

A CENTURY OF MODERN ANGLO-AMERICAN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

Anyone who proposes to give an overview of modern Anglo-American moral philosophy during the last one hundred years is immediately confronted by the fact that one of the more significant things that has recently taken place in Anglo-American moral philosophy is the presentation by one prominent Anglo-American moral philosopher of precisely such an overview. I refer, of course, to the thesis presented by Alasdair MacIntyre in 1981 in his book *After Virtue* and elaborated in other books since.¹ Given the importance of this thesis within modern Anglo-American moral philosophy and the controversy it caused, I am under some obligation to begin my task of giving an overview of Anglo-American moral philosophy by giving an overview of this overview of Anglo-American moral philosophy.

MacIntyre and Fragmented Moral Traditions

MacIntyre's thesis is that modern moral philosophy, especially in the Anglo-American world, is marked by a set of disagreements which it is impossible rationally to resolve. Proponents of rival moral views do argue, and argue validly, from or to certain premises or first principles but these premises or first principles themselves never get beyond the status of arbitrary assertion.² The reason for this, says MacIntyre, is that in our contemporary culture the language of morality is in a state of disorder and fragmentation. For that language contains ideas and concepts which are derived from several different and conflicting traditions where those ideas and concepts were

¹ *After Virtue* was published by the University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, and appeared in a second edition in 1984. Some indication of the interest and debate it caused can be found on the back cover of that second edition. All my references are to the second edition. MacIntyre's later books, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, were published by the same press in 1988 and 1990 respectively.

originally at home. Once divorced from their contexts, however, these same ideas and concepts not only undergo various changes of meaning but also, because they have conflicting sources, fail to come together into a coherent whole. Instead they form an “unharmonious mélange of ill-assorted fragments.”³ Consequently when modern moral philosophers come to use this mélange to argue about morality, they can justify their conclusions well enough from one or more of these fragments but they cannot justify these fragments themselves. They cannot say why this one should be adopted rather than another or why the one they have adopted is superior to all the rest. For the contexts in which it was and would be possible to justify any such fragments have been lost. So argument collapses into blank assertion and counter-assertion.

Such is the thesis and the first thing to ask about it is whether modern Anglo-American moral philosophy does display the kind of disagreement MacIntyre says it does. One must certainly concede that Anglo-American moral philosophy does present us with a series of rival moral doctrines (as notably the several forms of utilitarianism and deontology) and also with a series of rival positions on moral issues (as notably on abortion, euthanasia, social justice, welfare, and so on). But one would be hard put to it to find any period of philosophy anywhere which did not similarly present us with a series of disagreements and rival doctrines.⁴ Moreover, one should not exaggerate the extent of the disagreement. For instance, there are only two or perhaps three moral theories that have any great currency or standing in modern Anglo-American moral philosophy, I mean the two of utilitarianism and deontology, along with their several variants, and virtue ethics as the third (which is a relative new-comer on the scene and is not as well worked out). There are other theories floating about the edges to be sure, as the

² *After Virtue*, pp. 6-8.

³ *After Virtue*, p. 10. See also *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 190-94.

⁴ As Frankena pointed out in his ‘MacIntyre and Modern Morality,’ in *Ethics* 93 (1983), pp. 580-581.

natural law theory of John Finnis and Germain Grisez,⁵ which add some extra variety. But in the mainstream the options given serious attention are remarkably few.

If there is anything new that has broken into Anglo-American moral philosophy in more recent years it is various group- or culture-centered theories. I have in mind theories that take their premises and methods from some group or other that has, so it is claimed, been historically marginalized or oppressed by the dominant philosophy. The most obvious of these theories is feminist ethics, but there are, or could also be, ethics or theories focused round homosexuals, blacks, hispanics, native Americans, and the like. All these theories, despite their differences, agree in their basic strategy. They all say, for instance, that the favored group in question, women or blacks or native Americans, has a collective view or approach to ethics that is significantly different from, and, at least according to its proponents, significantly superior to, the prevailing view. This prevailing view, whether it be utilitarian or deontological or something else, may claim to be operating on the basis of universal principles of objective reason but its so called reason and its so called objectivity are really the particular self-interest of the dominant class.⁶ This class is typically identified as white, European, and male.

