Tradition as "Bearer of Reason" in Alasdair MacIntyre's Moral Inquiry

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Introduction

Alasdair MacIntyre rightly notes that the conception of rationality and truth as embodied in tradition-constituted inquiry is at odds with the Cartesian account of rationality. Descartes's description of his epistemological crisis is such that its starting point—a radical doubt—lacks all reference to a background of well-founded beliefs; Descartes thus starts from the assumption that he knows nothing until the moment in which he can discover a first principle, with no presuppositions, on which everything else can be founded.[1] Descartes's doubt is to be, in MacIntyre's own terms, a "contextless doubt."[2] As MacIntyre describes Descartes's enterprise, it is evident, however, that it is doomed to failure, for a radical doubt would dissociate Descartes from language and from a tradition from which he had inherited his epistemological ideals. According to MacIntyre,

> To say to oneself or to someone else "Doubt all your beliefs here and now" without reference to historical or autobiographical context is not

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[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in Gary Gutting, *Paradigms and Revolutions* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), p. 59.
[2] *Ibid.*

meaningless; but it is an invitation not to philosophy, but to mental breakdown, or rather to philosophy as a means of mental breakdown. Descartes concealed from himself . . . an unacknowledged background of beliefs which rendered what he was doing intelligible to himself and to others.[3]

It is this reference to a historical context or tradition which accounts for the intelligibility of one's story, of one's narrative, in the search for truth. To put one's whole background of beliefs also into question is to render one's story totally unintelligible to oneself and to others. An example of this is Hume's radical skepticism, which as MacIntyre describes it, may be termed a first-person epistemological project.[4] If tradition then is precisely the context which renders argumentation intelligible, then a separation from tradition will constitute an impoverishment of rational inquiry. The displacement of tradition will not therefore lead, as was once thought, to greater enlightenment, but rather to the darkness of irrationalism. This has been proven not only in the epistemological realm, but also in the area of ethics which concerns us here. The Enlightenment project of morality has exalted the ideal of universality and autonomy, and displaced authority and tradition. The Kantian solution to morality, like the Cartesian solution to epistemology, has failed, and with these failures, we have witnessed the degeneration of our moral and intellectual traditions. In order to transcend the Enlightenment project of morality, MacIntyre draws upon the resources of the Aristotelian-Thomistic moral tradition.

My purpose in this paper is to focus first briefly on MacIntyre's return to the Thomistic tradition, which he does in an innovative way, for according to MacIntyre himself, the recovery of a tradition can sometimes only be made possible through "a revolutionary reconstitution."[5] The latter is realized by MacIntyre through an approach or methodology which he terms "unThomistic." I will then turn to the theistic version of classical morality, which in the Thomistic tradition is seen as complementing and enriching the Aristotelian

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[3]*Ibid.*, p. 63.

[4]Alasdair MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*, The Aquinas Lecture (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1990), p. 12.

[5]"Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and Philosophy of Science," in Gary Gutting, *Paradigms and Revolutions* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), p. 63.

framework. What I wish to emphasize is that Kant's ethical construction has its roots in deviations from the Thomistic moral tradition, and that new theologians themselves, in debt to Kant's secularized rational moral theology, are in effect in a traditionless state. MacIntyre's return to Thomism shows that when moral rules and laws are placed within their proper context, they are retrieved from irrationalism and thus acquire once again their eminently reasonable character.

A Return to Thomism:
A Theistic Version of Classical Morality

If it is true that some of MacIntyre's critics find him unThomistic, although they do recognize his attempt to defend Thomism, it is also true that MacIntyre himself does not wish to present his arguments in a Thomistic way. Too much has happened in the history of philosophy to think that a revival of Thomism can occur in a traditionally systematic Thomistic fashion. In speaking about the contemporary rejection of the concept of a first principle, MacIntyre notes that this question cannot be addressed solely with the resources provided by Aquinas and his predecessors:

> It seems that, if this central Aristotelian and Thomistic concept is to be effectively defended, in key part it will have to be by drawing upon philosophical resources which are themselves—at least at first sight—as alien to, or almost as alien to, Thomism as are the theses and arguments which have been deployed against it. We inhabit a time in the history of philosophy in which Thomism can only develop adequate responses to the rejections of its central positions in what must seem initially at least to be unthomistic ways.[6]

Now, these unthomistic means to which MacIntyre resorts are similar to what Nietzsche called a genealogy. The genealogical narrative has as its purpose that of disclosing something about the activities, beliefs, and presuppositions of some class of persons. It normally explains how they have come to be in a type of predicament which they cannot explain out of their own conceptual resources. Genealogy provides, according to MacIntyre, "a subversive history."[7] As is known, Nietzsche

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[6]Alasdair MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*, The Aquinas Lecture (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1990), p. 2.
[7]*Ibid.*, p. 57.

