

A Proposal for Dealing with Intractable Disputes in Moral Theology

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Abstract

Written in response to a request for dialogue with opposing views, this article suggests a methodology about how such a dialogue might be structured. Since many of the disputed questions that have divided theologians in the field of moral theology have become intractable, this article seeks to adapt the thought of Alasdair MacIntyre in the service of breaking the log-jam. Three questions are proposed as a basis for this dialogue together with an analysis to make the questions transparent.

Key words: moral methodology, intractable disputes, moral philosophy, dialogue, human agency

In introducing their most recent article in *Theological Studies*, Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman (hereafter L&S) invited those of the Catholic theological community who do not share their particular stance on moral methodology to dialogue with them.¹ They stressed the importance of arriving at a commonly accepted methodology that was also “transparent.”² Since I do not share their stance, but do share their view on the need for transparency to heal our divisions, I offer this essay in the hope that it will initiate a dialogue leading toward a clarification of the moral methodology fitted for the twenty-first century.

In 2004, the then prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Ratzinger, wrote to the president of the University of Notre Dame, requesting his assistance in addressing the problem caused by the lack of a shared rationality about moral issues. The up-shot of that letter was the appearance of a book: *Intractable Disputes about the Natural Law: Alasdair MacIntyre and Critics*.³ In it, Alasdair MacIntyre offered, by his own estimation, his most comprehensive statement about philosophical disagreements that have become intractable and how they might be overcome.⁴ This present essay seeks to apply MacIntyre’s approach to the intractable disputes to the area of moral theological methodology so as to facilitate the Second Vatican Council’s desire for renewing moral theology and advancing dialogue with the modern world.⁵ To this end I propose first to sketch the notion of socially embodied traditions of moral inquiry with particular attention to MacIntyre’s thought. Secondly, I shall describe

¹ Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, “Method and Catholic Theological Ethics in the 21st Century,” (hereafter “Method”) *Theological Studies* 74 (2013) 903–34.

² L&S, “Method,” 904.

³ Lawrence S. Cunningham (ed.), *Intractable Disputes about the Natural Law: Alasdair MacIntyre and Critics*, (hereafter *Intractable*) (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2009).

⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, “Intractable Moral Disagreements,” in Lawrence S. Cunningham (ed.), *Intractable Disputes about the Natural Law: Alasdair MacIntyre and Critics*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2009) 1–52. (hereafter “Intractable Moral Disagreements”)

⁵ James F. Keenan, “Special Topic: Vatican II and Theological Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013) 163.

MacIntyre's methodological proposal for dealing with intractable disputes by way of a controlled confrontation or disputation of competing points of view. Thirdly, I shall consider a way of conducting such a disputation and the criteria for deciding the winner. Fourthly, I shall suggest possible questions for such a disputation with L&S. Fifthly, I shall analyze, for the sake of transparency, the rationale for the questions. Finally I shall present some conclusions regarding the attitude needed to make MacIntyre's approach useful in the elaboration of moral theology in the future.

I. MacIntyre's Notion of Socially Embodied Traditions of Moral Inquiry

There is no dispute about the fundamental importance of method in moral theology. The basic methodological principles that one adopts at the outset of any study will predetermine its final conclusions. Within the last thirty years a new way to understand and elaborate moral theology has appeared on the philosophical scene. This way supplies a context for ethics that was always there but has for the most part been hidden from sight by the fact that it was considered to be adequately accounted for under the rubric of the "circumstances of the act." I refer to Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of socially embodied traditions of moral inquiry as developed in *After Virtue*.⁶

In his commentary on MacIntyre's seminal book, Christopher Stephen Lutz identified the problem of human agency as its fundamental subject matter.⁷ MacIntyre has sought to make human acts intelligible by extending the consideration of why human agents act to a broader range of reasons than had previously been normally done. All agree that human agents must have an end (*finis*) in mind in order to act intelligibly. All agree that to achieve their end, human agents must choose suitable means to accomplish their end. The traditional term to describe those means is the *object (ea quae sunt ad finem)* of the act. Since ends are often intended to be means to other ends, according to MacIntyre, the choice of objects that agents make has a context that is broader than the traditional, more narrowly circumscribed description of the circumstances of the act. This broader context that makes objects intelligible both to the agent and to others, MacIntyre argues, is a narrative of a life conceived as a whole for the sake of which choices are made.⁸ The virtues which inform those categorical choices are therefore also only intelligible within the context of that same narrative. Finally, what shapes the narrative is the still broader social context in which that narrative unfolds. People are born of particular parents whose marriage and family life has been shaped by the larger beliefs and events impacting those social communities to which they belonged. Moral theology has to be concerned, therefore, with the whole picture about the human person so that the answers that it gives to the questions about the details of specific moral activity will cohere with the broader social context in which every life has to be lived.

Three ways to conceptualize human agency in moral inquiry

Any discussion about how human agency is conceptualized requires some prior reflections on the nature of human rationality. Though there is general agreement that rationality

⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd. ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007). (hereafter *After Virtue*)

⁷ Christopher Stephen Lutz, *Reading Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue*, (New York: Continuum International, 2012) 13.

⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*,

indicates a way of thinking that follows the laws of logic, mounting a moral inquiry involves more than logical thinking. Since there is no agreement, however, about what has to be added to simple logic to qualify a moral inquiry as rational, there has arisen at least three distinct ways of conducting a moral inquiry, with each way conceptualizing human agency differently.

The first way is what I prefer to call perfective ethics. In this view, human beings act so as to perfect themselves in one way or another. Among older authors, perfective ethics was called teleological ethics since it was taken for granted that order existed in creation because it was already ordered to an end, thereby receiving a meaning. The presupposed existence of a common human nature allowed for the identification of those goods which, if they were attained, would enable one to fulfill one's potentialities as a human being. In this view, what constituted virtue was determined by whatever facility was needed to accomplish whatever had to be done in order to become what one could become if he or she achieved his or her end. In this view virtue was its own reward, not a necessity to qualify for a reward.⁹ This category of human agency is unknown in the British analytical tradition which derives from a later historical stage in which teleological thinking had already been abandoned. MacIntyre's use of the term "teleological" is an exception to the common terminological use today since he uses the term "teleology" in its original Aristotelian sense. In this "classical" view, teleological thinking contrasts the human person in his present state with the potential state that he would achieve if he realized what is perfective of his nature. In describing the virtues, perfective ethics relates virtue not only to the will but to all the faculties, including the appetites. Because it locates the moral virtues in the appetites and not only in the will, the virtues cannot be reduced simply to the virtue of charity. This seems to be the point that Josef Fuchs was making in the pre-conciliar period when he warned that an excessive emphasis on the virtue of love *alone* would lead to a devaluation of the importance of the moral virtues.¹⁰

The second way to understand human agency is by way of normative ethics. The nominalistic denial of the real existence of universals led to the denial of the existence of a common nature. Once the ability of human reason to comprehend the ends (*teloi*) of things was denied due to the prior denial that things had essences (natures), the scope of human reason was reduced to the empirical calculation of "facts," the residue of an account of the natural world of events that were conceived of as incapable of engendering moral obligation or values.¹¹ This shift in the understanding of reason itself led in turn to the need for an alternative way to conceive of the notion of human agency. Since what constituted right and wrong could no longer be explained by conditions intrinsic to human nature, appeal had to be made to extrinsic conditions. Thus the need to appeal to an extrinsic law (or norm), first conceived of as imposed by God and later conceived of as self-imposed, gave rise to the approach to ethics that we call normative ethics. In its later autonomous phase of development under the influence of the rationalism of the Enlightenment, normative ethics concerned itself with how to establish rational norms. The analytical tradition knows only of this approach, giving it a kind of canonical standing. In this view the normative aspect of morality is to be found in a rule that directs the will of the person, engendering the obligation

⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 149.

¹⁰ Josef Fuchs, *Natural Law: A Theological Investigation*. trans. by Helmut Reckter, S.J. and John A. Dowling. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 73.

¹¹ J. D. Goldsworthy, "God or Mackie? The Dilemma of Secular Moral Philosophy," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 30 (1985) 48.

for what Martin Rhonheimer has called “moral striving.”¹² Striving thus came to be “understood as the intention of the agent to conform to the norm derived and justified by the *value* of the good that is the object of the striving.”¹³

Once morality was identified with the stance that a person took with regard to the norm, a distinction was able to be made between the intention to conform to the norm and the action that is performed because of such an intention.¹⁴ This distinction allowed for the distinction between goodness and rightness, a distinction that does not exist in perfective ethical thinking. In normative ethics, judgment about the goodness of an act is reserved to the transcendental level of the person, the level of intentionality. Since intentionality is a requirement for morality, morality can only exist on the transcendental level of the person. To the extent that the agent intends to conform to the norm, the person is considered morally good irrespective of the action that is done because of such a good intention.¹⁵ Conversely, failure to strive to conform denotes a bad intention, and a bad intention makes the person morally bad. On the categorical level, where the person decides concretely what to do in order to implement his good or bad intention, the judgment arrived at is not itself a moral act since it only concerns the rightness (or wrongness) for the situation of an external action based on the beneficial or harmful consequences that would flow from it. Whenever the will – particularly in the face of opposing inclinations, emotions and desires – is willing to be guided by objectively and autonomously determined universal rules for correct human behavior, a conscientious error in selecting the correct rule for any given situation does not disqualify one from the reward due to the achievement of the good of an upright will.

