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MACINTYRE AND HAUERWAS ON METAETHICS AND SCIENCE

Catholic moral theology needs philosophical elucidation if it is to carry out its work of evangelization and dialogue within the "court of the Gentiles." As the Athenian hearers of the apostle Paul on the Areopagus had difficulties with the notion of "resurrection," so today the educated classes of the West are insulated by intellectual barriers which must be addressed if they are to hear the Gospel.

Two key contemporary thinkers who can contribute to that task are the Scottish-American Catholic philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, and the American Protestant theologian, Stanley Hauerwas. Despite differences between them, there is an extensive commonality in their work. Indeed, one could argue that, taken together, their output might form the basis for both a serious critique of liberally-conceived moralities and the articulation of a meta-ethics consistent with Christian, and specifically Catholic Christian teaching.

One challenge to their work, however, which would appear to demand further attention by MacIntyre and Hauerwas is that which issues from naturalist understandings of the world. More specifically, there is the question: have they taken sufficient account of both the success of the scientific project and its profound effect, via philosophies of naturalism and scientism, upon modern western attitudes toward the key moral concept of freedom?

This article will firstly summarize the key themes of such a meta-ethic, highlighting how it stands in relation to contemporary alternatives and pointing to its value for Catholic moral theology. It will then consider the challenge offered by scientific progress, drawing out its significance for the orientation proposed by Hauerwas and MacIntyre, and offering suggestions for how one might respond to it.

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The Foundations of Morality: MacIntyre and Hauerwas

Both Hauerwas and MacIntyre are significant figures in their fields of study. MacIntyre has a readership that extends well beyond the confines of Catholic philosophy and theology. He is credited with being the key driver of the modern resurgence of virtue ethics such that it is now considered a kind of "third way" alongside deontological and consequentialist meta-ethical theories. Hauerwas, who was famously nominated in 2001 by Time magazine as "the best Theologian in the USA," has drawn heavily on the philosophical work of MacIntyre in forging a theological ethics. This is an area into which MacIntyre himself has ventured scarcely at all. What, then, are they saying about the philosophical/theological foundations of Christian ethics? To assist in focusing the discussion, their approaches to three ideas central to the accounts they give of morality will be examined: freedom, virtue and narrative. How they deal with these notions and their inter-relations should provide us with the sort of broad-brush picture relevant to our concerns.

Freedom

The dominant feature common to the accounts of freedom offered by Hauerwas and MacIntyre is their opposition to Kant's version of the notion.[1] For both of them, the subject of the free act is not Kant's autonomous self, but rather the indebted self; not the agent operating under the restraints of a self-generated and self-imposed rational law, but under a tradition-induced capacity for practical reason which makes sense to the individual; not as a rational will quarantined from the freedom-corrupting influences of desire, sentiment and need, but as a whole human being in which all these aspects play their part. In place of the mysterious decision-maker with its roots in the inaccessible world of the noumenal, for MacIntyre and Hauerwas, freedom is exercised by a subject with tight connections to the past of training and habit, to the intended future as given by its *telos*, and to other subjects as the guarantors of its own existence. Certainly, neither of them would wish to deny the centrality of that element of freedom which shows itself as freedom from political restraint and oppression,[2] but they would also want to affirm, against emotivist accounts, that

[1] Though not decisively supportive of this contention, it is suggestive that in his major work, *After Virtue* (3rd edition, London: Duckworth, 2007), MacIntyre refers to Kant more than to any other author, even Aristotle. For his part, Hauerwas, in the collection of readings representative of his work as a whole (*The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright [Durham NC/ London: Duke University Press, 2001]), certainly mentions a number of authors more frequently than Kant. These are invariably philosophers and theologians, however, who have had a positive influence on his thought. Kant stands out at the main 'opposition' figure.

[2] Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Tolerance and the Goods of Conflict," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays*, Volume 2 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 205-223, 213. Hauerwas challenges what he sees as the misguided aspects of the liberal notion of freedom, but often

the 'negative' form of freedom also includes freedom from unreasoning desire. One is not free who acts on whim.[3]

Furthermore, they are both unwavering in their conviction that freedom has a positive dimension; it is freedom *for* something, freedom to be able to pursue that which is good. Here we observe their common commitment to an Aristotelian conception of human action as *telos*-driven. What Aristotle has written in a slightly different context about practical wisdom would represent the view of both MacIntyre and Hauerwas on free human action:

> "[a] mark of the man of practical wisdom [is] to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect… but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general."[4]

Looking a little further at a key aspect of Kant's position which both Hauerwas and MacIntyre oppose, we note that it holds that the individual is able to stand outside of the flow of what could be described as goal-seeking action; indeed, on this account, it is only in the process of so doing that one can be considered free, for freedom, according to Kant, is by its very nature something quite other than the pursuit of self-centered desires that populate our daily experience. For Aristotle as for both Hauerwas and MacIntyre, such a way of seeing things misrepresents the reality of how human beings work. For them, thinking and actions are always immersed in the warp and weft of purposefulness (which, as will be indicate latter, finds its own context within narratives and traditions). Thus, freedom as inhering in this complex fabric rather than separated from it, must be conceived rather as the ordered outworking of this purposefulness.[5] MacIntyre's preferred way of expressing this is to say that free

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from the point of its oppressive character. See *A Community of Character: towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), pp. 80-82.

[3] Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, op. cit., Chapter 3 "Emotivism: Social Content and Social Context"; Stanley Hauerwas, "Christian Schooling," in *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), p. 220.

