

Thomist or Relativist?
MacIntyre's Interpretation of *adaequatio*
intellectus et rei

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A central concern of Alasdair MacIntyre's on-going philosophical project has been to show the compatibility between the following two claims. The first claim has to do with the nature of reason, both theoretical and practical. The claim is that, although observance of the law of non-contradiction and other such formal principles is a necessary condition of rationality, sufficient resources for rational adjudication between competing ethical positions are to be found only by reference to the substantive commitments and presuppositions of some particular tradition. MacIntyre, therefore, urges us to abandon what he characterizes as the Enlightenment belief in universal, ahistorical, tradition-transcendent canons of reason, canons available to and undeniable by any rational person, regardless of place and time. To the contrary, MacIntyre maintains that there is no such thing as rationality as such. Since the canons of rational justification are always immanent to a particular tradition, there are as many rationalities as there are traditions.¹

MacIntyre's second thesis, which he hopes to show compatible with the first, is the claim that, despite the tradition-constituted nature of rationality, it is possible for one tradition to show itself rationally superior to another.² In short, MacIntyre wants to argue that his first claim does not entail the relativism it might seem to imply. And it is not difficult to understand why it might so seem. For if each tradition carries with it its own standards of rationality, it is hard to imagine how one tradition could show itself rationally superior to another. Won't the contradictory claims of two traditions, A and B, always be vindicated each by the peculiar standards of its own tradition?

¹Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), chap. 1.

²Ibid., pp. 365-66.

Yet won't these same claims appear to lack justification when seen from the standpoint of its rival?

MacIntyre's response to these questions involves developing accounts of intra and inter-traditional rational justification given his views on the tradition-constituted nature of rationality outlined above. According to MacIntyre, a tradition is comprised not only of a set of substantive commitments by reference to which particular moral claims are justified, but also by a set of problems and disputed questions, which form the basis of an ongoing program of research and enquiry within that tradition. Such problems can emerge for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the teachings of the acknowledged authorities of a tradition contain or imply seeming inconsistencies. Or maybe certain experiences of the community raise new questions that challenge traditional assumptions. Whatever the case may be, it is important to note that it is by virtue of its own standards that a tradition recognizes its problems. According to MacIntyre, rational progress occurs within such a tradition when, whether through conceptual innovation or the reinterpretation of authoritative teaching, solutions to such problems can be found without abandoning the fundamental claims and authorities which make the tradition what it is. The theoretical products of such innovation and reinterpretation are justified, and constitute a measure of rational progress, precisely because of their ability to resolve disputed questions while retaining the tradition's basic commitments.³

But it may happen that solutions to such problems are not forthcoming, that intra-traditional rational progress does not occur. It is only at this point, according to MacIntyre, that inter-traditional rational progress becomes a possibility. A tradition has reached what MacIntyre calls an "epistemological crisis" when it is able to recognize by its own standards that it has problems, but is repeatedly unable to solve those problems. According to MacIntyre, it is possible for a tradition that has reached this crisis stage to find in some other tradition the resources needed both to diagnose its problems and to solve them. For this discovery to occur, the proponents of the crisis tradition will have to learn the other tradition from the inside out—so that they are able not only to understand that tradition as it understands itself, but also, so that they can see their own tradition from the perspective of the other. Under these circumstances, the proponents of the crisis tradition will discover the rational superiority of its rival if the following conditions are met. First, the rival tradition must afford them resources for seeing why their own tradition is limited in such a way as to generate the problems which it could not resolve given its own beliefs, categories and methods. Second, the rival tradition must be able to over-

³Ibid., chap. 18.

come those problems either by virtue of its superior conceptual resources, or by dispensing with the flawed assumptions which generated the problems in the first place. Finally, the rival tradition must not be plagued by an epistemological crisis of its own. When such conditions have been met, the proponents of the crisis tradition are justified in abandoning that tradition in favor of its rival. Notice that the rational conversion from one tradition to the other does not require a set of neutral standards, independent of both traditions; for it is by the standards of the former tradition that its problems were recognized, and it is by the standards of the latter that those problems were explained and overcome.⁴

My purpose in this paper is not to evaluate MacIntyre's success in overcoming relativism given his commitment to the tradition-constituted nature of rationality. I will simply assume for the sake of argument that MacIntyre succeeds,⁵ and focus, instead, on his understanding of truth. In particular, I want to ask whether MacIntyre holds a Thomistic conception of truth and, if so, how he might defend that conception. The first question is of interest, not only because MacIntyre increasingly identifies himself as a Thomist-Aristotelian, but also because he does so while defending an ostensibly un-Thomistic,⁶ historicist account of rationality. The latter question is of interest, because, insofar as MacIntyre does want to defend a conception of truth as an adequacy or conformity or correspondence between mind and thing, he will immediately be confronted by two sorts of objections, one from the anti-realist, and one from the realist. The anti-realist will regard as unwarranted any attempt to claim truth as a relationship between the mind and a reality independent of the mind. The realist, on the other hand, will embrace the Thomistic conception of truth, but will deny that that conception is compatible with MacIntyre's understanding of rationality as constituted by traditions. In what follows, I consider how MacIntyre responds to the first objection and suggest how he might respond to the second. I argue that the Thomistic conception of truth can be defended against the standard anti-realist objection, and that it can be defended even if MacIntyre is right about the tradition-constituted nature of rationality.