"used genealogy as an assault upon theological beliefs which Thomists share with other Christians and upon philosophical positions which Aristotelians share with other philosophers."[8] To thus adopt the methods of genealogical narrative is certainly to have recourse to un-Thomistic means. But as MacIntyre sees it, these are to be put to the service of Thomistic ends, for what his own genealogical construction reveals is that "the predicaments of contemporary philosophy, whether analytic or deconstructive, are best understood as a long-term consequence of the rejection of Aristotelian and Thomistic teleology at the threshold of the modern world."[9] So, whether in the epistemological or moral realms, what MacIntyre sees as missing within contemporary inquiry is the teleological scheme.

For those who have read *After Virtue*, this comes as no surprise. MacIntyre's chapter on why the Enlightenment project of justifying morality had to fail pinpoints the rejection of the teleological view of human nature as the reason why the whole project of morality in the modern age becomes unintelligible. He cites the Aristotelian teleological scheme, with its contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature, and the precepts of rational ethics, which permit the passage from potentiality to act and therefore the realization of man's nature and the attainment of his true end. But MacIntyre also notes that to this scheme was added, without any essential alteration, a framework of theistic beliefs, as the Christian one which is elaborated by Aquinas.[10] So, as MacIntyre presents it, the Christian framework does not alter the Aristotelian scheme but rather complements it and adds to it another dimension, thus enriching it. The theistic version of classical morality presents reason as instructing man with respect to what his true end is and how to reach it. Moreover, while it insists that the precepts of ethics are, as in Aristotelianism, teleological injunctions, it transcends Aristotelianism by affirming that its precepts are also expressions of divine law. In a well-ordered Christian tradition such as that of Thomism, there is no conflict between the obligation imposed by practical reasoning and the obligation imposed on man by divine law. This absence of conflict is implicit in the following:

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[8]*Ibid.*, p. 58.

[9]*Ibid.*

[10]Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, second edition), p. 53.

To say what someone ought to do is at one and the same time to say what course of action will in these circumstances as a matter of fact lead toward a man's true end and to say what the law, ordained by God and comprehended by reason, enjoins. Moral sentences are thus used within this framework to make claims which are true or false. Most medieval proponents of this scheme did of course believe that it was itself part of God's revelation, but also a discovery of reason and rationally defensible.[11]

This area of agreement does not survive. Its extinction, as MacIntyre himself recognizes, was not merely due to the new conception of reason embodied in seventeenth-century philosophy and science, which led to the Enlightenment; but additionally, and perhaps surprisingly, it was due to Protestantism, Jansenist Catholicism, and a Scholasticism that was not Thomistic. Thus, we might say that it was due in part to a Christian tradition that was not well-ordered. What I wish to emphasize here is that the dissociation between theism and morality was not exclusively an Enlightenment or Kantian discovery, but rather that it had its roots in a deviated theistic version of human nature and morality.

If Hume is indeed important for the Enlightenment project of morality, this is so because he comes upon an ethics which has been evacuated of its theistic content and rendered in effect contextless and thus unintelligible. In her essay "Modern Moral Philosophy," which has influenced MacIntyre's own thought, Elizabeth Anscombe says:

> Hume discovered the situation in which the notion 'obligation' survived, and the word 'ought' was invested with that peculiar force having which it is said to be used in a 'moral' sense, but in which the belief in divine law had long since been abandoned: for it was substantially given up among Protestants at the end of the Reformation. The situation . . . was the interesting one of the survival of a concept outside the framework of thought that made it a really intelligible one.[12]

Anscombe continues:

> They did not deny the existence of divine law; but their most characteristic doctrine was that it was given, not to be obeyed, but to show man's incapacity to obey it, even by grace; and this applied not merely to the

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[11]*Ibid.*
[12]G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy*, 33, 1958.

ramified prescriptions of the Torah, but to the requirements of 'natural divine law.'[13]

Anscombe's essay ties morality to religion, and although in *After Virtue* MacIntyre follows to a great extent the Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics, it is my contention that MacIntyre has an acute interest in the relationship between theism and morality. I will try to show this by reference to some of MacIntyre's earlier writings, as well as to some of his work in the last few years.

