PHIL 6000 – Virtue Ethics

3014 Moore Hall
Tues., 4:00-6:30
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Required Texts: *After Virtue* (MacIntyre)
Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (MacIntyre)
All other readings will be online

Course Description: Alasdair MacIntyre's ethical writings are among the most important and interesting produced during the 20th Century. They offer (among other things) a scathing critique of moral argumentation and theorizing in contemporary society, a reevaluation of the enlightenment of the Enlightenment, and a rethinking of the history of the virtues, justice, and rationality from early heroic societies up to the present. His general project is not wholly negative, however. MacIntyre also offers numerous intriguing suggestions about how to move forward from what he sees as our currently benighted ways of thinking towards a new age where the virtues and a non-instrumental understanding of rationality can again play a significant role. This course will be devoted to a close reading of some of MacIntyre's most important works. Along the way, we'll engage with most of the key figures in the history of ethical thought as well as many other significant philosophers, authors, playwrights, social scientists, and political theorists.

Schedule and Readings:

Week 1   Jan. 9   We'll discuss MacIntyre's "disquieting suggestion" about contemporary morality, as well as some methodological questions raised in the chapter.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 1
[2] Braddon-Mitchell and Nola, Introducing the Canberra Plan (excerpt)
[3] Brentano, *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*
[4] (*optional*) Scheler, Shame and Feelings of Modesty (excerpt)
[5] (*optional*) MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, Ch. II

[1] introduces one of MacIntyre's main theses—that our system of morality is in a state of "grave disorder"—and claims that neither the methods of analytic philosophy nor phenomenology/existentialism are sufficient for remedying this disorder. [2] outlines one popular approach to solving problems in analytic philosophy known as the "Canberra Plan." [3] is an early attempt to use a phenomenological approach in ethics. [4] provides another phenomenological analysis of some morally-important feelings in a way more in line with the style of phenomenology familiar from Husserl. [5] is a lecture by MacIntyre that discusses the genealogical/historical approach to the questions of ethics.

Week 2   Jan. 16   This week we'll consider the "noncognitivist" claim that our moral language and thought *can't* be fixed, *contra* MacIntyre.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 2
[2] MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, Ch. 1.3
[3] Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Preface
[4] Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Ch. 1.1-7

[5] (*optional*) Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew* (excerpt)
[6] (*optional*) Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Part I, ΔΙΑΨΑΛΜΑΤΑ (excerpts)
[7] (*optional*) Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Part I, Rotation of Crops
[8] (*optional*) James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, Ch. 22

In [1], MacIntyre presents a picture of contemporary moral discourse as consisting of interminable disagreement and gives the emotivist explanation of this state of affairs. [2] updates MacIntyre's picture of noncognitivist ethics by taking the development of expressivism into account. [3] introduces Moore's intuitionism, which (according to MacIntyre) gives emotivist theories of ethics the opportunity to thrive at Cambridge in the early 1900s. [4] contains a defense of the standard view that moral propositions aim to be prescriptive and universal, which may further indicate the historical contingency of the appeal of noncognitivist theories. [5]-[8] all involve vivid characters that can be seen as living as if emotivism were true.

Week 3   Jan. 23   Another one of MacIntyre's key claims in *After Virtue* is that every moral philosophy "characteristically presupposes a sociology." We'll look at some of the pieces of the sociology MacIntyre believes is presupposed by emotivism/expressivism this week.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 3
[2] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Ch. 1
[3] Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, Ch. I
[4] (*optional*) Weber, *Economy and Society* (excerpts)
[5] (*optional*) Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (excerpt)
[6] (*optional*) Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Part IV, Ch. 1

[1] argues that emotivism obliterates the distinction in society between authority and power, and then aims to demonstrate that this lost distinction shows itself in a means-ends view of rationality as well as in notions of personal identity inspired by Sartre. [2] goes into more detail about the views of rationality MacIntyre contends are in direct competition here. [3] is an attempt to trace the history of rationality from an instrument capable of evaluating ends to a instrument to be used for achieving any end whatever. [4] contains brief excerpts from Weber's writings that explain his thinking about the justification for the means-ends rationality discussed in [1]-[3]. [5] presents Sartre's popular statement and defense of existentialism as well as its view of the self. [6] presupposes something like Sartre's view of the self when it begins with Beauvoir's famous line, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." The chapter then sketches out the early development by means of which a human being is supposed to become a woman.