These group-centered theories which repudiate the tyranny, as they see it, of the reason of the dominant class, are typically claiming that there is no single reason or rationality valid for all men everywhere. There are many reasons and rationalities, each peculiar to the several groups or genders or cultures or traditions that there may be. Such theories represent a fairly radical breakdown in a consensus about reason that has been a distinctive mark, not only of Anglo-American philosophy, but of almost all philosophy for almost all its existence. The consensus in question

⁵ Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, published in 1980; *Fundamentals of Ethics*, published in 1983, and *Moral Absolutes*, published in 1991. Grisez, 'The First Principle of Practical Reason,' published in 1965, and *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, published in 1983.

⁶ This is a point noted by MacIntyre himself in *Whose Justice?* pp. 5-6.

was that reason was objective, universal, and the same for all, and that philosophy was the attempt, using this reason, to reach objective and universal truths the same for all.⁷

MacIntyre represents a similar break-down in the same consensus. He claims that the fragments of conflicting traditions, from which modern moral philosophy is currently made up, lead to irresolvable disagreement, not only because they have been divorced from the traditions where they naturally belong and have their sense, but also because these traditions themselves are not rationally commensurable. Rationality, says MacIntyre, is itself the product of a tradition and is always relative to that tradition. There exists, he says, no rationality as such. There exists only rationality within a tradition. So the fragments from different traditions that, according to MacIntyre, constitute moral language within modern Anglo-American philosophy not only meet each other as mutilated fragments but also as fragments that carry with them wholly different rationalities and standards of justification.⁸

MacIntyre's thesis about Anglo-American moral philosophy is thus part of a much larger break-down, not in Anglo-American moral philosophy simply, but in philosophy altogether. Still, it could remain true as a thesis about the nature of philosophy, or of Anglo-American moral philosophy in particular. Perhaps rationality is always the rationality of a tradition and perhaps Anglo-American moral philosophy is the result of an attempt to philosophize as if this were not so. But this question can, in fact, be answered fairly quickly. For MacIntyre's thesis and the argument he gives for it labor under insoluble difficulties.

First, the premise of the argument is false. That premise is the assertion, not just of disagreement, but of radical or incommensurable disagreement within Anglo-American moral

⁷ MacIntyre contends that this consensus was only ever true of the Enlightenment, *Whose Justice?* pp. 6-11. But this contention seems false. There is hardly a single great philosopher before the present century and a half who did not accept and appeal to a universal and objective reason.

⁸ These points are made especially in *Whose Justice?* chapters xviii-xx.

philosophy. There has been no such radical or incommensurable disagreement over the past 100 years. Or if there has been it has emerged only very recently and only among people like MacIntyre himself who espouse group-centered theories of rationality. People have disagreed, to be sure, as philosophers have always done, but they have also agreed that the way to solve disagreements is by appeal to objective and universal reason and they have tried so to resolve them. Examples are legion of philosophers changing their minds and giving up positions or adopting new ones because of the arguments of other philosophers. If the arguments keep going on, it is because there is always more left to understand and because old philosophers are always giving way to young ones who have to do the arguing and understanding all over again for themselves.

Second, the conclusion does not follow from, nor is rendered plausible by, the premise even were the premise true. That people disagree, even irresolubly, does not by itself show that there is no rational way to resolve the disagreement. There may well be such a way but not all people can be got to follow it. Some might not be intelligent enough to follow it. Some might be too ignorant to follow it. Others might be perverse and refuse to follow it. Others might want to follow it but fail to do so because of cowardice or impatience or despair or lack of self-control. MacIntyre's thesis would only follow from or be supported by his premise if he assumed the further premise that everyone will behave rationally or can be persuaded to accept the determinations of reason. That premise is false. As old Aristotle bluntly put it over two millennia ago: some people need force, not persuasion.⁹

Third, even if the conclusion did follow nothing would be proved, for the conclusion can be given no acceptable sense. To begin with, the way MacIntyre describes a tradition leads