[4] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vi, 5 ($1140^{a}25$). Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, op. cit., Chapter 14, *passim*. E.g. "There is no present which is not informed by some image of some future and an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a *telos*…" (p. 215). While Hauerwas employs the word *telos* much less frequently that MacIntyre, the central notion is present throughout his thought. It has been noted that "eschatology can play a similar role in Hauerwas's narrative ethic to the role played by *telos* for Alasdair MacIntyre." (Samuel Wells, "Stanley Hauerwas's Theological Ethics in Eschatological Perspective," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000): p. 433). In his article *From System to Story*, we find a fuller explanation of the relationship between narrative and end/*telos*. The article is conveniently accessed in Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, op. cit., the relevant pages being 177-178.

[5] For MacIntyre, see "What is a human body?" in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays* (Volume 1, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 96, ("[it is an error to suppose] that there is something which I am over and above my body, namely a disembodied human mind."). Hauerwas ("Going Forward by Looking Back", in *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, op. cit., p. 101) can

action is primarily directed by rational reflection towards that which is *good* for the subject whereas Hauerwas tends to write in terms of a movement towards *truthfulness* about reality, a movement which is guided by a meaningful (narrative) account of what is sought. One need not see here a divergence of any major significance since Hauerwas clearly intends by his terminology to mean that quality in persons which disposes them to move towards the "truth about the good."[6]

As primarily attentive to questions of moral *philosophy*, MacIntyre's account of freedom gives more attention to the different philosophical positions to which he relates his own; thus he distinguishes his view of freedom from reductionist and materialist versions.[7] His mature position incorporates two *interrelated* modes of explanation in seeking to understand the antecedents of free actions: (a) what might be referred to as causal texture, or the in-principle explanation of aspects of human action in terms of physical causality, and (b) rational explanation, that is, the reasons a subject draws upon to formulate a line of action. While the former cannot be ignored in seeking to understand actions, it is the latter which provides them with their truly human dimension since they (reasons-for-acting) represent the subject's free choice among possible finalities. MacIntyre also insists that individual actions, however they might be explained, are not intelligible outside of (a) the context of settled action-dispositions or virtues around which they cluster and from which they derive their meaning (this means that the attempt to understand an isolated action of a subject within the confines of his or her immediate circumstances, e.g. physical setting and brain-states, is destined to fail); and (b) an appreciation of the wider historical setting in which present individual actions can be understood as in some way causally/rationally linked to decisions made in the dim historical past. It is difficult to conceive, notes MacIntyre, that such matters could ever truly be accounted for in the search for a full explanation of an individual ac-

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write that "put simply, story is a more determinative category than self" and within those stories of our lives, "agency names those skills necessary to make our past our own…" (id., p. 93).

[6] Hauerwas typically employs the word "truthfulness" to refer to that which a person seeks to be in pursuing the truth. We have already spoken above of the "good" and the "truly good" to indicate much the same idea as truth. In view of his refusal to make a sharp separation between the true and the good, his use of "truthfulness" must be read as including an openness to the good. As evidence of this we note his response to a critique from Julian Hartt, in which he is able to write the following: "For I not only think Hartt is right not to ask me to distinguish between cognitional and moral truth; I think it is essential not to draw that distinction" ("Why the Truth Demands Truthfulness: An Imperious Engagement with Hartt," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52/1 (1984): p. 146).

[7] Cf. "Hegel on faces and skulls," in *The Tasks of Philosophy…*, op. cit., pp. 74-85. Also "Behaviorism: Philosophical Analysis," in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, ed. W. T. Reich et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 110-115.

tion. Nevertheless, in his most recent thinking[8] he recognizes that, in his account of freedom, there are still loose ends that are yet to be tied up. In particular, he sees problems in bringing into settled relationship both human finality and bodilyness.

Hauerwas, with his more *theological* bent, or perhaps because of his suspicions about the narrative bases of much analytical philosophy, has not provided us with a detailed account of how his notion of freedom intersects with the various philosophical positions on the matter or even where he stands on the questions MacIntyre has addressed.[9] Suffice it to say that, in his writings, his account of freedom is broadly Aristotelian,[10] and that he has not articulated arguments which would stand in contradiction to what MacIntyre has proposed. Indeed, he has more than once acknowledged the MacIntyrean maxim that "the concept of an intelligible action is more fundamental than that of an action as such" thus affirming the necessity of a narrative context for judging the freedom of an action. In line with this is his oft-repeated affirmation that freedom is a gift, that is, that we are born or led into narratives that, to a greater or lesser extent, give us the means by which we are able to consider ourselves accountable for our actions. Freedom is therefore as much *given* to us as it is the outworking of our own deliberations and efforts.[11]

Some narratives, according to Hauerwas, are better able to provide such resources than others. Comparative evaluation of them is afforded *to some extent* by observing their practical results: what are the consequences of living according to this or that way of thinking? Hauerwas proposes that it is the particular narrative associated with the Jewish/Christian tradition which most fully allows for genuine freedom.[12] This is not something that MacIntyre would deny.

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[8] See his "What is a human body?" in *The Tasks of Philosophy…*, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

[9] Hauerwas has spoken directly of his concerns about contemporary approaches to analytic philosophy in his comment that "I am by no means happy with those paradigms [of philosophical analysis]. See "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological," in *Against The Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Winston Press, Minneapolis MN 1985), p. 45, n. 3.