Week 4   Jan. 30   MacIntyre suggests that our path to the current state of disorder began when the thinkers of the Enlightenment tried to separate philosophy from religion, politics, and aesthetics and to give the subject its own independent rational justification. We'll aim to understand this "Enlightenment project" and its purported failure this week.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 4
[2] Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Part I, Preface
[3] (*optional*) Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Part II, The Balance between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality (excerpts)

[4] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.3.3
[5] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Ch. 4
[6] (*optional*) Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Second Section
[7] (*optional*) Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*, Ch. 5

In [1], MacIntyre explains what he takes the so-called Enlightenment project to be and argues that the project culminates in failure with Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. [2] contains Kierkegaard's famous posing of the fundamental question of ethics as requiring an arrational choice. More detail about the purported necessity of this choice and what the choice entails can be found in [3]. [4] gives Hume's well-known argument against reason as motivating force. [5] contains a more recent argument as to why the Enlightenment project can't find success in the work of Kant. [6] is the most important part of Kant's work under discussion in [1] and [5]. [7] gives a philosophically-informed history of what inspired the Enlightenment project.

Week 5   Feb. 6   This week, we'll look at MacIntyre's claim that, not only did the Enlightenment project fail, but it *had* to fail because it was aiming for something impossible. We'll also begin to consider what a well-ordered ethical theory might look like.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 5
[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7
[3] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Ch. VIII
[4] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3.1.1
[5] (*optional*) Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II:1,3,5
[6] (*optional*) Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, Book I
[7] (*optional*) MacIntyre, The *Theses on Feuerbach*: A Road Not Taken

[1] argues that the Enlightenment project could not succeed because the authority of moral rules cannot be grounded in human nature alone—an idea of man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos* is also needed. [2] contains Aristotle's famous "function argument," which claims that the *telos* of human life is the life of the good man. [3] presents a fuller account of what practical rationality looks like for Aristotle given this end. [4] is the passage from Hume that has been taken to disallow deriving 'ought's from 'is's, and which appears to ruin any hopes for a naturalistic teleological ethics. [5] contains several of the key passages that outline Aquinas's take on the human *telos*. [6] illustrates the way in which moral education was viewed by one major figure of the Enlightenment. [7] gives another view of what a society that could sustain a well-ordered moral theory might look like, deriving from an early work by Marx.

Week 6   Feb. 13   Obviously, attempts to give an independent rational justification for the principles of morality didn't end with Kierkegaard. MacIntyre argues that the Enlightenment thinkers' failure to find this justification required either a new non-Aristotelian *telos* or a rethinking of the Kantian project. We'll look at utilitarianism as an example of the first approach and theories based on rights as examples of the second.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 6
[2] Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, Book IV, Ch. VI
[3] Tuck, The Dangers of Natural Rights

[4] MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, Ch. 3.1,2
[5] (*optional*) Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Ch. 10
[6] (*optional*) Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 2.1-10
[7] (*optional*) MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, Ch. 2.2
[8] (*optional*) Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, preface

[1] presents MacIntyre's arguments that utilitarianism and rights theories are consequences of the failure of the Enlightenment project and that these theories don't succeed in generating the kind of rational grounding necessary. [2] is the final chapter of Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*, where he seems to admit that the principle of utility can't be given a completely rational justification. [3] is an article by one of the most important historians of natural rights theories, which raises questions about the wisdom of natural rights approaches in ethics. [4] contains a more general critique of what MacIntyre labels "Morality"—the form of theory that answers to the question, "How should one live?" have historically tended to take within academic philosophy. [5] presents some of Bernard Williams's reasons for being skeptical of this "peculiar institution" of Morality as well. [6]-[8] concern (what MacIntyre calls) the "moral fictions" of utility and natural rights. [6] contains Mill's discussion of higher and lower pleasures. [7] discusses the role of pleasure in Hume's theorizing. [8] is the preface to the work by Nozick that is often credited with reigniting interest in rights-based theories.

Week 7	Feb. 20	According to MacIntyre, the failure of utility- and rights-talk to rationally ground morality, while nevertheless remaining the primary languages of moral debate, leads to a masking of the "arbitrariness of the will and power at work" in settling such debates. This week we'll discuss MacIntyre's attempt to unmask, in particular, the claims to authority made by those with supposed "managerial expertise."