A Non-Thomistic Christian Moral Tradition as Precursor of Kant's Ethical Construction

It is well to note first of all that Anscombe's essay dates from 1958, and that in 1967 MacIntyre contributed two essays to the lecture topic, *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, presented at Columbia University, along with Paul Ricoeur. In the first of these two essays, "The Fate of Theism," MacIntyre notes that in an effort to render theism intelligible or perhaps palatable to the secular-minded man, theologians have evacuated theism of its content, and in so doing they have failed in their attempt to have theism accepted by a secular audience.[14]Nineteenth-century theists argued that the loss of theistic belief results in moral collapse; one has only to think of Dostoyevsky's famous phrase: "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted." However, in his second essay "Atheism and Morals," MacIntyre questions the Dostoyevskian contention: "What I am principally concerned with here are the logical connections between belief in God and morality; my contention is that theism itself requires and presupposes both a moral vocabulary which can be understood independently of theistic beliefs, and moral practices which can be justified independently of theistic beliefs."[15] The problem which arises here, according to MacIntyre, is that "we ought to do what God commands, if we are theists, because it is right in some independent sense of 'right,' rather than hold that what God commands is right

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[13]*Ibid.*

[14]Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Fate of Theism," in *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 26–29.

[15]Alasdair MacIntyre, "Atheism and Morals," *ibid.*, p. 32.

just because God commands it, a view which depends upon 'right' being defined as 'being in accordance with what God commands'."[16] What MacIntyre wishes to emphasize, and rightfully so, is that man should have *reasons* for doing what is good or right, rather than simply appeal to divine *power* when he obeys divine commandments. "If God's commands are not to be mere fiats backed by arbitrary power then they must, [according to MacIntyre], command actions which can be seen to have [reasonable] point and purpose independent of, and antecedent to, the divine utterance of divine law."[17] The practice of making moral judgments pre-existed the utterance of theistic moral injunctions. These points were especially well understood by many medieval theologians, the most important of which was Aquinas.

For MacIntyre theism requires an independently understood moral vocabulary and independent moral practices, which must be of a certain kind. What theism presupposes and requires morality to be is in effect what morality has been *traditionally* considered to be, and no longer is.

> What morality is required to be by theism and what it usually has been considered to be is a set of rules which are taken as given and are seen as having validity and authority independent of any external values or judgments. It is essential to morality so conceived that we accept the rules wholly and without question. We must not seek rational grounds for accepting them, nor can we decide, on rational grounds, to revise them. . . . When morality is considered in this light, theories about morality are accounts of why the code of moral rules includes the items that it does and no others. Platonic and Aristotelian morality offer theories of this kind. Aristotelianism grounds its explanation in the view that human nature has certain inherent goals, needs, and wants. The cogency of this theoretical explanation depends on the fact that the society which upholds the given moral rules agrees upon a way of life defined in terms of just those goals, wants, and needs.[18]

When morality is thus understood, the theistic framework completes that of a natural morality, in such a way that there is no arbitrariness but rather reinforcement.

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[16]*Ibid.*, p. 33.
[17]*Ibid.*, p. 35–36.
[18]*Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

Theism furnishes an explanation for the authority and the fixed character of the rules, both by according them divine status and by providing grounds for the underlying belief in a single determinate human nature. God created men with just those goals, wants, and needs which a way of life embodying the given rules will enable them to achieve. To the natural morality of men theism adds rules concerned with man's supernatural end, and a set of beliefs and practices concerning guilt, repentance, and forgiveness to provide for moral, as well as religious failure. Theism and morality of this kind naturally and easily reinforce one another.[19]

