Learning from MacIntyre

Edited by

Ron Beadle and Geoff Moore

Introduction

Ron Beadle and Geoff Moore

Most who discover the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre do so second-hand, through their own discipline rather than his. This book is designed for such readers. Although there is a large secondary literature on MacIntyre, most of it sits within disciplines;[1] this book is an attempt to cast the net more widely. We wanted to compile a text that would introduce the way in which MacIntyre speaks to different traditions and to different disciplines—the kind of book that we would find useful as scholars who themselves work in a particular discipline.

We were both teaching in Newcastle Business School, UK in the late 1990s, when we found to our surprise that we had each been reading Alasdair MacIntyre. We eagerly began to talk about how his work reframed our understanding of the workplace, and later to write about this and to write to him, asking for clarifications and to see what might have gone wrong with our own arguments. We did not always agree with each other or with him, but we knew that his theses could transform the way in which work organizations are understood.

In the mid-2000s we organised a symposium at Durham University in which philosophers, sociologists and business ethicists discussed his work. Unbeknown to us, Kelvin Knight was already organizing a much more significant event at London Metropolitan University. And so in 2007 over 100 scholars met for a conference in London opened by MacIntyre himself. The conference attracted Marxists who had known MacIntyre as a comrade in the 1960s, Thomistic Catholics who has known him as a profound influence from the 1980s onward, and others who knew little or nothing of these allegiances. Arguments were had, discoveries made, late nights were the norm and a sense of amazement at the breadth of his influence was evident just from looking around the room.

[1] Recent examples include Hannan, *Ethics under Capit*al and Moore, *Virtue at Work*.

MacIntyre had brought together people who would never normally encounter one another, and a level of intellectual energy and excitement resulted that was incomparable to the disciplinary conferences to which we were all used. On their return to the United States, Christopher Lutz, Thomas Osborne and Jeff Nicholas decided that this event had to be repeated, in part to attract many American scholars who been unable to attend the London conference. In 2008, this second conference took place in the St Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, Indiana. The noted theologian Stanley Hauerwas was a keynote speaker. For doctoral students working with MacIntyre's ideas, and even a small number of undergraduates who attended such as Caleb Bernacchio, these conferences provided opportunities to test ideas and encounter others working with similar issues in different disciplines and different traditions.

The International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry (ISME)[2] formalised the developing project to create opportunities for such dialogue to continue. Jim Kelly arranged for his Law students at Notre Dame to see us through incorporation as an educational charity based in Indiana. We have subsequently held conferences in Dublin, Vilnius, Providence, Nottingham, Grand Rapids, Athens, St Louis, Wroclaw, Paris and Durham UK, as well as contributing panels at other academic events. A range of publications has emerged from this work, alongside an online presence, active social media and hundreds of members across the globe.

The royalties from this volume will go to the Society but, more importantly, our aim is to enable some of the flavour of our work to become available to people who cannot attend these conferences. We are keenly aware of our own privilege, that our conferences overwhelmingly attract scholars and research students from Europe and North America who have institutional support to attend. Whilst events in Australia and a planned conference in

[2] https://www.macintyreanenquiry.org/.

South America will extend our reach, we understand that scholars and students elsewhere find it difficult to join us in person. In seeking a publisher for this project our principal criterion was to produce a volume that would be accessible and priced at a level that such scholars and students could afford. We are enormously grateful to Wipf and Stock whose commitment to this matched our ambition, and to Stanley Hauerwas who recommended them to us. Although we had not anticipated it, one feature of this volume is contributors' regular use of texts and lectures by MacIntyre that are not easily available. This enables arguments to be considered that readers only familiar with MacIntyre's books and collections are unlikely to have encountered.

Our contributors share an understanding that, whilst the products of the work carry their own names, they should be understood as common goods—they could not have been achieved without ongoing dialogue and constrained dispute between scholars. In this spirit we challenged our contributors to write about MacIntyre in the context of their own tradition or discipline. They have responded in a variety of ways—some focus on how MacIntyre's work has been taken up, challenged and developed in their disciplines (Beabout, Dunne, Fritz), others about what his work means for practice (especially Kelly), some about what should be but has not yet been learned from him (Osborne, Angier, McMylor, Blackledge and Korkut Raptis), others show both what has been learned and what has not (Bernacchio and Knight, Malakos, McMylor), and finally some explore how his work integrates material from different disciplines and thereby encourage readers to consider their relationships (Hauerwas, Lear, Nicholas).