[10] The whole discussion in the chapter "Character, Narrative and Growth," in *A Community of Character*, op. cit., pp. 129-152, is based upon an Aristotelian framework, in spite of Hauerwas's different take on the question of the 'unity-of-virtues.' Cf. n. 29 (p. 275) where he notes – approvingly – that "'freedom' for Aristotle is not a status prior to our acquisition of character, but is exactly dependent on our having become virtuous." Against Kant, he can later affirm that, "[i]n contrast, Aristotle (and I) assumed that our ability to hold ourselves responsible for our 'character' is context-dependent on the kind of narratives into which we have been initiated" (id., p. 275)

[11] For an illuminating illustration taken from Hauerwas's own experience which takes up this theme and provides an extended commentary on it, see "Character, Narrative and Growth" in *A Community of Character*, op. cit., pp. 145f.

[12] Christian beliefs "claim to provide a truthful understanding of God, self, and the world" (*A Community of Character*, op. cit., p. 90). Hauerwas uses the term 'world' to refer to the many other stories, incomplete, distorting of the truth, and not easily reconciled (Id, p. 91). "What we

His interest, however, is primarily philosophical in that he relies only on secular rationality (rather than the truths of revelation), and thus we do not find in his work such explicit statements about Christian freedom as Hauerwas the theologian is wont to express.

Virtue

MacIntyre was not the instigator of the revival of interest in virtue ethics, yet he is commonly identified as its key protagonist. His *After Virtue* has come to be considered one of its founding documents.[13] And yet it must be acknowledged that (somewhat) independently of MacIntyre, Hauerwas during the seventies was developing his own virtue-centered ethical theory.[14] Whereas MacIntyre based his work primarily upon Aristotle and Aquinas, Hauerwas began with Barth and the centrality of doctrine for a Christian morality, and then through the lense of both Wittgenstein and narrative theory (e.g. Hans Frei), examined the history of how Christians saw their lives as related to Christ. Only later did the Aristotelian/Thomist tradition find a central place in his thinking. His more intensive study of MacIntyre's work during the late seventies and early eighties led him to both recognize the existence of much common ground between the two, and to adopt some important insights from MacIntyre for his own thought.[15]

MacIntyre since *After Virtue* (1981) has consistently sustained a basically Aristotelian line when it comes to thinking about virtue.[16] Virtues are habitual action-dispositions which are oriented to the achievement of *eudaimonia*. Their expression is in fact what constitutes *eudaimonia*, although he later follows Aquinas in seeing this end or fundamental finality of life as only *fully* available in the age to come. Yet what is distinctive about MacIntyre's approach is his

require is… a true story… Christians believe scripture offers such a story" (Id., p. 149). Our freedom depends on the truthfulness of this story (cf. id., pp. 147-149).

[13] One recent scholar has noted: "The two texts that are most widely cited as the starting points and the inspiration for the [virtue ethics] movement are Elizabeth Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" and Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*" (Brewer Talbot, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 2).

[14] This can be seen from his doctoral thesis, later published as *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (2nd Edition, San Antonio TX: Trinity University Press, 1985). See also his autobiography, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2010), especially Chapter 3.

[15] Hauerwas first noticed the work of MacIntyre during his graduate study at Yale in the late sixties (*Hannah's Child*, op. cit., p. 68), but during the next decade he came increasingly under MacIntyre's influence. Further details of MacIntyre's influence can be found later in the same work (Id., pp. 160-161).

[16] His most recent major work, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999), xi, describes his account of the virtues as "that of a Thomist Aristotelian."

decision to formulate a grounding of the virtues in terms broader than on the basis of an analysis of human nature. Virtues arise as the "glue" binding together and maintaining humans in those social activities which are rewarding in their own right; thus we can say that virtues dispose towards such activities. Yet these activities – or practices as MacIntyre calls them – are not separable from the history of argument which sustains them within institutionalized forms, and relates them to one another within a wider community, and those individuals who are part of them must integrate the various practices which make up their social lives. Thus virtues are also tied to and defined by these aspects of practices.

Such thinking fits well with what Hauerwas writes about virtue. Like MacIntyre he is keen to broaden the Aristotelian approach so as to place the emphasis upon the social sources of the virtues.[17] Since humans *qua* humans inescapably inhabit the world of language and sociality, the qualities men and women need to live a good life must necessarily be expressed in the terms of that world.[18] And yet in a few minor ways, Hauerwas differs from MacIntyre in the style by which he expresses himself in relation to virtue. For example, he adopts some of his own vocabulary: commonly he employs the word "skill" to stand for "virtue" although he clearly intends a narrower scope of meaning than the word "skill" by itself implies. Virtues for him are skills we acquire which orient our actions towards the good, rather than, say, football skills we might develop in the interest of praise from others. In his later writings, Hauerwas, too, prefers to speak of particular virtues such as justice, humility and such rather than virtue in the abstract.[19] Also, when he is writing on the subject of virtues, his preferred term for describing their centre of integration in the individual is "character." Perhaps in an effort to dissuade his readers from interpreting any mention of personal identity in Kantian terms, Hauerwas consistently uses the term "character" – rather than "the self" or "identity" – to mean both the locus of virtues within the individual, and the role that one plays in one's life story and in that of others.[20]

And yet despite these surface differences, Hauerwas shares with MacIntyre a conviction about the centrality of virtue as the appropriate level of analysis at which human action must be examined, and the starting point from which

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[17] See his discussion of the virtues and human nature in *A Community of Character*, op. cit., pp. 121-125.