According to MacIntyre, the traditional attitude to moral rules which theism required has decayed, and this decay has been to a great extent prior to the loss of theistic belief, for which reason he holds that a change in the character of morality is in part responsible for the modern man's inability to accept theistic beliefs. The Dostoyevskian contention about the relation between theism and morals is thus inverted. One of the causes that MacIntyre cites for the decay of the traditional attitude to moral rules is the impact of certain versions of Christianity. There is no doubt that MacIntyre sees this deviated Christian tradition as having exercised enormous influence; he refers to it not only in his essay "Atheism and Morals," but also in *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, in *After Virtue*, and in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. The most important culprits here are Protestantism and Jansenist Catholicism. Both these versions of Christianity present a human nature which has been corrupted by original sin; man's will and reason are so depraved that they cannot possibly adhere to the moral law except by the aid of grace. It is not surprising then that justification should become a matter of faith alone. "The consequence of [the Protestant and Jansenist Catholic] view is that from any human standpoint the divine commandments do become arbitrary fiats imposed on us externally; our nature does not summon us to obey them, because we cannot recognize them as being for our good. The motives of hope of eternal reward and fear of eternal punishment then must completely replace temporal motives for morality."[20] Such a theistic framework leaves man morality-less; he no longer recognizes in his nature an internal finality which is not at odds with an external

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[19]*Ibid.*, p. 38.
[20]*Ibid.*, p. 39.

finality (the good for man is God and the way toward this good is adherence to the natural moral law; in other words, actions in conformity with his nature, which in a theistic framework are seen as God-given). Theism and morality thus become dissociated; theism no longer grounds morality; the two no longer reinforce one another. As a result, secularization ensues. Certain realms of human life become autonomous in their norms because they are not considered to belong to the realm of salvation and damnation, and yet paradoxically success, for example, in the economic realm, is seen as a sign of redemption. The theistic framework then seems to provide for no more than divine arbitrariness. If man considers himself to be one of the elect, then the only restraint put on his actions is external—namely, the threat of punishment.

It was precisely this type of Protestant ethic which was inherited by Kant; it is no wonder then that there should be in Kant a distinction made between phenomenal man, as a creature of nature, led by the desires and goals inherent in his nature, and noumenal man, as the self-determining personality or individual, who is an autonomous moral agent, imposing laws on himself, with no other authority than the self as a rational agent. MacIntyre sees Kant as a coherent analyst of the change which had in part already occurred in the character of morality and of the split between theism and morality. Kant had inherited the Protestant denial of the essential integrity of fallen human nature; in declaring man's autonomy from his nature, moral injunctions have only the authority of each individual's will. Such an ethic is inconsistent with the morality that theism really requires. The only reason why Kant invokes theism is to insure that man will be rewarded for his virtuous living. The effect of "radical evil," as Kant puts it, on man's nature is such that morality cannot possibly be derived from theism, if God is to be considered good.

[F]or Kant the heterogeneity, the variety, the incompatibility, which mark man's natural goals, needs and wants entail that these can provide us with no stable criteria. He cannot find, as the medieval Aristotelian would, any point or proof for morality in terms of the satisfaction of the needs and wants of a human nature created by God to be of a certain determinate kind.[21]

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[21]*Ibid.*, p. 42.

Theism is thus relegated to a tenuous position, for, as was suggested above, God is needed only to apportion happiness for man's goodness, in another life.

If there is then no stable criteria to which man can appeal to determine the morality of his actions, since recourse to a single determinate human nature has been abandoned for moral prescriptions which have no authority other than that derived from the autonomous moral agent, it is then not surprising that moral disputes should seem insoluble. As MacIntyre notes: "Theism has lost the morality which it logically presupposed; and the lack of social contact between theism and contemporary morality is at least partly to be explained by the lack of logical connection between theistic beliefs and modern moral belief."[22] If Kant was the coherent and consistent interpreter of a deviated Christian tradition, it would seem that the new theology which has emerged from the radicalization of Kant's own theological construction cannot provide any justification for these rules and thus their adherence to the rules seems "arbitrary and irrational."[23] Traditional Christianity then appears as false and as having been secularized not from without, but rather from within. "The new theism turns out to be in morals as in theology the project of retaining a religious vocabulary emptied of belief-content."[24] If this new theism is in effect a product of the Enlightenment, caused by the rationalism of such thinkers as Kant but also due to the impact, as we have shown, of Protestantism and Jansenist Catholicism, then the Enlightenment's attempt to replace the irrational, traditional world view with a rational, progressive one has indeed been thwarted. What is now apparent is that the rational, progressive world view with its attempt to cut itself off from tradition and all beliefs is in effect an invitation to irrationalism.[25]

Rehabilitation of Tradition: the Thomistic Tradition

It is perhaps this irrationalism which best characterizes the postmodern age and which MacIntyre, along with other philosophers,

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[22]*Ibid.*, p. 44.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 46.

