the use of religious reasons. And second, it interprets the neutrality requirement, that the state be neutral with respect to the religious and other comprehensives perspectives present in society, as requiring impartiality rather than separation.’ In promoting political justice (and thus echoing elements of the Preamble to the South African Constitution) it ‘agrees with the liberal position and opposes the competition-of-interests position concerning the goal of political discussions, decision, and actions’ – providing the sort of necessary grounding to which Ndungane refers in warning of the dangers of dominance by market forces.

This is an argument for all forms of pluralism for, Wolterstorff argues, it is unnecessary (as well as futile) to attempt to find any ‘abiding set of agreed-on principles to which all of us, from day to day and year to year, can appeal in deciding and discussing political issues’⁵⁸⁹ and specifically those that deal with the bases of

⁵⁸⁸ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 114-5 – emphasis in original.

⁵⁸⁹ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, – emphases in the quotes that follow in the original.

justice. For, he asserts, the purpose of political debate in practice is to reach agreement on specific policies, laws or constitutional provisions, and ‘our agreement on some policy need not be based on some set of principles agreed on by all present and future citizens and rich enough to settle all important political issues.’ It is sufficient for citizens, for whatever their reasons, to achieve the ‘fairly gained and fairly executed agreement of the majority’ on policy for the time being. It is only over appropriate ‘restraint’ in the conduct of debate (as noted above) that agreement is necessary. This reflects a commitment to constitutional democracy itself – even though precise terms of both constitution and its implementation must remain open to debate – as a legitimate instantiation of the primary precepts of natural law.

Within South Africa’s considerable diversity, Christianity is by far the largest faith community, with close to 80% support according to the 2001 census. Christian leaders such as Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak played a significant role in opposing apartheid, in which Christians across the great majority of denominations not only worked together, but also forged close links with other faith communities. A high, and very visible, level of inter-faith cooperation has since continued, with religious leaders regularly taking a joint stand on issues which address, firstly, aspects of the common good (such as poverty alleviation); and secondly, the promotion of practices of good constitutional democracy, including tackling corruption, low moral standards in public life, inter-ethnic and politically motivated violence, and the conduct of debate. So, for example, in March 2011 the National Religious Association for Social Development issued a strongly worded condemnation of racial categorisation, following remarks in this vein by an ANC spokesman,⁵⁹⁰ and the Western Cape Religious Leaders’ Forum censured crowd intolerance of a senior opposition party speaker (and the failure of the President and ruling party to take effective action against this) at a Human Rights Day event.⁵⁹¹ Each statement drew attention to the importance of aspects of the primary precepts being upheld in the conduct of public discourse.

I now turn to a broader reflection on how pluralism might best be understood and practiced in contemporary politics, given by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, in his Chevening Lecture at the British Council in New Delhi,

⁵⁹⁰ See ‘Religious Leaders’ Statement on Fundamental Human Equality, Regardless of Race’, 13 March 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://archbishop.anglican churchsa.org/2011/03/religious-leaders-statement-on.html>.

⁵⁹¹ See ‘Western Cape Religious Leaders’ Statement on Human Rights Day’, 21 March 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://archbishop.anglican churchsa.org/2011/03/western-cape-religious-leaders.html>.

during his visit to India in October 2010.⁵⁹² As the issues it raises range from the way that communities of tradition best pursue moral rationality individually and through substantive exchange, through to why and how a secular civil space can best promote such exchanges with others, including interfaith dialogue – and so touch on matters that span the breadth of this thesis – I shall consider this in some detail.

A Secular Context for Religious Pluralism

Williams begins his Chevening Lecture by granting that ‘the word “pluralism” has come to mean an uncomfortable variety of things in both the political and the religious sphere’. He then explores these possibilities by focussing on the example of India, which, ‘in declaring itself a secular state at independence, was making a clear option for a certain kind of public and political neutrality’ and ‘consistently tried to define a “secularism” that is not hostile to multiple religious identities.’ Rather, in acknowledging ‘that to be a citizen in India could not be something that depended on any particular communal identity’ (in other words recognising and affirming the need, for which Wolterstorff argued, to live with multiple communities) the state pursued a form of neutrality in which ‘it could not intervene in religious disagreements except insofar as they became socially disruptive.’

Williams addresses the implications for both inter-faith relations and wider public discourse. Significant from the perspective of this thesis is the aim he explicitly sets himself in the speech, of ‘hop[ing] to show that modern India is a very fruitful context in which to examine the various meanings of the word “pluralism” – to look at how they apply in practice and at some of the questions to which they give rise.’

Williams presents himself as sharing his own exploration of the issues, rather than offering an exhaustive or definitive account. He also suggests that the breadth of understandings of pluralism indicate ‘an unexamined aspect of what social modernity means’, adding that ‘both conceptually and practically, there is unfinished business’ which he does not ‘expect to finish ... in a brief lecture.’ In this way, he describes his objective as being ‘to offer some thoughts about how religious pluralism might be understood in a fresh way that will not simply leave us with relativism or indifference,’ and adds ‘I shall be trying to connect this with some thoughts about the

⁵⁹² See Rowan Williams, ‘Archbishop’s Chevening Lecture at the British Council, New Delhi’, 15 October 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/569/archbishops-chevening-lecture-at-the-british-council-new-delhi.

character of a well-functioning modern democracy that seeks to secure equal liberties for diverse communities.’ He can thus be seen as speaking in order to enhance the level of understanding around the issues at stake in the conduct of pluralism. It is an educative stance. He sets out his own analysis as persuasively as he can – hence a full and detailed account – but does so not as political polemic, but in order to communicate what he concludes and why, and with an expressed readiness himself to learn further. At various points he invites the response of others, to bring their own experiences and insights to a shared ‘continuing struggle’ to address the challenges of ‘what I have elsewhere called “argumentative democracy”,’ in which his ‘contention has been that our best political future lies’, and further, that ‘religious integrity is well served and not undermined by such a vision for our society’. This approach exhibits many of the elements MacIntyre describes as characteristic of the conduct of moral rational enquiry at all levels.

Much of the speech is devoted to pluralism in the context of dialogue between faiths, and it advocates many of the practices of debate between communities of tradition with a greater, or lesser, degree of commensurability, which were described in chapters 3 and 5 respectively. (There is, as Williams acknowledges, far greater diversity among the religious communities of India than among the Abrahamic faiths.) The importance of preserving the integrity of each tradition, including its embeddedness in the social practices of its community through which adherents develop their faith, is reflected in the Archbishop’s insistence that ‘while it may be possible to distil a fairly general core of common wisdom from the diverse languages of faith throughout the world, each will provide a different rationale for believing – and, even more importantly, a different discipline of life and practice for becoming aligned with it, living it out effectively ... So a religious “pluralism” that seeks to identify a core of common insights as opposed to a diversity of ways in which these are clothed is in danger of ignoring not only the narratives of origin which all faiths appeal to but also the narratives of personal development and transformation related to believers.’ From this he draws further implications that also chime closely with a MacIntyrean analysis, namely that ‘The “common core” approach cannot become an embodied practice, except in terms of ethical recommendations of a pretty uncontroversial kind; and such recommendations have usually been regarded by religious people as impossible to sustain independently of the practices (and thus the narratives) of particular religious commitments.’ It further follows that ‘It is not realistic, either intellectually or practically, to see religious “pluralism” in its frequently used sense as a straightforward programme that can guarantee peaceful

coexistence between faith communities on the basis that they all come to regard their distinctive narratives as non-essential and culturally-conditioned “extras” to a basic common vision.’

However, as Williams is swift to point out, ‘this need not mean that we are left either with a world – or society – of mutually uncomprehending systems or with a bitter competition for supremacy between the “religions”.’ Rather, each faith must make its own contribution to this ‘complex map of stories and rituals’ which are ‘shaped and expressed in such a way that they inevitably make implicit or explicit claims about what is the fullest or most effective way to secure and understand contact between humanity and the sacred.’ It is ‘careful and attentive interaction between communities of religious practice’ that must be the way forward, given that there can ‘be no “neutral” evidence’ to settle questions between different faiths (as MacIntyre of course also argues).

Williams contends that it is a properly pluralistic context, in which ‘the political and the religious aspects ... converge,’ which best serves such interaction. He ‘suggests’ (an appropriate humility and provisionality which invites continuing dialectical exploration) that ‘interreligious conversation needs to beware of two misleading perspectives – on the one hand, the idea that any encounter must always be a contest between two or more self-contained rival systems, offering clear alternative answers to the same set of questions so that only one of them can be regarded as ultimately true; and on the other hand, the belief that all specific narrative and doctrinal schemes are variant expression of the same underlying conviction or convictions.’ In order ‘to avoid assumptions both of “zero sum” conflict and of the possibility of a final dissolution of real otherness ... there has to be a secure space for genuine exchange and exploration’ (i.e. with the sort of context of safety, trust and honesty to which the primary precepts of natural law point). And so Williams draws the far-reaching conclusion that, ‘There has to be a “civil space” for religious communities to meet each other.’ Not only is it possible for religious communities to survive within secular contexts, but such contexts also best provide for substantial inter-faith engagement – the sort of engagement that is necessary to promote moral rationality within any given faith community, through extensive dialectical exchange with others. Furthermore, ‘what the neutral or secular modern state makes possible is a deeper and more empathetic encounter between religious discourses and systems.’ And so he reaches the conclusion we would expect: ‘The secular public sphere provides the space for civil argument.’

Of course, this is not to say that all forms of secularism guarantee such a space. Rather, it is the sort of secularism which Williams outlines within this same address – a secularism that ‘rather than trying to build civil loyalty from nothing ... build[s] on the experience of co-operation and passionate concern for the common good’. Like MacIntyre, he sees understanding of and commitment to the common good as being ‘nurtured in particular communities, especially by a religiously formed ethic of self-giving, so that this sense of mutual investment and mutually created well-being can carry across into the wider realm.’ To work well, secularism needs to draw on the strengths of communities of tradition, including faith communities, which follows from them being able to operate within the public space as ‘communities of habit and conviction’. Such a state ‘takes religious belonging seriously and sees itself, as a state, as serving the healthy coexistence and interaction of diverse communities of conviction,’ and therefore it must have a ‘system of legal universalism and a morally serious and committed project of securing every particular community’s liberty to express itself and argue about shared concerns and hopes.’ This self-expression must happen on each community’s own terms – as noted above – since ‘secular democracy can perfectly well benefit from the serious arguments that may be generated between these communities about shared goods and concerns and the moral and religious basis on which goals are pursued in society.’ Once more, the overarching concern is the best possible apprehension and pursuit of the common good for all. And so Williams argues that ‘the state’s job is not to silence all this but to ensure that there is a space in which the argument can be pursued with civility.’