⁴Ibid.

⁵I find MacIntyre's efforts in this regard to be promising, although some have argued otherwise. See Alicia Juarrero Roque, "Language Competence and Tradition-constituted Rationality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51:3 (September 1991), pp. 611-17. For criticisms of MacIntyre from a Thomistic perspective see Robert George, "Moral Particularism, Thomism, and Traditions," *The Review of Metaphysics* 42 (March 1989), pp. 593-605; and John Haldane, "MacIntyre's Thomist Revival: What Next?," in *After MacIntyre*, eds. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 91-107.

⁶See especially "Moral Particularism, Thomism, and Traditions," pp. 599-600. See also Janet Coleman, "MacIntyre and Aquinas," in *After MacIntyre*, pp. 65-90.

How Thomistic is MacIntyre's Conception of Truth?

At the very end of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, after four hundred pages devoted to an examination of the rationality of traditions, and after having declared the person allied to no tradition to be in a state of moral and intellectual destitution, MacIntyre finally proclaims his own allegiance to the tradition of Aquinas.⁷ Already, in chapter ten of the same book, MacIntyre speaks favorably of Aquinas's conception of truth.⁸ And though he doesn't offer an explicit exegesis of the texts in which Aquinas defines truth as "*adaequatio intellectus et rei*," he does use some form of the English cognate "adequate" over twenty-five times in chapter eighteen, when discussing the notion of truth which accompanies his account of rationality. Hence, even before he reveals his allegiance at the end of the book, the reader can't help but feel that MacIntyre sees himself as giving what is in substance a Thomistic account of truth, freed of scholastic jargon, and ready for consideration by contemporary philosophers.

I suspect most Thomists would heartily welcome the following sorts of passages:

What is it precisely that corresponds or fails to correspond to what? Assertions in speech or writing, certainly, but these as secondary expressions of intelligent thought which is or is not adequate in its dealings with its objects, the realities of the social and rational world.⁹

The concept of truth is timeless. To claim that some thesis is true is not only to claim that for all possible times and places that it cannot be shown to fail to correspond to reality ... but also that the mind which expresses its thought in that thesis is in fact adequate to its object.¹⁰

One of the great originating insights of tradition constituted enquiries is that false beliefs and false judgments represent a failure of the mind, and not of its objects. It is the mind which stands in need of correction.¹¹

Nor does MacIntyre fail to note and to reject the pragmatist alternative to the Thomistic conception of truth. He explicitly criticizes Hilary Putnam's reduction of truth to an idealization of the concept of warranted assertibility.¹²

⁷*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, pp. 401-03.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 168, 171.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 356.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 363.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 169.

All of the above suggests that in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre unequivocally holds to a Thomistic account of truth. Nevertheless, there are other passages that might seem to resist this conclusion. MacIntyre denies, for instance, that there are “two distinguishable items, a judgment on the one hand, and that portrayed in the judgment on the other, between which a relationship of correspondence can hold or fail to hold,”¹³ and he maintains that it is a large error to read a correspondence theory of truth into such older formulations as “*adaequatio mentis ad rem*.”¹⁴ Indeed, in some passages, what seem to correspond are not the mind and reality, but two sets of beliefs. Thus MacIntyre tells us that the correspondence theory of truth originates as a correspondence theory of falsity. We perceive that our former beliefs about the world fail to correspond to “reality as now perceived, classified and understood,” and it is by virtue of this failure to correspond to our current beliefs that we judge those former beliefs to be false.¹⁵ Finally, in discussing the truth of our images and concepts, MacIntyre declares that “their adequacy or inadequacy is always relative to some purpose of the mind,”¹⁶ and he states “the mind is adequate to its objects insofar as the expectations which it frames on the basis of its activities are not liable to disappointment.”¹⁷ Such passages have led John Haldane to worry that MacIntyre characterizes truth in “ways that suggest a pragmatist version of anti-realism.” Haldane, in fact, likens MacIntyre’s account to those very proposals of Putnam, which MacIntyre explicitly rejects.¹⁸ What are we to make of all this?