[24]*Ibid.*, p. 53.

[25]See Alasdair MacIntyre's discussion of Descartes's rejection of tradition in "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science" in Gary Gutting, *Paradigms and Revolutions* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), pp. 59–64.

is trying to supersede, through a rehabilitation of that which has been rejected, namely, tradition. If the Enlightenment pitted tradition against the progress of reason, MacIntyre considers tradition a bearer of reason, for we cannot really understand our actions and our very selves unless the narrative of our life is ultimately embedded within a tradition. The story of our life is accordingly only made intelligible through reference to a tradition.

> A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argu-ment, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition. Within a tradition, the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations. Hence the individual's search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual's life is a part, and this is true both of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life.[26]

MacIntyre's appeal to tradition in *After Virtue* is thus made in order to provide a context which will render man's actions intelligible. When man seeks for the good or exercises the virtues, he does so not *qua* individual, but rather as the bearer of a particular social identity. To this effect,"What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition."[27]

MacIntyre further elaborates his thoughts on tradition in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Education in the virtues is for MacIntyre what permits one to justify one's actions, and in order to become virtuous, one has to enter into a craft-like tradition, in which one accepts the authority of others, the standards, the rules. In a craft the apprentice learns from the instructor how to apply relatively simple rules: he acquires the disposition to do what the rule prescribes. In a similar manner, in moral education one learns certain rules or truths and one applies them in particular situations; where it is difficult to see if the rule applies to the case, then one has to apply right judgment. The virtuous person does not abide by rules, but rather is the one

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[26]Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 222.
[27]*Ibid.*, p. 221.

who knows how to exercise judgment in particular cases. Because the virtuous man has not only knowledge of the good, but is good himself, he will know what the appropriate course of action should be in a given situation. His practice of virtue informs his desires by reason. But, as MacIntyre insists, one becomes virtuous, rational, by participating in a rational practice based community, and not simply as an autonomous individual. It is thus necessary to establish relationships with persons so as to learn what one's good is; one needs therefore the support and advice of others.

The comparison of moral inquiry or moral education to the craft-like tradition is continued in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, according to which progress in inquiry and in the moral life will be predetermined by the nature of a prior commitment, that is, commitment to a tradition. As in a craft, the apprentice relies on the rational teaching authority of the master, so also in the practice of the "craft" of moral inquiry, a teacher is needed. MacIntyre recognizes that this conception is at odds with that of the encyclopedist and the genealogist: for the former, authority comes from within, whereas for the latter, authority represents the will to power and therefore should be resisted. MacIntyre is presenting the Thomistic tradition as the rational alternative to the encyclopedist and to the genealogist. In Thomism initiation into the moral life is initiation into a tradition, by way of a teacher; both virtue and practical reasoning are acquired within a community, through acceptance of an authority within that community. Since MacIntyre sees Thomism as a synthesis, as it were, of Aristotelianism and of Augustinianism, it is interesting to note MacIntyre's Augustinian-Thomistic side, for when he speaks of acceptance of tradition, of authority, as the way to advance toward the truth and toward perfection or goodness, he observes in an Augustinian way that faith in authority, or faith in tradition, precedes rational understanding. This is certainly reminiscent of Augustine's faith seeking understanding, and it is, in my opinion, in consonance with MacIntyre's own self-description as an Augustinian-Christian.[28] What I believe MacIntyre wishes to emphasize here is that faith in tradition, in authority, is not a blind surrender to the irrational, but

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[28]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), p. 10.

rather a movement toward meaning and truth itself. We can create meaning, advance in the truth, only because meaning and truth are already present. And the acceptance of that meaning and truth is faith. We have to stand in the truth, that is, accept the authority of another, be committed to the truth, in order to understand. Faith thus conceived makes understanding possible; in the last analysis, we could say that faith is a deciding for the truth; this conception of the faith is certainly very different from the Enlightenment stance, in which as we noted above, faith is pitted against reason. Faith here is seen as reasonable, because authority and tradition are bearers of reason, and faith in authority and tradition permits advancement in reasoning or the true progress of reason, that is, man's ever better understanding of the truth, which also advances his own perfection and goodness by the correction of his will.