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 7 & 8
[2] Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, Ch. 1
[3] (*optional*) Putnam, Fact and Value in the World of Amartya Sen
[4] (*optional*) Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (excerpts)
[5] (*optional*) Chomsky, A Review of B.F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*
[6] (*optional*) Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior*, Conclusion
[7] (*optional*) Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXV

The chapters in [1] set out to show that there is no domain of morally neutral facts in relation to which the bureaucratic manager is expert and that these so-called experts are not really in possession of any true law-like generalizations that could ground their expertise. Without these two things, MacIntyre argues, the pronouncements made by the character of the manager can't claim legitimate authority. [2] contains an introduction to the concept of ideology in the Marxian sense, which aids in understanding and thinking through the unmasking MacIntyre is attempting in these chapters. [3] is an attempt to unmask the role that a faulty distinction between fact and value can play in economic thinking. [4] is a well-known discussion of the disastrous role obedience to bureaucratic authority can have. [5] is Chomsky's famous critique of behaviorism, which bolsters the claims made in Chapter 7 of [1] that hu-

man behavior can't be understood in purely mechanistic terms. [6] contains the thoughts of one of the world's leading social theorists about the possibility and successes of social science. [7] is a brief passage from Machiavelli discussing the ineliminable role of *fortuna* in our lives.

Week 8   Feb. 27   This week we'll discuss the culmination of the first half of the book: the supposedly-forced choice between opting for a morality based on power and interests in the spirit of Nietzsche or reassessing the prospects for a well-functioning moral theory in the spirit of Aristotle.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 9
[2] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Ch. XVII
[3] Geuss, Marxism and the Ethos of the Twentieth Century
[4] (*optional*) Geuss, Liberalism and Its Discontents
[5] (*optional*) Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, IV.335
[6] (*optional*) Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*

[1] presents MacIntyre's arguments for the claim that we can either see Nietzsche as revealing that morality is nothing but a power struggle between particular interests or reassess whether or not Nietzsche's critiques hit their target in relation to Aristotelian ethics. [2] discusses the development and tradition of classical liberalism *à la* Mill, which arguably can be seen as accepting the Nietzschean option presented by MacIntyre. [3] is a reflection on post-Nietzschean moral philosophy that also considers Marxism as world-view attempting to provide guidance for human life in this setting. [4] is another piece by Geuss discussing the tradition of liberalism and the difficulties involved with thinking of any other viable alternative. [5] is a brief statement of Nietzsche's views about what the claims of moral philosophy are really up to. [6] is widely considered to be Nietzsche's most important work in moral philosophy.

Week 9   Mar. 13   The whole thrust of MacIntyre's theorizing about moral thought so far has been based around the idea that to understand a type of moral thought one must also understand its inheritances and historical context. Therefore, in order to get a clear sense of the prospects for an Aristotle-inspired ethics, we must get a sense of what came before Aristotle and what his world was like. We'll begin that undertaking this week by looking at some so-called heroic societies and Athens up to the time of Plato.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 10 & 11
[2] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Ch. II-V
[3] (*optional*) Homer, *The Iliad* 1.1-260, 16
[4] (*optional*) Homer, *The Odyssey* 13.283-503
[5] (*optional*) *Njal's Saga*, Ch. 116, 123, 127-130
[6] (*optional*) *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, The Boyhood Deeds
[7] (*optional*) Sophocles, *Philoctetes* (excerpt)
[8] (*optional*) Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, II.34-46

[1] is MacIntyre's discussion of some important virtues, their derivation from particular social structures, and their roles in heroic societies and in ancient Athens. [2] is a long reading where MacIntyre notes competing conceptions of justice and

rationality emerging from the inheritors of the Homeric canon and being disputed in Athens by the time of Plato. (This is a lot of reading, so just try to get through some of it leaving enough time and energy to at least glance at one or two of the optional pieces.) [3] and [4] give a picture of some of the virtues in Homer. Agamemnon and Achilles seem forced to respond in ways appropriate to their station and honor in Book 1 of *The Iliad*. Book 16 shows some of the famous friendship between Achilles and Patroclus. [4] illustrates the way cunningness and deception were valued in Homer. [5] is from one of the major Icelandic sagas showing both the role of shaming and honor and the sometimes-tragic dimensions of winning. [6] contains a description of some exploits of one of the great Irish heroes, Cúchulainn. [7] is an exerpt from the play by Sophocles that MacIntyre makes a lot out of in [1]. [8] is Pericles's famous Funeral Oration, which portrays Athens itself as something of a Homeric hero.