The best interpretation of these passages, which takes into consideration their context, reads them as not so inimical to a Thomistic conception of truth as they might at first appear. Closer examination, for example, reveals that MacIntyre wants to distance *adaequatio mentis ad rem*, not from anything which might be called a correspondence theory, but from a peculiarly modern version of it, which invents pseudo-realities called “facts” to correspond to “propositions,” which function as “truth-bearers.” According to MacIntyre, “this kind of correspondence theory of truth arrived on the philosophical

¹³Ibid., p. 357.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 358.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 356.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 357.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 356.

¹⁸“MacIntyre’s Thomist Revival: What Next?,” p. 105. It is interesting that the English “adequate,” unlike the Latin “*adaequatio*,” lends itself to a pragmatist construal. Hence, we perhaps most often use “adequate” in situations where we want to say that someone or something is “adequate to the task.”

scene only comparatively recently and has been as conclusively refuted as any theory can be.”¹⁹ Nor does MacIntyre’s account of the *genesis* of the traditional correspondence theory of truth as a correspondence theory of falsity entail that he believes truth to be a correspondence between two sets of beliefs. For, the passage in which MacIntyre engages in this bit of conceptual genealogy is followed immediately by the first of the passages quoted three paragraphs above, where MacIntyre identifies the correspondence to hold between “intelligent thought” and the “realities of the social and intellectual world.” We must distinguish between MacIntyre’s account of the *origin* of the concept of truth, and his understanding of the *nature* of truth. More threatening than these passages, perhaps, are the pragmatist sounding passages that trouble Haldane. Yet can we not understand MacIntyre’s claim that “the mind is adequate to its objects insofar as the expectations which it frames on the basis of its activities are not liable to disappointment” to be stating a criterion, rather than a definition, of truth? And when MacIntyre states that “adequacy or inadequacy is always relative to some purpose of the mind,” should not this be read in light of MacIntyre’s corrective to a Cartesian conception of mind as a static container of ideas?²⁰

Those who have followed MacIntyre’s career from *After Virtue* forward have witnessed his steady development in the direction of Aquinas, and I think that any ambiguity in the *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* account, if there be any, can be explained, at least in part, as evidence of that development in progress.²¹ In a more recent essay, entitled “Moral Relativism, Truth, and Justification,” MacIntyre offers an unequivocally Thomistic account. “Truth,” MacIntyre tells us, is “the adequacy of the intellect to its *res*.” When a “person’s intellect is adequate to some particular subject-matter with which

¹⁹ *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 358. For a critique of this kind of correspondence theory, MacIntyre refers us to P. F. Strawson’s “Truth” in P. F. Strawson, *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (London: Methuen & Co., 1971), pp. 190-213.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 356. MacIntyre writes: “It is important to remember that the presupposed conception of mind is not Cartesian. It is rather of mind as activity, of mind as engaging with the natural and social world in such activities as identification, reidentification, collecting, separating, classifying, and naming and all this by touching, grasping, pointing, breaking down, building up, calling to, answering to, and so on.”

²¹ In *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), MacIntyre rejected Aristotle’s metaphysical biology, and relegated Aquinas to a marginal figure in the history of ethics (pp. 162, 178). By the time of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), Aquinas had become the hero, and even more so in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). In his most recent book, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), MacIntyre, now, denies that it is possible to do ethics without biology, and manifests an increasing appreciation for those things which make Aquinas different from Aristotle (pp. x-xi).

it is engaged in its thinking, it is what the objects of that thinking in fact are which makes it the case that that person's thoughts about those objects are what they are ... the mind has become formally what the object is."²² This passage certainly clears up any ambiguity there might be between Thomist and pragmatist characterizations of truth in the pages of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. What the later essay provides, however, is not simply an unequivocal commitment to a Thomistic account of truth, but a more developed set of arguments for rejecting the pragmatist alternative. In the following section, we will consider what role these arguments play in MacIntyre's response to the anti-realist objection.

The Anti-Realist Objection

MacIntyre's sensitivity to the anti-realist objection manifests itself already in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. No sooner has he introduced Aquinas's understanding of truth than he considers why some philosophers have rejected it:

How can it be, such writers have asked, that our whole web of beliefs and concepts could be judged true or false, adequate or inadequate, in virtue of its and their relationship to some reality quite external to that web? For in order for us to compare our beliefs and concepts to that reality we should have to already have beliefs about it and have understood certain of our concepts as having application to it. So, they conclude, an understanding of any reality, in relation to which truth and falsity, adequacy and inadequacy are judged, must be internal to our web of concepts and beliefs; there can be no reference beyond that web to anything genuinely external to it.²³

Two contemporary advocates of this objection are Michael Dummett and Hilary Putnam. Dummett, for example, argues that there is a "major conceptual leap" involved when the criterion of truth requires that, over and above a claim's being justified, it relate to "some state of affairs obtaining independently of our knowledge." Dummett suspects that "any formulation of such a condition begs the question whether it is coherent to attribute to anyone a grasp of such a condition."²⁴ Similarly, Hilary Putnam rejects the correspon-

²²*Moral Truth and Moral Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe*, ed. Luke Gormally (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), p. 18.