Such ‘civility’ echoes MacIntyre’s focus on the primary precepts of natural law, and indeed what Williams commends coheres closely. Alongside ‘a degree of equal access to social goods’, he notes ‘fairness before the law, the chance of economic liberty and protection from the violence of other groups,’ and points to the necessity of states having ‘moral commitments’ that include ‘seeing everyone as deserving of legal protection and capable of sharing in democratic decision-making’. The state must support ‘a situation in which genuine diversity in society can be acknowledged and worked with through a shared loyalty to legal institutions that protect all’ so that ‘a degree of mutual loyalty develops, a sense of shared interest and investment in the neighbour’s well-being.’⁵⁹³ Therefore, he says, ‘the challenge before the healthy pluralist state is to maintain a robust defence of universal civic liberties and universal access to legal process and legal protection, while seeking to work with the grain of existing loyalties and solidarities [that is, within faith and other

⁵⁹³ Williams’ emphasis.

communities] to secure a better settlement for all, not just a majority.’ And so the state should never become ‘only a harassed referee between sometimes violently competing identities and claims,’ but must also be a place where the ‘issues of [religious and political] power and advantage’ by which ‘conversation is always affected and usually distorted’ can be open to ‘question ... challenge or critique’.

And so, though Williams acknowledges that ‘the civic space is in one sense artificial’, he concludes that ‘in a complex society it is a necessity not only for order and social collaboration but also for the intelligent discussion and appropriation of more basic loyalties and affiliations’. In other words, a ‘political pluralism that is fully conscious of the potential of interactive variety ... is a fruitful context for an interreligious encounter that does not compromise convictions but is also ready to envisage growth and change.’ Thus, he argues, the best interests of faith communities – or certainly, of those faith communities that are committed to the pursuit of truth (in its fullest sense, which includes just, moral, rational living) through openness to learn from respectful and honest dialogue with others – is most fully served through this sort of secularism. And by presenting his arguments as he does, he clearly intends to contribute to the promotion of such secularism.

Speaking of Pluralist Secularism

However, for all that Williams’ address illustrates a range of close parallels with the sort of approach that I have developed from MacIntyre’s work, it also raises questions. The first is the extent to which Williams follows his own advice – for he says almost nothing from within the context of his own faith, barring illustrative references to the Nicene Creed and the doctrine of the Trinity, and quotations from the Jesuit scholar Francis X Clooney. This failure to speak explicitly out of ‘the distinctive assertions’ of his own faith prompts the further question of whether, notwithstanding all the references to faith communities, the common good, and elements of the primary precepts of natural law, his discourse is nonetheless too close to the sort of deracinated ‘internationalised’ or ostensibly context-neutral English that, according to MacIntyre’s analysis, is incapable of conveying a fundamental moral rationality. Or are we able to discern, within these references, the seeds (or building blocks), in terms of both vocabulary and concepts, of a form of ‘communal language’ which I postulated in the previous chapter?

In Williams’ defence it should be noted that he is speaking in India and using the Indian context to illustrate his point. But only in the loosest sense is his ‘community of tradition’ present within India, and it is not the public arena of which

he is truly a member. As he points out, Christianity ‘has a particularly varied experience’ of ‘moving into a new cultural situation and seek[ing] expression in a new language’, and so the instantiation of Christianity, and particularly Anglicanism – with the Churches of North and South India being United Churches, in which Anglicans combined with other denominations – is especially ‘Indian’ in its character. Williams’ reflections are consciously intended also for a wider audience, not least within the UK, as he said in an interview published in *The Hindu* later during this visit.⁵⁹⁴ Here, his interviewer had noted how Williams highlighted the ‘different sense of the word secularism here and there’ (i.e. in India and Britain), adding ‘It signifies equal respect for all religions and a certain neutrality in religious terms here while in England is signifies the principle of separation of matters of Church and state. Is there a point there that’s worth elucidating?’ To this Williams responded in the terms partially quoted in chapter 4: ‘what I’ve suggested in a couple of interventions over the last few years is that we in England need to be much more careful distinguishing between what I sometimes call Procedural Secularism, which is, the state steps back but allows debate to go on and the state itself stays neutral, and Programmatic Secularism, where the state drives an agenda to push religion out of the public space.’

Nonetheless, to speak in broad terms, as Williams has done in India, underlines the difficulties of developing any depth of ‘communal language’ where there is so little shared on-going context. This is on a par with the challenges noted, in the last chapter, of addressing international political contexts, such as Ndungane’s critique of the World Trade Organisation, or, as MacIntyre has argued, within much of western academic discourse. Those, like Williams and Ndungane in these instances, who have what might be called ‘occasional’ opportunities to speak into such spaces, can probably expect not to be able to do much more than set down the markers of the key elements: citing the vocabulary of the common good and the primary precepts, drawing basic connections with the context at hand, and inviting those who more fully inhabit those contexts to continue discussion around them. Those who operate within these contexts are better placed to sustain a continuing dialogue in which a more textured debate around these elements can be pursued over time – for it is they who have the familiarity with the context that is necessary for seeing how best to develop conceptual language suitable for addressing the primary precepts and the common good as they are instantiated within these specific circumstances. This is largely what MacIntyre and Hauerwas have done within the academy, as Stout has noted, despite persistently expressing negative views of the worth of such endeavours. This

⁵⁹⁴ Williams, ‘Hindu Interview’.

approach ought also to be among the primary tasks of the Anglican Communion's representatives to the United Nations and the European Union, as well as of the Provinces of the Communion in their public participation in the life of the nations in which they find themselves. This is illustrated by the continuing engagement of Archbishops of Cape Town within the public discourse of South Africa, where they utilise a breadth of media from the opinion pieces in newspapers to TV interviews and radio phone-in programmes as well as formal sermons and speeches, as part of a persistent 'drip feed' approach to return the focus of debate to the central question of 'How then shall we live?' and how we understand and explore answers to such a question.

Therefore it is not surprising to find in Williams' earlier speeches on programmatic and procedural secularism, made within what he terms the North Atlantic, and specifically British, arenas, a much more detailed and contextually focussed approach to that he took in India, with far greater reflection of the position and practice of his own community of tradition. Appropriately, these also contain a variety of emphases, tailored to the particular circumstances in which he speaks. These range, for example, from the entirely secular Raymond Williams Lecture, 'Has Secularism Failed?', at the Hay Festival in June 2002 when he was still Archbishop of Wales;⁵⁹⁵ and his address to political leaders on 'Religion, Culture, Diversity and Tolerance – Shaping the new Europe', delivered during a visit to the European Institutions in November 2005;⁵⁹⁶ through to talking to academic theologians and social scientists on 'Secularism, Faith and Freedom' in November 2006 at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in Rome;⁵⁹⁷ or considering 'The finality of Christ in a pluralist world' in a meeting with Anglican clergy and laity during a visit to the Diocese of Guildford in March 2010.⁵⁹⁸ I shall consider aspects of each of these in turn, to highlight elements either that effectively reflect the praxis I proposed in the last chapter, or which could be strengthened by adhering more closely to the approach developed from MacIntyre.

⁵⁹⁵ Rowan Williams, 'Raymond Williams Lecture given at the Hay Festival', 1 June 2002, accessed 15 May 2011, www.churchinwales.org.uk/structure/bishops/sermons/r13.html.

⁵⁹⁶ Rowan Williams, "'Religion, culture, diversity and tolerance - shaping the new Europe": address at the European Policy Centre, Brussels', 7 November 2005, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1179/religion-culture-diversity-and-tolerance-shaping-the-new-europe-address-at-the-european-policy-centr.

⁵⁹⁷ Williams, 'Rome Lecture'.

⁵⁹⁸ Rowan Williams, 'The finality of Christ in a pluralist world', 2 March 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/585/the-finality-of-christ-in-a-pluralist-world.

It should be remembered that it is not merely the task of the Archbishop to promote moral rational debate and living within the public sphere – as is largely the focus of the first two of these. For one lesson of MacIntyre’s tradition-based moral rationality is that Williams, and others like him, must also help members of his own community to share in the responsibility, and to take the opportunities that are afforded to them – whether as church leaders, or as engaged Christians in their various individual capacities (as William Temple had argued is the task of lay people). This is more the focus of the third, and especially the fourth of these speeches. And the Archbishop, too, must be open to continue learning not only from those outside the community, but also from the mutual holding to account and shared dialectic that is an integral part of the community’s on-going pursuit of moral rational living.

Developing a Communal Language for Secularism

All four of these addresses have as their underlying foundation the same stance as the Chevening Lecture, namely Williams’ desire to educate and persuade others of the need to work for some form of procedural secularism, through which both communities of tradition (including faith communities) and members of society as a whole, are best able to pursue authentic flourishing. However, both the central focus and the language which Williams employs varies between them, as we see by considering each in turn.

Thus, at the Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts, Williams’ particular concern is the failure of programmatic secularism – too often prevalent in British society – to respond adequately to the common good because of failings in understanding the nature of the human person and what true human flourishing means.⁵⁹⁹ Instead, it overly prioritises the functionalism and instrumentalism that are reflected in ‘the dominance in our culture of managerial standards’, of bureaucratic efficiency and of economic criteria, and in consequence also fails morally and ethically. He draws parallels between the ways this threatens both artistic and religious life.

Williams begins by arguing that ‘we need to follow through the implication of treating secular modernity and functionalism as belonging together; which is that one of secularism’s opposites is the resolve to regard the environment, human and non-human, as more than instrumental.’ In this he is voicing opposition to what Wolterstorff has described as the ‘competition-of-interests position’, bringing to bear

⁵⁹⁹ Williams, ‘Raymond Williams Lecture’.

an analysis that resembles Stout's stereoscopic social criticism, unmasking the hidden, or false, agendas of this form of secularism, as well as focussing on its inadequate, even warped, understanding of MacIntyre's 'metaphysical biology' and humanity's common good and right telos. Such a secularism, says Williams, 'implies that the definitive "currency" of the public realm is to do with calculation about functions,' and, in the way it proposes what is 'ruled "admissible" in public discourse', it 'suggests that the most substantive motivation of at least a lot of agents and groups will be ruled out of public discourse; it will have to dress in borrowed clothes.' This echoes Wolterstorff and Stout's concerns of how rational moral engagement is undermined when people cannot engage on the basis of their genuine convictions.