The third way to account for human agency is what I call situational ethics, for lack of a better term.¹⁶ This account appeared in response to the failure of the Enlightenment project to found the rationality of ethical thinking on secured universal agreement on how to justify moral norms. According to MacIntyre, this project was doomed to failure from the beginning due to the lack of consensus about the nature of the human good that it was supposed to protect and promote.¹⁷ That failure was due in turn, says MacIntyre, to the initial rejection of an account of the meaning of human life and the articulation of an end for a human life that secured a reason for human agency. From this failure Friedrich Nietzsche drew the conclusion that morality itself was simply a mask to conceal the will to power, which then came to be seen as the driving force for human agency.¹⁸ This view denied that there is any objective code of behavior that could foresee all possible contingent situations. Once again, as with normative ethics, the *good* is understood here as the common good which is to be achieved on the basis of a judgment by

¹² Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000) 574.

¹³ Francis Michael Walsh, *Josef Fuchs' Proposal for the Renewal of Moral Theology: An Analysis and Critique in the Light of Veritatis Splendor*, (Rome: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 2004) 249–50; also, Lambert Academic Publishing, (25 October 2012) 212.

¹⁴ Cf. Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, “Virtue Ethics: Natural and Christian,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013) 460 (hereafter “Virtue Ethics”).

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of this view, see Mark E. Graham, “Rethinking Morality’s Relationship to Salvation: Josef Fuchs, S.J., on Moral Goodness,” *Theological Studies* 64, (2003) 750–72, and my response, “Amending Fuchs’s Account of Morality: A Response to Mark E. Graham,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 13 (2006) 114–30.

¹⁶ I am certainly open to another descriptive term. In 1977 Richard McCormick rejected the term “situation ethics” as “totally useless.” See Richard A. McCormick, S.J., *Notes on Moral Theology: 1965 through 1980*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1981) 641. “Before it [situation ethics] takes on meaning, one must know the methodology and conclusions it is meant to describe, and the validity of the methodology and conclusions. *Those* are the real issues, and they are not illumined by referring to them as ‘situationist.’”

¹⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 51.

¹⁸ See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 22; and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1988), 353 (hereafter *Whose Justice*).

the speculative intellect of the agent as to what in this particular situation would be most fitting for that end. Without any acknowledgement of a fixed end for human agency, however, the only methodology that this view allows is that of an arbitrary choice of a stance as the starting point for moral reflection.¹⁹ As Lutz correctly observes: "In the absence of any given end or fixed teleology for human agency, modern moral and political philosophy must choose its values, and this choice makes its ethics and politics fundamentally arbitrary, all its protestations to the contrary notwithstanding."²⁰

The notion of moral inquiry

From MacIntyre's perspective, moral inquiry is a reflective search for the truth about what kind of *end* one should have as the goal of one's life lived in a particular time and place and in a particular culture. Such an inquiry presupposes that there is such a thing as a truth that is objectively valid for everyone. It also implies that there such a thing as falsity, and a way to distinguish it from the truth. Claims to possess the truth, says MacIntyre, "are claims to have transcended the limitations of any merely local standpoint."²¹

Denying the possibility of such transcendence, classical relativism attempted to put in question all claims to truth coming from rival views by claiming that, because the standards by which judgments are made about the truth are internal to each viewpoint, all claims to truth are incommensurable.²² Relativism holds, therefore, that no one view has the resources needed to deny legitimacy to the truth claims of a competing viewpoint. Closely linked to the relativist challenge is the challenge of perspectivism. Here the affirmation is made that all views have at best a part of the truth, and none have such a claim on truth as to be able to exclude any other view as false. Instead, all claims to truth are somehow compatible.

MacIntyre ascribes to the shapers of the Enlightenment a specific view of truth and of the historical account of the rational inquiry aimed at attaining truth: one that was singular, impartial, and universal.²³ By *singular*, MacIntyre means that the correct rational account of moral inquiry was conceived of as allowing for only one expression of moral truth. In this view, there was only one way to think rationally about moral truth, and only one account of the history of such a search. By *impartial*, MacIntyre means that the correct account of rational inquiry was conceived of as being objective in the sense that it had escaped all one-sidedness. By *universal*, MacIntyre means that the account of rational inquiry was conceived of as valid and applicable to all rational persons. Those who held such views, says MacIntyre, were also logical compelled to hold the follows positions: 1) that other accounts of morality that did not agree with their own must suffer from the limitations of one-sided partiality; 2) that other rival accounts of morality that reached opposite conclusions were false; and 3) that, if their own inquiry at some later point demonstrated the superiority of some rival mode of rationality, then they were obliged to admit that their original way of thinking had been defeated as an

¹⁹ An example of this methodology may be found in L&S's discussion of the competing Catholic stances regarding chastity. See L&S "Method," 925–33. Also Cf. Francis Michael Walsh, "The Moral Theology of John Paul II: A Response to Charles E. Curran," *The Heythrop Journal* 53 (2012) 787-805 at 800-1.

²⁰ Lutz, 102

²¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification," in Kelvin Knight (ed.) *The MacIntyre Reader*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1998) 292–229, at 214. (hereafter "Moral Relativism").

²² MacIntyre, *Whose Justice*, 352.

²³ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice*, 6.

adequate mode of rational inquiry and was capable of being replaced by its rival.²⁴ Thus, the claim to truth contained in the Enlightenment project strictly denied a place for any doctrine of relativism or perspectivism. These later views can only find a home in post-modernity, and this is precisely the claim of those who defend the views of Nietzsche. They hold that the Enlightenment project simply masked a struggle for power since the truth that can only be said to exist is truth from a particular perspective. Both relativism and perspectivism are the children of post-modern thinking.

For MacIntyre, the question of truth and the question of its rational justification are two separate-able questions. Moral inquiry, as a search for truth, terminates when one is able to say how things are in themselves rather than simply how things appear to be from a particular standpoint. At that point, the human mind has grasped the inner reality of something external to itself. The justification of the claims of success in arriving at the truth in any given inquiry needs to be made, but, according to MacIntyre, to make the explanation of truth dependent on the terms of its rational justification would be to invert their relationship.²⁵ It is the other way around.

The notion of a tradition of moral inquiry

A tradition of moral inquiry is the result of a communal, systematic inquiry over time to arrive at the truth about human agency. When a community proposes questions about human agency and evaluates the answers that such questions elicit, the resulting shared understanding by the members of that community becomes socially embodied in the way the members relate to one another. Due to the fact that there is more than one way to think about what is important to include in such an inquiry, different communities arrive at competing traditions of answers and patterns of social life. "A living tradition, for MacIntyre, is the property of a community engaged in practices that continues to seek new and better ways to pursue the goods internal to those practices."²⁶ In addition, practices have standards of excellence which are internal to those practices. In order to excel in those practices, the beginner must abide (at least initially) by the rules or norms of the practices in order to acquire the facility needed to perform the practice. "To enter into a practice," says MacIntyre, "is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preference and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice."²⁷ Only when one has mastered any given practice is he or she in a position to judge the standards of the practice and propose new answers with their accompanying practices and standards.

These traditions of answers continue to develop as communities confront new situations which have the possibility of calling into question the answers already arrived at. When these developments challenge the tradition, old positions need to be rethought. This process has, according to MacIntyre, three identifiable stages.²⁸ A tradition is in the first stage of its development when members of a particular community have no reason to doubt the correctness of the views according to which they order their lives. The second stage occurs

²⁴ MacIntyre, "Moral Relativism," 208.

²⁵ Idem, 207-8.

²⁶ Lutz, 128.

²⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190.

²⁸ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice*, 355.

when events raise doubts regarding the correctness of the regnant view. These doubts create the crisis that MacIntyre has called an “epistemological crisis.”²⁹ The tradition in this state would no longer be able to understand itself on its own terms. The third stage of development is marked by the solution of the crisis. “The solution to a genuine epistemological crisis,” says MacIntyre, “requires the invention or discovery of new concepts and the framing of some new type or types of theory which meet three highly exacting requirements.”³⁰ These requirements are: 1) the adoption of new elements into the worldview of the tradition in crisis that solves the problem that initially called the older formulations of the tradition into question; 2) the ability of these new elements to explain why the crisis occurred in the first place; and 3) the ability of these new elements to allow for some form of organic continuity between the older and newer forms of the tradition.³¹ Failure to achieve all three requirements would be the equivalent of the defeat of the tradition by another tradition superior to it.