²³*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, pp. 168-69.

²⁴Michael Dummett, "The source of the concept of truth," in *Meaning and method: Essays in Honor of Hilary Putnam*, ed. George Boolos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 12, 14.

dence theory of truth since “to single out a correspondence between two domains one needs some independent access to both domains.”²⁵

Both Putnam and Dummett would agree with Putnam’s demand that “what is supposed to be ‘true’ be warrantable ... for creatures with a rational and sensible nature.”²⁶ It is precisely because they don’t think we can warrant claims that our beliefs correspond to a mind-independent reality that they propose a revision in our understanding of truth. Accordingly, both argue that truth be defined in terms of justification, Dummett sometimes simply identifying truth with justification,²⁷ and Putnam preferring to define truth as an idealization of the concept of justification.²⁸ Such proposals entail severe consequences for logic and metaphysics, consequences that neither philosopher hesitates to recognize. Dummett, for example, rejects the law of the excluded middle, since it assumes that the truth-value of an assertion depends on the way things are, and not on whether we have the ability to provide a justification for that assertion.²⁹ And Putnam, appealing to the theory-dependent character of justification, embraces the possibility that incompatible ontologies could both be true, relative to the different theories on which they are justified.³⁰

MacIntyre’s strategy for dealing with the anti-realist objection is not to address the argument directly, but to challenge the conception of truth that proponents of the argument propose as an alternative to the correspondence theory. Such may appear a weak strategy on MacIntyre’s part, for it may appear that instead of answering the charges against the Thomistic theory, he simply avoids those charges by waging a counter-attack against his opponent’s proposal. But I think MacIntyre’s approach deserves more credit than that. For, if as MacIntyre seems to believe, the only or most obvious alternative to the Thomistic conception of truth is one which assimilates truth to justification,³¹ and if this alternative can be

²⁵Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 74.

²⁶Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 41. See Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 16-17.

²⁷“The only legitimate notion of truth is one that is to be explained in terms of what justifies an assertion: a sentence is true if an assertion made by means of it would be justified.” Michael Dummett, “What does the Appeal to Use Do for the Theory of Meaning?,” in *Meaning and Use*, ed. Avishai Margalit (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), p. 129.

²⁸*Realism with a Human Face*, pp. 114-15. See also Putnam’s *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 49-50, 84.

²⁹*Truth and Other Enigmas*, pp. 16-17. See also Dummett’s *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 9.

³⁰*Realism with a Human Face*, p. 40.

³¹For example, MacIntyre states that “it is characteristic of those who adopt this view [the critique of the correspondence theory] that almost always in practice and often enough in

shown to be fatally flawed, then this gives us some reason, at least, to stick with the Thomistic conception and to believe that there must be some problem with any argument purporting to refute it. Furthermore, exposing the difficulties with the alternative conception of truth may provide the clues needed for identifying the problem with the anti-realist argument, which drives some to that alternative conception.

What, then, are MacIntyre's objections to defining truth in terms of justification? I want to focus on three. First, simply to identify truth with justification, as Michael Dummett has sometimes done, is to flout the commonplace that a person can be justified in making a claim which turns out to be false.³² Even Putnam has argued that "truth cannot simply *be* justification," for "truth is supposed to be a property of a statement that cannot be lost, whereas justification can be lost; justification is a matter of degree, whereas truth is not." Hence, Putnam rejects Dummett's identification of truth with justification in favor of an understanding of truth as an "idealization of justification."³³ It is unclear, however, what difference Putnam's amendment makes, for as MacIntyre observes, "the notion of idealization invoked has never been given adequate content."³⁴ Indeed, the theory's most notable advocate doesn't seem to think that such content could be given. Thus, Putnam denies that "we can even sketch a theory of actual warrant, let alone a theory of idealized warrant."³⁵ And though he maintains that a statement is true if it would be justified under epistemically ideal conditions, he confesses that "we cannot really attain epistemically ideal conditions, or even be absolutely certain that we have come sufficiently close to them."³⁶ These concessions appear disastrous not only for Putnam's conception of truth, but

avowed theory they treat the concept of truth as nothing more than an idealization of the concept of warranted assertibility. For on this view [the anti-correspondence view] we can have no criterion of truth beyond the best warrants that we can offer for our assertions." *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 169.

³²"Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification," p. 10.

³³*Realism and Reason*, p. 84. In a more recent essay, Dummett backs off from a straightforward identification of truth and justification, but he does not explain precisely how the one is supposed to be defined in terms of the other: "The concept which corresponds to the full-fledged realist notion of truth, but which, on this view, is the most we are entitled to, is indeed more refined than the straightforward concept of justifiability; but it will still be one that can be explained, even if in a complex and subtle way, in terms of justifiability." See "The source of the concept of truth," p. 15.