Williams readily finds common cause with those attending the Festival, as he cites the 'life of the imagination', aesthetics and art as examples of what is 'never reducible to an instrumental account of the world', all of which lies alongside, though is not coterminous with, religious sensibility. He warns of the 'ultimately exclusive, even anti-humanist closure' for which he sees secularism 'bidding', and the way that 'the ultimate secularity of imagination' entails 'a condition without the possibility of art'; and then goes on to draw links with 'a further and disturbing dimension to this which needs mentioning, and that is the effective secularisation of a great deal of religious discourse.' He then turns to his own community of tradition, speaking of aspects of the Christian faith on its own terms though while also employing similar vocabulary and concepts to those he has used in relation to the arts. Thus he talks of the 'incommensurable' nature of God's perspective, Wittgenstein's descriptions of religious language and practice, the importance to faiths of 'self-imagining and self-interpreting, through prayer and action'. In this way he uses images and language that are rooted in faith communities' and specifically Christian tradition's own self-understanding, but which resonate with the discourse of literature and the arts.

In this substantial speech, Williams moves back and forth between these themes, giving various other illustrations of the dehumanising dangers of programmatic secularism both to the world of art and literature and, in very similar ways, to the world of faith, and offering his solutions. This is a means of educating and encouraging his listeners in the sort of critique of the public space which is the right, and latent capacity, of all plain persons, according to MacIntyre. By drawing clear links between the arts and religion (for example, arguing that 'the success of secularism is not only a problem for modern religion; it is manifestly an issue for the arts'), he implicitly invites his audience to draw resources from his own fully-realised community of tradition on what it is to be human and flourish, and to find tools with

which to lay bare the destructive influences too often prevalent in contemporary society.

Though he may do so unconsciously, Williams is in this way, I would contend, working towards developing the sort of conceptual ‘communal language’ which I proposed in the previous chapter: the context-specific instantiation of a world-view that can sustain at least some degree of discourse around the elements on which plain persons can engage their rulers, and which can develop increasing depth and texture. He does so through the skills of what we might describe as ‘bilingualism’, in relation to both literature and the arts (he has written on Dostoyevsky, and published poetry, alongside his theological works) as well as the socio-political context of contemporary Britain. Such bilingualism should work both ways, not only speaking into the public space, but also opening the door so those from outside his own community of tradition, or indeed any such community, can begin to see into – and perhaps themselves be drawn into – the operation of rational morality through the social practices of his own community, which is directed towards such ends. Indeed, Williams implicitly underscores MacIntyre and Stout’s insistence that true moral languages are to be found within the social practices of communities, when he says that ‘the aspiration [of secularism] to universal description must be challenged by the localisms of “natural language” – which for this purpose includes the poetic and the religious.’ And so he ends with his opening question, ‘Has secularism failed? The combination of a robust poetics, a self-scrutinising theology and a politics resolved against one-dimensionality suggests at least some ways of answering without resort to Enlightenment placebos or restorationist religiosity.’ This neatly encapsulates both the concerns of stereoscopic social criticism and their remedies through the engagement of plain persons – the fundamental building blocks for developing an ever more fully realised moral, rational, discourse.

On turning to Williams’ lecture to the political leaders of the European Institutions,⁶⁰⁰ we find that the focus is unsurprisingly rather more on the locus and exercise of legitimate authority and power – another issue which MacIntyre argues that plain persons have the capacity to address. His particular target seems to be to expose and oppose the tendency of the states and institutions of modernity to step outside their historic contingency and to arrogate to themselves authority to be arbiters their own legitimacy. He aims instead to offer to those who wield power and influence a better way of doing so, to achieve the valid liberal goals of freedom and

⁶⁰⁰ Williams, ‘Religion, Culture’.

prosperity with security. It is very much the same critique of modernity's political structures which led MacIntyre to speak of 'being asked to die for the telephone company' (see chapter 6). Yet Williams, like MacIntyre, is alert to the Scylla and Charybdis of replacing absolutism with relativism, if 'Enlightenment liberalism' – which he describes as holding 'that cultural and religious variety are superficial matters of choice or chance' – is seen as it 'now appears as simply one cultural and historical phenomenon among others'. His 'solution requires us first to retell the history of Europe' in which, he asserts, 'the Christian Church is quite simply the most extensive and enduring' institution. Like MacIntyre, he looks to the anchor provided by a persisting community of tradition, rooted in its unfolding historic narrative and its quest for all that is true and good and just, and sees in this an authentication of the rightness of its beliefs and practices. Later in his text he points to other key aspects of Christian tradition which parallel further building blocks of MacIntyre's tradition-based rationality, and presents the Church as the crucible of the virtues of European political liberalism. He also freely acknowledges failings in the church's history, from which it has had to learn and move forward – the proper humility required of a sincere community of tradition.

As Williams puts it, 'the point of this rather breathless (and by no means uncontroversial) tour of Western European history is to try and identify what the argument is that has made Europe the way it is.' His answer is that 'the conflict of the so-called Dark Ages, the encounter between the tribal kingdoms and the Church, the tangled relations of common law, canon law and Romanised civil law guarantee that political power in Western Europe was always a matter of negotiation and balance.' So he concludes that 'Despite what some historical caricatures have maintained, sovereign state power in Europe was never consistently treated as a sacred thing. Political power is always answerable to law and to God, and it is therefore right in some circumstances to challenge it.' He implicitly challenges those who now run the states and institutions of Europe to acknowledge that they too are answerable not only to themselves. He makes explicit reference to how Aquinas 'reserved for citizens the right to criticise, and even in some circumstance to replace, a monarch on the basis of universal law.'

Further, Williams asserts that 'Western modernity and liberalism are at risk when they refuse to recognise that they are the way they are because of the presence in their midst of that partner and critic which speaks of "alternative citizenship" – the Christian community' for 'it is important for the health of the political community that it is able to engage seriously with the tradition in which its own roots lie.' This is not,

he says, ‘to demand the impossible, a return to some past age when the institutional Church claimed to dictate public policy.’ Rather, his point is that ‘without a willingness to listen to the questions and challenges of the Church, liberal society is in danger of becoming illiberal.’ Herein lies the crux of his concern: that those who shape and run contemporary European political structures should have better understanding of how to do this well; and that they must realise that genuine dialogue, especially with those who have the skills and experiences of moral rational enquiry intrinsic to successful communities of tradition, is an essential part of this. Making themselves accountable to their citizens, as Aquinas described, will contribute to, rather than undermine, both their legitimacy and their capacity to deliver effective and truly liberal democracy.

In arguing that ‘the distinctively European style of political argument and debate is made possible by the Church’s persistent witness to the fact that states do not have ultimate religious claims on their citizens,’ Williams also importantly commits the Church to participating in, and promoting best practices of, the necessary dialectic for shaping political power rightly. As he puts it, ‘the presence of the Church at least goes on obstinately asking the state about its accountability and the justification of its priorities.’ This language closely echoes MacIntyre’s description of the role of ‘plain persons’, and especially those skilled in the moral rationality of communities of tradition. Williams also stresses the need for states to take account of various ‘intermediate institutions, guilds, unions, churches, ethnic groups, all sorts of civil associations’ which ‘have a natural liberty to exist and organise themselves’. It is, he says, ‘the state’s role ... to harmonise and to some degree regulate this social variety’ in a form of ‘interactive pluralism’ in which ‘distinctive styles and convictions could challenge each other and affect each other, but on the basis that they first had the freedom to be themselves.’ We would expect MacIntyre to endorse his emphasis on the important role civil society groupings play as potential arenas for developing the practices of moral reasoning, which can then be brought to bear through those groupings’ engagement, on their own terms, in the wider political context.

Islam and Pluralist Secularism

Williams devotes part of this European speech to considering how Islam and Muslim communities might find a place within the sort of democratic pluralist secularism he describes. This is an important topic, adequate consideration of which lies beyond the scope of this thesis. But let me offer some limited comment on how an approach rooted in a MacIntyrean justification of appropriate relationships between

nation states and their citizens, and as further developed and instantiated through the writing and speaking of such as Stout, Wolterstorff and Williams, could make a vital contribution to current debates within the UK.

In his 5 February 2011 speech at the Munich Security Conference,⁶⁰¹ British Prime Minister David Cameron described what he saw as the ‘failure’ of ‘state multiculturalism’ in terms that drew a sharp response from commenters such as Madeleine Bunting in the Guardian, who argued his entire analysis was flawed.⁶⁰² She pointed to the undermining of intermediate institutions; the tendency of individualistic consumer capitalism to eliminate identity; and the depersonalising effects of globalisation as being far more influential factors in weakening shared senses of citizenship and national belonging, than the reasons to which Cameron and his party have generally alluded here and elsewhere. These are all consequences of the sort of illiberal secularism which Williams has highlighted in these two speeches. Procedural secularism would challenge Cameron to consider whether the root of the problem lies in a misconception of the nation state and how it can with integrity demand allegiance. Too great an emphasis on instrumental considerations, as found in the discourse of much of Conservative Party politics, delivers an approach little better than asking one to ‘die for the telephone company’.

There also needs to be better debate around questions of what constitutes national identity and the sort of ‘shared common values’ which, it is often said, should be at the centre of national life. Much of the furore over Williams’ ‘Sharia’ Radio 4 interview and lecture⁶⁰³ tended to reject outright the question of whether ‘multicultural’ differentiation of any sort was applicable in British public life – and

⁶⁰¹ David Cameron, ‘PM’s Speech at Munich Security Conference’, 5 February 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2011/02/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference-60293.

⁶⁰² Madeleine Bunting, ‘Blame consumer capitalism, not multiculturalism’, The Guardian, 6 February 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/06/capitalism-multiculturalism-cameron-flawed-analysis.

⁶⁰³ Rowan Williams, ‘Archbishop on Radio 4 World at One - UK law needs to find accommodation with religious law codes’, 7 February 2008, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/707/archbishop-on-radio-4-world-at-one-uk-law-needs-to-find-accommodation-with-religious-law-codes; and Rowan Williams, ‘Archbishop’s lecture - Civil and Religious Law in England: a religious perspective’, 7 February 2008, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1137/archbishops-lecture-civil-and-religious-law-in-england-a-religious-perspective. Full consideration of these and the responses they provoked is beyond the scope of this thesis. Though I would take issue with some of his analysis, there is an overview of the issues in Rupert Shortt, *Rowan’s Rule* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008) 390-402.

failed to engage with how the speech sensitively addressed this possibility, or to recognise positive examples such as in South Africa. Confident legitimate diversity – constructive multiculturalism – within the United Kingdom would be better served by having at its foundations a shared commitment to a version of procedural secularism, rooted in the genuine values that arise from the appropriate expression of the primary precepts of natural law within the British context.⁶⁰⁴ This would, I contend, provide a far better description of what constitutes ‘Britishness’, and one for which allegiance can justifiably be argued, than producing more arbitrary lists of apparent British habits, as some politicians and commentators seem prone to do. At best, these may reflect some secondary characteristics of primary principles that could equally well find expression in other authentic ways. In contrast, the approach I describe would make it far easier to identify such legitimacy (‘fair play’ for example may take many guises). This could form the basis for appropriate ‘bilingualism’ between particular communities and the wider national identity, rather than either searching for the chimera of a Rawlsian commonality, or expecting everyone to speak a sort of conceptual ‘British Esperanto’, the futility of which Stout has indicated (chapter 6). At worst these lists can be little more than hackneyed and superficial stereotypes, often merely of ‘Englishness’, such as Norman Tebbit’s notorious ‘cricket test’ which had little applicability to those of us from much of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland!