False beliefs based on faulty judgments have a chance to surface and be re-evaluated when the answers given in the past are compared to both the new experiences of the present and to the answers that other traditions have given to these same problematic issues. The recognition of false beliefs, says MacIntyre, comes through this retrospective judgment about the past inadequacy of earlier beliefs in the light of an answer commonly accepted as better at some later stage of the tradition. A judgment that some belief is false signals the recognition of a failure of the mind to judge correctly in a given matter. What cannot exist, says MacIntyre, is any distinction made between a judgment, on the one hand, and the object that is judged, on the other. Knowledge is not restricted to the judgment made by the mind; it extends to the objects of the judgment. The reason for this, says MacIntyre, is because failures in judgment are not the faulty of the objects revealing themselves to the mind. “One of the great originating insights of tradition-constituted inquiries,” says MacIntyre, “is that false beliefs and false judgments represent a failure of the mind, not of its objects. It is [the] mind which stands in need of correction. Those realities which [the] mind encounters reveal themselves as they are, the presented, the manifest, the unhidden. So the most primitive conception of truth is [that] of the manifestness of the objects which present themselves to [the] mind; and it is when [the] mind fails to re-present that manifestness that falsity, the inadequacy of mind to its objects, appears.”³²

The notion of virtue

Virtue in the context of human agency is excellence in choosing the right means to achieve the right ends.³³ Virtues are qualities that do not exist in and for themselves. They exist so that those goods which perfect persons may be achieved with ease. According to MacIntyre, “[a] virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”³⁴ But this exercise has an ironic aspect for those who are committed to any form of utilitarianism. In order to achieve the goods that are internal to the

²⁹ Idem, 362.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Idem, 357.

³³ Lutz, 150.

³⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

practice and the internal rewards which that practice brings, the virtues must be exercised without regard to the consequences that they afford. Even though virtues are ordered toward the achievement of certain goods, says MacIntyre, "unless we practice them irrespective of whether in any particular set of contingent circumstances they will produce those goods or not, we cannot possess them at all."³⁵ Virtue that is not a full time profession is not a virtue.

The identification of the virtues

MacIntyre's account of the identification of what counts as a virtue proceeds through three stages. The first stage concerns the identification of those qualities necessary to those practices which enable the goods perfective of persons to be achieved.³⁶ By the term "practice" MacIntyre means "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended."³⁷ The securing of goods that are seen as perfective both of a person and of the society to which that person belongs is the reason why certain practices are prized as virtues.

The second stage of MacIntyre's account of the identification of what constitutes a virtue is the evaluation of the various practices with regard to the attainment of the qualities needed to sustain the end of a whole life. Practices, in order to be intelligible as virtues, need a context which only a broader narrative can supply. MacIntyre cites the example of ruthlessness. The practices that ruthlessness employs can be a virtue if the task at hand is to secure the survival of a platoon of soldiers on the battlefield. But that same ruthlessness in the context of raising a family becomes a formula for disaster.³⁸ Virtues cannot therefore be defined in the abstract; they need a context of a life narrative that is socially embodied in order to make the choice of a given practice intelligible as a virtue. Just as a human act is intelligible because it is directed toward the achievement of some end, so what constitutes a virtue is made intelligible as part of a narrative about the pursuit of some end (*telos*). In telling that narrative, the first thing that needs to be identified is an end (*telos*) for which someone would be willing to live (or die). Without such a narrative and the end it provides, nothing about human agency will be intelligible to the agent.³⁹ He or she will not be able to understand what he or she is doing. In addition, without a social context that is accessible to others, the actions that are performed will not be intelligible to the community of which the agent is a member. "Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions."⁴⁰

The sociology of human agency

The third stage of MacIntyre's account of what is required for the identification of the virtues is the further context of a on-going social tradition that results from a community's continuing search for better and better ways to achieve the goods internal to its social

³⁵ Idem, 198.

³⁶ Idem, 273.

³⁷ Idem, 187.

³⁸ Idem, 275.

³⁹ Idem, 205.

⁴⁰ Idem, 208.

practices.⁴¹ The narrative of a whole life, if it is to be intelligible, needs a second narrative that puts an individual's life into the context of the life of a broader community. The virtues proposed by a given social order identify the qualities needed to attain the ends (*teloi*) prized by that society. Change the society and its social order, and the list of virtues changes accordingly. Virtues do not exist prior to the identification of the social embedded practices that require them. This third stage corresponds to what MacIntyre refers to as the sociology of virtue. The centerpiece in MacIntyre's attempt to revive virtue ethics is the restoration of an appreciation of the importance of the *telos*, the end for which something is done. Virtues cannot be manufactured at will. They require the context of a sociology which implies an end (*telos*) which itself cannot be manufactured at will and which must be distinguished from misconceptions of our end that can mask self-centered desires for pleasure, power, and money.⁴² According to MacIntyre, only those human qualities can be considered virtues are those that satisfy the conditions of each of these three stages sketched above. "This [point] is important," he says, "because there are qualities which it is at least plausible to understand as satisfying those conditions which are derived from this notion of a practice, but which are not virtues, qualities which survive the tests of the first stage, but fail at the second or third."⁴³

II. MacIntyre's Methodological Proposal to Deal with Intractable Disputes

The loss of a common understanding of how to understand human agency has led in moral theology to a series of intractable disputes which are never resolved. They arise because there is a prior and unrecognized dispute about what constitutes the proper way to think rationally. These plural rationalities give rise to a plurality of standards of rationality. When this prior dispute about the proper way to think rationally does not receive the needed attention, the parties to the dispute end up talking past one another. Both parties believe that they have given a successful defense of their position and have answered successfully all the objections coming from the other side. Both sides consequently find no grounds for believing that the other side has been able to contradict successfully the positions that their side has defended. Since by general agreement there do not exist standards of rationality that are objectively neutral and that can be called upon to evaluate objectively which side has the better arguments, both sides have only their own standard to judge who has been victorious over the arguments of the other.⁴⁴

A moment of opportunity to break out of this intractability arises when one of these competing traditions finds itself in an epistemological crisis, without the resources to make a coherent response to some development it has encountered that has not allowed it to respond effectively. This happens when, according to its own standards, it judges that it does not have the persuasive force to be intelligible to itself by remaining in continuity with itself and yet to defeat the defenders of another tradition. At such a moment, one tradition can reassess its own presuppositions and resolve the crisis by adopting the views of what it recognizes as a superior tradition. Since all traditions have their own presuppositions and operate as an

⁴¹ *Idem*, 273.

⁴² MacIntyre, *Intractable Disputes*, 16.

⁴³ *Idem*, 275.

⁴⁴ MacIntyre, "Intractable Moral Disagreements" 32–52.

ideology, the only way to make progress in dealing with intractable disputes is by putting any given tradition in crisis by showing either that the positions defended by that tradition are incoherent in keeping with its presuppositions or that it is unable to explain historical data. This type of crisis renders its defenders open to examine the possibility that other traditions may have resources that make available, as MacIntyre says, "cogent explanations of weaknesses, of inabilities to formulate or solve problems adequately, of a variety of incoherencies in one's own tradition for which the resources of one's own tradition had not been able to offer a convincing account."⁴⁵ To facilitate a reconciliation among the various competing traditions, MacIntyre proposes a restoration of sorts of the medieval methodology of *disputation*. The practice of disputation involves pitting incompatible traditions against one another to see which is able to give the best answer to a moral inquiry. In shaping the needed questions to put an opposing view into epistemological crisis, MacIntyre recommends focusing on the premises of each tradition to show how one or the other side is incoherent according to the standards of rationality that each side employs in defending its positions.⁴⁶

The art of putting intractable disputes into question

There are two ways that MacIntyre attempts to put into question competing and incompatible views of moral inquiry. The first way is by questioning their view of history. The coherency of a given tradition can be judged on how well it is able to explain the twists and turns of history. At this point, a word needs to be said about the relationship between rationality and history. There are two conflicting views about this relationship. One holds to the Enlightenment view that what constitutes rationality has laws and principles that of necessity are universal in their scope. In this view, the telling of history is singular and transhistorical and does not itself have a history. The second view considers that the telling of history is plural and has itself a history. Different sides tell different stories. In a "Postscript to the Second Edition" of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre responds to various criticisms that the original edition had garnered, among which was the charge made by William K. Frankena that MacIntyre had failed to distinguish his philosophical claims from the history of philosophy itself.⁴⁷ Such a "failure," MacIntyre insists, is not a failure at all, but a necessary step in support of his central claim that there can be no account of philosophy that is distinct from the telling of the history of philosophy. How someone thinks about philosophy, he maintains, is historically conditioned. The same must be said of theology. Theology (especially moral theology) shares in having a history of what had to be denied and why it had to be denied in a given circumstance in order that something else could be affirmed.⁴⁸

The second way that MacIntyre suggests for judging competing traditions is the account that they give of what he calls the sociology that is at least implied in their account of moral philosophy/theology. One cannot give a *full* account of morality, he insists, without at the same time giving the social context for that account of morality. "For every moral philosophy," says MacIntyre, "offers explicitly or implicitly at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions, and in so doing generally presupposes some claim that these concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real social

⁴⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 276–7.

⁴⁶ MacIntyre, "Intractable Moral Disagreements," 52.

⁴⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 265, citing William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 93, (1983) 500.

⁴⁸ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice*, 8–10.

world."⁴⁹ A coherent sociology must, therefore, include a broader narrative that provides a way of evaluating what are the ends for which a life is worth living. Included in this sociology must also be an account of the role assigned by each competing moral tradition to the role that ends play in its account of human agency. Every attempt to write on the subject of human agency has implicit within it the links to a broader story. When these links are not made explicitly in any account, they can legitimately be supplied by those who wish to put the adequacy of that account into question. To do this filling-in of the blanks, however, requires a little detective work since the clues have to be sought in those aspects of any given account that reveal its philosophical underpinnings. Moreover, whenever a change is introduced in one aspect of that account, a corresponding change is implied in the sociology that is at least implicitly a part of that account. For example, if one rejects the notion of the individual as developed in the Enlightenment, there is also implied a rejection of the Enlightenment sociology that gave rise to that notion in the first place. Because ethical thinking, like nature, abhors a vacuum, rejection of one notion requires the (at least implicit) embrace of another to fill the hole. Thus, the affirmation of one view implies the negation of what is incompatible with what is affirmed.