³⁴"Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification," p. 10.

³⁵*Realism with a Human Face*, p. 42. See also p. 114, "I do not [believe] that one can specify in an effective way what the justification conditions for the sentences of a natural language are."

³⁶*Reason, Truth and History*, p. 55.

also for the anti-realist's case against the correspondence theory. With respect to the former, if the concept of truth is defined as justification under ideal conditions, but if no "sketch" of those conditions has or can be given, then the concept of truth is rendered vacuous. With respect to the latter, if the anti-realist's objection to the correspondence theory is that its criterion of truth is one that could never be recognized, and hence that we could never know when to make truth claims or be justified in making them, this objection turns out to apply equally to a theory of truth as idealized justification. For given that there is no account of what the ideal conditions are (not to mention Putnam's claim that we can never attain them), we could no more recognize when the criterion of truth has been met on this theory than on the correspondence theory.

Let us turn, then, to a second objection. If one of the goals of a philosophic account of truth is to explain what we mean and how we use that concept in ordinary moral and scientific enquiry, the account of truth that reduces truth to some form of justification fails miserably. We saw above that contemporary anti-realists are often forced to deny the law of excluded middle, or to affirm that incompatible ontologies could both be true, which is, in effect, to deny also the principle of non-contradiction. But certainly MacIntyre is right when he observes that, almost universally, those making fundamental moral claims are committed to the falsehood of claims incompatible with their own.³⁷ Moralists never see themselves in emotivist or relativist terms, even if moral philosophers do. And, certainly, a presupposition that incompatible ontologies cannot both be true is what motivates the quest for a unified theory in the sciences. Hence, a reduction of the concept of truth to justification, insofar as it denies the law of excluded middle and the principle of non-contradiction, appears at odds with how we ordinarily understand and use that concept. What's more, as MacIntyre argues drawing off the work of Peter Geach, any interpretation of sentences of a natural language involving the most basic logical connectives requires a notion of meaning to be explained in terms of truth conditions, not merely justification conditions.³⁸ This point can be seen most clearly with respect to conditionals. Take the following example, "If God does not exist, all is permitted." The truth or justification (if you like) of this conditional assertion depends not on whether or not the antecedent can

³⁷"Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification," p. 8.

³⁸Ibid., p. 15. The works of Geach to which MacIntyre appeals are "Assertion," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965), pp. 449-65 and "Verdad o Assercion Justificada?" *Anuario filosofico* 15: 2 (1982).

or cannot be *justified*, but on whether or not assuming the *truth* of the antecedent, the consequent follows. The truth or falsehood of Dostoevsky's claim depends not in the least on whether we have good arguments for the existence of God.³⁹ Such considerations have led Michael Dummett to concede that "although there is a way of understanding conditionals that can be explained in terms of justifiability, rather than of truth, it does not yield even a plausible approximation to the actual use of conditionals in natural language."⁴⁰

A third objection to the alternative conception of truth is that "it has the unfortunate effect of distorting our understanding not only of truth, but also of rational justification."⁴¹ According to MacIntyre, the anti-realist has the cart before the horse. He tries to define truth in terms of the supposedly prior and more basic notion of justification, when it should, in fact, be the other way around: "Practices of rational justification are devised and are only fully intelligible as parts of all those human activities which aim at truth."⁴² MacIntyre compares the anti-realist's attempt to reduce truth to justification with other attempts at reductionism: they all fail for the same reason. Thus the concept of a physical object cannot be reduced to or constructed out of that of sense-data, for sense-data have to be already understood in terms of physical objects. The concept of pain cannot be reduced to or constructed out of bodily expressions of pain, for bodily expressions of pain already have to be understood in terms of pain. So also the concept of truth cannot be reduced to or constructed out of the concept of justifiability, for justifiability has to be already understood in terms of truth.⁴³ Physical objects, pain, and truth are the logically prior concepts. The anti-realist believes that there is an unwarranted "conceptual leap" involved in the move from the concept of justification to that of truth only because he begins with the concept of justification, failing to notice that justification cannot be understood independently of truth, but only as that activity which has knowledge, understanding, and truth as its telos.⁴⁴

³⁹ Notice that this argument against reducing the concept of truth to justification holds even if we are concerned only with the justification (and not the truth or falsehood) of the conditional assertion. For we are justified in asserting "If God does not exist, all is permitted" if, assuming the truth of the antecedent, we have good reasons for believing the consequent. Whether or not we are also justified in believing the antecedent is entirely irrelevant to justifying the conditional as a whole.

⁴⁰"The source of the concept of truth," p. 9.