Peter McMylor advised one of us before we first met Alasdair MacIntyre in person, that the last thing he wants is fawning admiration. This was wise guidance from the first person to have written his intellectual biography.[3] Contributors to this volume have sought to

[3] McMylor, *MacIntyre.*

summarise MacIntyre's work, to consider how we have and should learn from it, but also to challenge him; and this is how he would want it. It is not by accident that in each of his volumes MacIntyre thanks participants in symposia that have considered particular arguments and chapters.[4] In such exchanges, some of which we have been fortunate enough to attend, he considers challenges, refines his theses, develops his arguments and anticipates objections.

To engage in such exchanges well, to learn that all-too-difficult virtue of being genuinely grateful for correction, to be robust in our defences and to identify incoherence, poor argumentation or weak evidence, requires both us and our interlocutors to care for truth above all. It requires us to observe an ethics of enquiry that necessitates listening with care, to persevere with difficult ideas and to judge fairly; in other words, to observe the precepts of natural law.

Such forms of deliberative and shared reasoning must be at least as cross-disciplinary as the subjects they consider, and amongst MacIntyre's hallmarks as a philosopher is his deployment of arguments and evidence from sociology, history, psychology and many others. Excessive disciplinary divisions and early specialization prevents scholars from encountering and working with those from other disciplines and traditions. As a result, we are likely to see parts of our own traditions and disciplines clearly, but others poorly. When challenged by critics from another tradition, we may have few sound defences to make. The decline in theistic belief has, for example, involved the failure of theists to defend their positions against critics, particularly natural scientists. Were they to understand the recent findings of natural science better then they would be able to engage with such critics on more equal terms.[5]

---

[4] For example MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, xviii–xix., MacIntyre *Three Rival Versions*, ix., MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, xii.

[5] MacIntyre made this argument in remarks to a Symposium at The De Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at Notre Dame on his volume *God, Philosophy, Universities*. This can be found online: MacIntyre, "Comments on God, Philosophy, and Universities," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCwKdkW6-lw from 1:32:35.

Where theology and philosophy once integrated scholarly understanding so that different elements of our disciplinary learning could be contextualised within wider commitments, contemporary scholars now have to do this work for themselves, or else fall into an incoherence which is either not recognised or, if it is, may appear inevitable. But this is not inevitable and the engagements that MacIntyreans have undertaken with one another, in part to overcome these very limitations, have also and happily meant that we have become one another's teachers, students and friends. This volume is above all an attempt to capture that spirit of enquiry, to encourage scholars working with MacIntyre's theses to look up from their disciplinary microscopes, if not to seek a telescope, at least to seek some perspective.

The chapters that follow have been at our invitation, as we sought scholars who could consider MacIntyre's work in the context of their own disciplines and traditions. There is one exception, however. We invited Christopher Lutz to write an intellectual biography to navigate the development of MacIntyre's thinking over time. As Lutz argues elsewhere[6] MacIntyre's own history embodies the argument that to be rational requires us to give our allegiance to whichever tradition best refutes the arguments made against it. Since his conversion to Catholicism in the late 1980s, MacIntyre has argued that this tradition is Thomistic Aristotelianism, but in a form that bears the influence of Marx above anyone else. Reading MacIntyre's earlier work without understanding his subsequent conversions is liable to lead to interpretive error and Lutz's opening chapter provides an antidote. Lutz's central claim is that a continuity of purpose in his understanding of moral philosophy provides a narrative unity despite the changes in MacIntyre's allegiances: "Moral philosophy, for MacIntyre, would be a study of practical reasoning and of the habits of judgment that Aristotelians associate with the virtue of prudence."

[6] Lutz, *Tradition.*

Chapter 2 is a revised version of Stanley Hauerwas's keynote address "God and Alasdair MacIntyre" to the 2018 ISME Conference at Durham, UK. In "MacIntyre and Theology," Hauerwas considers MacIntyre's philosophical arguments for Christianity but finds his distinction between philosophy and theology to be both unconvincing and, perhaps more importantly, in conflict with Aquinas. Despite this he concludes that, "We might like him to do more, but we should not complain because he has given us more than most contemporary philosophers think possible."

In Chapter 3, Thomas Osborne takes up MacIntyre's relationship to Thomism more widely. His focus is on what Thomists should have learned from MacIntyre but so far have not. In particular, Osborne urges Thomists to engage with MacIntyre's largely sociological account of moral disagreement, one that challenges Aquinas himself but does not involve a denial of fundamental Thomistic positions. He argues: "Learning from MacIntyre that moral judgments are in a way embedded in practices and social roles does not remove moral judgments from the scope of rational evaluation. But it does show that the rational evaluation of moral norms has implications not only for moral theory but also for practice."

In Chapter 4, Tolis Malakos considers MacIntyre within the context of contemporary moral philosophy. He argues that MacIntyre's influence in the rejection of the once popular view that there are no rational foundations for ethics and morality has been sadly overlooked. By contrast to Lutz's account of the coherence of MacIntyre's Thomistic Aristotelianism in this volume however, Malakos suggests a tension between MacIntyre's critique of the Enlightenment and his arguments for the universality of natural law. He argues that, "a considerable degree of tension and conflict can be now discerned both in his positive account of practical rationality and action, and in his critique of some of the Enlightenment projects."