⁹ *Metaphysics* 1009a17-18. MacIntyre is aware that his conclusion is not strictly entailed by his premise, *Whose Justice?* p. 346. He thinks it nevertheless a plausible response to that premise.

inevitably to indeterminacy. MacIntyre speaks of a tradition as something that embraces certain fundamental agreements.¹⁰ But how do we know when an agreement is to count as fundamental and when not? One of the things that traditions will disagree on is precisely what to count as fundamental. Views about what is fundamental and what is trivial must inevitably form a substantive part of what, in a given MacIntyrean tradition, it means to be rational. So if conditions on what can reasonably count as fundamental can be laid down in advance then there will after all be a rationality that is independent of traditions or a rationality as such, namely whatever these conditions are. If no such conditions can be laid down in advance then we are never going to be able to pick out one tradition from another because we are never going to know which set of agreements is fundamental and so actually constitutes a tradition. The traditions we do in fact pick out will be arbitrary. They will reflect the opinions that we ourselves happen to have about what may reasonably count as fundamental. Certainly, not a few critics will say this of the traditions MacIntyre picks out. Every one of these traditions is constituted by thinkers who are white, European, male, and, for the most part, dead. Nowhere, for instance, does MacIntyre suggest that the views of women, living or dead, might have constituted a tradition of their own.

The same problem can be made to arise in this other way. MacIntyre speaks a lot about traditions and conceptual schemes, and about how they can, despite their supposed incommensurability, confront each other in mutual challenge and comparison. In such confrontations, he says, one tradition can measure itself against another in respect of its capacity to anticipate and solve its own and the other's internally generated problems. A tradition can even come to acknowledge that another tradition is better equipped in this regard than it itself is and so come to concede that, even in its own terms, the other tradition is superior.¹¹ But how are

¹⁰ *Whose Justice?* p. 12. See also *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 116-17, 128.

¹¹ These are themes of *Three Rival Versions*. See especially chapters V-VIII.

traditions to identify themselves and each other in order to reach such conclusions? And how are we to identify traditions in order to assess the truth of such conclusions? One way to do so, and a way MacIntyre seems to have in mind, is to equate a tradition with a particular philosophical school. One may think of the ancient Stoics and Epicureans or, with MacIntyre himself, of medieval Augustinians and Aristotelians.¹² But a school in this sense is little more than a set of distinctive doctrines, and a set of distinctive doctrines is not the same as a conceptual scheme or an incommensurable rationality. MacIntyre could perhaps insist that it is or that that is what he means by a conceptual scheme or a rationality. If so he is using ‘conceptual scheme’ and ‘rationality’ in peculiar and contentious ways. He is certainly using them in ways too weak to sustain his general claim that there is no common universe of understanding in terms of which disagreements between such schemes can be straightforwardly stated, discussed, and resolved. A difference in doctrines is not a difference in universes of discourse and understanding.

In short, MacIntyre faces an impasse. He has to define the key terms of his thesis in some way or other in order for that thesis to say something definite and intelligible. If he defines them to mean a sort of philosophical school the thesis will be implausible not to say false. There is no reason to suppose that philosophical schools are incommensurable rationalities of the sort the thesis requires. If he defines them to mean whatever they need to mean for the thesis to be true, the thesis will be trivial. It will tell us only about how MacIntyre is using certain words and nothing about substantive issues in the history of philosophy. If he defines them by reference to fundamental agreements the thesis will be indeterminate and arbitrary. It will not enable us to say what can or cannot count as fundamental. If he wants to define them in some other way, we do not know what that way is and it is hard even to guess what it could be.