[18] The most sustained statement about these notions is to be found in *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, (2nd Edition, London: SCM Press, 2003), Chapters 6 & 7.

[19] "The Testament of Friends: How My Mind Has Changed," *The Christian Century* 107/7 (1990): pp. 212-216.

[20] Cf. Hauerwas's essay, "Going Forward by Looking Back: Agency Reconsidered," in *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, op. cit., pp. 93-103.

judgments about the good life are to be developed.[21] For both of them, the good life is that which is lived by the virtuous person. We cannot stand outside of our modes of seeking to live a virtuous life so as to "more objectively" define the good life in terms of universal obligations, maximization of pre-moral goods, or even universal (natural) laws.

Finally, we need to recognize that in writing about virtue and its foundations, over the years MacIntyre and Hauerwas have tended to turn their attention to quite different issues. MacIntyre has always been drawn to the task of situating his notion of 'virtue' within the wider questions of intellectual enquiry including but not limited to philosophy. His earlier concern was to interpret virtue in socio-historical terms, but later on he came to realize that his account was deficient without a consideration of its biological and developmental aspects.[22] Hauerwas, apart from his earlier interest in philosophical questions,[23] has in general preferred to apply his energies elsewhere. In fact most of his later writings have addressed particular normative ethical issues in which he has sought to apply virtue ethical thinking to the actual issues facing specific Christian communities.[24] The linkages to specifically philosophical matters are typically consigned to footnotes.

Narrative

Just as for both Hauerwas and MacIntyre, one cannot speak at length about a free action without bringing virtue into the discussion, so too one cannot reflect long about virtues and the structuring of character without mentioning that of which character forms an essential part – narrative. What is commonly called the self, MacIntyre refers to as the "narrative self" to remind us that what we might think of as a supra-historical point of integration of our experience, is in fact a unity only in virtue of the intelligibility of the story of our lives.[25]

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[21] Hauerwas sets out the basis for his ethic of virtue in brief terms in *A Community of Character*, op. cit., pp. 113-117. MacIntyre's clearest statement is found in Chapter 14 of *After Virtue*.

[22] See especially *Dependent Rational Animals*, op. cit., p. x. Hauerwas has in fact touched on the relation between virtues and human nature (*A Community of Character*, op. cit., pp. 121-125); here his emphasis is upon the historical dimension of man's nature.

[23] The key examples of this work are the published version of his *Character and the Christian Life*, sections of *A Community of Character*, the early chapters of Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Piches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) and in such articles as "From System to Story," in Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), p. 77.

[24] For example, "Should War be Eliminated? A Though Experiment," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, op. cit., pp. 392-425; Stanley Hauerwas and Richard Bondi, "Memory, Community, and the Reasons for Living: Reflections on Suicide and Euthanasia," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, op. cit., pp. 577-595.

[25] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, op. cit., Chapter 15.

When he has addressed this issue, Hauerwas has tended to avoid talk of a "self," in favour of "character," for similar reasons.[26] If there is one undergirding idea that has nourished the thought of both MacIntyre and Hauerwas in the vast range of matters they have addressed, and which has provoked the lion's share of opposition to their work, it is their conviction that narrative itself is the essential context in which theory, any theory, is to be understood. "It is the intentional nature of human action which evokes a narrative account" writes Hauerwas,[27] and since rational enquiry belongs to human activity, it too must take a narrative form. This is inescapable, and to the extent that each of us belongs to several narratives, including narratives about how to reason, and how to think morally, we have to take this into account when we are faced with theories and ideas rooted in traditions differing from our own. Such encounters, notes MacIntyre, are to be evaluated in terms of the explanatory power of the accounts of reality that the resources of the traditions allow them to produce.[28]

Both Hauerwas and MacIntyre exploit this idea of narrative in many ways, but perhaps their most broad-ranging application of it is to be found in their critique of the western liberal philosophical tradition. MacIntyre's focus in his trilogy has been on the semi-eclipse of the Aristotelian tradition during the centuries immediately prior to and during the Enlightenment, and the ascendancy of various traditions of enquiry so structured and related that they have no capacity within themselves to ever be able to develop transcending and problem-resolving possibilities. In short, western philosophy – and moral philosophy in particular – is heading down a cul-de-sac.[29] MacIntyre himself has expended great efforts in framing a history of the path of modern moral philosophy which points to the need to re-discover a form of practical rationality such as that shaped by the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas. Without that, the dominant western liberal tradition, molded as it is by the main currents of post-Enlightenment philosophy, will continue instinctively and vigorously to reject the idea that it itself is a tradition shaped by its past, by its cultural context and by its economic/political history. It will hold on to the myth that it is able to locate itself in a position where it can stand above all traditions, rather than to acknowledge that there is no such place.

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[26] Stanley Hauerwas, "Going Forward by Looking Back," op. cit., p. 94: "character is the source of our agency."

[27] Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "From System to Story", in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, op. cit., p. 178.

[28] For his claims in this regard for an Aristotelian/Thomist synthesis, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 170-215.

[29] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, op. cit., Chapter 5, headed, "Why the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality Had to Fail."