In Chapter 5, Tom Angier argues for the singular importance of MacIntyre's own learning as a classicist to understanding the continuity of his mature arguments, and casts him

as a Platonizing Aristotelian. Noting how "Uncovering and unpacking this continuity, however, is not a straightforward task," his method involves a forensic examination of MacIntyre's key texts, one that allows him to develop the novel conclusion that, "whereas *After Virtue* casts Aristotelianism as the antidote to the moral and moral philosophical failure of the "Enlightenment Project," *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* casts Aristotle as the antidote to the political philosophical failure of Plato."

In Chapter 6, Caleb Bernacchio and Kelvin Knight outline MacIntyre's political vision, and contrast its Aristotelian focus on politics as a purposive and inclusive activity concerned with the achievement of our common good with the centrality of relations between citizens and state in post-Enlightenment political thought. Acknowledging that MacIntyre has written more on politics than he has published, they consider whether this omission accounts for the neglect of his work by conventional political philosophy. Perhaps, however, the focus of his politics on local political action might bear a greater responsibility. Bernacchio and Knight summarise this dramatically: "But what is clear, given the importance of the public goods provided by the state for the flourishing of local communities, and the irrationality and absence of rational enquiry in many state decisions concerning the allocation of resources, is that it is only through conflict—with the state or its many agencies, or often with the large corporations closely aligned with it—that local communities can flourish."

In Chapter 7, Paul Blackledge and Buket Korkut Raptis take up MacIntyre's radical politics in relation to his Marxist roots. They argue that including MacIntyre with other post Marxists who turned to ethics may lie at the root of his neglect but that, "while he searched for a justifiable basis for resistance to capitalism, his focus was on the forms of practice that might underpin this alternative rather than the abstract norm through which it might be articulated." Unlike Angier who points to MacIntyre's roots in classical philosophy, or Lutz, who argues that the relationship between moral philosophy and practical rationality is the

abiding feature of MacIntyre's work, Blackledge and Korkut Raptis maintain that, "the strongest elements of MacIntyre's mature thought stem from the Aristotelian Marxism of his youth."

In Chapter 8, Jeffery Nicholas pursues MacIntyre's relationship to a specific offshoot of Marxism, namely Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Despite MacIntyre's notorious attack on Herbert Marcuse,[7] that leading light of the Frankfurt School, Nicholas argues that MacIntyre's critique of capitalism and Frankfurt School ethics have much to learn from each other: "both traditions share a common cause of ending suffering and developing a society free of capitalist inhumanity. That more dialogue has not occurred is a sadness, but one which opens up the possibility of common research programs and solidarity in the task of making the world a place suited for human flourishing."

In Chapter 9, Janie Harden Fritz carefully traces MacIntyre's influence on the development of communication ethics, communication theory and the philosophy of communication. She claims: "In each area, his treatment of narrative and tradition as a ground for ethics, as well as the concept of practices emerging from and supporting traditions, appeals to an action-oriented, meaning-centered understanding of human communicative life." A key focus of this chapter is on the agenda-setting potential of MacIntyre's work in such developing areas as communication and religion, journalism and new media.

In Chapter 10, Greg Beabout narrates another field in which MacIntyre has, perhaps surprisingly, enjoyed a sustained influence, business ethics. Beabout locates these developments in the wider growth of business ethics from the 1980s onwards and traces the debates that the interest in his work has spurred. These include the relationship between practices and institutions, the role of the manager, and the virtue of practical wisdom.

---

[7] MacIntyre, *Marcuse*.

In Chapter 11, Peter McMylor casts MacIntyre as a singularly sociological philosopher, one whose claims for the intimacy of the relationship between these disciplines sets him apart from the analytical and phenomenological traditions which have dominated sociology in the late twentieth century. McMylor argues that MacIntyre "can best be viewed as belonging to a form of scholarship that can be understood not by adopting the popular term 'interdisciplinary,' but rather by that of 'post-disciplinary.'" Echoing some of Osborne's arguments as to why Thomists need to pay more attention to MacIntyre's sociology, McMylor commends MacIntyre's argument that structural constraints and socially embedded decision-making processes are critical to understanding limitations on moral agency. Alongside the arguments of Fritz and Beabout, McMylor sees MacIntyre's main influence as deriving from his notion of narrative, of the relationship between practices and institutions, and of the relationship between goods and practices within cultural sociology.