At all events, we are now in a position to conclude that MacIntyre’s thesis cannot be a

¹² *Three Rival Versions*, chs. V and VI.

true account of modern Anglo-American moral philosophy. It is too indefinite or trivial or lacking in plausibility to be an acceptable account of anything. MacIntyre's thesis is rather one of the things that any account of modern Anglo-American moral philosophy is itself going to have to account for. Note, then, that that thesis is in a certain way a thesis of despair. While not completely despairing of reason, it despairs of reason enough to claim that there is no common universe of discourse and understanding the same for all men always and everywhere. To this extent MacIntyre shares the historicist thinking that has been dominant in Continental philosophy since Hegel, or at any rate since Nietzsche, and has now become increasingly dominant in Anglo-American philosophy too.¹³

Rawls and the Abandonment of Moral Philosophy

MacIntyre is not the only nor the first thinker within Anglo-American philosophy to succumb to a certain despair of universal reason. Wittgenstein is a more striking instance of the same despair, the Wittgenstein who abandoned the brilliant severity of the *Tractatus* for the pervasive relativism of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein has had many followers in this regard, but there are similar indications to be found in rather different writers, as W.V.O. Quine and David Lewis among others.¹⁴ These are all writers noted for their work in areas of philosophy other than ethics. Are there any indications of despair within modern Anglo-American moral philosophy? There are indeed and in a place one might not immediately think

¹³ Historicism may be reduced, as regards its origins, to three basic theses: what we are immediately aware of is the contents of our own consciousness; the intelligibility of these contents, or what we actually know and think, is made by us; what we make is subject to the vagaries of time and place. The first thesis derives from Descartes, as does the second implicitly though it becomes most obvious in Kant. The third thesis may be regarded as something fairly obvious and harmless in itself, though it necessarily produces historicism, or the doctrine that what we know and think is historically conditioned, when added to the other two. See also Pope St. Pius X, *Pascendi* (1907), and Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (1953).

¹⁴ As noted by MacIntyre himself, *After Virtue*, pp. 266-267. MacIntyre also rightly refers to R. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982), pp. 214-217, but to this one may also usefully add J. Dancy, *Introduction to*

of, I mean John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*.¹⁵ This book has had enormous influence since it was first published in 1971 and it is probably still the single most influential work of moral and political philosophy within the contemporary Anglo-American world.¹⁶

Rawls' project in this book, especially if we read it in the light of his more recent clarifications,¹⁷ was to find an organized set of principles, or a coherent overall theory, which would express for us, as well as possible, the structure and meaning of our considered moral judgments. We are all inclined to say, and to go on saying after due consideration, that justice requires people to be left free to manage their own lives as much as possible and not, for instance, to be forced to believe one religion rather than another or to serve someone else as his slave. These beliefs or judgments are just there as beliefs or judgments we are disposed to make. But there is, presumably, some principle or principles which these judgments reflect or instantiate. Such principles, if made explicit and put into some logical order, would not only account for why we make these judgments and in this particular way, but also enable us to bring the rest of our judgments into harmony with them, by telling us which other judgments are consistent or not consistent with them or are entailed or excluded by them. Now this process might involve some toing and froing, for it may be that our first attempt at stating what principles our judgments instantiate succeeds in saving some of those judgments but not others. We will then have to decide whether to change these other judgments in line with the principles or to change the principles in line with the judgments or perhaps do a bit of both. At all events, if we

Contemporary Epistemology (1985).

¹⁵ It was published by Harvard in 1971 and by Oxford in 1972. The word 'despair' is actually used of Rawls' work, or his later work as they see it, by C. Kukathas and P. Pettit in their *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and its Critics* (1990), pp. 150-151.

¹⁶ One may refer in particular to the first chapter of Kukathas' and Pettit's *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and its Critics*. This chapter is significantly entitled, in reference to Rawls, 'A New Departure.'

¹⁷ 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (1985) pp. 223-251, especially pp. 223-226, 228. Much of this essay was incorporated into lecture 1 of Rawls' more recent book, *Political Liberalism* (1993). The same idea can be found, if not stated with the same clarity or pursued with the same

continue this process long enough, we should eventually come to a set of principles and their corresponding judgments which, all things considered, we are happy to acknowledge as best expressing the ensemble of our settled beliefs.