Hauerwas applies the notion of narrative in similar ways to MacIntyre but speaks from within an explicitly Christian theological position. That means that rather than carrying out his work without recourse to doctrinal positions as does MacIntyre, Hauerwas always assumes in his writings the stance of one who is operating within a Christian narrative. Concomitantly, his audiences tend to be those who see themselves as living and working within the Christian tradition, and to the extent that he speaks beyond these circles, his approach is characterized more by the style of a witness rather than that of an apologist. Here we see the formative influence on Hauerwas of the confessional stance of Karl Barth who famously remarked that "Belief cannot argue with unbelief, it can only preach to it."[30] The important manifestation, for Hauerwas, of the liberal philosophical tradition is the American political/economic/social system. Like MacIntyre, he sees the "system" as irredeemably corrupt, or at least redeemable only on the basis of the system shedding its foundations and submitting to the lordship of Jesus Christ. He seems not to have articulated a version of how in broad terms that might come to pass but, like MacIntyre who, in relation to western societies, sees progress in the immediate future only through local communities guided by Aristotelian-style narrative traditions of rationality,[31] he too points to the positive value of small-scale faithful Christian communities as the seedbeds out of which the Kingdom of God will reveal itself. Thus in this respect their sense of how a narrative tradition might best be incarnated, as it were, is quite similar, with MacIntyre perhaps more open to the possibility of communities based on narratives other than the Christian story.

Concluding Comments

In many respects, this summary provides only a very limited snapshot of the work of MacIntyre and Hauerwas in grounding Christian moral life on theologically-integrated philosophical bases. In this sense it raises a number of questions that only more extended discussion of their work would be able to deal with. In any case, of particular interest here is the role that the notion of "narrative" serves in relativizing, as it were, any purported master-narrative that might be put forward. And it is at this point, that we need to give thought to one culturally significant master narrative of extraordinary power within western societies – that of the rise and progress of science and of its metaphysical (as distinct from its methodological) foundation in naturalism.

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[30] Barth is purported to have made this statement. Reference to it is to be found in Anthony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), p. 9.

[31] For an extended treatment of this theme, see his "Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good" in *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame Press, 1998), pp. 235-252.

The Challenge of Science

Perhaps the most urgent contemporary challenge faced by any philosophical/theological project is that presented by the world of science. Prima facie, there would seem to be an unambiguous difference in the capacity of science and technology *as distinct from moral theory* to develop, to build on past work, and in general to make progress. Given that both Hauerwas and MacIntyre treat these two kinds of theory as conforming to essentially the same epistemological constraints, the challenge raised by this question would seem to be worthy of examination. The question one might address to them is the following: Is it true that the natural sciences have no epistemological advantages over theories of morality/practical reason?

The position of MacIntyre and Hauerwas

Throughout the extensive bodies of work that MacIntyre and Hauerwas have produced, we find both implicit and explicit affirmation of the idea that when faced with the task of comparing rival theories or traditions, those whose subject is of an empirical nature have no advantage over those dealing with practical or moral matters.[32] Scientific theories are no more able to be separated off from the narratives of intellectual endeavours with which they are associated than are theories of morality. Both typically take form as complex and articulated theories with only indirect means available to judge between rival possibilities, indeed the same means available for refutation and vindication apply to both.

Something of Hauerwas's attitude towards science can been grasped in a passage from his book, *Christian Existence Today*. Responding to what he saw as the moral theologian James Gustafson's claim that theological affirmations should be tested and revised in the light of recent scientific research, Hauerwas wrote:

> But rather than asserting that material theological convictions must be revised in the light of science, should not Gustafson indicate which scientific conclusion should be considered and why? Certainly I see no reason why the central affirma-

[32] In discussing notions of refutation and vindication of theories, MacIntyre makes no distinction between natural and moral theories, and is critical of those such as the Encyclopaedists who attempt to do so. (cf. *After Virtue*, op. cit., p. 268; *Three Rival Versions*, op. cit., pp. 18-24). Like moral theories, those of the natural sciences are marked by "rupture and discontinuity" (Id., p. 24). This is not to say that science does not make progress towards the truth. As he notes, "A history which moved from Aristotelianism directly to relativistic physics [rather than through Newtonian mechanics] is not an imaginable history." ("Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in *The Tasks of Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 21). Jean Porter offers a critique of MacIntyre on this whole question, but it is marred by relying too much on accepting the validity of the is/ought distinction (Jean Porter, "Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre," in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. Mark Murphy (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 38-69, especially pp. 53-54).

> tion of the Christian faith need to be surrendered or denaturalized in terms of the mere activity of science… The history of modern theology is littered with the wrecks of such revision done on the basis of a science that no longer has any credence; which is but a way of saying that while I have eminent respect for scientific work, I am less confident than is Gustafson that it is meaningful to assign to science qua science an overriding veridical status.[33]

In a footnote dealing with this matter, Hauerwas quotes approvingly from an article by MacIntyre:

> History has primacy over semantics and the continuities of history are moral continuities, continuities of tasks and projects which cannot be defined except with reference to the internal goods which specify the goals of such tasks and projects. Those tasks and projects are embodied in practices, and practices are in turn embodied in institutions and in communities. The scientific community is one among the moral communities of mankind and its unity is unintelligible apart from a commitment to realism… To be objective is to understand oneself as part of a community and one's work as part of a project and of a history. The authority of this history and this project derives from the goods internal to the practice. Objectivity is a moral concept before it is a methodological concept, and the activities of natural science turn out to be a species of moral activity.[34]

These two quotations are only a sample of many affirmations that Hauerwas and MacIntyre make of the notion that the natural sciences have no epistemological advantage over morality or practical reason.