The coherency of the sociology of any given tradition can be judged on the basis of how well its account of human agency is able to provide a guide to order a human life within a given community. Philosophical and theological accounts of human agency that erase any properly metaphysical or sociological content from their description of the ends (*teloi*) for which people act and consider the ends (*teloi*) simply to be the psychological motivation of the agent quickly become incoherent, says MacIntyre, when they try to explain why any given action should be performed or avoided.⁵⁰ The identification of these incoherencies (if any) then becomes one of the goals of the disputation.

Dealing with the claims of relativism and perspectivism

The possibility for such a disputation must first be established and defended against the contrary claims of relativism and perspectivism. Relativism denies that there is an objective truth that applies universally to all. Relativism denies that truth-as-such exists; there is only truth from a given viewpoint and within the confines of a given tradition. It concludes that favoring one particular viewpoint over another viewpoint is not possible on rational grounds due to the fact that standards of rationality, independent of all competing traditions, do not exist.⁵¹ Since no one tradition can claim to be superior to any other tradition, rational disputation between competing traditions are held to be impossible. If these competing traditions have no more claim on truth than do their rivals, the inference could be made that any rational person should theoretically "be equally at home within the modes of life informed by the moral schemes of each of these standpoints."⁵²

Perspectivism, for its part, claims that the only rational way to harmonize seemingly conflicted points of view is to withdraw the claims of "truth" and "falsity" from all conflicting claims and to grant that all such claims are simply complementary perspectives for envisaging

⁴⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 23.

⁵⁰ MacIntyre, "Intractable Moral Disagreements," 50.

⁵¹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice*, 352.

⁵² MacIntyre, "Moral Relativism," 203.

the same realities.⁵³ Each view captures some aspects of that reality, but none captures all of them. All conflicts regarding truth claims, in the view of perspectivism, are reconcilable. To this view MacIntyre has a very strong retort: Perspectivism, he says, “is a doctrine only possible for those who regard themselves as outsiders, as uncommitted or rather as committed only to acting a succession of temporary parts. From their point of view any conception of truth but the most minimal appears to have been discredited. And from the standpoint afforded by the rationality of tradition-constituted inquiry it is clear that such persons are by their stance excluded from the possession of any concept of truth adequate for systematic rational enquiry. Hence theirs is not so much a conclusion about truth as [it is] an exclusion from it and thereby from rational debate.”⁵⁴ Such a view is, of course, open to dispute, and those who wish to contest it are invited to prepare to submit their questions for the disputation.

III. The Disputation and the Stages of Its Progress

The point of the disputation is to determine which tradition has the better answer to a disputed issue that is internally coherent according to its own standards of rationality and the resources needed to answer future questions put to it by competing traditions. The “victory” of one side over the other can be the result of one of two things: either the answers were well given by one side and demonstrated the resources of its tradition to respond to attempts to put it into an epistemological crisis, or the questions were badly fashioned by the other side and have to be refashioned and repropounded by those who remain unpersuaded by the answers given by the other side. Only that side can be declared the “winner,” however, that has been able to do three things simultaneously. First, the “winner” must have been able to reconcile to the broader context of moral theology the answers given to the proposed questions suchwise that those answers can also explain the history of moral theology. Since all affirmations imply negations, only those answers can be considered complete that explain what had to be denied and why it had to be denied in order that the affirmations contained in the answers could have been made. This explanation would be incomplete if it does not account for the intellectual catastrophe to which MacIntyre, Joseph Kleutgen, and Servais Pinckaers – in their own separate ways – have pointed.⁵⁵ For example, a “victorious” account must be able to explain both the confusion that appeared in the Catholic moral tradition regarding the principles governing choices with double effects and also to explain why that confusion appeared in the tradition in the first place.⁵⁶ Moreover, for the sake of total transparency, this requirement to acknowledge what had to be denied and why it had to be denied in order that the affirmations of any given tradition could have been made extends to all the sources that have been incorporated into that tradition in the course of its development. Only when an answer has acknowledged its complete intellectual genealogy has the question been answered completely. There would be no further questions regarding history that could be asked.

⁵³ L&S, “Virtue Ethics,” 471.

⁵⁴ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice*, 368.

⁵⁵ John Inglis, *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy*, (Boston: Brill’s Academic Publishing, 1998); Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, (Washington: Catholic University, 1995) 240–53. (hereafter *Sources*)

⁵⁶ Julia Fleming, “Jean-Pierre Gury’s Sources: A Missing Chapter in the History of Double Effect,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013) 420–441; Francis Michael Walsh, “The Villain Who Confused Moral Theology,” *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010) 268–87.

Secondly, the “winner” must be able to furnish an account of the sociology of moral theology that is not fundamentally arbitrary. Thus the arbitrary adoption of a “stance” without any justification for that “stance” as the starting point for moral reasoning would disqualify the answer given since the point of the disputation is to arrive at consensus. Consensus cannot be reached in the face of arbitrary presuppositions imposed by one of partners to the disputation.

Thirdly, the “winner” must explain the links between the mode of rationality used in the answers and the way in which communities identify those goods which they come to believe are needed in order to flourish as communities and whose attainment requires those skills which subsequently are denominated as the virtues.

The process of the disputation implies that further questions can be proposed by all sides. Only those questions, however, that are consonant with the opposing tradition’s mode of rationality would qualify for a disputation that seeks to test the coherency of opposing views. Questions have to be formulated from within the worldview of the opposing tradition if they are to stand any chance of convincing the defenders of that tradition of the need to rethink their own first principles.

A disputation aimed at breaking the log-jam of an intractable dispute is radically different from the literary genre that has come to be known as a *quaestio disputata*. This latter contains traditionally at least four identifiable elements: 1) a *statement* of the view that is being defended; 2) the enumeration of the reasons why this view is correct and not simply an ultimately reconcilable perspective that momentarily contrasts with the view being opposed; 3) the enumeration of the reasons why the opposing view deserves to be rejected; and 4) a definitive conclusion (which implicitly is a claim of victory). In the writing of a *quaestio disputata* conceived along these lines, by necessity the author imports all the presuppositions of the process or mode of rationality that he or she accepts as rational according to the description given above. By focusing on the issue being contested, the author risks to miss noticing the mode of rationality being employed that is the reason why consensus has not already been reached on the issue. The end result then will be the production of just another chapter in an intractable dispute. The author may be very happy with the resulting essay, but experience teaches us that the essay normally will not meet the standards of rationality employed by the critics defending the opposing view. Frustration on the part of all the participants is the predictable result.

A disputation in the MacIntyrean sense, by contrast, is a *question* (not a *statement*) that seeks to uncover any internal inconsistencies (if there be any) in a given opposing view while respecting the traditions of rationality of the opponents who hold to them. While not defending a particular view, these questions seek instead to provoke an epistemological crisis in the opposing tradition to see if the defenders of that tradition have the resources from within their own tradition to answer the questions in a way that is internally coherent according to the canons of rationality employed by that tradition. What characterizes the approach of disputation is the presumption that the discovery of incoherency of itself will force a reevaluation of one’s previous views. This approach, of course, does not insure success in putting opposing views into crisis, nor does it guarantee that those who hold opposing views will admit defeat and be forced automatically to acknowledge another tradition as superior. The most that can be claimed is that the original terms of the dispute will have changed. There will be a new appreciation and respect for the partners in the disputation.

IV. Questions for a Disputation with Lawler and Salzman

To illustrate the notion of disputation that I am advocating as a methodology for dealing with conflicting views and how it differs from the more traditional *quaestio disputata*, I propose the following questions to L&S:

Question 1 : What makes the normative account of virtue ethics more acceptable than the normative account of Hume's utilitarian ethics or Kant's ethical formalism?

Question 2: Are you in agreement with the Magisterium in its rejection of relativism? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Question 3: How can the virtues needed for the pursuit of certain goods be defined prior to and independent of a knowledge of what goods should be pursued and before the identification of the ends for which they are to be pursued?

V. The Rational for the Questions

What is striking in reading the two essays that are the subject of this dialogue is how often, in the course of advancing their arguments, L&S quote many different authors without developing the broader context from which those quotes derive. The impression thus received on first glance is that the cited authors are in fundamental agreement with one another. Thus, L&S can write: "We share with Philippa Foot and Alasdair MacIntyre the judgment that neither utilitarianism nor deontology offers (sic) an adequately comprehensive moral theory, indeed that, because of them, 'We have – very largely if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.'⁵⁷ We join with them and the many other modern ethicists who advance virtue ethics as a normative ethics more promising to the moral life than utilitarianism or deontology.^{58,59} What is not acknowledged by L&S, however, is the huge gap between, Foote and almost all of the other authors cited (with the one exception of G. E. M. Anscombe, who does not figure in the narrative of the article)⁶⁰ on the one hand, and MacIntyre on the other. Without an awareness of the broader historical context in which individual statements are made, the reader will not have the chance to judge the coherency of the argument being advanced because, as MacIntyre observes, "the relationship of individual theses and arguments as parts to wholes never appears."⁶¹ The methodology that MacIntyre proposes has for its purpose to allow for the relationship of parts to wholes to appear. He considers an explanation of any given argument as historically adequate only if it explains what had to be rejected and why it had to be rejected in order that something else could be affirmed.