Such is the thesis. Now it might appear, and has so appeared to some,¹⁸ that Rawls is begging the question in all this. He first starts off with a set of judgments we are disposed to make and then looks for principles to account for these judgments. Any principles that look as if they might account for these judgments but turn out eventually not to (as Rawls says is true of the principles of utilitarianism) are rejected in favor of others that will (as Rawls says is true of the two principles of justice he actually adopts). In other words, the judgments are first used to justify the principles and then the principles are used to justify the judgments. There are certainly elements of *A Theory of Justice* that give this impression. However, the criticism is in the end unfair. It was, in fact, never Rawls' intention to justify either the principles or the judgments, or to prove that they are the judgments and principles which are universally correct and express the truth about justice and human persons simply. On the contrary, Rawls' aim was, as he now puts it, political and not metaphysical. It was simply to state what justice looks like from the point of view of a modern constitutional democracy. It was not to give a general conception of justice or morality that is true and applicable universally.

Rawls does not, to be sure, say that one cannot ask the universal or metaphysical question, as he calls it. Nor does he say that one cannot offer answers to it. He does not even say that his own theory of justice could not eventually be made to serve as the answer to such a question. What he does say is that it is a different question and not one that he has been concerned to answer. His project is a far more modest one: to state a theory of justice that is

consistency, in *A Theory of Justice* at pp. 19-21, 46-53, 206, 243-244, and especially pp. 451-452.

¹⁸ As notably R.M. Hare, in N. Daniels, *Reading Rawls* (1975), especially p. 84. But see also MacIntyre *Whose*

applicable to a modern constitutional democracy or, if you like, that could enable modern democrats to be more consistent, reflective, and systematic in carrying out, in their institutions and practices, the idea of democracy.¹⁹

A parallel may perhaps make the point clearer. What Rawls is trying to do for democracy is not unlike what Aristotle also tried to do for democracy, and indeed for oligarchy too (not to mention tyranny), namely to state what the idea of each of these regimes was and to suggest ways in which the respective partisans might best be able to arrange their favored regime so that it would be internally coherent and lasting.²⁰ Aristotle did this despite considering all of these regimes to be unjust and to operate on an understanding of justice (which Aristotle calls democratic justice and oligarchic justice) that was not justice, or not justice simply.²¹ Aristotle had a theory of justice simply. He used it to pass judgment on all regimes and their corresponding theories of justice and to determine which was correct and which incorrect, which best and which worse or worst.²² We can say then, applying the parallel, that what we get in Rawls is just part of the whole that we get in Aristotle. Rawls gives us an account of justice as it is seen in some particular regime, the regime of a modern constitutional democracy, but not an account of justice simply (or even an account of justice as it is seen in other and rival regimes). Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* should really have been called *A Theory of Modern Democratic Justice*.

If we were to ask about the justice of Rawls' democratic justice, or to ask how far that justice was in agreement with justice simply, there would be nothing in his book to enable us to

Justice? pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ These points are made with sufficient clarity in 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,' pp. 224-231, but they actually reflect the teaching of *A Theory of Justice* too, as at pp. 19-21, 46-53, 577-583.

²⁰ *Politics* books 6(4)-8(6), and especially 8(6).2-5.

²¹ *Politics* 1280a7-11.

²² *Politics* 3.6-7.

answer the question. But, Rawls would say in response, it was never his intention to answer that question. He never set out to talk about justice; he only ever set out to talk about democratic justice. Aristotle, we may recall, blamed Plato and other thinkers for only talking about justice simply, or only talking about the justice of the simply best regime. They had left the rest of political philosophy, the discussion of inferior and commonly existing regimes and their theories of justice, completely aside.²³ So, conversely, we may imagine Aristotle blaming Rawls for leaving the first part of political philosophy, the discussion of justice simply and of the best regime simply, completely aside. Now Rawls, as we have noted, would readily admit that this criticism was correct, that there was this other part of political philosophy, and that he himself had not done it.²⁴ He would only reply that there was no need for him to do it. All he wanted to do was come to the aid, as it were, of modern constitutional democracy and help it to understand and organize itself better. He only ever wanted to do politics, not philosophy.

Perhaps we should not blame Rawls for this narrow aim. Perhaps Aristotle would not blame him either. After all the aim is legitimate as far as it goes. It is even an act of charity as far as it goes (a doctor should do his best by the patient he has, whatever that patient's state of health). But for Rawls to confine himself to this task means that he has, for all intents and purposes, abandoned the attempt to do moral and political philosophy.²⁵ He has abandoned the attempt to do what is at the center and heart of moral and political philosophy, namely the study of justice simply and of the best regime simply. He is confining himself only to certain things on the periphery or, as he himself confesses, on the surface.²⁶ It is this abandonment that lies behind the complaints, and is the truth in the complaints, of those who have accused Rawls of begging

²³ *Politics* 6(4).1.1288b35-1289a7.