Week 10   Mar. 20   Having established the context in which Aristotle's ethics and politics arise, this week we'll attempt to get an understanding of what Aristotle's theories say and how they can form the foundation of a well-functioning ethics.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 12
[2] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Ch. VI-VIII
[3] (*optional*) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6-9
[4] (*optional*) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.3-13
[5] (*optional*) Aristotle, *Politics* II.1261^{a}23-1261^{b}5, III.4
[6] (*optional*) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.13, III.1-5, VI.1-2, VII.1-3
[7] (*optional*) Burnyeat, Aristotle on Learning to be Good

[1] is MacIntyre's account of Aristotle's virtue-based ethics. [2] (which again is a lot, but read what you can) is MacIntyre's later discussion of Aristotle's views on practical rationality and justice. [3] is Aristotle's overview of the virtues of character. [4] is Aristotle's treatment of the intellectual virtues. [5] contains Aristotle's discussion of the well-functioning *polis* and the relation between being a good citizen and being a good person. [6] contains important discussions of human psychology that govern Aristotle's ethical theory. [5] is a useful and much-cited work on the role of character in Aristotle's ethics.

Week 11   Mar. 27   Last week we left Aristotle's ethics facing three main problems: (*i*) it relied on an outdated biology; (*ii*) it relied on a person's location in an outdated from of political life; and (*iii*) it didn't take into account fully enough the possibility of conflict in ideas about ends and happiness. This week, we'll begin to ask whether mediaeval writers who dealt with the virtues can helpfully supplement and improve Aristotle's basic account.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 13
[2] Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIX.1-17
[3] Augustine, *Confessions*, Book II
[4] (*optional*) MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Ch. IX
[5] (*optional*) Abelard, *Ethica* (excerpt)
[6] (*optional*) Guy, *Thomas Becket: Warrior, Priest, Rebel*, Ch. 17
[7] (*optional*) Dante, *Inferno*, Cantos I-III

In [1], MacIntyre attempts to situate the specifics of mediaeval ethical thought, which he takes to improve upon the pure Aristotelian account we discussed last time, by thinking of life as a journey along which obstacles must be overcome on the way to happiness within the often chaotic conflicts prevalent in the culture of the time. [2] presents Augustine's thinking about the *telos* of human life and the roles earthly and divine justice might play in it. [3] is one of the most famous passages from the *Confessions*, where Augustine undermines one of the guiding thoughts of ancient Greek philosophy, that no one knowingly does wrong: Augustine shows that knowing right from wrong is not enough to ensure virtuous behavior. [4] gives MacIntyre's general take on Augustine's account of divine law and justice as discussed (in part) in [2] and [3]. [5] is another mediaeval work on ethics that challenges ancient Greek thought: according to Abelard, you *can't* do evil without knowing that you're doing evil. [6] contains a brief, popular account of the clash between Henry II and Thomas Becket. [7] is the beginning of the *Divine Comedy* in which Dante invents the "personal epic" in which the author undertakes a journey in search of meaning and understanding in his life.

Week 12   Apr. 3   This week we'll discuss MacIntyre's attempt to synthesize everything learned so far about the virtues and a well-ordered ethical theory to come up with a workable modern account of the virtues and a human *telos*.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 14 & 15
[2] Nussbaum, Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach
[3] (*optional*) MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, Ch. 4.12,13
[4] (*optional*) Ricoeur, Narrative Identity
[5] (*optional*) Austen, *Mansfield Park*, vol. III.2-3
[6] (*optional*) Schlegel, *Lucinde, a novel*, An Idyll of Idleness
[7] (*optional*) Heine, The Mountain People: Some Notes on the Ik of North-Eastern Uganda

[1] gives MacIntyre's definition of practices, goods internal to practices, and virtues, as well as presents his account of the unity of a human life. [2] attempts to defend an ethics based on the virtues from charges of relativism. [3] is a more recent defense by MacIntyre of some of the ideas presented in Chapter 15 of [1]. [4] is Ricoeur reflecting on some issues regarding narrative identity roughly twenty years after he began to see the importance of the notion while completing his major three-volume work *Time and Narrative*. [5] shows Austen's character, Fanny, dealing with the suspect constancy of Mr. Crawford and the expectations of duty from her uncle. [6] raises some worries for MacIntyre's project by suggesting that the true goal of life might be "pure vegetating." [7] contains a major critique of the work by Turnbull on the Ik people mentioned in [1].