⁵⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd. ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007). (hereafter *After Virtue*)

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *NE*), trans. David Ross, intro. Lesley Brown (New York: Oxford University, 2009) II.6.1106b. See Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University, 1999) 11.

⁵⁹ Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, "Virtue Ethics: Natural and Christian," *Theological Studies* 74 (2013) 443. (hereafter "Virtue Ethics")

⁶⁰ L&S, "Virtue Ethics," 443, note 1.

⁶¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 2 (hereafter *Versions*). See also G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958) 1-19; and Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59 (1958-1959) 83-104.

The rational for the first question

The first question is posed so that L&S will have the opportunity to explain the history of moral theology. MacIntyre bases his explanation on the “disquieting suggestion” that a major dislocation of the received traditional account of ethics occurred at the beginning of the modern era.⁶² He credits the desire of the defenders of the traditions of Augustinian theology to guard against the inroads of the Thomistic synthesis for unwittingly initiating this revolution.⁶³ Even though MacIntyre does not further identify those responsible for the catastrophe, others have not been so reluctant. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and others representing the theological movement that has come to be known as *Radical Orthodoxy*, point to John Duns Scotus as the one most responsible for the shift in thinking that led to the dismantling of the synthesis that Aquinas had constructed.⁶⁴ In order to answer the question of the unity of the subject matter for metaphysics, Scotus broke with him, MacIntyre says, by shifting to a metaphysics of univocity.⁶⁵ Whereas Thomas understood “being” to be capable of analogous predication, Scotus read Avicenna’s text, “*ens prima impressione imprimatur in intellectu*,” as justification for predicating “being” of all existents univocally, the Creator as well as his creation.⁶⁶ By putting the consideration of the act of being before the act of creation, and thus attributing to the Creator and his creation the same kind of act of being, Scotus endowed creation with a metaphysical autonomy.⁶⁷ This move meant, according to Phillip Blond, that the existence of creation no longer needed to be understood as a participation in, and hence dependent on, the existence of God.⁶⁸ By shifting the universe from the category of creation (implying a necessary relationship to a creator) to the category of nature (one not implying any such necessary relationship) Scotus allowed “creation” to be thought of as simply “the universe,” whose existence could be intelligible apart from any creator. Its existence no longer bespoke the existence of God. Since “is” now had only one meaning, the question “Is there a God?” wound up on the same level as the question “Is there an Easter Bunny?” The answer “no” to both questions became a theoretical possibility. This consequence was not intended, nor did atheistic secularism appear immediately, but the foundations for it were laid.

In a variation of the same hypothesis, Servais Pinckaers⁶⁹ and Germain Grisez⁷⁰ point to William of Ockham as responsible for the initial shift. According to their collective account, Ockham, thinking within the metaphysical context of the univocity of being, was forced to deny to universals the same act of being as he attributed to particulars. What existed in the real world, he said, were particulars, not universals. According to him, the words intended to

⁶² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd. ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007) 1-5. (hereafter *After Virtue*)

⁶³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) 99. (hereafter *Selective History*)

⁶⁴ John Milbank, “The theological critique of philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi,” in *Radical Orthodoxy* (ed.) John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 21-37 at 23; John Montag, “The false legacy of Suárez,” *Radical Orthodoxy* (ed.) John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 38-63 at 51.

⁶⁵ Cf. MacIntyre, *Selective History*, 98. Here MacIntyre raises the possibility that Scotus’s real target was Henry of Ghent. Also see Giorgio Pini, Univocity in Scotus’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam*: The Solution to a Riddle, http://faculty.fordham.edu/pini/pini/Blank_files/Univocity in Scotus.pdf (accessed August 15, 2015).

⁶⁶ Stephen Brown, “Avicenna and the Unity of the Concept of Being,” *Franciscan Studies* 25 (1965) 117-150 at 130.

⁶⁷ James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2004) 96-100.

⁶⁸ Phillip Blond, “Perception: From modern painting to the vision in Christ,” in *Radical Orthodoxy* (ed.) John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 220-42 at 233-4.

⁶⁹ Pinckaers, *Sources*, 240-253.

⁷⁰ Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus (Christian Moral Principles)* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983) p. 36, note 16. Here Grisez cites Louis Gustave Vereecke, “Moral Theology, History of (700 to Vatican Council I)” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 9 pp. 1119-1122 at 1120.

designate things generically were just names for the products of our abstracting which could not be said to having "being" in the same sense that concrete particulars do.⁷¹ This assertion forms the core of what we know today as nominalism. Its repercussions are with us still.

What might those repercussions be? Once the only foundational categories that existed to describe beings were "being" and "non-being" (either something is or it is not), only particulars were judged to have real existence; universals, viewed as simply mental constructs, did not so qualify. Likewise, the real existence of essences reflected in the universal concept arrived at through abstraction from their sensible phenomena, was also denied. Without real essences, there could be no basis for maintaining the real distinction between essence and existence. Once the distinction between essence and existence disappeared, species could not appear since there were no longer any natures that supplied the inner bonds to bind creatures together. Only individuals without any internal connections with one another could appear. Without any description of the nature of the human species, there could not be any basis for determining what contributed to the flourishing of human nature. At one stroke, the basis for any type of perfective ethics disappeared.

Once perfective ethics was abandoned, its teleological focus also fell by the wayside. Ockham inflicted the further blow on the Thomistic synthesis by rejecting a role in moral thinking for the natural inclinations that St. Thomas had used as his guide to identify the goods that were perfective of the person. Chief among those inclinations is the drive for happiness, a consideration of which had been starting point for the *Prima Secundae*. By the time of Francisco Suárez, this part of the treatise had been transformed simply into a consideration of the beatific vision as of the end of Man, the issue of happiness disappearing completely from moral theology until modern times. Pinckaers notes that, "[i]ndubitably, the inclination to happiness exists within us, but according to Ockham we remain entirely free to choose it or not, even as we are free in regard to our ultimate end or to our existence itself."⁷²

Without perfective ethics, a new basis for moral thinking had to be found. This basis was found in the norm and its accompanying normative account of morality. The adoption of this account of morality, however, created its own problems. The first was how to understand the nature of the ethical act and its relationship to virtue. The ethical act had previously been understood in terms of passing from potency to act. In the new metaphysical world introduced by Scotus and Ockham, potency, understood as potential being, was now classified as "non-being" since only what actually exists qualified as actual being. Once conceived of as absolute non-being, potency could no longer serve as a co-principle of being. This move had profound consequences for understanding the ethical act. Without the concepts of potency and act, moral theology lost the capacity to express the intransitive, as opposed to the transitive, effect of human actions. The transitive effect is the change in the external state of affairs that Man brings about by his actions. The intransitive effect is the change that Man brings about in himself because of his choices. If in acting, one passes from potency to act, change is fundamentally and foremost a change in the acting person. In this view, only secondarily does acting produce a change in the external state of affairs. Once, however, potency and act are not available to serve as principles of being, human choices only have a significance that is

⁷¹ Richard A. Lee, "Concepts and Existing Singulars: Heidegger, Adorno, Ockham," *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, 3 (2007) pp. 70-74.

⁷² Pinckaers, *Sources*, 244.

external to the person. Once the consequences of human choices were understood as external to the person, they could no longer be acts of self-determination by which a person determines what kind of person he will be for all eternity.

Once the act of choice was no longer seen as an act of self-determination, what was to be the meaning of choice? At this point Ockham again showed himself to be a follower of Scotus for whom choice was love in action.⁷³ Ockham explained that the meaning of choice lay in the willingness or unwillingness of Man to conform himself to the will of God. In practice, this meant that the moral task is to conform one's action to the demands of an external norm as an expression of love for God.⁷⁴

The advent of normative morality also raised the question as to what were the conditions of possibility for the reward for goodness or the punishment for badness. The answer that Ockham proposed was that, in order to qualify for reward or punishment, Man had to be responsible for his actions. Without responsibility, there would be no merit or guilt to be rewarded or punished. However, what is it that makes Man responsible for his acts? The answer given was that he had to be free. What, however, did it mean to be free? The nature of Man's freedom was one of the controversies at the University of Paris in the time of St. Thomas. The Franciscans led by Scotus held – according to the standard interpretation – that freedom resided simply in the will, since it was the only rational faculty that was free.⁷⁵ Since the defenders of the Augustinian school were desirous of defending the unconditional primacy to the will, they gave an account of the intellect that made it inert in its relationship with the will in order to save the freedom of the will. The intellect was not capable of moving the will. A disciple of Scotus on this point also. Ockham held that the intellect was not free because of its being ordered to the truth. He proposed a notion of freedom that entailed a radical autonomy of the will from all outside influences.⁷⁶ For him, freedom meant the power to do various things in such a way that one could act or not act without any dependency on any outside power.⁷⁷ To be free, Man had to determine himself for or against a particular course of act without any restraints and without any prior determination. This freedom had to be what Pinckaers calls the freedom of indifference.⁷⁸

Once freedom became the focus of the moral life, the human act was no longer understood as sufficient to constitute it as a moral act, for the human act already involved cooperation between the intellect and the will. Since the intellect was already determined by the demands of truth, it could not be free since it had to seek the truth. Only the will could exercise the freedom of indifference.⁷⁹ Thus, a distinction between the human act and the moral act was introduced since in this way "the will's being moved by its good [was] something distinct from

⁷³ Cf. Mary Beth Ingham, "Duns Scotus, Morality and Happiness," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXIV (2000) 195.