²⁴ He actually says this, though in different words, in 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,' p. 225.

²⁵ Kukathas and Pettit do actually accuse Rawls of this, *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and its Critics*, pp. 150-151.

²⁶ "Justice as fairness deliberately stays on the surface, philosophically speaking," he says on p. 230 of 'Justice as

the question.

The abandonment of moral and political philosophy is, however, both different from, and, in a way, more serious than, a mere begging of the question. For to beg the question is at least to take up the question one is begging. But Rawls is refusing even to take up the question. Nevertheless, when his book first came out, he did seem to be doing moral and political philosophy and was taken by many actually to be doing moral and political philosophy. Indeed, his book was hailed as the first attempt for a very long time to do full-scale moral and political philosophy.²⁷ At least it was so hailed in the world of Anglo-American philosophy. For it was the first book, or one of the first books, in the Anglo-American world for a very long time to deal with substantial moral and political questions. Prior to Rawls, most writings on moral philosophy had not been about what people ought to do but about what people are doing when they *talk* about what they ought to do.²⁸ They had been about *metaethics* not ethics, as the jargon had it, that is, they had been about the conceptual analysis of ethical terms.

Rawls' book was very much about ethics, for it was about justice and what people ought to do in order to be just. Indeed, one of the things Rawls claimed for his book was that it made this shift from metaethics to ethics.²⁹ The popularity and immense influence exercised by Rawls' book, both when it appeared and since, owes not a little to this fact. Here at last was a philosopher who was ready and willing to talk ethics, to descend from the ivory tower of conceptual analysis, as it were, and get his hands dirty in the nitty gritty task of giving advice about what to do. Rawls' book has been a principal factor behind the veritable explosion of books and articles on practical ethics that has occurred over the past twenty and more years.

Fairness: Political not Metaphysical.'

²⁷ As noted in chapter 1 of Kukathas and Pettit, *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and its Critics*, and also on the back cover of the 1978 printing of the Oxford paperback edition of *A Theory of Justice*.

²⁸ As W.D. Hudson put it in his *Modern Moral Philosophy* (1970), p. 1.

People had been conscious for some time of the lack of practicality in Anglo-American moral philosophy,³⁰ and were anxious to rectify the deficiency. But how to do it in a respectable way? How to do it and at the same escape, or disarm in advance, the accusations of the conceptual analysts that one was omitting the indispensably prior task of determining the meaning or logic of moral terms?

Rawls provided the answer. He declared, in effect, that the conceptual disputes did not matter as much as people had thought and could be side-stepped, or if necessary sorted out as one went along. *Solvitur ambulando*. He accordingly refused to let himself be bothered or deterred by the accusations from conceptual analysts that were sure to come, as come they did.³¹ Now it mattered a great deal that Rawls was saying and doing this and not someone else. Or rather it mattered a great deal that Rawls was a professor, and a most distinguished professor, at the most distinguished university in America. If a Harvard professor could come along and say it was all right to ignore the conceptual disputes and get on with substantive moral questions, and if this Harvard professor went on to provide a method of doing so, then it must be all right for everyone else at every other university, from Yale to Dubuque, Iowa, to do the same and follow the same method. So everyone could line up behind Rawls and start doing ethics in the Rawlsian manner. And if one of those nasty conceptual analysts came along and started complaining, all one need do was point to Rawls and say: "Harvard says it is all right, and if Harvard says it is all right who are you to say it is not all right?" Something of this sort is what happened, and it is striking how much of what was subsequently written on substantive moral questions depended on or took its beginning from Rawls' *Theory of Justice*.

²⁹ *Theory of Justice*, pp. 51, 579.

³⁰ C.L. Stevenson, *Facts and Values* (1963), p. 116; B.A.O. Williams, *Morality* (1972), pp. 9-10; J. Wilson, *Reason and Morals* (1963), p. 1ff.