The Challenge and its Rationale

It is not difficult to discern that theories having to do with what the world is like and what *can* be done, are having a much better run of things than those which seek to describe *the good* that we humans are to do. Much of the work to do with the former, i.e. scientific theories and technological development, seems to progress in a broadly stepwise manner or at least in fits and starts, with the occasional major advance resulting from so-called paradigm shifts, or major reconceptualizations. Consensus is generally achieved among the experts over time as the relevant data come in, and often the results are able to be put to good technological use for the betterment of mankind – an observation which seems to suggest that scientific theories are doing something more than that which is being achieved in the world of moral reflection and dialogue.

As an example of this seemingly more rapid and stepwise development, we might note developments in the field of mechanics since Newton's time. In the late seventeenth century and early eighteen century Newtonian physics was hailed as a groundbreaking development in understanding relationships between

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[33] Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham NC: Labyrinth Press, 1988), p. 19.

[34] Id., p. 9. The MacIntyre quotation is found in "Objectivity in Morality and Objectivity in Science," in *Morals, Science, and Society*, ed. H. Tristram Engelhardt and Daniel Callahan (New York: Hastings Centre, 1978), pp. 36-37.

mass, motion, force and gravity. It was able to take account of the available astronomical data, for example, in a way that the Ptolemaic system was incapable of doing. In the early twentieth century further progress was achieved in this field by means of Einstein's theories of special and general relativity. As the technology necessary for testing these theories has become available, they too have often been supported though at times with sufficient ambiguity to inspire alternate theories. One might cite empirical evidence such as that which raises questions about the assumption of uniformity of fundamental physical constants across time and thus seeks to qualify or re-found relativistic physics.[35] Certainly these developments can be seen as ruptures and discontinuities, and yet what appears to be happening is that even earlier empirically tested theories, though superseded, are retained *in large part*. Thus few would argue that the physics of Newton is no longer to be viewed as a major advance on previous knowledge because of the fact that it has been surpassed. For the vast majority of applications it is still entirely adequate. Newton's own treatment of the orbit of Halley's Comet is even today sufficient for physics students to use in predicting with excellent accuracy its next appearance from earth.[36]

Further examples of such developments could be mentioned: the impetus given to biological knowledge by Darwin's theory of evolution; the growth in understanding of the chemical properties of matter as shown in Mendeleev's version of the periodic table; Bowlby's attachment theory which revolutionized understanding of human emotional development. Certainly at each major step forward in understanding, there has been something like MacIntyre's conflict between rival traditions of interpretation, but these have been resolved through the availability of new empirical data in a way which seems to operate differently from that which occurs in contests between different traditions of moral enquiry. It is apparent, too, that this capacity of scientific understanding to develop and grow has had its effects on the way theology carries out it work. When apparent conflicts between the two surface, the latter feels itself bound to at least take account of developments within the field of science.[37] One would

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[35] See, for example, the work of the physicist John Webb and colleagues such as Victor Flambaum, Christopher Churchill, Michael Drinkwater and John Barrow, "Search for Time Variation of the Fine Structure Constant," *Physical Review Letters* 82 (1999): pp. 884-887.

[36] Isaac Newton, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (Chicago/London/Toronto: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 366-367.

[37] One can compare the manner in which the doctrine of creation is expressed in the Roman Catechism of 1566, Article 1, Chapter 2, para. 18 (*Catechismus Ex Decreto Concilii Tridentini: Ad Parochos Pii Quintii*, Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1845, p. 17): "The earth also God commanded to stand in the midst of the world… Lastly, He formed man from the slime of the earth… By referring to the sacred history of Genesis the pastor will easily make himself familiar with these things for the instruction of the faithful." (*Deus verbo suo iussit in media mundi parte consistere... Postremo ex limo terrae hominem sic corpore affectum et consti-*

be hard put to find parallel instances in which recent doctrinal statements took similar account of dominant theories of morality.

In contrast to the natural sciences, it is difficult to discern similar lines of progress in the field of ethics. Instead of global consensus on such issues as the morality of homosexual relationships, major divisions not only between western and traditional approaches but also within developed societies, are apparent.[38] In the United States, a context that has been extensively studied, a seemingly entrenched split exists in relation to public views on abortion such that it appears that neither side is confident of making significant progress for their cause in the foreseeable future.[39] This split can be interpreted as a proxy contest between rival moral traditions. The liberal hope that economic development would inevitably lead to secularization, the loss of influence of "troublesome and outdated" religious viewpoints, and the emergence of a truly "rational" value system also seems to have been dashed by stubborn exceptions to the rule. One could multiply examples of such seemingly irresolvable confrontations between rival theories of morality. The question raised here is this: over and above MacIntyre's explanation for the interminability of such divisions, is it possible that empirical evidence has a power to exert the kind of pressure necessary to lead to resolutions between rival traditions or paradigms within the natural sciences which it does not have to the same extent in relation to theories of morality ?

If such differences in persuasive power exemplified here were found to represent genuine differences, what might be their basis? Here one can do no more than suggest a few possibilities. The central challenge centres upon the claim that such differences exist.

First, there could be differences between the two modes of knowing in the ability of proponents of rival theories to agree on what would constitute appropriately discriminating tests. One might observe that in the natural sciences generally there emerges over time a broad agreement about the kind of experimental and other evidentiary processes necessary to discriminate between

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tutum effinxit… quae quidem facile erit parochis ad fidelium institutionem ex sacra Genesis historia cognoscere). Compare this to the similar section in the 1997 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Strathfield NSW: St. Pauls Publications, 1997), p. 283: "The question about the origins of the world and of man has been the object of many scientific studies which have splendidly enriched our knowledge of the age and dimensions of the cosmos, the development of life-forms and the appearance of man." (*Quaestio de originibus mundi et hominis obiectum estt plurium investigationum scientificarum, quae nostras cognitiones de aetate et dimensionibus mundi universi, de effectione formarum viventium, de prima hominis apparitione magnopere ditaverunt*. See *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), pp. 82-83).