⁷⁴ Cf. Mary Beth Ingham, "Duns Scotus, Morality and Happiness," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXIV (2000) 193. Cf. Thomas Williams, "How Scotus Separates Morality From Happiness," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 59 (1995) 425-46.

⁷⁵ Cf. William A. Frank and Allan B. Wolter, *Duns Scotus, Metaphysician*, (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1995) pp.200-4 at 200-1, 204. Cf. Mary Beth Ingham, "Duns Scotus, Morality and Happiness," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXIV (2000) pp. 173-195 at 188.

⁷⁶ Cf. Lucan Freppert, *The Basis of Morality According to William Ockham*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), p. 33.

⁷⁷ William of Ockham, *Guillelmi de Ockham opera philosophica et theologica*, (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Editiones Instituti Franciscani Universitatis S. Bonaventurae) *Opera theologica*, Vol. IX, 87, *Quodlibeta*. I, q. 16, "...voco libertatem potestatem qua possum indifferenter et contingenter diversa ponere, ita quod possum eumdum effectum causare et non causare, nulla diversitate existente alibi extra illam potentiam."

⁷⁸ Pinckaers, *Sources*, 268.

⁷⁹ Pinckaers, *Sources*, 250-1.

the will's being obedient to the command of another."⁸⁰ Those who willed to keep the commandments out of a desire to be obedient to the will of God were worthy of reward; those who did not were not so entitled. On MacIntyre's account, Scotus considered this move necessary in order to secure the needed uprightness of the will. "Part of the freedom of the will to defy God would, on Scotus's view, be taken away if merely by pursuing its own good the will was obedient to God. The will therefore can only exhibit its obedience to God by not only obeying the natural law *qua* directive of our good but also *qua* divine commandment."⁸¹ Once the goal of the moral life was seen in terms of the attainment of reward or the avoidance of punishment, virtue was no longer seen as its own reward. Rather, one was virtuous in order to receive a reward for having the good will that led one to conform oneself to the norm. The adoption of normative ethics in moral theology in turn opened the door to the art of casuistry needed to decide which norms applied to which situations.

The consequence of giving priority to the will over the intellect, however, led to a disturbance of the account that St. Thomas had given of the cooperation of the intellect and the will in the performance of the human act. Since St. Thomas does not give an *ex professo* account of the human act, we have to rely on the neo-scholastic reconstruction of his account of the human act involves a dialogue between the intellect and will regarding the end to be achieved and then about the means to be employed to achieve that end.⁸² In Ockham's account, the intellect was subject to the prior willing of the will. Following Ockham, Suárez insists that there is no causality of the end with regard to the will until the will itself is moved to act.⁸³ Only by denying to the intellect any role in determining the will does Suárez think that it is possible to establish the freedom of the will.⁸⁴

Once freedom required complete indifference of the will, and the moral life was no longer understood as an act of self-determination by passing from potency to act, the function of in principle of finality lost its relevance to the whole moral project. St. Thomas had considered the finality of the moral act to be the basic element in the account of voluntary action.⁸⁵ But once the function of finality in shaping the act of choice (of a means to the intended end) had been reduced and thus obscured, the inner connection between the interior and exterior act of the will that was the inner link between one voluntary act and another, each act was viewed as

⁸⁰ MacIntyre, *Versions*, 155.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Thomas Gilby (ed.) *ST, I-II*, vol 17, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970) 215.

⁸³ Francisco Suárez, *Omnia Opera, Vol. IV, Tractatus Primus, De Fine Hominis*, Tractatus Primus, Disp. I, Sec. I, 7, p. 3. Dico ergo causalitatem finis circa voluntatem nostram non esse in actu secundo, donec ipsa voluntas actu moveatur, et tendat in ipsum finem. Haec assertio probatur sufficienter argumentis factis contra secundam sententiam, et videtur mihi expresse divi Thomae, locus nuper citatis [ST, I-II, q. 2, art. 6, ad 1], ex cujus verbis potest ratione nova confirmari: quia donec causa efficiens sit in actu, non potest intelligi causa finalis actu causare: nam finis, ut definit Aristoteles, est, cujus gratia aliquid fit: si ergo nihil actu fit, non est actu finis: si autem efficiens actu non efficit actu, nihil fit: et consequenter nihil fit propter finem; ergo, de primo ad ultimum, ante actum agentis non est causalitas finis: ergo pari ratione in voluntate ante actionem voluntatis non est causalitas finis circa ipsam in actu secundo. Quod tandem declaratur, quia vel haec causalitas esset circa ipsam potentiam voluntatis, et hoc non, quia, secluso actu, illa non aliter se habet, nec immutatur aliquo modo: vel est circa actum ipsius voluntatis, et hoc esse non potest sine ipso actu.

⁸⁴ Suárez, *Primus Tractatus*, Disp. I Sec. I, 6, p. 2. Haec vero nec intelligi possunt, nec satisfacere: quia hic non agimus de causalitate finis in actu primo, ut sic dicam seu de proxima applicatione ejus ad causandum, sed de causalitate, et influxu ejus in actu secundo, hic autem intelligi non potest priusquam in voluntate aliquid causatum sit, quia reallis causalitas debet ad aliquid reale haberi, alias nihil esset: sed si in voluntate nulla est res nova, nec operatio aliqua, vel affectio, nihil intelligi potest, quod a fine causarum sit: ergo nec intelligi potest causalitas finis in actu secundo. Confirmatur ac declaratur, quia illa excitatio, quae dicitur esse in homine cognoscente finem et bonitatem ejus, antequam voluntas proprio motu moveatur, nihil aliud est revera, quam cognitio et iudicium intellectus, nam in voluntate nihil de novo positum est, quod ante non esset: sed iudicium intellectus non est causalitas finis, ut per se constate, sed potius est approximatio finis, ut causare possit: ergo non potest in hoc solo consistere causalitas finis.

⁸⁵ Pinckaers, *Sources*, 243.

an isolated event, free of any determination supplied by previous intentions or actions. According to Pinckaers, such an uncoupling, deemed necessary in order to protect the freedom of indifference, flowed from Ockham's denial of any universal application of the principle of finality. Though he considered the choice of an end to be the principal object of the free act, Ockham "considered that the end existed within the individual act and could not therefore establish essential bonds with other acts."⁸⁶ Moreover, in the case of a person willing a thing in view of a further end willed for its own sake, he saw two perfectly distinguishable actions.⁸⁷ "The act directed to one thing would have as its end a 'partial object' and would be distinct from the act that directly sought the end and grasped it as a 'total object.'"⁸⁸ As a consequence, Ockham equated finality simply with the intention of the agent in placing a free act (i.e., the interior act).

The obscuring of the principle of finality also caused the loss of the appreciation for the distinction between the interior act of the will and the exterior act commanded by the will.⁸⁹ Finality established the end of the interior act, but had no role to play in the shaping of the exterior act. In addition, without the metaphysical principle of finality to hold the two acts of the will together, successive physical acts no longer had any internal, intentional bond so that they could constitute from within an integral whole. Exterior acts which were not *per se* ordered to the end of the interior act were now seen as separate moral acts. The distinction between the interior and exterior act of the will originally had arisen from the desire to allow the interiority of the moral act to appear. The obscuring, however, of the connection between the interior and exterior aspects of the moral act led directly to an eclipse of the appreciation for the interiority of the moral act.⁹⁰ It also led to the view that one can *act* well without necessarily *thinking* well. Since L&S posit the importance of not only acting well but also thinking well, their explanation will have to explain how such a disjunction between how one acts and how one thinks is possible.⁹¹

The loss of the bond connecting the interior and exterior act resulted eventually in each act being assigned its own end. The exterior act had for its object the *finis operis*, which was the end of the act, viewed "objectively" from the standpoint of the third person, while the interior act had for its object the *finis operantis*, the intention of the agent placing the moral act.⁹² The adoption of the standpoint of the third person then led directly to a confusion of the moral object with the physical or material object. External acts were viewed as having a "nature" of their own that distinguished one kind of moral act from another independently of the intention of the agent. Once moral action was viewed "objectively," the agent's intention (the *finis operantis*) did not have a role in defining the object. It supplied, instead, a circumstance for the moral act.⁹³ It was thought that the laws and structures of the physical world already defined

⁸⁶ *Idem*, 244.

⁸⁷ For echoes of this approach, see Steven A. Long, "Veritatis Splendor §78 and the Moral Act," *Nova et Vetera*, 6 (2008) 146.

⁸⁸ Pinckaers, *Sources*, 244.