³¹ Hare, in Daniels, *Reading Rawls* p. 85.

Remember, however, that according to Rawls himself what he was doing in *Theory of Justice* was only part, and indeed only a superficial part, of the whole of moral philosophy. The remaining and chief part of moral philosophy, or the metaphysical part, he had deliberately left aside in order to do the political part. His work was thus only a fragment, to use MacIntyre's word, of a larger whole. But this larger whole was not a MacIntyrean tradition that had somehow got lost. It was, according to Rawls himself, the larger whole of moral philosophy proper, a whole which had not got lost at all but just left to one side. Yet Rawls only admitted and made perfectly clear this fragmentary character of his work some fourteen years after the publication of *Theory of Justice*. This was the view he held now, he said in 1985, and not necessarily the view he may have given the impression he held in 1971.³² In other words *Theory of Justice* gave the impression, as is evident from what was said about it at the time and has been said since, that it was an attempt at the whole of moral philosophy, and not at a fragment of it, or at any rate an attempt at its chief and metaphysical part and not just at its superficial and political part.

But what this means is that in 1971 a most distinguished professor of moral philosophy at America's most distinguished university was giving everyone the impression that ethics, or the examination of substantive moral issues as opposed to the examination of the meaning of moral terms, was just a matter of relying on the moral intuitions you or your society or your group actually happened to have and of putting these intuitions into some kind of systematic order. It was not a matter of examining the truth of your intuitions to find out which were or were not correct and why. One of Rawls' sharpest critics at the time was not slow to predict the result.³³ Since different people and different groups and societies generally have different moral intuitions, to reduce moral philosophy to the systematizing of such intuitions is to reduce moral

³² 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,' p. 224.

³³ Hare, in Daniels, *Reading Rawls* pp. 82-83.

philosophy to the assertion, albeit systematic assertion, by one group after another of its own arbitrary intuitions. One cannot, assuredly, blame Rawls for the present irrationalist riot of group-centrisms and culture-centrisms in morals and politics, or the craze for multiculturalism generally. The phenomenon is too complex and wild for someone even with the prestige of a Harvard professor to have brought about single-handedly.³⁴ But one can fairly say that Rawls' *Theory of Justice* could and did do nothing to stop it and may well have done a great deal to encourage it. If not itself despairing of universal reason, it was giving comfort and succor to those who did despair of it.

The particular critic who predicted that such would be the result of Rawlsian moral philosophizing had every right to be, and in fact was, upset and annoyed at the way Rawls was carrying on. The critic in question, R.M. Hare, was and is noted most of all for his contributions to metaethics, or to the conceptual analysis of moral terms.³⁵ But Hare has least of all been guilty of the charge of failing to deal with substantive moral questions. On the contrary he has asked and answered in a careful and systematic way substantive moral questions of a more concrete and complex nature than Rawls himself has attempted.³⁶ Moreover Hare never gave the impression, as Rawls by his own confession has, that substantive moral questions could be settled by appeal to prevailing and unargued intuitions. Hare has instead developed over the years a complete moral theory that includes a fully and cleverly argued analysis of moral concepts, a method of moral reasoning consistent with that analysis which does not rely on unargued intuitions, and a series of concrete examples showing how that method works in

³⁴ Some of the complications are explored by MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chapters 2-3, *Whose Justice?* pp. 4-6, *Three Rival Versions*, chapter 2, though one might also usefully ponder Pope St. Pius X's encyclicals *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili* of 1907.

³⁵ His first major book, *The Language of Morals*, was published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, in 1952, his second, *Freedom and Reason*, by the same press in 1963, and his third, *Moral Thinking*, again by the same press in 1981.

³⁶ See the bibliography of Hare's writings at the end of *Moral Thinking*.

practice. It is a veritable *tour de force* of modern analytic philosophy.

Hare was for a long time White's Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Oxford in England. That Rawls' work has had a greater effect than his on modern Anglo-American moral philosophy may indicate that Harvard enjoys more prestige these days and exercises more influence than Oxford. But perhaps it rather indicates that Hare, in refusing to rely on unargued intuitions and insisting instead on reason, is, unlike Rawls, swimming against the tide of our multiculturalist age. Rawls, to be sure, is not a multiculturalist nor does he share its irrationalism. But his work provides no defense against it.