It seems to me that MacIntyre's work is to a great extent an effort to reconcile in a sense faith and reason, tradition and progress, the particular and the universal. It is for this reason, I believe, that MacIntyre's reference to *Aeterni Patris* in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* is particularly fortunate, since this encyclical calls for *a return to the scholastic thought of St. Thomas (it is well to note* that not all scholastic thinkers are Thomists and that the influence of these non-Thomistic scholastic minds, such as Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, has led to deviations in traditional Christianity and in the Thomistic tradition), in which faith and reason are not antagonistic toward each other. Rather each helps the other so that there is no contradiction: reason is illumined by faith and faith is better understood through reason. It is this effort of reconciliation, of harmonizing, without accomodationisms, which we see in MacIntyre's work. The theistic framework is not something superfluous or extrinsic to the moral framework, as we saw, for example, in Kant. The moral life is not simply for self-perfection, but is rather for the ordering now of man's life to God. God is thus not extrinsic to morality. This was MacIntyre's point when he reversed the Dostoyevskian contention: "If everything is permitted, then God does not exist." In line with this, MacIntyre makes the following observations:

> Modern Catholic protagonists of theories of natural law have sometimes claimed that we can fully understand and obey the natural law without any knowledge of God. But according to Aquinas all the moral precepts of the Old Law, the Mosaic Law summed up in the Ten Commandments, belong

to the natural law, including those which command us as to how we are to regard God and comport ourselves in relation to Him. A knowledge of God is, on Aquinas' view, available to us from the outset of our moral enquiry and plays a crucial part in our progress in that enquiry. And it would be very surprising if this were not so: the unifying framework within which our understanding of ourselves, of each other, and of our shared environment progresses is one in which that understanding, by tracing the sequences of final, formal, efficient, and material causality, always refers us back to a unified first cause from which flows all that is good and all that is true in what we encounter. So in articulating the natural law itself we understand the peculiar character of our own directedness and in understanding the natural law better we move initially from what is evident to any plain person's unclouded moral apprehension to what is evident only or at least much more clearly to the *sapientes*, those whom Aquinas saw as masters of the master-craft (I-IIae 100, 1), and to what supernatural revelation discloses. But in so doing we progress or fail to progress, both as members of a community with a particular sacred history, the history of Israel and the church, and as members of communities with secular political histories.[29]

Man does not therefore have, as it were, two finalities, one natural and one supernatural, one known through reason and another known only through faith; man is simply ordered to God, and in our understanding of the natural law, we understand, as MacIntyre puts it, "the peculiar character of our own directedness."

Elsewhere MacIntyre points out that obedience to the natural law is in effect obedience to God; the "ought" of moral obligation, of obedience to God because He commands what is right, is not extrinsic to the "ought" of practical reasoning; in other words, moral obligation is not to be identified as an obligation simply in virtue of the command of another, but rather because of what it enjoins in the doing or achieving of something good.

[T]o know that God commands those precepts of the natural law, in obedience to which one's good is to be realized, gives one no further, additional reason for obedience to those precepts, except insofar as our knowledge of God's unqualified goodness and omniscience gives us reasons for holding

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[29]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1990), pp. 141–142.

his judgments of our good, as promulgated in the Old and New laws, to be superior to our own. The "ought" of "One ought to obey God" is the same "ought" as the "ought" of "To do so and so is the good of such a one; so such a one ought to do so and so"—the same "ought," that is, as the "ought" of practical reasoning.[30]

MacIntyre's return to the Thomistic tradition shows then the interpenetration of theism and morality. His return to Thomism also emphasizes how the individual moral life is set within a tradition, in which the rational teaching authority of another is accepted so as to progress in truth and in virtue.[31]

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[30]*Ibid.*, p. 154.

[31]This paper is the result of research initiated during an NEH Summer Seminar for College Teachers at Boston University on the Enlightenment and its twentieth-century critiques.