⁸⁹ *Idem*, 243-4.

⁹⁰ *Idem*, 78-9.

⁹¹ L&S, "Virtue Ethics," 447. Cf. Giorgio Pini, "Two Models of Thinking: Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus on Occurrent Thoughts," https://www.academia.edu/9841824/Two_Models_of_Thinking_Thomas_Aquinas_and_John_Duns_Scotus_on_Occurrent_Thoughts (assessed August 28, 2015).

⁹² Pinckaers, *Sources*, 231.

⁹³ The bungled attempt to correct this misstep gave rise in the modern era to proportionalism. Cf. Peter Knauer, S.J., "The Hermeneutic Function of the Principle of Double Effect," *Natural Law Forum* 12 (1967), 132-62. The article was republished in Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J. (ed.) *Readings in Moral Theology No. 1: Moral Norms and Catholic Tradition*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 2.

the object of the moral act. In this way, there arose in moral theology the custom of considering human acts as types of human behavior. Virtues were now considered types of good human behavior performed with the required freedom of indifference.⁹⁴

Since conformity to the moral norm had become the basis for choices, the concept of good and bad objects of choice – the moral object – tended to disappear in favor of the generic concept of morality with its attendant concepts of goodness and badness of the will. Without the principle of finality to guide the focus of theologians in their description of the moral object, the focus of attention now shifted to the abstract notion of “objective morality.”⁹⁵ This attempt to maintain an objective view morality by abandoning the viewpoint of the first person, the acting person, and adopting the viewpoint of the third person led to a confusion of the moral order with the physical or natural order of things.⁹⁶ The moral object disappeared from view, its place being taken by the physical object. The sign that this confusion was present was the fact that the distinction between the moral order and the physical order became obscured. The issue of the formal or moral object and its differentiation from the material or natural object is really part of a larger issue, the differentiation of the two orders. Since Suarez was anxious to root his understanding of the moral life in objective reality, the issue of how to distinguish the moral order from the order of nature became critical. What constituted the physical act as a moral act was something that Suarez admitted was a very obscure question.⁹⁷

The second problem created by the shift from perfective to normative ethics was to explain from where the moral life derived its obligation. The loss of the principle of finality brought about a change in the way law was seen to function. The new basis for moral thinking shifted the source of law from God’s reason to his will.⁹⁸ Law exists in God’s intellect only to the extent that he recognizes goodness and badness in things and thus orders his plan for his creation accordingly. Secondly, and more importantly, obligation was now conceived as a distinct act of the divine will which decreed that all creatures should conform to that plan. As a consequence, morality was no longer understood as “a matter of molding one’s actions to conform to the requirements of an objective good crystallized in the moral law, but only of allowing one’s practical reason to conform to the moral law.”⁹⁹ No longer was law viewed as the work of practical reason and prudence of the lawgiver ordering the proper means to achieve the

⁹⁴ In support of this view of virtue and freedom Francisco Suárez explicitly cites Scotus, Gabriel, and Ockham. Cf. Francisco Suárez, *Omnia Opera, De Bonitate et Malitia Humanorum Actuum*, Disp. III, Sec. 3, 19, (Paris: Vivès, 1856) 315. Dicendum tertio, ut hoc esse virtutis, quod est in actu voluntatis, denominetur bonum morale, seu bonitas moralis, necesse est ut illi jungatur esse liberum. Ita docuit Scotus, quodl. 18 § 2, Gabriel cum Ockham, in 3, d. 23, q. 1, notab, 4, et constat ex doctrina supra data de esse morali: sicut enim actus voluntatis etiamsi in substantia sua sit omnino idem, si non sit liber non est moralis, ita quamvis talis actus tendat in honestum ut sic, et in hac ratione sit omnino rectus, et studiosus nihilominus si non sit liber, illa rectitudo non erit moralis: quia videre licet in actu amoris divini, nam in beatis est rectissimus, et ab eadem virtute charitatis procedens, atque adeo ejusdem speciei cum amore viae, ut est probabilius et nihilominus ibi non habet bonitatem moralem, non quia desit illa bonitas, quam habet ex objecto, et differentia specifica, sed quia deest illi moralitas quae sumitur ex libertate.

⁹⁵ Francisco Suarez in his *De Bonitate et Malitia Humanorum Actuum* has much to say about “objective morality” and nothing about the moral object. The same is true of Josef Fuchs in his *Theologia Moralis Generalis*, his pre-Vatican II class notes for his course in moral theology at the Gregorian University.

⁹⁶ Cf. Steven A. Long, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007); Francis Michael Walsh, “The Villain Who Confused Moral Theology,” *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010) 268-87.

⁹⁷ Suárez, *De Bonitate et Malitia Humanorum Actuum*, Disp. I, Sec. 2, 1, p. 279. Quid sit in hujusmodi actu morali ipsum esse morale. 1. Ratio prima dubitandi. - Ratio dubii esse potest, quia in hoc actu possunt duo considerari, scilicet substantia ipsius actus, quae est veluti quid materiale et formalis ipsa denominatio seu forma illa, a qua actus denominatur moralis. De primo constat esse ipsam entitatem actus, quae est etiam quid physicum et naturale. De secundo autem valde obscurum est quid sit.

⁹⁸ Pinckaers, *Sources*, 231.

⁹⁹ Karol Wojtyła, “The Separation of Experience from the Act in Ethics,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, (trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM) (New York: Peter Lang, 1993) pp. 27-28.

common good, as it had for St. Thomas. Once it was no longer viewed as a means to an end, law was seen as the work of the will of the lawgiver arbitrarily commanding certain things to be done or avoided for no other reason than his own desires.¹⁰⁰ At this point, “legalism” entered moral theology.

The notion of law as an act of the will of the legislator triggered in turn a change in the understanding of the Natural Law. For St. Thomas, the Natural Law was the product of a cooperative interaction between speculative and practical reason which, by taking into account his natural inclinations, showed Man what was to be pursued and what was to be avoided in order for him to be happy. Without the teleology built into the natural world as a guide, the distinction between natural ends and human purposes collapsed. It was no longer possible (or necessary) to argue for and defend the priority of natural ends over human purposes.¹⁰¹

Once the existence of universal “natures” had been denied and the teleological vision of what Man might become if he achieved his end had consequently disappeared from view, the only reality that existed upon which to found a defense of Natural Law involved concrete particulars of things as they are. MacIntyre observes: “Since the whole point of ethics –both as a theoretical and a practical discipline – is to enable man to pass from his present state to his true end, the elimination of any notion of essential human nature [– due to the unrecognized influence of nominalism –] and with it the abandonment of any notion of a *telos* [left] behind a moral scheme composed of [human nature as it is and moral precepts designed it foster its perfection whose mutual relationship had become] quite unclear.”¹⁰² The solution proposed to supply an explanation for why one ought to act in a given way was to appeal to derive an “ought” from an “is.” The reasoning ran this way: the way things are is the way they ought to be. The physical order of nature became the yardstick of the moral order. Natural Law then came to be understood as simply the articulation of the teleology found in the order of nature as it is which is discoverable by the speculative intellect. There was no room or necessity for the prudential judgment of the practical intellect. The Natural Law, to the extent that it survived, now came to be conceived as the awareness of God’s plan that Man attained through the use of his *speculative* reason. What was conformable to human nature was seen as engendering the consequent obligation to conform one’s behavior to the demands of that plan. The natural, physical finalities of the body were now the criterion for deciding what was suitable and what was not. In this way, the problem of what later would be called “naturalistic fallacy” entered moral theology.

The change in understanding the nature of Natural Law led, in turn, to a problem with rooting the Natural Law. Why do things have to be the way they are? If law is rooted simply in the will of God, things are the way they are because God, who is absolutely free and who can do whatever he wills whenever he wills it, wills it for as long as he wants to will it. Law was binding simply because God, the Lawgiver, willed it to be so at any given moment in time. In this way all moral laws became voluntaristic, arbitrarily rooted in the will of God rather than in

¹⁰⁰ Pinckaers, *Sources*, 270.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Robert Sokolowski, “What Is Natural Law? Human Purposes and Human Ends,” *The Thomist* 68 (2004) 521.

¹⁰² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 54-5.

the nature of God.¹⁰³ This move, says Pinckaers, put the treatise on law in the dominant position in moral theology and made the commandments its divisions.¹⁰⁴

Once morality was seen in terms of laws, the law was seen as a possible threat to freedom. A way was needed to protect freedom from the suffocating encroachment of law. This need gave rise to the various systems for resolving doubts about the extent of the obligation of the law. In the case of probabilism, says Pinckaers, “[t]he idea was simple, if a bit subtle. In weighing reasons in favor of freedom or of law in doubtful cases, it was permissible to follow the opinion in favor of freedom if it was probable and was supported by good reasons, even if the opposite opinion, maintaining a legal obligation, was based on better reasons.”¹⁰⁵ In offering this solution, Bartholomew of Medina and his followers, in the opinion of Pinckaers, “had passed the frontier of reason, which naturally favors the opinion with the best reasons behind it. Conscience, as a result, lost its balance; a long time was required to restore it to normalcy.”¹⁰⁶ St. Thomas had previously assigned the role of conscience to *practical* reason aided by the virtue of prudence and the other moral virtues. Now a special treatment of conscience replaced the treatment of the virtue of prudence.¹⁰⁷ Under the influence of legalistic thinking, the link between conscience and the virtue of prudence was no longer clear. Conscience became a judge whose function was to take the law and apply it to particular cases. This task involved interpreting the law to determine with precision the line between what was a matter of obligation and what was a matter of freedom.¹⁰⁸ Freedom, however, was understood as the permissibility to do whatever one pleased, the freedom of indifference, free from the burden of the law.¹⁰⁹ Conscience was thus transformed into a public defender whose job was to defend human freedom against the relentless reaches of the law.