There is considerable potential for improving the discourse around this vital issue.⁶⁰⁵ We should also consciously and intentionally follow Williams’ advice, in pursuing the ‘alternative route’⁶⁰⁶ which ‘mature European politics will take’, which is ‘seeking for effective partnership with the component communities of the state, including religious bodies. It will try to avoid creating ghettos. It will value and acknowledge all those sources of healthy corporate identity and political formation (in the widest sense) that are around.’ My strong recommendation would be that the Anglican churches in Britain, through the approach outlined above, can, and must, make a focussed, deliberate and persistent contribution to this debate in order to promote a healthy British society in which all can freely flourish, in accordance with

⁶⁰⁴ Admittedly, Cameron in his speech does point to the importance of commitment to universal human rights; equality of all before the law; democracy; freedom of speech and of worship; and the right of people to elect their own government.

⁶⁰⁵ Further debate was invited in a subsequent speech – Rowan Williams, ‘Multiculturalism: Friend or Foe?’ 16 May 2007, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1152/multiculturalism-friend-or-foe-archbishops-lecture.

⁶⁰⁶ Williams, ‘Religion, Culture’.

the good practices set out in the primary precepts of natural law, appropriately instantiated within our public life.

The scope of what the Church can offer here is indicated well by the closing section of Williams' lecture to the European Institutions:

And perhaps this is the central contribution to be made to a future European identity by the Christian tradition. It challenges the global socio-political juggernaut - consumer pluralism combined with insensitive Western promotion of a rootless individualism, disguised as liberal democracy. It affirms the significance of local and intentional communities, and their role in public life. It is able to welcome the stranger, including the Muslim stranger in its midst, as a partner in the work of proper liberalism, the continuing argument about common good and just governance. When it is allowed its proper visibility, it makes room for other communities and faiths to be visible. By holding the space for public moral argument to be possible and legitimate, it reduces the risk of open social conflict, because it is not content to relegate the moral and the spiritual to a private sphere where they may be distorted into fanaticism and exclusion. For Europe to celebrate its Christian heritage in this sense is precisely for it to affirm a legacy and a possibility of truly constructive pluralism. And for the Church to offer this to Europe (and from Europe to the wider world) is not for it to replace its theology with a vague set of nostrums about democracy and tolerance but for it to affirm its faithfulness to the tradition of Christian freedom in the face of the world's sovereignties.

Thus he not only affirms a 'truly constructive pluralism' but also insists that undiluted orthodox Christianity is at its heart.

I turn now to the third and fourth of Williams' speeches around pluralism and secularism, which more directly address the churches, and consider the extent to which they encourage, educate and resource Christians in their public engagement. For they too need to be convinced of what sort of public space can best serve their interests, and learn how they can promote this form of secularism and participate effectively within it in pursuit of human flourishing for all.

Christian Tradition Engaging with Pluralist Secularism

In his November 2006 lecture to the Pontifical Academy, Williams gives himself the task of 'arguing that "secular" freedom is not enough'.⁶⁰⁷ For, he says an 'account of the liberal society' in which 'argument that arises from specific

⁶⁰⁷ Williams, 'Rome Lecture'.

commitments of a religious or ideological nature has to be ruled out of court' when it comes to 'public reason' ... 'dangerously simplifies the notion of freedom and ends up diminishing our understanding of the human person.' Exploring the links between 'Secularism, Faith and Freedom' before an academic audience concerned with pursuing political and socio-economic questions in close relationship with the Roman Catholic Church,⁶⁰⁸ he explicitly raises the alternatives of programmatic and procedural secularism; and then considers the implications of each perspective for various contemporary public debates, and the concepts of what it is to be human and flourish that these bring into question. Issues range from abortion, the embryo and genetic research, and euthanasia, through to educational systems and the environment. Williams argues, in terms already familiar, that these illustrate how programmatic secularism 'threatens to end up in political bankruptcy'. While its 'empty public square ... implies in effect that the almost value-free atmosphere of public neutrality and the public invisibility of specific commitments is enough to provide sustainable moral energy for a properly self-critical society,' he contends that it is, however, 'not at all self-evident that people can so readily detach their perspectives and policies in social or political discussion from fundamental convictions that are not allowed to be mentioned or manifested in public.'

Williams sets out the justifications for a public space in which such convictions can indeed be mentioned and manifested: 'the alternative is a situation in which – for example – religious convictions are granted a public hearing in debate; not necessarily one in which they are privileged or regarded as beyond criticism, but one in which they are attended to as representing the considered moral foundation of the choices and priorities of citizens.' But it is not just that the churches must argue (and learn how to argue effectively, using resources such as those he provides) that they should be heard on their own terms. For, like liberals who must learn a new sort of secularism (as he argued in the previous two speeches), so too the churches must learn what it means to operate within this pluralist space. He warns them to expect that 'This is a potentially a noisier and untidier situation than one where everyone agrees what will and will not "count" as an intervention in public debate.'

Like Wolterstorff, and MacIntyre in his interpretation of Aquinas, Williams commends to the church the touchstone of law, in its most basic sense, that is, as reflecting the primary precepts: 'what makes this more than a free-for-all where the loudest voice wins the right to impose views is the shared recognition of law, that

⁶⁰⁸ The role of the Academy is described at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdscien/own/documents/passhistory.html.

system of determining the limits of any individual's or group's freedom which represents the agreement in principle of all groups in a society to renounce violent struggle or assertion because of a basic trust that all voices are being heard in the process of "brokering" harmony.' And though, he points out, the detail of the law may not always accord well with religious beliefs (for example on abortion), 'such decisions always remain open to argument' and therefore, given this possibility of future change under the sort of secularism he advocates, 'can be lived with'. Though having to live with some legislation that is offensive might be seen as 'a somewhat high-risk position', he wants to convince his listeners that in the long term such a secularism is far more in the churches' interest than any other. For, he asserts, 'in a working liberal democracy of a "procedurally" secular kind, there can be interaction and public engagement between varieties of both religious and non-religious argument. Essentially what I am suggesting is that this alone guarantees the kind of political freedom I am concerned to define and to secure.' This reflects the sort of shared common commitment of Wolterstorff, rather than Rawls.

Though on the basis of what has been argued earlier in this thesis, it is clear that Williams has a strong argument, I nonetheless wonder whether, given his Roman Catholic audience, he might have strengthened his case by making explicit the links to Aquinas' understanding of natural law, also offering them as resources for others to draw on them.⁶⁰⁹ This would have promoted their 'bilingualism' in both communicating the beliefs and practices of the community of tradition – here, the church – into the wider secular context, but interpreting the secular context so that it can be properly understood in, and so engaged with by members of, the community. To some degree this is what Williams does in the immediately subsequent passages. Here he roots procedural secularism, and the form of law it embodies, in the life of Jesus Christ, the teaching of the New Testament (particularly the 'imagery of the Body of Christ in St Paul's letters'), and the 'call and empowering of Christ's Spirit'. 'There is' he says 'no Christian identity in the new Testament that is not grounded in ... a pattern of the common life lived in the fullest possible accord with the nature and will of God – a life in which each member's flourishing depends closely and strictly on the flourishing of every other and in which every specific gift or advantage had to be understood as a gift offered to the common life.' He therefore draws the implication that 'Christian identity is irreducibly political in the sense that it defines a

⁶⁰⁹ That said, the current Pope, it has been suggested (not least on evidence from his own writings), is far less influenced by Aquinas than his predecessor – see 'Pope Benedict on St Thomas Aquinas', The Benedict Blog, 14 July 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://popebenedictxvnews.blogspot.com/2010/07/pope-benedict-on-st-thomas-aquinas.html>.

politeia, a kind of citizenship (Philippians 3:20); yet its existence and integrity are not bound to a successful realisation of this citizenship within history' and concludes that 'there does not have to be a final and sacred political order created in order for the integrity of the Church to survive.'

This, says Williams, is the 'fundamental theme of Augustine's City of God and much of the medieval tradition' – though again he does not name Aquinas specifically, and so the potential impact of affirming Thomistic teaching is not ensured. With further examples drawn from the Roman era through the Middle Ages, the Lutheran and English Reformations, and on to the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the 18th and 19th centuries, Williams roots his argument in unfolding Christian tradition – or narrative, as MacIntyre might say – throughout which, he says, there has been recognition of an appropriate separation of church and state: 'In all of this theological and political history ... the most significant point was always the recognition that what the state could properly demand of the citizen was limited by relationships and obligations beyond the state's reach.' Alongside Anglican sources, he draws on a treatise of Carl Theodor von Dalberg, later Archbishop-Elector of Mainz, in which it was argued that 'the state exists because of the need of citizens to labour together for their common welfare, and there is therefore no necessary conflict between individual and the state.' Williams also cites the Catholic political thinker, Lord Acton, by coincidence Dalberg's great-nephew, who was influential on many Anglicans, and concludes 'what emerges from this reading of the Christian contribution to the history of political thought, a reading shaped by both Roman Catholic and Anglican thinkers ... is that there is serious case for saying that some aspects of liberal politics would be unthinkable without Christian theology, and that these are the aspects that offer the clearest foundation for a full defence of active political liberty.' After again referencing the early church, he then underlines the comprehensive applicability of his arguments for a particular sort of Christian engagement in politics by asserting – with examples that range from education and the protection of women and children through to the 'maintenance of some forms of trustworthy associational life' – that the contemporary role of the Church in post-conflict Africa 'illustrates with dramatic and poignant clarity exactly what [it] means' to say, as he does, that 'faith is the root of freedom and programmatic secularism cannot deliver anything comparable.'

And, in case he has not already made his points sufficiently clear, Williams reiterates his concerns: 'Programmatic secularism, as a shorthand for the denial of the public legitimacy of religious commitment as a partner in political conversation, will

always carry the seeds, not of totalitarianism in the obvious sense, but of that “totalising” spirit which stifles critique by silencing others.’ This reflects MacIntyre’s critique of the claims of ‘objective neutrality’ that deny any other perspective. In contrast, ‘Procedural secularism is the acceptance by the state authority of a prior and irreducible other or others.’ In this way, as Williams stresses, the state, importantly, ‘remains secular, because as soon as it systematically privileged one group it would ally its legitimacy with the sacred and so destroy its otherness’; whereas, by remaining properly secular, ‘it can move into and out of alliance with the perspectives of faith, depending on the varying and unpredictable outcomes of honest social argument, and can collaborate without anxiety with communities of faith in the provision, for example, of education or social regeneration.’ There are close parallels with MacIntyre’s account of Aquinas’ assertion that a ruler – or, in the contemporary context, a system of governance – does not need to be Christian to be legitimate.