⁴¹"Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification," p. 11.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁴Ibid.

In this third objection, we are given what amounts to more than a reason for rejecting the reduction of truth to justification. We are also offered resources for a direct response to the argument against the correspondence theory. For if MacIntyre is right, that an adequate account of justification must presuppose the concepts of knowledge and truth as its telos, then epistemology, understood as the normative science of justification, presupposes the metaphysics of knowledge, understood as that science which tells us what knowledge and truth are. The metaphysics of knowledge is the higher science, providing epistemology with its principles and assumptions. From this standpoint, we can discern both why the anti-realist's challenge to the correspondence theory appears so insuperable, and yet why rejecting that theory leads to serious difficulties of the sort we have been discussing. For the anti-realist is asking the impossible, namely, that a lower science demonstrate the conclusions of a higher science, conclusions which, properly understood, provide that lower science with its basic assumptions. Hence, the anti-realist demands an epistemological justification not just for the truth of this or that conclusion, but for there being any such thing as truth. The problem with this demand is that the whole activity of justifying, giving arguments, and drawing conclusions already tacitly assumes that we can attain knowledge and truth, a point which explains, also, why most skeptical arguments are vulnerable to the charge that they are self-refuting. For even that argument that would justify a denial of truth aims to give us a conclusion about how things are. I conclude, therefore, that a proper understanding of the relationship between truth and justification may be the key to overcoming certain anti-realist arguments.

The Realist Objection

Let us turn, then, to the realist's objection. As will be recalled, the realist has no quarrel with MacIntyre's Thomistic account of truth, but denies, instead, that that account is compatible with an understanding of rationality as tradition-constituted. Consider a passage from John Haldane:

Given the conceptual connections between rationality and truth, and the claim that the former is immanent within, and constituted by, traditions of enquiry, it is difficult to see how truth itself can be tradition-transcendent, which is what metaphysical realism requires.⁴⁵

⁴⁵“MacIntyre's Thomist Revival: What Next?,” p. 105.

Haldane's suggestion appears to be that truth cannot transcend traditions unless rationality does also. But this seems wrong. Truth is transcendent not by virtue of any property of rationality or justification, but because it is a relationship between the mind and a reality independent of the mind. It is not the tradition-transcendence of rationality that makes truth transcendent, but the transcendence of the objects of knowledge. Indeed, someone might easily, *pace* Kant, affirm the universality and tradition-transcendence of reason, but deny that the objects of knowledge are transcendent, and thereby deny metaphysical realism.

Surprisingly enough, however, MacIntyre seems to agree with Haldane on an intimate connection between truth and tradition-transcendent rationality. According to MacIntyre,

Those who claim truth for the central theses of their own moral standpoint are thereby also committed to a set of theses about rational justification. For they are bound to hold that the arguments in support of rival and incompatible sets of theses are unsound, not merely that they fail relative to this or that set of standards, but that either their premises are false or their inferences invalid. But insofar as the claim to truth also involves this further claim, it commits those who uphold it to a non-relativist conception of rational justification, to a belief that there must somehow or other be adequate standards of rational justification, which are not the standards internal to this or that standpoint, but are the standards of rational justification as such.⁴⁶

To be sure, the relationship between rationality and truth here is not precisely the one suggested by Haldane. MacIntyre does not claim that the tradition-transcendence of truth depends on rationality's being tradition-transcendent. Nevertheless, he does maintain that those who make truth claims are committed to the view that there are standards of rational justification that are not just the standards internal to this or that standpoint. One might have expected MacIntyre to argue just the opposite—to argue for the coherence of making truth claims even if there are no standards of rationality as such. Instead, though he endorses a Thomistic account of truth, MacIntyre would seem to require of anyone claiming to reach such truth an understanding of rationality that he himself rejects. Has MacIntyre contradicted himself?

The apparent contradiction results only from a misleading use of language. By "the standards of rationality as such," MacIntyre does not mean to require that those making truth claims believe what he has always argued against—that there are sufficient standards of rational justification available to all persons, regardless of tradition. Rather, he wants to point out that inso-

⁴⁶ "Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification," p. 8.

far as the truth of an assertion entails the falsehood of incompatible claims, it also entails the falsehood of at least some of the premises or principles on which those claims are justified. To claim that a belief is false, therefore, is to claim, in addition, that the standards which rationally justify that belief are false. By contrast, to claim for one's own beliefs that they are true is to claim truth for the standards that support them. Such standards are not *simply* "the standards internal to this or that standpoint," for they are the "adequate" or true standards. What MacIntyre points out is that those claiming truth for their beliefs must also believe that theirs are the true standards of rationality. But this requirement does not entail their denying that such standards are internal to their tradition, or their believing that they are equally available to all persons.