[38] See World Value Survey material, www.worldvaluessurvey.org, accessed Sep 4, 2012.

[39] For an extensive account of recent surveys on various aspects of abortion in the US see "Abortion", www.gallup.com/poll/1576/abortion.aspx#2, accessed Sep 4, 2012,

the veracity of rival theories. Practical theories, on the other hand, are disadvantaged in that such agreement is difficult to achieve for a number of reasons: difficulty in testing theories which encompass both this-worldly and transcendent realities (e.g. how does one test the jihadist's belief about the relationship between involvement in terrorist activities and its rewards in the after-life?); emotional and practical commitments to theories/traditions that prevent critical stances (The theory of relativity does not tell me what to do in the way a moral theory does); or the existence of elements such as the is/ought distinction which can render a practical theory immune to empirical falsifiability.[40]

In relation to the second reason – emotional or practical commitments – one might argue that a crucial feature of natural scientific endeavour is that consensus can typically be achieved among people who operate with a variety of motivations, and/or who populate a vast array of traditions of moral enquiry. For example, in the light of the large body of medical and epidemiological evidence, few even within the tobacco industry would still argue for the harmlessness of heavy, long-term cigarette smoking, and this in spite of strong inner psychological pressures to do so. It is doubtful that such a consensus about the physical harm produced by heavy smoking is mirrored in a similarly pervasive and consensual belief among those of diverse motivations about the *morality* of smoking.[41] Similarly, today few pro-choice advocates hold that abortion is the taking of something other than human life; the scientific questions about whether an embryo is alive and whether it is human are not in dispute. What is

[40] The notion of falsifiability held an important place in twentieth-century philosophy of science. Karl Popper, for example, held that Marxism and Freudian theory among others were non-falsifiable traditions which tended to render themselves immune to feedback from events in the world. This was exhibited in their supposed capacity to "explain" *every* piece of evidence related to their theory. Moreover, many religious traditions incorporate beliefs in transcendent realities which are not amenable to empirical investigation, and to that extent are resistant to testing. And yet, for perhaps most traditions, there would seem to be – at some points – contacts with reality such that at least in principle a research project could lead to consensus about *the way things are or have been* which would result in qualifications of the convictions and approaches which are part of those traditions. As a faith that makes historical claims, Christianity opens itself up to this form of testing. Thus the apostle Paul could write to the Corinthians: "if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (I Cor 15:14). That is, however, the resurrection of Christ is to be conceived, the apostle certainly regarded it as having a within-history dimension, and thus, if it could be shown that such an event did not actually occur, then the Christian message would be irretrievably compromised.

[41] This example illustrates that the difference between natural and moral sciences cannot be ascribed simply to the fact that the former do not directly touch our personal lives while the latter do. The tobacco company executive, whose life would have been powerfully affected by the implications of theories of smoking-cancer linkage, might have taken a long time to accept the research findings, but will typically have reached a point of acceptance of them. Thereafter his/her continuing participation in the industry will probably be on the basis of a commitment to the free choice of the consumer to engage in smoking.

at stake, rather, is the *value* to be assigned or recognized in the unborn human life.[42]

What is *not* being suggested here is that the kinds of processes used by theoretical sciences to evaluate rival perspectives exist in some neutral position outside of any tradition of enquiry. Rather, what is being signaled is the possibility that these processes will typically form part of many traditions in such a way as to allow a *good-enough level* of comparison and judgment over time between rival orientations. This would seem to be not inconsistent with the way Hauerwas and MacIntyre conceive of the confrontation between rival traditions.

A second aspect apparent in the very nature of theories of practical truth might also render them difficult to evaluate by empirical means. What is referred to here is the commonly recognized disagreement among members of rival moral traditions about what constitutes the final end, the ultimate good, the truly right, etc. In western societies the conviction that a unitary notion of the good is not possible is now pervasive. More generally, agreement about what makes up the good for human beings is not easy to obtain, shaped as it is by a diverse range of religious traditions. Thus on a number of measures any formulation of the anti-religious Marxist utopia is difficult to square with the orthodox Christian conception as, likewise, are those post-Kantian theories which privilege values such as freedom and unaided human reason.

Finally, a third possible difference between theoretical and practical knowledge is that, while there might be no *in principle* problem in applying in the evaluation of practical theories the same kinds of testing processes as experimental sciences employ, in practice it is the case that few people are willing to allow their lives to be given over to experiments (with randomly assigned conditions) aimed at testing theories about what constitutes the good life. And while that "hindrance" exists, there is always the option of holding fast to one's current theories about what activities form the good life rather than following wherever any evidence might lead.

The Possibility of a Response

What effect this whole line of thought about the possible difference between theoretical and practical sciences might have on the framework set out by MacIntyre and Hauerwas is worth pondering. Given that it does not *necessarily* undermine their central conviction about "no neutral standpoint," one could

[42] What is not being questioned here is the agreement across cultures and moralities of what are called the first principles of practical reason. The negative evaluation of the intentional taking of an innocent life would seem to have general acceptance despite the effects of the Fall. Here, however, we are pointing to the difficulties in reaching agreement about lower-order principles of practical reason.

imagine their understanding being able to accommodate such a consideration. But what form ought it to take?