While Williams does not directly address international organisations, he does allude to the importance of the broader perspective, saying that ‘the critical presence of communities of religious commitment means that it is always possible to challenge accounts of political reasoning that take no account of solidarities beyond those of the state.’ He goes on to refer to Dalberg’s ‘awareness of citizenship in a transnational community, and membership within an interdependent created order’ as offering ‘vivid illustrations of the moral perspectives that state loyalties alone will not secure’ - and this points him to ‘a slightly different idiom’, one that ‘poses the very significant question of how “civil society” is to be understood.’ I believe he has identified an area requiring considerably more reflection from Christian tradition when he goes on to say ‘the idea that [civil society] might have a properly international dimension is in fact more and more compelling in our own day.’ The sort of MacIntyrean approach I have outlined can offer considerable resources, in particular through arguing for the central question of how we conceive humanity, and the common good, for addressing the forms of governance of international bodies – for example through bolstering, sustaining and further developing the sort of lines of argument reflected in Ndungane’s critique of the World Trade Organisation.

Tackling the global perspective from another angle, Williams again considers Islam. Worth noting here is the particular challenge Williams poses to the Christian community to engage with Muslim theologians and political theorists around issues of law, secularism, pluralism within Islam, through the sort of careful attentiveness to one another’s perspectives that underlies the MacIntyrean approach to dialogue between communities outlined in chapter 3. For, he rightly says, ‘unless we are able to argue in ways that engage with the distinctive features of Islamic polity and politics,

we are not going to connect or to make any difference.’ There are Christians who, through developing appropriate bilingualism, can play an important role as an interpretative bridge between the best of secularism and Islam.

Williams concludes his speech by affirming the irrevocable interconnectedness of ‘proper secularism’, faith and freedom, anchoring this in ‘a concept of the person’ that is ‘unavoidably religious in character’ in that ‘it assumes that we “answer” not only to circumstances or instinct or even to each other but to a Creator who addresses us and engages us before we ever embark on social negotiation’ – noting that this is why we regard the very young, very old, or otherwise incapable as nonetheless ‘persons, whose dignities and liberties are inalienable’. And so, with the nature of what it is to be human and to flourish emphasised in ways that resonate strongly with MacIntyre’s analysis, he ends ‘The struggle for a right balance of secular process and public religious debate is part of a wider struggle for a concept of the personal that is appropriately robust and able to withstand the pressures of a functionalist and reductionist climate. This is a larger matter than we can explore here; but without this dimension, the liberal ideal becomes deeply anti-humanist. And, like it or not, we need a theology to arrest this degeneration.’

Yet even though Williams ends by putting theology centre stage, many Christians may have a question-mark against whether it is possible with integrity to engage with a system that gives no privileged position to any faith or ideology. For is not the implication of accepting pluralist secularism in effect to say that one accepts the view that Christianity is only one perspective among many of equal legitimacy? As noted in chapter 2, there is considerable concern amongst those characterised as conservative that so-called liberals sit far too lightly to the core commitments of Christianity, as well as embracing what are in their view unacceptably inclusivist or universalist soteriologies; and the Church of England and its Archbishop have been criticised for excessive accommodation with contemporary political culture.⁶¹⁰ Does a MacIntyrean analysis allow us to speak unapologetically of our beliefs in the ultimate truth of Jesus Christ in a pluralist secularist context, even the sort of ‘procedural’ secularism that, as outlined by Wolterstorff and Williams, provides a place where all should be able to speak from their own convictions? And if so, how do we do so in practice?

⁶¹⁰ For example, by the then Primate of Nigeria and the Archbishop of Sydney at the launch of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans / UK in London on 6 July 2009 – see Peter Akinola, ‘Greetings from the Archbishop Akinola’, 7 July 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.gafcon.org/news/greetings_from_archbishop_akinola/ and Peter Jensen, ‘The Jerusalem Declaration - why it matters’, 12 July 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.gafcon.org/news/the_jerusalem_declaration_why_it_matters/.

It is precisely to these questions that I now turn, in considering the fourth of Williams' speeches, in which he addresses clergy and laity of the Diocese of Guildford on 'The Finality of Christ in a Pluralist World'.

Ultimate Truth in a Pluralist Context

'The classic Christian conviction,' says Williams, is that 'what we encounter in Jesus Christ is simply the truth. It is the truth about God and the truth about humanity. Not living into that truth and accepting it, has consequences because this is the last word about God and God's creation. So we speak of the finality of Christ. There's nothing more to know. Or we speak of the uniqueness of Christ. No one apart from Jesus of Nazareth expresses the truth like this.'⁶¹¹ Yet, he acknowledges, to speak in such terms 'is problematic for so many people in our world today.' He points to three areas of difficulty: moral ('Can we believe in a just God who – in effect – punishes people ... who never had a chance of hearing about Jesus?'); political ('If you claim that Christ is the final truth about God and the universe, doesn't that give you a perfect excuse for trying to shut up anyone who says different? ...Isn't this a recipe for contempt towards a large part of the human race?'); and philosophical ('Every truth is spoken in the terms of its own culture and its own times. What could we possibly mean by saying that truth expressed in the Middle East two thousand years ago was a truth applicable to everybody, everywhere? Wouldn't this be to lift our claims right out of the realm of ordinary human conversation to claim something inhuman and actually indefensible and unsustainable?').

While these difficulties echo the twin traps noted before of absolutism and relativism, including the absolutism of a programmatic secular position, in what Williams goes on to say it is clear that they are felt not only by those outside the Church, whether from other faiths or none, but also by those within who, for example, may be 'uneasy about the perception that believing in absolute truth necessarily makes you a bigot and intolerant ... In other words, belief in the uniqueness or finality of Christ in the way it's usually been understood is something that sits very badly indeed not just with a plural society (whatever that means) but with a society that regards itself as liberal or democratic.'

Though Williams acknowledges that these are 'powerful objections', he insists that the answer is to show what a properly pluralist, liberal and democratic society ought to look like, and then to show how these difficulties variously fall away

⁶¹¹ Williams, 'Finality of Christ' - his emphases.

in this context, allowing Christians to speak on their own terms without risk of such pitfalls: ‘if we are to commend the Christian faith in our own social and cultural context we need to be very sure what we’re commending and how to meet some of these objections.’ One thing that he is not prepared to do is ‘to give up on the uniqueness or finality of Jesus Christ.’

I shall not consider his response to the moral objection in detail, given that questions of theology per se are not at the heart of this thesis. But it is pertinent to note that in enunciating his interpretation of salvation in terms of being ‘created to be sons and daughters of the heavenly Father,’ he stresses ‘*That’s what human beings are made for.*’⁶¹² In other words, a clear understanding of humanity’s telos, so central to MacIntyre’s moral rationality, is also at the heart of what Williams affirms. And because this applies to all humanity, ‘unfairness is not God arbitrarily deciding that if you don’t believe that, you’re out. Unfairness would be not trying to share that human possibility as broadly as possible.’ In effect, Williams argues that for God’s people to act justly – which, according to MacIntyre, is an intrinsic part of pursuing moral rationality – they must promote humanity’s right telos as effectively as they can. In this way, a MacIntyrean justification can be shown to underpin the necessity of the missionary, even evangelistic, vocation of the Church, enunciated unconstrainedly into an appropriately pluralist secular context.

Williams’ response to the political objection recalls MacIntyre’s account of a Thomistic view of truth, which is, as noted in chapter 2, ultimately to see things as they truly are when viewed from the standpoint of God, and to think of them as God thinks of them. For though, says Williams, we speak about God in ways that are ‘culturally expressed’, what we need is to ‘believe that God really is God’ and the more we do this, ‘the less [we] believe God needs to be protected by human beings from the consequences of his own recklessness.’ Though using very different language to MacIntyre, what Williams is saying comes close to MacIntyre’s requirement that, in humility, we seek after an ever greater apprehension of the truth that is God, and of reality seen from God’s perspective, and that this is what we must aim to convey to others.⁶¹³ Further, we allow ourselves to be critiqued, and critique

⁶¹² Williams’ emphasis.

⁶¹³ Shortt quotes Oliver O’Donovan as describing Williams, on his appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury as ‘a theologian who does not think it the business of theology “to make Christian faith less offensive to modern man, but rather to expand modern man’s imagination to the dimension of Trinitarian faith”’. See extract from Shortt, R., 2005, *God’s Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, citing O’Donovan,

others, on the basis of this truth into understanding of which we grow, but we never make ourselves arbiters of the truth in the way that programmatic secularism and the 'Enlightenment Project' aspire to do.

The philosophical objection can be similarly tackled. Williams draws the careful distinction between, wrongly, 'claim[ing] ... that there is an absolutely sacred form of words that tells us everything we need to know' and, rightly, 'say[ing] something about human nature which is beyond change and negotiation; something about the way we are as humans.' As he stresses, 'complete relativism about human beings is not actually something that can be sustained.' In other words, we can put pursuit of a right understanding of what it is to be fully human centre stage – as MacIntyre proposes plain persons should do – and do so confident that, in the integrity of how we practice our own faith, we are ourselves being led ever more fully into an answer that reflects the absolute truth. For, as Williams affirms, 'we are always also talking about humanity made in the divine image. We can't pull those apart.' Therefore 'We claim that there is a basic dignity and a basic destiny for all human beings, and we claim that in relationship with Jesus the world made flesh become fully real.' On the basis of these arguments, which so closely follow MacIntyre's reasoning, Williams asserts that 'Expressed in these terms it is I believe possible to answer some of the moral, political and philosophical questions.'

Just as for MacIntyre's plain persons, the exploration and pursuit of the common good goes hand in hand with the conduct of that exploration and pursuit, so too Williams understands that it is not just what Christians assert about humanity, but also the way that we do this, that matters in public debate. This includes being open to learn – a necessity on both theological and philosophical grounds. As Williams puts it, 'in true dialogue with people of different faiths or convictions we expect to learn something: we expect to be different as a result of the encounter.' But, just as MacIntyre says that we need not proceed as though our core tenets were in question unless there is good reason so to do, so Williams reassures his listeners 'We don't as a rule expect to change our minds. We come with conviction and gratitude and confidence, but it's the confidence that I believe allows us to embark on these encounters hoping that we may learn ... And to say that I have learned from a Buddhist or a Muslim about God and humanity is not to compromise where I began. Because the infinite truth that is in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is not a matter which can be exhausted by one set of formulae or one set of practices. I may

O., 2003, Rowan Williams, *The New Archbishop of Canterbury, Pro Ecclesia*, 12(1), pp. 5-8, available at <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=600>.

emerge from my dialogue as confident as I have ever been about the Trinitarian nature of God and the finality of Jesus, and yet say that I've learned something I never dreamed of, and that my discipleship is enriched in gratitude and respect.'