For MacIntyre, then, even the true standards of rationality are tradition-constituted—a claim which invites a further challenge to his realism. I will follow Haldane's definition of realism as consisting in an ontological and an epistemological thesis. The ontological thesis is that the world exists and has whatever structure it has independently of the mind. The epistemological thesis is that we can come to know and speak truly of this world.⁴⁷ I argued against Haldane's suggestion that the transcendence of truth depends on the transcendence of rationality, because it seems to me that truth is transcendent, not by virtue of some property of reason, but because the objects of knowledge are transcendent. Nevertheless, to know these transcendent objects presupposes that our means of knowing are adequate to the task. Now, for MacIntyre, the central means by which we know is the activity of rational justification, for it is this activity that has knowledge and truth as its telos. If we come to know through the process of rational justification, however, there needs to be some explanation of why true beliefs are vindicated and false beliefs discredited. And it is on account of this requirement that many realists balk at MacIntyre's suggestion that rationality is tradition-constituted. For if the true standards of rational justification were available to all persons, then these standards could account for the fact that true beliefs are vindicated and false beliefs discredited, and hence for the fact that we come to know truth through the process of justification. But if the standards of rational justification vary from one tradition to another, then contradictory claims might very well be justified from the standpoint of two different traditions. Since contradictory claims cannot both

⁴⁷ John Haldane, "Mind-World Identity Theory and the Anti-Realist Challenge," in *Reality, Representation, and Projection*, eds. John Haldane and Crispin Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 15-16. Haldane distinguishes strong and weak versions of both ontological and epistemological realism. The definition I adopt accords with the stronger versions of both, the versions which Haldane wants to defend.

be true, the process of justification, far from being that which leads to truth, would be for at least one of these traditions, precisely that which leads to error. The claim that rationality is tradition-constituted, coupled with the claim that we come to know through the process of rational justification, would seem to doom realism's epistemological thesis. For on this view, at most some human beings—those inhabiting the right tradition—would be able to know mind-independent reality.

I think, however, that MacIntyre might be able to answer the foregoing objection. What is needed is an explanation of how all persons can potentially know through the process of rational justification, even if some initially inhabit traditions whose standards of justification support false beliefs. The answer has two parts. MacIntyre provides the first part in his account of how one tradition can show itself rationally superior to another. Recall from the introduction, that such superiority is shown without appeal to independent standards of rationality. For it is by its own standards that a crisis tradition recognizes its problems, and it is by the standards of the superior tradition that those problems are diagnosed and overcome. When the inhabitants of the crisis tradition abandon that tradition in favor of its rival, they adopt the rival's superior standards of rational justification. On MacIntyre's account, then, there is no reason why someone who initially inhabits a tradition whose standards of justification support false beliefs cannot move to a superior tradition with superior standards.

An unsatisfactory aspect of MacIntyre's account of how one tradition can show itself rationally superior to another, however, is that he never gives a good explanation of why a tradition should ever fall into an epistemological crisis. Why should a tradition ever turn up defective according to its own standards? Won't a sufficiently developed tradition interpret experience in such a way as always to confirm its own fundamental claims? It would seem that, on MacIntyre's account, most traditions should devolve into closed systems of mutually supporting beliefs, such that they would never fall into an epistemological crisis, regardless of how badly they conformed to reality.⁴⁸ The second part of a response to our objection, therefore, must provide some explanation of why traditions of false belief enter into epistemological crises and why it is the traditions which better conform to reality which show themselves to be rationally superior.

⁴⁸ MacIntyre seems to think that the more fully developed a tradition of enquiry, the more liable it is to meet an epistemological crisis. But why shouldn't it be the other way around? In any event, MacIntyre admits that incompatible traditions can coexist side by side for long periods of time without either of them entering an epistemological crisis. See *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 366.

Resources for this explanation can be found in the inquiries of Aquinas and his followers into the metaphysics of knowledge. A central conclusion of these inquiries is the thesis that reality measures the mind, for when the mind knows, the reality known is in an important sense the cause of that knowledge.⁴⁹ In particular, reality informs the mind, which is a capacity for being so informed, and which is compared to reality as potency to act.⁵⁰ Knowledge has been achieved precisely to the extent that this potency has been actualized and the mind has become formally what reality is. Hence, it is not just that truth is a correspondence between two *relata*, mind and thing. One of these *relata*, the thing, is in large part the cause of the conformity that the other, the mind, has to it. What resources do these insights afford for explaining why and giving us reason to expect that traditions of false belief will end in epistemological crises and be supplanted by traditions whose beliefs better conform to reality? Instead of explaining this by appeal to standards of rationality available to all persons from the outset, we can now simply appeal to reality. Since reality measures the mind, which is a capacity to be so measured, it is the formal structure of reality, acting on the mind, which ultimately insures that beliefs that don't conform to that formal structure will turn up defective. On MacIntyre's account, when one set of claims proves itself rationally superior to another, this rational progress can be explained as the thing under consideration exerting its formal causality on the mind whose potential to become informed by reality has become more fully actualized.