Week 13   Apr. 10   This week we'll begin to discuss two major obstacles faced by anyone wanting to rehabilitate an ethics of the virtues: (*i*) classical liberalism has taught us not to think of society as being the locus of working towards some public good; (*ii*) the narrative understanding of human life has been lost in part by the marginalization of art. The effects of (*i*) on our conception of justice will also have to be addressed.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 16 & 17
[2] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality*, Ch. XX

[3] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book IV.I, VIII
[4] (*optional*) Marx, Estranged Labor
[5] (*optional*) Heidegger, *Nietzsche, vol. I*: *The Will to Power as Art*, Ch. 13
[6] (*optional*) Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* §§1-4, 8, 11
[7] (*optional*) Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Ch. 7 (excerpt)

[1] presents MacIntyre's arguments that something important has been lost by the individualism of modern life. [2] is the final chapter of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* in which MacIntyre further reflects on competing contemporary pictures of justice and how to judge the competitions. [3] contains some of Rousseau's discussion of the concept of a general will and common good. [4] presents some of Marx's unfinished notes on the value and human need for the kind of work that is maintained by practices of the sort MacIntyre is trying to rehabilitate. [5] presents some thoughts from Heidegger about how art came to belong to "the domain of the pastry chef" through the development of aesthetics. [6] and [7] are brief statements of the two theories of justice discussed in Chapter 17 of [1].

Week 14   Apr. 17   This week we'll discuss MacIntyre's conclusion that an Aristotelian version of ethical theory based on the virtues can withstand Nietzsche's critiques as well as his thoughts about overcoming the "dark age" of the virtues he contends we're currently experiencing.

[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Ch. 18
[2] MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 4.2,3
[3] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Ch. XVIII
[4] (*optional*) Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*: *An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, Ch. III
[5] (*optional*) Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*: *What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?*, Ch. XI.3
[6] (*optional*) Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of Benedict*, Ch. VII, XXXIII, XXXIV, LVIII, LXXIII
[7] (*optional*) Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*: *Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, Ch. I.1

[1] is MacIntyre's attempt to answer the "Nietzsche or Aristotle?"-question in favor of Aristotle in light of the work done in Chapters 10-17. [2] is a more recent assessment of the prospects for the success of various societies based on the virtues. [3] and [4] are both contributions to the general project of trying to adjudicate between competing views about human life and value. [5] contains some of the pessimistic writings of Trotsky, which are referred to in [1]. [6] is a collection of some of the more interesting rules of the Benedictine order. [7] is a recent attempt to understand forms of life governed by rules in which a life is "linked so closely to its form that it proves to be inseparable form it."

Assignments:

Presentation	10%	10-15 minute presentation on a relevant article/chapter	
Paper Prep.	5%	Paper-topic proposal and bibliography	Due: Apr. 10 by 8pm
Connections	5%	Send me something from life that relates to the course	Due: Apr. 17 by 8pm

Participation   10%   Regular attendance and participation is expected

Final Paper   70%   Roughly 15-20 page seminar paper   Due: Apr. 20 by 8pm

Accommodations: Any student with a documented disability who needs to arrange reasonable accommo-dations must contact me and the appropriate Disability Services office at the beginning of the semester. The two disability service offices on campus are: Disabled Student Resources and Services (269) 387-2116 and the Office of Services for Students with Learning Disabilities (269) 387-4411.

Academic Honesty: You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the university's policies and procedures that pertain to Academic Honesty. If there is reason to believe you have been in-volved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s). If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with me if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment.

Grading: The grading for this course will be based on the following scale.

A	$[92.5, 100]$
BA	$[87.5, 92.5)$
B	$[82.5, 87.5)$
CB	$[77.5, 82.5)$
C	$[72.5, 77.5)$
DC	$[67.5, 72.5)$
D	$[60, 67.5)$
E	$[0, 60)$