With various examples from Scripture as well as from the contemporary Roman Catholic theologian Gavin D'Costa, Williams speaks in terms that resonate with orthodox Anglican tradition, running these in parallel with his more philosophically couched arguments. He draws his speech to a close saying:

belief in the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ – for all the assaults made upon it in the modern age – remains for the Christian a way of speaking about hope for the entire human family. And because it's that, we are bound to say something about it. We are very rightly suspicious of proselytism, of manipulative, bullying, insensitive approaches to people of other faith which treat them as if they knew nothing, as if we had nothing to learn and as if the tradition of their reflection and imagination were of no interest to us or God. God save us from that kind of approach. But God save us also from the nervousness about our own conviction which doesn't allow us to say that we speak about Jesus because we believe he matters.

Thus Williams argues that the Church should with confidence enunciate its beliefs within a pluralist context in ways that can avoid both inappropriate absolutism and boundless relativism; which draw on MacIntyre's advice to plain persons; and which reflect the processes of theoretical enquiry both within and between traditions.

Lessons for the Church

I see the central lessons exemplified in these four addresses as follows. The need for the church is twofold. First, it must know how to argue for a public space in which its own convictions can indeed be mentioned and manifested (to borrow Williams' terminology), and second, it must know how then to use the opportunities this offers in order to communicate effectively what it believes about the issues at hand, within the wider context of addressing the fundamental questions of 'How then shall we live?' that are at the heart of right human teleology. In terms of drawing the link with the theory of the last chapter, developed from MacIntyre's assertions in relation to plain persons, this means working for a public space where there is agreement that the central focus of debate is around the twin question of what is the common good and how it may be achieved, and, further, that this debate is to be conducted (and the wider political context shaped) according to the primary precepts

of natural law – and this must include participants being able to communicate from the perspective of their own beliefs and practices. It also means proposing answers to the question of what constitutes the common good and its just achievement, in ways that most help draw others into the social practices and conceptual language of the best of moral reasoning. This will necessarily include communicating why we believe human flourishing, of individuals and of society, is best achieved through authentic Christian faith and life.

I have considered these speeches by Williams in some detail, because I believe that though he may not have done so deliberately, he has in practice come close to the sort of approach that follows from the MacIntyrean analysis of previous chapters. For these speeches demonstrate many of the key elements MacIntyre describes as necessary, both to communities of tradition in their pursuit of moral rationality, and to plain persons acting within public arenas. Williams has provided theoretical justification of what he terms procedural secularism, both to secular audiences and in speaking to the church. He has also offered justification, resources (conceptual and linguistic), and methodological guidelines for engaging substantively around central questions of the nature of what it is to be human and to flourish, both to civil society and to Christian clergy and laity. There is much here from which others, especially within the Church, can learn, and on which they can build.

That said, Williams deploys his arguments with great subtlety and sophistication – a subtlety that perhaps means that the radical importance and fundamental strength of his arguments may sometimes be lost on his listeners, who are not aware of the powerful theoretical justifications of MacIntyre and how well the two cohere. My recommendation to those who are engaged in the public discourse of the church within the public sphere, would be that, at least sometimes, more of the underlying fundamentals provided by MacIntyrean justification could be explicitly enunciated, both as a resource on which the churches could draw in their own self-understanding, and in bolstering the Christian perspective (and confidence in deploying it) in pluralist debate. In particular, I would propose more attention be given to the arguments around what constitutes rationality, including moral rationality, in relation to human living, and why it is that communities of faith may well have stronger cases to make than their opponents. For though the strength of MacIntyre's arguments, alongside those of Wolterstorff, and others, in overturning foundationalist justification, are understood within the field of philosophy of religion (and also where appropriate in philosophy of science), in western public popular discourse there remains too widespread a conviction that to have religious faith is to be irrational.

Indeed, such is the pervasiveness of this view that even among Christians there can be an assumption that rationality and faith are somehow of different orders, and even that it is wrong to attempt any sort of rational justification of belief because this will serve to undermine true faith. Both Christians and their interlocutors need to be exposed to the clear message that main-line historic Christianity, at least, has high claims to rationality.

Therefore Christians, especially from historic traditions compatible with MacIntyre's Thomistic Aristotelianism, ought to be encouraged to grasp the reality that they enjoy a faith the moral rationality of which is justifiably 'good enough' for now, and certainly 'good enough' to serve as a basis for engagement in the public space. They should be better resourced to speak about the integrity of the moral rationality they espouse, and to counter arguments challenging this; and to address questions of substance from this perspective; and to do both with the humble but unassailable confidence that, given their own pursuit of the ultimate truth that is found in God whose world this is and whose creation we all are, they stand only to gain from the sort of honest open exchange with others of which I have written. (As before, there are separate concerns which would apply, from, say, a political perspective over the appropriateness of dealing with certain interlocutors or within certain contexts, or a tactical viewpoint.)

A Better Bilingualism

This leads me to a further comment on the speeches and writings of Rowan Williams, which relates to the extent to which he follows his own conclusions that Christians can and should speak from within their own convictions, not only in relation to the broad question of a place for a religious perspective in the public arena, but also when it comes to discussing specific ethical issues. For to do this both promotes the possibilities of the sort of discourse that is found in procedural secularism (including through illustrating what it means to belong to a well-functioning community of tradition, and so encouraging others to pursue moral rationality by similar means), and additionally provides the best possible contribution that Christians are able to make (being the product of their best endeavours towards moral rationality) on the substance of the matter in question. Yet there are many occasions when Williams confines himself to, at most, implicit allusions to the essence of what it is to be human and the common good, without clearly drawing the links with the beliefs and practices of faith.

Of course, there are occasions where there is limited opportunity to offer more than a very brief contribution, as, for example, in the House of Lords debate on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill (previous chapter). Though most listeners might consider Williams call for ‘further clarity’ in response to what he sees as ‘inexorable’ movement of legislation ‘towards a more instrumental view of how we may treat human organisms’ a fair enough comment, only those particularly alert to the philosophical issues are likely to recognise the full import from a Christian perspective. In the considerably longer contribution to the debate on the Good Childhood Inquiry Report in February 2009, he only mentions ‘the dimension of religious faith’ in a short section at the very end, with a single explicit reference to ‘the Gospel’s injunction to take example from children ...’⁶¹⁴ And while, after his introductory remarks, he does begin by saying ‘The report paints a very sobering picture of a society that has become clumsy and neglectful in the priority it gives to the central task of civilised humanity: the task of inducting children into responsible and fulfilling life’, it is only those able to read between the lines who will see the potential linkage to issues of the common good and MacIntyre’s social practices. The rest of the speech could have made been just as readily by someone with no faith commitment. It seems to me that when Williams uses solely such discourse he has overly chosen to ‘dress in borrowed clothes’, which is precisely what he spoke against in his Hay Festival lecture.

These examples contrast with his March 2009 speech on ‘Ethics, Economics and Global Justice.’⁶¹⁵ This incisive commentary (not addressed to a faith-based audience) on the roots of the so-called ‘credit crunch’, and the remedies it most needs, contextualises these themes wholly within questions of what constitutes genuine well-being (including care for the vulnerable) and of the need to maintain trust, accountability, respect and other aspects of the MacIntyrean language of plain persons. He also argues against privileging economic-based criteria, especially when rooted in false concepts of unlimited natural resources. Alongside these building blocks of a ‘communal language’ for the secular space, there is continuing referencing of a breadth of Christian teaching from Scripture and the life of Christ, through the monastic era, to the legacy of Roman Catholic social teaching and of Church of

⁶¹⁴ Rowan Williams, ‘Archbishop’s speech at House of Lords Debate - Good Childhood Inquiry Report’, 12 February 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/825/archbishops-speech-at-house-of-lords-debate-good-childhood-inquiry-report.

⁶¹⁵ Rowan Williams, ‘Ethics, Economics and Global Justice’, 7 March 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/818/ethics-economics-and-global-justice.

England social theologians and Archbishops of the last two centuries. Taken together, these provide the dominant narrative, within which quotations from business analysts, academics, political commentators are placed. It is a speech that only a Christian can have given; and, further, it seems to me to exemplify what can be achieved, by Williams both speaking out of his own tradition, and offering what is in effect a ‘parallel translation’ from his own beliefs and practices into the basic building blocks of a ‘communal language’ for the particular context which he is addressing. Its contribution to the secular arena is analogous to that of his Royal Charter sermon in addressing those with the basis of a ‘moral language’ (chapter 5). Williams has been able to present Christian and ‘communal language’ arguments in parallel on other topics, for example, climate change, whether in the public lecture sponsored by the Christian group Operation Noah in Southwark Cathedral⁶¹⁶ in October 2009 or in the very brief slot allotted on the Terry Wogan show’s Pause for Thought⁶¹⁷ in December later that year.

For surely, it is the task of the Christian voice to contribute what cannot, or cannot so easily or clearly or justifiably, be said from another perspective. Bishops need to show they have something particular to add, or why should their voice be given any particular attention? Stout criticises the way that, within academic circles, there has been an assumption – false, in his view – that there is ‘an exclusive choice between two foci of loyalty, that one must turn one’s back on tradition in order to be heard by the educated public at large (and vice versa).’⁶¹⁸ This has ‘turned theologians into methodologists’ the result of which is that ‘secular intellectuals have largely stopped paying attention’ since ‘academic theologians have increasingly given the impression of saying nothing atheists don’t know already.’ I would want to argue that, in all areas, on all occasions, we should at least consider seriously the need to go beyond saying ‘what atheists would know already’, so to speak. Indeed, I would want to suggest that the tendency, particularly since the middle of the twentieth century, by many church people to speak only in the language of this sort of secularism (for sincere but misguided reasons, generally rooted in ‘the Enlightenment project’) has exacerbated the assumption by others that the church has ‘nothing to say’.

⁶¹⁶ Rowan Williams, ‘Act locally as well as nationally urges Archbishop’, 13 October 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/773/act-locally-as-well-as-nationally-urges-archbishop.