One possible approach is to view current accounts of the scientific endeavor and its philosophical underpinnings as constituting a distinctive form of narrative, yet one which by its very nature cannot serve as a *moral* narrative. That is, it could be viewed as instrumental to the extent that it kept such moral narratives firmly grounded in physical/natural reality but without the capacity *by itself* to generate a story by which individuals and communities could form a genuinely moral narrative.

Regarding the first aspect, the distinctiveness of science, we would note that, given fundamental agreements about what constitutes support or refutation of a scientific theory, research groups operating from a diverse range of purposes within different moral, political and individual stories are generally in a position to reach broadly based agreement as to the theoretical significance of a body of data. This is not to say that such progress follows a smooth trajectory; rival theories often contend over a period of decades, false basic assumptions can take generations to detect. Yet, to describe what typically happens as genuine and substantial progress would appear to be a fair statement.

Yet the other aspect must also be acknowledged. As *instruments*, the myriad scientific projects that have existed and continue to be active are always part of more or less satisfactory moral narratives. They are never self-contained institutional or personal stories since, shorn of integration within a moral tradition, they are simply tossed to and fro by political or quasi-political forces, and, of course, by the fragmented and not easily identified narratives that make up the lives of many science practitioners in Western societies.[43] Thus, a moral tradition might make use of a study into the effects on animals of various forms of experimental intervention which seek to determine the degree to which they inflict pain and suffering, and as such can easily be integrated into any of a number of moral traditions. The way such a tradition sees the appropriate treatment of animals could therefore be conditioned by the outcomes of such research, and thus tradition would advance. On the other hand, claims that such a research program should be viewed as complete in and of itself – as "pure" science – would not bear scrutiny since it would in fact form part of implicit, less-than-satisfying life narratives which are driven by dynamics such as possible publication of results in prestigious scientific journals, career advancement for its investigators, institutional status and the like. In this perspective, in short, there is no such thing as fully independent science.

[43] MacIntyre describes in more detail the oftentimes split identities of the modern Western individual in Chapter 3 of *After Virtue*.

Something like this way of considering empirical science would have the effect of slightly complicating the relatively straightforward approach of MacIntyre/Hauerwas to tradition comparability. No longer would the focus be solely upon the commensurability-only-with-difficulty of rival moral traditions. For, to the extent that such traditions penetrate into the realm of the empirical and the testable, thus far, too, do they open themselves up to genuine comparison, not necessarily in relation to their core convictions, but at the very least to implications or entailments that impinge upon the sensible world.

The kind of subordinate though substantive role mapped out for the science narrative is surely to be preferred over the overarching claims it makes today in the form of scientism. This latter is nothing other than the assertion that in itself it represents a moral tradition. As such, it inflicts corrosive effects on notions of agency and freedom which play central roles in moral traditions. A hint of this difficulty, noted above, is apparent in MacIntyre's more recent hesitations over his earlier formulations of the relationship between human finality and bodilyness. More generally, we can state the problem in the form of the question: how does one create a *genuinely convincing* space for human freedom, in view of the dominant naturalism of contemporary western elites? This points to another area calling out for further consideration.[44]

Conclusion

This article has sought to sketch the outlines of an approach, based upon the work of MacIntyre and Hauerwas, which provides Christian moral theology with some congenial meta-ethical equipment. This sketch has relied upon an examination of three concepts – freedom, virtue and narrative – together with the occasional sideways glance at contemporary secular moral traditions with which the Christian tradition finds itself in competition. It has also been suggested that this approach has to pay more attention to what seems to be a basic epistemological difference between so-called scientific and moral narratives. The case has been put that, in opposition to the MacIntyre/Hauerwas affirmation that "the activities of natural science" are merely another "species of moral activity," in fact science is a special case. In some way, it transcends the boundaries of rival moral traditions, though not as moral tradition, but in the subordinate role of an instrument of traditions. Some hints at possible ways of dealing with this challenge were proposed; it is not suggested, however, that the basic structure of the framework that Hauerwas and MacIntyre support would thereby

[44] For what it is worth, my own suspicion is that the kind of freedom we need to be defending probably has an inextricably theological dimension to it. This would make it impossible for someone like MacIntyre, who relies solely on secular reasoning, to provide such a persuasive account.

be compromised. The work of preparing for more fruitful engagement in the "court of the Gentiles" continues.

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MACINTYRE AND HAUERWAS ON METAETHICS AND SCIENCE

SUMMARY

The article seeks to sketch the outlines of an approach, based upon the work of MacIntyre and Hauerwas, which provides Christian moral theology with some congenial meta-ethical equipment. This sketch relies upon an examination of three concepts – freedom, virtue and narrative – together with the occasional sideways glance at contemporary secular moral traditions with which the Christian tradition finds itself in competition. The author suggests that this approach has to pay more attention to what seems to be a basic epistemological difference between so-called scientific and moral narratives. He claims that, in opposition to the MacIntyre/Hauerwas affirmation that "the activities of natural science" are merely another "species of moral activity," science in some way transcends the boundaries of rival moral traditions, though not as moral tradition, but in the subordinate role of an instrument of traditions. He gives some hints at possible ways of dealing with this challenge.

KEYWORDS: MacIntyre, Hauerwas, metaethics, science, freedom, virtue, narrative, morality, secularism.