In Chapter 12, Joseph Dunne revises his 2018 keynote address to the ISME Conference in Durham, UK that highlights MacIntyre's ongoing attempt to understand how best to from particular thinkers and texts. Dunne outlines his task as: "I follow his own example, then—doing unto him what he has done unto others—in asking what can we learn from MacIntyre; more specifically, what can we learn from him about learning itself?" His chapter considers MacIntyre's remarks on learning throughout his career considering how we learn through childhood, through practices, and through engagement in ethics and politics. Anticipating Hauerwas, Dunne characterizes MacIntyre's distinction between philosophy and theology as an example of the very compartmentalization that he criticizes elsewhere, and one indeed that renders the central notion of a "final end" opaque in MacIntyre's work. Perhaps more pointedly, anticipating Lear, Dunne emphasizes the role of human fallibility in MacIntyre's work as both condition for and limitation of our learning, and points to the need for an expansion of the second person-perspective in MacIntyrean enquiry, especially in

respect of relationships which involve pedagogy and relationships involving love. Such a perspective is essential if we are to address the first person weaknesses to which we all are prone.

Jim Kelly opens Chapter 13 with a memorable phrase: “The law now has little to do with justice. Like a couple in a long, unhappy marriage, they spend a lot of time together but rarely actually talk with one another.” However, rather than pursue a natural law critique of positive law, his essay goes on to provide an account of what justice and law would look like in the type of practice-based community that MacIntyre commends. Whilst providing commendable levels of detail as to how the law might be used to create housing trusts that would enable such communities to develop, it is critical to see the role of law as facilitative rather than the primary focus of enquiry. The purpose is clear: “When members of the community can call one another neighbors and friends, the networks of giving and receiving so fundamental to the achievement of common goods need not be so fragmented and isolated as they once were.”

In our final chapter, Jonathan Lear offers his keynote address to the 2019 conference held at Notre Dame to mark Alasdair MacIntyre’s 90th Birthday. Lear, a philosopher and psychologist, highlights the therapeutic potential of MacIntyre’s recent work. Whereas Aristotle’s *Ethics* spoke to readers in pursuit of the good life, MacIntyre’s directs his readers to the ways in which lives go wrong. Both resonate with their intended audience. Nevertheless, Lear takes up MacIntyre on not being Aristotelian enough in denying the importance of happiness in human flourishing. Lear argues we need the guidance of theorists such as MacIntyre to put our social structures in question, but we also need good friends to provide the second-person perspective that Dunne highlights, and a psychoanalyst for dealing with the non-rational parts of our souls.

This book is designed to be read as a whole *or* as the moment of interest strikes you. In either case, however, we hope that it helps convince you that in place of our conventional academic specialisation, one of the most important lessons to be learned from MacIntyre is the need to learn from one another.

Any project such as this incurs a variety of debts and a long list of those to whom we should be, and are, grateful. This list includes our contributors, who have been generous in their responses to our requests, swift (mainly) in meeting our deadlines, and both thoughtful and erudite. A second debt is to our reviewers for taking the time to consider earlier versions of this text and to provide excellent suggestions. A third is to Wipf and Stock for their agreement to participate in this project, for their professionalism and also for their flexibility, care and commitment throughout. A fourth debt is to our institutions for giving us the time and resource to pursue this and many other projects in which we have sought to defend, extend and apply MacIntyre's work. This debt is not only to our managers in the Newcastle and Durham University Business Schools but also to the cleaners, reception staff, professional support colleagues and many others without whom these institutions would not provide us, our colleagues and our students with the opportunity to teach, research and learn. A fifth debt is to the hundreds of scholars and students with whom we have discussed and debated these ideas and to the International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry. Our sixth debt is to Cumbrian artist Alison Dyer-Smith for permission to use her painting 'The Virtues' as the front cover image. Our seventh debt is of a more personal nature and due to our life partners, Shakuntala and Alison, who have once again exemplified the virtue of patience during this project. Finally, the debt that we, alongside the other contributors to this volume, owe to Alasdair MacIntyre is unrepayable. The best we can do is to invite others to learn, as we have learned, from his remarkable body of work.

[A]Bibliography

Hannan, Jason. *Ethics under Capital: MacIntyre, Communication, and the Culture Wars.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2019.

Lutz, Christopher Stephen. *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism, and Philosophy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009.

MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue – 3rd Ed*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

———. *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

———. *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

———. "Intractable Moral Disagreements." In *Intractable Disputes about the Natural Law: Alasdair MacIntyre and His Critics*, edited by Lawrence S. Cunningham, 1–52. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009.

———. *Marcuse*: *An Exposition and Polemic*. New York: Viking, 1970.

———. *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy and Tradition.* London: Duckworth, 1990.

McMylor, Peter. *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity*. London: Routledge, 1994

Moore, Geoff. *Virtue at Work: Ethics for Individuals, Managers and Organizations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.