

which clarifies and enriches the concept of order in a manner we seldom find beyond the work of his own intellectual fathers. Happily, these books are themselves critical and artistic models of the order the author seeks.

The Pursuit of Truth

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

IN THIS BOOK Professor Alasdair MacIntyre publishes the Gifford lectures that he delivered in 1988. Taking the lectures themselves as his theme, he asks whether or not it is really possible, in the current intellectual and academic environment, to deliver lectures such as Adam Gifford envisioned. In his will, Gifford stipulated that the lectures should be concerned with natural theology, which Gifford took to be the foundation of ethics, treating it "as a strictly natural science." MacIntyre's theme, then, is whether we can any longer engage in serious inquiry about topics like natural theology and ethics, and if we can, what form such inquiry must take. It is not moral philosophy itself so much as its setting which concerns the author. Can we, in our contemporary academic institutions, debate moral matters in such a way that we discover and further the truth?

In MacIntyre's estimation, most contemporary academic debate about moral questions—including therein philosophical, historical, literary, anthropological, and sociological debates—is sterile, being marked by a persistent inability to reach agreement on any substantive issue. For every question there are a num-

ber of opposing answers and the arguments never seem to pass beyond them. The reason for this lack of progress is not simply the number of opposing views on given issues. Beneath the conflicting positions lie much more fundamental differences. Participants in contemporary debates bring to them radically different understandings of what it means to engage in rational inquiry and to enter into debate. What are the starting points, what serves as an argument or a proof, how particular arguments are to be weighed, what counts, in the case of conflicts, as victory or defeat? The present-day answers to these questions are so various and so opposed that MacIntyre thinks we can justifiably talk about different "rationalities," each of which has its own version of what constitutes rational inquiry, especially moral inquiry. Disagreements at this level undermine the possibility of substantive debate, and yet, because these differences are largely unacknowledged or simply ignored, we witness ceaseless disputes in which all claim victory on their own terms while no one admits defeat.

A plurality of "rationalities" would have been wholly inconceivable for Adam Gifford, and his contemporaries. They shared the notion of a single, unitary rationality which all educated persons anywhere would share, a rationality which was epitomized in the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1875 ff.). This was an autonomous, enlightened rationality, freed from myth, superstition, dogma, and tradition. Its history was one of steady progress and the Ninth Edition marked the highest point yet reached (it was more than a tool of reference). The goal of this progress was a universal and unified scientific understanding of the universe, and to this goal the Gifford Lectures would contribute in the area of natural theology. Thus "encyclopaedia," as MacIntyre terms this view, was not bound to the past, nor did

it see itself as a tradition but rather as the voice of impartial and ahistorical reason. Since it represented pure rationality and was accessible to any rational being there was no need for any *moral* predispositions on the part of the inquirer, particularly those of religious belief; religious tests only hindered the work of reason and their removal produced the modern liberal university. For its proper mode of discourse "encyclopaedia" fixed upon the lecture. In it, the lecturer presents to the public the conclusions reached by scientific reason without any dialectic defense of his views against opposing views, the sure sign of truth being the universal assent it elicited.

This understanding of rationality is dead. In fact, with respect to moral questions, it disintegrated within a few decades of the publication of the Ninth Edition. Gifford's project neither was nor can be realized. Thus the great question for MacIntyre is whether moral questions can be pursued and the truth found in some other mode of rationality. He develops his answer to it within the framework of two other versions of moral inquiry, each of which he traces back to a seminal work contemporary with the Ninth Edition: the version of Nietzsche and his followers ("genealogy") that was articulated in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* (1887); and Thomism ("tradition") that was rejuvenated by Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879).

While encyclopaedia was confidently spreading its branches, Nietzsche was already laying his axe to its roots. According to Nietzsche and those like Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze who have followed him, any claim to truth is an illusion. There is no nature of things apart from interpretation, and interpretation is itself always a creation. "Truth," as Nietzsche writes, "is a mobile army of metaphors." For Nietzsche, the Enlightenment claim to universal truth is only a modern form of the ever-present will to

power. The genealogist's task, then, is one of subversion: to bring into the light the unrecognized motivations and unacknowledged purposes which the claims to truth, especially moral truth, actually serve. The genealogist himself makes no claim to universal or fixed truth. Consequently the appropriate literary form of genealogy is the *aphorism* which, detached from any larger scheme of things, thrusts easily and quickly like a stiletto. If a genealogist like Nietzsche should take up the form of academic treatise, as he does in *The Genealogy of Morals*, there is no commitment to the presuppositions that such a form implies; it is but one more mask assumed for the purpose of exposing and subverting. Thus for the genealogist, encyclopaedia was doomed to failure and so likewise are any other attempts at rational moral inquiry.

Opposed to both genealogy and encyclopaedia stands the Thomistic tradition. On the one hand, Thomism (vs. genealogy) accepts the existence of truth and the possibility of attaining it. On the other hand, it does not hold (vs. encyclopaedia) that truth is equally accessible to all rational inquirers. Thomism, following in the footsteps of Plato, Aristotle, and especially Augustine (*credo ut intellegam*), maintains that certain dispositions on the part of the inquirer are necessary for the truth to be seen, especially moral truths. Certain people may be morally incapable of seizing the truth even when it is presented to them, and as a result it is unreasonable to set universal assent as a sign of truth. One must be changed by the truth in order to grasp it.