⁶¹⁷ Rowan Williams, ‘Archbishop on Pause for Thought with Terry Wogan, BBC Radio 2’, 8 December 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/658/archbishop-on-pause-for-thought-with-terry-wogan-bbc-radio-2.

⁶¹⁸ EaB, 163-4.

Of course, there are other pertinent considerations. Williams engages as the Archbishop of Canterbury and an Anglican intellectual of long-standing, and therefore he is inevitably seen as speaking from a Christian perspective, and the invitations he receives to address various audiences come to him on this basis. He, like other Anglican Bishops in the UK and elsewhere who similarly receive opportunities to speak (as do also other clergy and those known to be practicing Christians), will encounter far more of an expectation that he will employ faith-based discourse than those invited for other reasons, who nonetheless ‘happen to be Christians’. This should strengthen the arguments in favour of the former speaking explicitly from the faith perspective, when balanced against other factors such as the political and tactical arguments about where to pitch not only individual speeches but also the overall balance of public utterances. For there will doubtless be occasions where the greatest impact can be achieved through concentrating more on building up the communal language than on providing a detailed account of aspects of the life of faith, and other times when the reverse will be true.

A good example of this expectation comes from the retired Conservative politician, and Roman Catholic convert, Ann Widdecombe, writing in the Daily Express that she had cheered on hearing of the death of Osama Bin Laden – as no doubt did many other of its readers.⁶¹⁹ But she went on to say that ‘The fact that I did cheer does not mean I’m unsympathetic to the sentiments of the Archbishop of Canterbury who professed discomfort at the killing of an unarmed man. It’s the duty of the church to remind us of our obligations towards wrongdoers because nobody else will. An Archbishop of Canterbury should put the gospel first and political expediency second. If we don’t understand that then secularism has so far eaten away the nation’s conscience that we have completely lost sight of the teachings of Christianity. I’m still glad that Bin Laden has gone to judgment, glad there is one arch terrorist less, glad, I even admit, that he probably felt real fear in his last moments but Rowan Williams is a representative of Christ not of Barack Obama and his duty is to remind us of what we would rather forget: that killing an unarmed man should give us pause for thought.’ Thus, for all that she ultimately disagrees, she nonetheless considers it both valuable and necessary that the Archbishop speaks ‘as Archbishop’ in the public arena.

⁶¹⁹ Ann Widdecombe, ‘Osama Bin Laden’s death should give us pause for thought’, The Express, 11 May 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, www.express.co.uk/posts/view/245881/Osama-Bin-Laden-s-death-should-give-us-pause-for-thought.

The situation may not be immediately as encouraging for those who are not seen as formal representatives of the church in some capacity, but who speak as ‘private’ Christians. A detailed consideration of the range of options that are likely to arise here is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is an important area for further work, and perhaps the most urgent next step for continuing research. Simply put, it is likely to be easier for Christians participating in arenas where people contribute as independent individuals (for example, in a neighbourhood civil society association), than when acting within areas where a particular ethos prevails (such as within certain areas of employment). Wolterstorff, who considers this question in some detail, concludes that while private citizens, in general discourse, and through democratic processes such as elections, should have a high degree of freedom to contribute as they wish, legislators and public officials will inevitably find themselves constrained, whether by the need to reflect to some degree the views of those who have elected them, or in the implementation of policies set through proper democratic means.⁶²⁰ Even so, as he points out, there will be considerable leeway in putting flesh on the detail of how agreed policies are drawn up and implemented. This may well include arguments around upholding the spirit and not merely the letter of legislation, in ways that work against overly instrumental interpretations. My expectation is that fuller reflection on these questions would provide greater justification for Christians to contribute from their own perspective (even if sometimes primarily in terms of working at ‘communal language’) than is often assumed in contemporary public life within the UK, in contrast to prevalent expectations of having to work within the severe limitations – when it comes to moral rational discourse – of ‘moral Esperanto’. It should also propose appropriate, and differentiated, strategies for making the fullest contribution, according to context.

It is important to note the differences between the sort of bilingualism I am commending and the proposal by Audi (made in debate with Wolterstorff) that one ought to be able to give both one’s own reasons and ‘secular’ reasons for one’s opinions, in public debate. Of particular concern to me is his assertion that ‘the chief point is not that one cannot have and be motivated by religious reasons but that one should have and be motivated by at least one set of evidentially adequate secular reasons.’⁶²¹ I have emphasised this phrase, because, if the nature of the secular space is inimical to religious reasoning ‘counting’ – some form of programmatic secularism – then it is unlikely that any reason which is satisfying within the norms of that

⁶²⁰ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 116-9.

⁶²¹ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 138 – my emphasis.

context is going to be found morally rational by a faith community with evaluative standards as described by MacIntyre. In this case, what Audi advocates simply cannot be done. One might be able to advance some sort of secular reasons, but to be motivated by them would be alien to one's own and one's community's convictions. Further, it would be the case that to espouse such reasoning in public debate – for example, promoting forms of instrumentalism such as decision-making solely on economic criteria or bureaucratic efficiency – would give entirely the wrong message, one of support for such a system of governance. For this reason, I would be similarly hesitant to commend another of Audi's proposals, which is the use of what he calls 'leveraging' alongside offering one's own genuine reasons. This, he says, is essentially 'pointing out reasons the audience already has, at least implicitly, that support the policy, whether one thinks they are good reasons or not.' In doing this, 'one tries to move an audience to a view by noting one or more reasons there are for it from the audience's point of view. This is compatible with not holding the position and even with thinking that the reasons do not in fact support it.'⁶²² While arguing against using leveraging alone, on the grounds that 'the audience cannot see who I am' and that this is 'for the most part not a good way to relate to fellow citizens' for 'it tends to conceal much of my perspective and so does not promote understanding of me of my view; and it tends to arouse suspicion ...' – views I would wholly endorse, on MacIntyrean grounds – he nonetheless contends that leveraging has an important place in political discourse. But again it would seem disingenuous to appear to support reasoning that is fundamentally incompatible with one's own; not least as one's genuine reasons should be those with the greatest moral rationality. Giving parallel reasons in this way is certainly not the sort of bilingualism I am advocating, where one gives one's own reasons on one's own terms, and in parallel offers entirely compatible reasons which draw in simple conceptual language on the instantiation of the primary precepts of the natural law and a concept of the common good within that specific context.

But Audi's approach should not entirely be written off. For, in affirming Wolterstorff's view that 'it is hopeless for a pluralistic society to operate as a single community in the sense in which that implies a shared overall view of the world', he proposes distinguishing 'first- and second-order communities': the former being what we might call communities of tradition, together with associations more loosely by social practices with internal goods of excellence; and the second being a far broader community made up of these first-order communities, sharing 'a commitment to

⁶²² Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 135-6 – emphases in the original.

liberal (or other) principles of mutual self-government and civil activity'.⁶²³ At the heart of these principles, Audi wants to place 'the advocacy and the support of laws and public policies.' It seems to me that where this 'law' is akin to that Williams espoused in his Chevening Lecture (and thus reflects the essence of natural law), and the public space is shaped along procedural lines, then to offer both our own and 'secular' reasons in parallel would be appropriate bilingualism, in support of promoting moral rational public discourse. There are parallels here with the promotion of effective civil society networks, outlined in the previous chapter.

A related matter is the issue of how often we may find ourselves agreeing with others, without noticing that we are doing so on differing grounds. Stout has suggested this may occur rather more than we are prone to recognising.⁶²⁴ I would propose that there is value in paying rather more attention to this, given that our overall objective is not merely to achieve individual policy objectives that we feel are in accord with Christian beliefs and practices, but rather to contribute to a maturing procedural secularism in which there can be an increasing 'thickness' in the communal language and in the substance of ethical discourse. Identifying where our grounds differ, and why, can highlight fertile areas around which to direct dialogue.

These are the sort of areas on which the churches should focus, as they consider being more deliberate in training their people to engage in bilingualism and stereoscopic social criticism in relation to the practices and subcultures of democracy and pluralist secularism.

Optimism Against the Odds

MacIntyre's analysis of the scope and application of Aquinas's account of natural law in relation to moral disagreement on one level holds out no new hopes for guaranteeing any acceptance of faith-based positions in secular discourse, or of the superiority of procedural over programmatic secularism. It must be acknowledged that there can be widespread indifference and even outright opposition towards the enunciation of religious perspectives within western public discourse, as illustrated by the popularity of the writings of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Anthony Grayling and others. However, what MacIntyre's work does do is provide a thoroughly justifiable basis for pursuing a far more positive climate in which we can relate to those with whom we differ, and stimulate conversations about the nature of

⁶²³ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion*, 137-8.

⁶²⁴ *EaB*, 213.

our disagreements, not least the central consideration of the essence of what it is to be human, and to flourish. It gives at least some grounds for optimism.

And, perhaps often unwittingly, there are significant elements within contemporary discourse with which we can work. Even though there has been rather too much of a return to ‘business as usual’ in recent months, the credit crunch has opened up debate around the dominance of instrumental aspects of finance and economics over human considerations.⁶²⁵ In the US, a speech by President Barack Obama to George Washington University in April 2011 brought surprised reaction at the extent to which he turned to ‘quasi-political-philosophical quotes’ around ‘the common good and shared sacrifice’.⁶²⁶ It is entirely right therefore that the ‘common good’ in one guise or another is a theme to which Rowan Williams continually returns.⁶²⁷ In much the same way, the primary precepts are not so far from the surface of the political arena, as MacIntyre similarly asserted in relation to the conduct of academic debate. In the UK, a recent Guardian editorial on the 190th anniversary of the newspaper’s first edition commented, in terms that resonate with Aquinas’ primary principles, ‘It is good to pause and reflect that the things that matter most – truthfulness, free thought, honest reporting, a plurality of opinion, a belief in fairness, justice and, most crucially, independence – do not change.’⁶²⁸ The tension between

⁶²⁵ Ethics and values were high on the World Economic Forum’s agenda in 2009 – see Larry Elliott and Ashley Seager, ‘Financiers in the spotlight as ethics takes centre stage at Davos’, *The Guardian*, 27 January 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/jan/27/world-economic-forum-davos; and in 2010 – see Angela Monaghan, ‘Davos 2010: Survey highlights “crisis of ethics”’, *The Telegraph*, 18 January 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financetopics/davos/7019964/Davos-2010-Survey-highlights-crisis-of-ethics.html. However, 2011 saw calls to ‘move on’ with a return to the pre-crisis banking climate – see Kamal Ahmed, ‘Davos view: enough regulation, let’s move on’, *The Telegraph*, 29 January 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/comment/kamal-ahmed/8290382/Davos-view-enough-regulation-lets-move-on.html.