According to Pinckaers, once the law was seen as a limitation of freedom, only actions pertaining to freedom were considered part of moral theology. Although in theory the subject matter of moral theology was human action, in practice only those actions falling under law and obligation were considered.¹¹⁰ The result was to exclude from moral theology any consideration of the most profound of human acts, the ones in which the person was most deeply involved - those great actions, works, and creations in the spiritual order such as holiness and moral stature. The heart’s thrust toward all that is best, toward perfection and excellence, escaped this account of moral theology.¹¹¹ Also gone from moral theology was any consideration of the passions as St. Thomas had presented them. Instead of viewing the emotions as capable of contributing positively to moral actions, the emotions were viewed from the standpoint of their negative effect on human freedom. In this way the treatise on the passions became “a study of the hindrances and obstacles to the freedom of voluntary acts and took on an entirely negative orientation.”¹¹² Says Pinckaers: “In the same way, sensible

¹⁰³ Pope Benedict XVI made this very point about Islam’s view of the relationship of law and the will of God in his famous comments at the University of Regensburg in 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Pinckaers, *Sources*, 268-270.

¹⁰⁵ *Idem*, 275.

¹⁰⁶ *Idem*, 275.

¹⁰⁷ *Idem*, 231.

¹⁰⁸ *Idem*, 272.

¹⁰⁹ *Idem*, 268.

¹¹⁰ *Idem*, 271.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Idem*, 231.

passions were considered obstacles to free action, although according to St. Thomas they had a positive contribution to offer."¹¹³

Once ethical thinking had become secularized, the absence of the threat of eternal damnation left the motive for the ethical life once again in question. Hume, the source of utilitarianism, Kant, the source of deontology, and Kierkegaard, the advocate of the moral stance as the beginning point of ethical reflection, each proposed mutually exclusive answers to the problem of how to supply it and thus ground morality. "Just as Hume seeks to found morality on the passions because his arguments have excluded the possibility of founding it on reason," explains MacIntyre, "so Kant finds it on reason because his arguments have excluded the possibility of founding it on the passions, and Kierkegaard on criterionless fundamental choice because of what he takes to be the compelling nature of the considerations which exclude both reason and the passions."¹¹⁴

As MacIntyre correctly observes, normative ethical thinking has no place for goods that are internal to the exercise of virtue.¹¹⁵ Once it was no longer understood as its own reward, virtue became an external condition for qualifying for a reward. Teleology then came to be understood as a system for judging the acceptability of any given action based on a prediction of its probable consequences. The *end* then came to mean little more than consequences. This utilitarian position in moral thinking brought such a stinging rebuke from G. E. M. Anscombe that today she is credited both with initiating the search for an alternative way to think ethically and also with coining the term "consequentialism" as an expression of opprobrium.¹¹⁶ The search for an alternative way to supply the norms needed in normative ethics resulted in a normative version of "virtue ethics," one that would look to the virtues as sources of norms.¹¹⁷ The first question, therefore, asked of L&S invites them to explain what they had to deny and why they had to deny it in order to affirm the intelligibility (and the superiority) of their theory of normative virtue ethics.

The rational for the second question

The second question stems from the understandable concern that L&S have to protect their proposal from any possible criticism from a Magisterium hostile to relativism. To do this, they seek to show that any criticism based on the presence of relativism in their position would be misguided due to a failure to make the necessary distinctions between the relativism rejected (deservedly, they seem to imply) by the Magisterium and the perspectivism which they defend. Conceding that "[c]oncern about relativism is undoubtedly warranted in the 21st century," L&S warn, nevertheless, that "magisterial teaching fails to discern the difference between relativism, which rejects all objective ethical truth, and perspectivism, which acknowledges that there is objective ethical truth, albeit partial."¹¹⁸ Thus, while they reject the view that no objective truth claims can be made since (as relativism holds) no such claim can be made that

¹¹³ *Idem*, 269. Cf. L&S, "Virtue Ethics," 453. "We believe this same sort of argument can be constructed for situations in which other virtues are in question, and as a result we offer our own axiom: the harder it is to act virtuously, the more it is against our personal emotion and desire, the more virtue is required to act virtuously." For the position of St. Thomas, cf. ST, I-II, q. 17, articles 1 & 7. For a helpful commentary on the latter, cf. Craig Steven Titus, "Passions in Christ: Spontaneity, Development, and Virtue," *The Thomist* 73 (2009) 53-88.

¹¹⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 49.

¹¹⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 198-9.

¹¹⁶ G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, No. 124 (January 1958); accessed (November 20, 2013) at <http://www.philosophy.uncc.edu/mleldrid/cmt/mmp.html>

¹¹⁷ Cf. L&S, "Virtue Ethics" 457.

¹¹⁸ L&S, "Method," 905.

would exclude another truth claim as false, L&S appear to defend the view that all truth claims are partial and therefore reconcilable in the end (as perspectivism holds) such that no other competing claim can be excluded on the basis of being false.¹¹⁹ This view would appear to rule out the possibility of the magisterium being able to declare any position as incompatible (and hence, irreconcilable) with Catholic teaching. The second question, therefore, seeks to discover the nature of moral inquiry that L&S presuppose in their methodology: As a search for truth, does moral enquiry terminate when one is able to say how things are in themselves rather than simply how things appear to be from a particular standpoint?

The rationale for the third question

In an effort to make the reasons for the third question more transparent, I wish to remind the reader that both MacIntyre and L&S are in stated agreement that virtues cannot be identified apart from a social context.¹²⁰ For MacIntyre, however, this context is supplied by the practices that communities undertake to secure the goods that are seen as perfective both of the community and of the individual members of that community. L&S have “clarified” MacIntyre’s description of a “practice” in such a way that references to the role of teleology as MacIntyre understands it have been removed. They quote MacIntyre’s description of a practice in this way: “a coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to and partially definitive of that form of activity.”¹²¹ What they omitted from their quote is the rest of the sentence which runs: “with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.”¹²² The key part of the omission, from the standpoint of MacIntyre’s proposal for the restoration of teleological thinking to moral reflection, is the reference to “the ends and goods involved.” They then offer a commentary on that portion of the sentence they have quoted:

That [i.e., MacIntyre’s] complex definition requires instantiation for clarification. That a practice is a “socially established cooperative human activity” signals the importance of membership in, and the influence of, a community and culture on the individual learning virtue. The form of “socially established cooperative human activity” in focus here is the search for virtue or goodness; “goods internal to that form of activity” are the virtues themselves as defined in the community and culture; the desire “to achieve those standards of excellence [in that culture] appropriate to” being virtuous provides motivation to strive to achieve those virtuous goods.¹²³

What they have done in their “instantiation” is to strip MacIntyre’s project of its central point, the restoration of teleological thinking to ethical reflection. This third question, therefore, is directed at discovering if L&S have understood the ways in which MacIntyre’s

¹¹⁹ L&S, “Method,” 906–11.

¹²⁰ L&S, “Virtue Ethics,” 448.

¹²¹ L&S, “Virtue Ethics,” 448.

¹²² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

¹²³ L&S, “Virtue Ethics,” 448.

project is not simply a different perspective from the views of the other authors cited, but rather a contradiction of those views, and whether L&S would agree that the restoration of teleological thinking to ethical reflection would subvert their own project.

VI. Conclusions

In the kind of disputation that I have envisioned, questions have to be asked and answers have to be sought for the simple reason that theology is an imperfect science. What characterizes a science in such a state is the tentativeness of its conclusions. It is still working toward the elaboration of its first principles from which the entire body of knowledge encompassed by the science can then be deduced once all the problems have been identified and solved. As long as a science remains imperfect (as theology always will remain until the Second Coming), the reasoning involved is necessarily inductive (reasoning *to* first principles, rather than *from* first principles).¹²⁴ This historical mode of rationality moves from particular facts to general conclusions, but to conclusions that remain tentative because they are still subject to revision in the light of further developments. The arguments mounted in favor of one solution or another are by necessity exploratory. Hence comes the methodological need for continuous questioning (and the answers that it evokes) to see which side has arrived at better answers as new situations present themselves.

Questions can also be ignored, but ignoring questions that have been asked contains within itself its own (normally unrecognized and unacknowledged) methodology. The unexpressed view (or hope) is that, if bothersome questions are ignored, they will go away. This method – it should be quickly noted – can be employed by all sides to a dispute and is subject to being made into a high art form when the ignoring is justified on the grounds that the questions themselves are based on a faulty methodology. It seems to me that the only way to deal creatively with faulty methodology, intractable disputes, or any other difference is by the putting of questions (back and forth) so as to force into the open the hidden presuppositions that keep us apart.

¹²⁴ MacIntyre, *Versions*, 88.