These two claims, first, that one set of standards and beliefs can show itself rationally superior to another, and second, that reality influences this process so that those beliefs which better conform to reality will ultimately be vindicated, enable us to explain how all persons have the potential to know through the activity of rational justification, even if some initially inhabit traditions whose standards of justification support false beliefs. Hence, it is shown how realism's epistemological thesis is compatible with the claim that rationality is constituted by traditions.

In conclusion, let me make clear what the foregoing argument has assumed about MacIntyre's thesis that rationality is tradition-constituted. I have interpreted this thesis to mean that the resources sufficient to provide rational justification for and to resolve disagreements about competing scientific, metaphysical, and moral claims are to be found only by appeal to the substantive commitments of particular traditions. So interpreted, this thesis is perfectly compatible with holding that human beings, regardless of tradition,

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* 1.a. 2.

⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 79, a. 2.

share certain cognitive faculties or capacities to know. Otherwise, we could not address the realist's challenge by appeal to a common human potency to be informed by reality. In characterizing my proposal, it is useful to distinguish an internalist theory of justification from an externalist theory of knowledge.⁵¹ An internalist theory of justification holds that rational justification is grounded and makes reference to what is internal and introspectively accessible to the knower.⁵² An externalist theory of knowledge, by contrast, holds that knowledge is constituted by certain states or processes that are external and not introspectively accessible to the knower. I assume that MacIntyre holds an internalist theory of justification, but suggest that he needs to combine this theory with an externalist theory of knowledge.⁵³ According to his theory of justification, the introspectively accessible resources by reference to which justifications are made vary from person to person, depending on their tradition. The kind of externalist theory of knowledge that MacIntyre needs would consist in at least three claims. First, he would need to claim with most externalists that the reason knowledge, unlike justification, is not something introspectively accessible is that knowledge presupposes truth, which, being a conformity between the mind and a reality independent of the mind, is not something to which we have introspective access. Second, he would need to claim that knowledge is made possible by the fact that the mind is capable of being informed by reality, a capacity that, likewise, cannot be verified introspectively.⁵⁴ Finally, he would need to claim that the activity of justification is under the informing influence of reality, an influence to which we have no introspective access, but which accounts for the fact that systems of belief are not closed systems and that our activities of

⁵¹ For a discussion of this distinction see Robert Audi, *Belief, Justification, and Knowledge* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 113-15.

⁵² As used here, "internalism" should of course not be understood solipsistically or as involving commitment to private languages.

⁵³ Eleonore Stump suggests that Aquinas' theory of knowledge should be understood as a species of externalism. See her "Aquinas on the Foundations of Knowledge," in *Aristotle and his Medieval Interpreters*, ed. Richard Bosley and Martin Tweedale, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, supplementary volume 17 (1991), pp. 125-58. See also Norman Kretzmann's endorsement of Stump's suggestion in his article of the same volume: "Infallibility, Error, and Ignorance," pp. 159-94.

⁵⁴ Notice that MacIntyre appears to make this claim in the passage quoted earlier where he states that a "person's intellect is adequate to some particular subject matter with which it is engaged in its thinking [when] it is what the objects of that thinking in fact are which makes it the case that that person's thoughts about those objects are what they are ... So the activity of the mind in respect of that particular subject matter is informed and conformed to what its objects are; the mind has become formally what the object is." See "Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification," p. 18.

enquiry and justification – through which we come to know and to which we do have introspective access—yield truth, even if slowly and with much difficulty. On the assumption that the activity of justification is under the informing influence of reality, we are warranted in claiming truth for our beliefs insofar as those beliefs have been rationally vindicated throughout the course of enquiry. But there is no introspectively available feature of justification that guarantees that a set of beliefs is true, and hence, we must be ready to abandon those beliefs if they can no longer be rationally sustained.⁵⁵ The proposed solution is realist, but fallibilist.

Admittedly, this non-introspectively-verifiable influence of reality on the contents of introspective consciousness through which we come to know is very mysterious and difficult to explain – which is one reason why philosophers such as Putnam and Dummett have rejected realism. Yet postulating some such influence appears unavoidable for the realist, and whether or not we agree with MacIntyre's claim that rationality is tradition-constituted makes it no less mysterious.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Cf. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, pp. 360-61.

⁵⁶ To say that something is mysterious is, of course, not to deny that we have good reasons for affirming it, take the existence of God or the immateriality of the intellect, for instance. Rather, it is to acknowledge that such things will be difficult to understand for minds that, as Aquinas has pointed out, are primarily equipped for knowing the intelligible structures of material things.