⁶²⁶ Michael Tomasky, ‘Obama’s speech: reticent delivery, but fiery words’, *The Guardian*, 13 April 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/michaeltomasky/2011/apr/13/barack-obama-usdomesticpolicy-reticent-fiery-speech.

⁶²⁷ Two further examples are Rowan Williams, ‘Christianity – Public Religion and the Common Good’, 12 May 2007, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1165/christianity-public-religion-and-the-common-good; and Rowan Williams, ‘Archbishop’s Isaiah Berlin Lecture’, 16 November 2010, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/566/archbishops-isaiah-berlin-lecture. A search of the term ‘common good’ on the Archbishop’s website produces many other instances.

⁶²⁸ Editorial: ‘The Manchester Guardian, born 5 May 1821: 190 years – work in progress’, *The Guardian*, 5 May 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/may/05/manchester-guardian-work-in-progress.

combatting anthropogenic climate change and the need to overcome global poverty is an area where questions are being raised about justice, on which MacIntyre's 'plain persons' have much that is pertinent to offer. Earlier, I mentioned the introduction of the world's first degree in secularism. Intriguingly, the US academic Martin Seligman has stepped back from his earlier much publicised focus on 'happiness' studies, having concluded 'he was naive in the past to think wellbeing was based only on mood' and now considers human 'flourishing' as the fundamental goal of society, and so has recently published a best-selling volume of popular psychology, *Flourish*.⁶²⁹ All of these are examples of the many toe-holds in contemporary debate for Christians to exploit to promote further constructive engagement.

Within the ongoing debate on multiculturalism, the growing field of inter-faith activity, including the Faith Foundation set up by Tony Blair on retirement, is a particular area for potentially fertile engagement. Here, there may need to be particular attention to upholding the integrity of the distinctiveness of each faith (as the Foundation asserts, in its affirmation of the OSCE's Toledo Guiding Principles⁶³⁰) and to avoid the sort of inadequate 'common core' approach against which Williams warned in his Chevening speech. The Foundation should therefore be wary of speaking of 'understanding religious faith'⁶³¹ as if it were homogenous, or as if some 'religious Esperanto' existed. Prince Charles' apparent intention to be titled 'Defender of Faith[s]' rather than 'Defender of the Faith', as and when he ascends the throne, is another area where a MacIntyrean approach could help bring clarity to the issues at stake.

Thus, the task is not easy. But it should be tackled with optimism, because ready – even if slender – opportunities for engagement exist in plenty, and the case Christians have to make in response is as good as, and generally better than, the alternatives on offer.

Concluding Summary and Final Reflections

Let me end with a broad summary of what I have attempted to argue in this thesis. Its overarching aim was to show that the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, suitably

⁶²⁹ Tracy McVeigh, 'David Cameron measuring "wrong type of happiness",' *The Guardian*, 10 April 2011, accessed 15 May 2011, www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/apr/10/david-cameron-wrong-type-happiness.

⁶³⁰ 'Principles', Tony Blair Faith Foundation, accessed 15 May 2011, www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/pages/principles-face-to-faith/.

⁶³¹ Lecture at the National University of Singapore: Tony Blair, 'Faith and Globalisation', 26 March 2009, accessed 15 May 2011, http://blairfaith.3cdn.net/f3e664b211076019fd_jim6ibklz.pdf.

reinterpreted and developed where necessary, could provide essential resources to enable the Bishops of the Anglican Communion, and the churches they lead (along with those of other religious traditions, though particularly Western Christian tradition in the lineage of Thomistic Aristotelianism), to pursue their twin commitments made at the 2008 Lambeth Conference to better understanding the contextualisation of their faith, and how to promote their beliefs around all that makes for genuine human flourishing in today's world. I have identified four broad areas of specific value:

- First, these resources can help them 'regard local contexts' and allow these and the issues the Bishops face here to 'impinge' appropriately on their interpretation of the Gospel, with the greatest possible integrity – not least, through helping them to look beyond their own presuppositions and potential blind spots and prejudices.
- Second, these resources help them to engage effectively in advocacy for social justice through providing a basis for them legitimately to enunciate their perspectives, as fully justifiable within pluralist rational discourse, especially on moral and ethical questions.
- Third, they give convincing grounds not only for this assertion of their own position on their own terms (and offering tools for doing this well), but also for requiring others to give justification for their own beliefs and practices in turn.
- And fourth, they offer important guidance on how Anglicans can work to shape the public space so that it best allows for fertile pluralist discourse in pursuit of the flourishing of all citizens.

Neither we nor other traditions perfectly uphold the rationality (with all that it brings of justification, justice, truth, morality, values and so forth) which MacIntyre outlines. We are limited by finitude, and by the provisionality and change that is inevitably part of temporal life, but also by intrinsic human fallibility and failings. Our ability to share standards of rational evaluation and conceptions of human flourishing and the common good will also always be partial and imperfect, but may nonetheless be 'good enough' to be considered entirely 'adequate'. And while it is the case much of society lives with a very limited understanding of the sort of rationality, evaluative processes, and concept of humanity's telos which MacIntyre upholds, here too there is a gap between theory and practice – in that moral incoherence and irrationality, and the influences of wealth, power and status and fragmentary pursuit of desires of the moment, are by no means as all-encompassing as MacIntyre's caricatures. Thin understandings of internal goods of practices, for which there is widespread evidence

within the many different associative groupings and networks of society, may well be more adequate as a basis for engaging one another, and with greater substance, than MacIntyre realises.

We should view all these spaces between theory and practice with optimism rather than the pessimism which tends to colour MacIntyre's conclusions. For just as pessimistic disengagement contributes to the undermining of the possibilities of discourse, and weakens democratic debate's ability to function as a tradition (as Stout fears⁶³²), so too optimistic engagement can strengthen what is present and promote a continuing dynamic from the less adequate to the more adequate at every level of debate of substance around moral questions, rooted in concepts of human flourishing.

We can deduce that this is so from MacIntyre's own description of the social practices of communities of tradition. The more skilled not only work to hone their own skills and understandings (including of our telos), they also endeavour to improve the skills and understandings of the less able. This process of moving from less to greater adequacy applies both to the skilled and to their teaching of others. There are no prior criteria the young must meet before such exposure can begin, or begin to take effect – other than a preparedness to be part of this process. 'Anthropologists' and new adult members similarly are open to being trained in the 'language-in-use' of the community well enough for 'knowing how to go on, and go further'.

In all these cases, training and understanding comes not only through the conviction that arises out of rational discourse but through encounter and observation, and 'walking alongside'. Since such processes apply even to those entirely 'alienated' from traditions, who experience 'radical conversion', there appear to be no circumstances from which it is intrinsically impossible for an individual to come into functional fluency within some tradition. Though not all may be willing to walk through it, the door to 'knowing how to go on and go further' in a tradition appears always to be open.

At every level of encounter, those of us who have these competences can choose, and choose how far, to share them with others. For all his pessimism, MacIntyre gives grounds, and provides resources, for engaging with others on ethical questions at every level – from the substantive dialogue of commensurate communities of tradition with bilingualism across their languages-in-use; to the capacity to connect with those who have less fully developed moral languages,

⁶³² 'What they preach ... may well be contributing to the erosion of habits and virtues essential to democracy', EaB, 342.

particularly as developed by Stout in his stereoscopic social criticism; to the engagement of plain persons around the common good on the basis of the primary precepts of natural law, working to develop an instantiated communal language as a way of addressing ethical questions in contexts that admit no tradition.⁶³³ We have the choice of whether to employ these approaches with optimism and generosity: the ‘generous magnanimity’ that John Sentamu, Archbishop of York, describes as characteristic of the best of Anglicanism,⁶³⁴ or Stout’s ‘hermeneutical charity’.⁶³⁵ Drawing others into our habits – through both our explanations and our demonstrations of how we live – is the primary way of sharing and inculcating what we can offer, so that others can come to sufficient understanding of the justification of what it is that we believe and practice and promote.

Furthermore, this optimism suggests that it is appropriate always to choose to assume the existence of greater rather than lesser potential for engagement (all other considerations, such as political and tactical, being equal). For it is only through attempting ‘to go on and go further’ until we can make no more progress, that we find where the limitations lie, and where it is we have no option but to resort to the resources MacIntyre proposes for ‘thinner’ encounters. And the farther that we find we are able to go, the greater the moral rationality that both we and our dialogue partners stand to gain. Such optimism in starting with a ‘thicker’ mode of discourse is also justifiable in that it is the way to bring that ‘shock of recognition’ to those who, on strict theoretical analysis, might fall outside of the appropriate category for potential engagement in that way, but are nonetheless close enough in practice to find that the gap can be bridged. And, beyond this, in instantiating theory into practice, we have nothing to lose by interpreting categories of ‘close enough’ and ‘adequate’ with liberality. It is better to find that we have hit the limits of ‘going further’ and then adjust our discourse appropriately to a more simple mode of encounter, than to lose an opportunity for substantive and thicker debate through limiting our own participation.

⁶³³ In fact, Solomon sees greater implicit optimism in MacIntyre’s work than is often given credit: ‘MacIntyre’s optimism about the possibility of moral agreement across communities may be one point at which his religious views do influence his moral philosophy. Mindful of the Christian injunction to avoid despair and the centrality of the virtue of hope in the Christian life, he surely has resources for expecting things to work out that are denied more secular thinkers. In this respect, it is easier for Christians to “work without a net”.’ Solomon, ‘MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy’, n.22, 151.

⁶³⁴ John Sentamu, ‘Epieikes and Epieikeia: More than justice’, 10 July 2006, accessed 15 May 2011, www.archbishopofyork.org/articles.php/1737/epieikes-and-epieikeia-more-than-justice.

⁶³⁵ EaB, 351.

To engage generously is also to communicate trust. Trust promotes relationship, improving the context of our mutual encounters, which also enhances the capacity for communication. Trust also invites others to come closer to our community, increasing their exposure to our own practices. Trust is particularly vital in those encounters where there is least potential for substantive encounter, since trust is a fundamental element of Aquinas' primary precepts of natural law. More than this, where others are able to meet us believing trust is present, the implication they can draw is that we have their 'good' at heart – and thus trust helps open the door more widely to exchanges about how we might come more fully to understand what comprises such 'good'.

Wherever possible we can and should at least attempt to establish where the potential exists for substantive common ground that rests on foundations to which we give allegiance, and then attempt to build upon it. Engaging with optimistic generosity does not guarantee that we will always be met in kind, nor that all difficulties in substantive communication will be overcome and others will readily admit to the superiority of our views. However, to fail to engage is to be complicit in the persistence and deterioration of the status quo, with all its injustices and failings. To engage is always to insist on, and always to promote, the potential for greater human flourishing according to humanity's ultimate telos found in the God by whom and in whose image we are created. This is the Anglican way.

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