Thomism also differs from the encyclopaedia outlook in that it consciously recognizes itself as a tradition, a form of inquiry which not only has a history but also is essentially tied to that history. This is not to say that truth is relative to individuals, but only to acknowledge that its discovery and possession always are

a personal matter. The questions which need answers, the presuppositions which shape those answers, the literary forms in which they are cast, all these arise with historical contingency. Questions are raised and answered, new questions arise or old answers are challenged; the tradition moves ahead, at each stage supplying the best answers it can find for the questions it faces. In this way, MacIntyre maintains that truth is justified historically; present beliefs are accepted because, having defeated all rival answers, they are the best so far. Clearly, then, within tradition the past is embraced and even cherished since it has generated and indeed renders intelligible the truth we now possess.

MacIntyre believes that these three versions of inquiry, encyclopaedia, genealogy, and tradition, along with the world views they presuppose, are simply incommensurable and untranslatable. None is merely an extension or a specification of another; none can be understood from within another; and none can be translated into another's terms. They stand toward each other as the outlook of a primitive people that practices witchcraft does to a modern scientific understanding of the universe. Hence the crucial question for MacIntyre is whether or not debate between these rivals is possible. If not, speakers of rival camps will only speak past one another without ever really coming to terms.

Here Thomas Aquinas provides a striking example of a thinker forced to grapple with radically opposed outlooks and conceptions of rationality. The middle chapters of the book describe the momentous intellectual crisis of thirteenth-century Paris that saw the clash of two great systems of thought, Aristotelianism and Augustinianism. Each offered a seemingly complete understanding of the world, and yet they differed on many issues so fundamental as the understanding of truth and the role of the will in

moral actions. They seemed at the time to be simply irreconcilable. Augustinian Christianity is antithetical to the philosophic understanding of Aristotle; one who makes belief a condition for understanding could hardly be an Aristotelian. Likewise, Christian notions like creation find no room in Aristotle's conception of the world. It required the genius of Aquinas to unite them, without mere eclecticism, into a simple whole that preserved both, and at the same time represented for each one a decided step forward.

Here Aquinas provides evidence that conflicting traditions can be brought to terms and he even sheds light on how this takes place. He was able to bring these disparate systems together because he entered into each one so thoroughly that each became for him like a first language, understood on its own terms. Thoroughly formed in both traditions, he was able to see the shortcomings of each and recognize how each might supply what the other lacked.

At this point we see MacIntyre's understanding of what it is for there to be a conflict of traditions, a point he developed earlier in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988). As we have seen for MacIntyre there are incommensurable systems of thought which can be recognized as such. Incommensurability, however, does not preclude conflict, nor does it mean that one system cannot prove to be superior to another. What it does mean—and this is the crucial point—is that to prove the superiority of one's tradition requires entering into the other and learning it as a second first language. From that point of view one must then indicate its internal inconsistencies and tensions or the problems it cannot treat and finally show how the superior tradition can solve these problems and even explain why, given the other system as a whole, such problems necessarily arose.

In the later chapters MacIntyre tries to apply just this approach to the present

situation, outlining how Thomism might prove its superiority to both the encyclopaedia and genealogy approaches. As an internal problem for the encyclopaedist he points to the notion of "morality" and moral obligation, and the persistent inability to provide any clear grounding for these. He draws a fascinating comparison between Enlightenment morality and the notion of taboo as it was discovered by Europeans in the eighteenth century. The inability of the Polynesian natives to explain taboo arose because, in its later stages, taboo was detached from its former place in a larger scheme of a relationship to the gods and so from its real meaning. Similarly, Enlightenment morality is a surd cut off from a larger tradition, a "survival" unable now to account for itself. A Thomist would recognize that every ought is derived from an end to be achieved (if you want to be x you ought to do y), and that the moral ought derives from the naturally given end of human life. Cut off from a teleological understanding of nature, Enlightenment morality could never explain the rules it had inherited nor their binding force.

Similarly, the genealogist encounters a possible inconsistency in that he necessarily rejects any metaphysical basis for personal identity and yet maintains some degree of identity behind the various masks he assumes, if only so that he can point to a past which he has rejected. The Thomist would have to show how the genealogist's rejection of metaphysics disallows a notion of individual identity, while entering into discourse always presupposes one.

Serious moral inquiry in the present intellectual climate, MacIntyre concludes, will necessarily take the form of a "battle of the traditions" from which one tradition can emerge victor and within which real progress toward truth can be made. There remains, however, a serious obstacle. The Enlightenment, with

its goal of a unitary and generally agreed upon rationality, while effectively dead, still holds sway over academia in that behind almost all debates lies the assumption that there is some neutral space independent of any tradition in which all rational inquirers equally can meet. Thus the very real differences which he has described between the modes of inquiry need to be confronted and debate must explicitly recognize them. In practice this would mean that participants in debates would acknowledge that they are speaking from within one view or another; they must, so to speak, declare their colors. They would engage other views by entering into them and showing their shortcomings and only then argue for the superiority of their own.

Debate of this sort is almost impossible in the present liberal university which, built as it is upon the rationality of Enlightenment and using the lecture as its primary mode of discourse, does not afford genealogy or tradition a real forum. MacIntyre proposes a non-liberal model for the university in which each tradition would carry out its moral inquiry within a context of basic agreement, an agreement which would be to some degree enforced. This could give rise to a number of "confessional" universities, each publicly embodying a certain mode of inquiry wherein students would be introduced into that mode and also taught to enter into conflicts with the opposing rationalities.

Alasdair MacIntyre's deep knowledge of the different versions of inquiry he has described and his long and diverse experience of academic debates have enabled him to offer an analysis of our present intellectual and academic situation different from and far more penetrating than any others that have been offered in recent years. The simple return to the "Great Books" which ignores the radical differences among the traditions is only cosmetic; MacIntyre would have the uni-

versity become once again the scene of real pursuit of truth, especially moral truth. It is the merit of this book to provide the theoretical framework which can guide our efforts toward this goal.

—Reviewed by David Gallagher