Part of what induced Rawls to go down this path was, as already noted, his dissatisfaction with the dominance of metaethics in Anglo-American moral philosophy. And it certainly is true that the bulk of that moral philosophy was focused on metaethics. Even Hare's published work was, up to then, predominantly metaethics. These metaethical debates had been rumbling on for most of the century and even though they had come to occupy almost the whole of moral philosophers' attention there was still no consensus in sight. Accordingly there was not much hope either that, if these debates continued to dominate in the way they had, any serious treatment of substantive moral questions would occur. Rawls' attempt to change this state of affairs and to bring the substantive questions back into the center of moral philosophy was not only successful, it was also reasonable. These questions certainly did belong at the center and should never have got pushed to one side. It was not in this that Rawls erred, but rather in the method he adopted.

Moore and the Naturalistic Fallacy

Rawls found support and inspiration for his method, the method of bringing our intuitions into

some sort of order and coherence, in the way the classical writers on ethics up to Sidgwick had, so he said, understood the subject. He mentioned Aristotle as an instance along with Sidgwick.³⁷ There are certainly elements of Rawlsian method to be found in Sidgwick and Sidgwick himself declared he had found these elements in Aristotle.³⁸ At any rate Sidgwick came to think of Aristotle's *Ethics* as an attempt to reduce to consistency "the Common Sense Morality of Greece," and he wondered accordingly whether he himself might not do the same for the common sense morality of his own day. It is false, however, to suppose that all Aristotle was doing in his *Ethics* was systematizing the moral intuitions of ancient Greeks. True, he appeals to certain common beliefs, but these are not the beliefs of all Greeks nor the beliefs of Greeks only. They are the beliefs of gentlemen, not the vulgar, and of gentlemen always and everywhere, not in Greece alone. Moreover they have their source ultimately in nature and the soul and can be corrected by reference to nature and the soul.

Actually it would be false to Sidgwick too to think that he confined ethics to Rawlsian systematizing of opinions. Sidgwick was acutely aware of the question of the ultimate truth of these opinions and was never content with the mere fact that they were held. He was never merely political, in Rawls' sense, but also always metaphysical. If Rawls is following Sidgwick it is only part of Sidgwick he is following, and not the whole. Still whatever Sidgwick was doing he was certainly doing moral philosophy in its traditional sense. He was certainly engaging in the discussion of substantive moral issues. What was it that changed after Sidgwick to bring about the shift to metaethics if, as Rawls seems not implausibly to believe, it was after him that the shift occurred?

When Sidgwick died in 1900, he was working on the sixth edition of his major work on

³⁷ *Theory of Justice*, p. 51, n6.

³⁸ *The Methods of Ethics* (1901), pp. xix-xx.

moral philosophy, *The Methods of Ethics*. That sixth edition was published posthumously in 1901. Two years later, in 1903, there appeared on the scene a book of moral philosophy which was, in the words of one its admirers, “the beginning of a renaissance, the opening of a new heaven on a new earth.”³⁹ The book in question was G.E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*. What Moore did in that book may, for present purposes, be reduced to two things. First he declared that the first job of ethics was to determine the meaning of moral terms, and in particular of the term good, and second, having so determined this meaning, he declared what things were in fact good and how to get them. The latter declaration was what earned for the book the title of a new heaven and impressed people most at the time, especially Moore’s friends in the Bloomsbury Group. But the latter declaration depended crucially on the former. It was this former declaration that drew the most interest from philosophers and gave Anglo-American moral philosophy, from then on virtually up to Rawls, its direction and object.

What Moore declared in this respect was that the meaning of good was simple and indefinable and incapable of being equated with any other notion at all. The attempt to define it Moore dubbed the naturalistic fallacy, the fallacy of equating goodness with some natural property or matter of fact like pleasure or happiness. Moore had a striking argument for this contention, the so-called open-question argument. If, he said, you tried to equate good with some natural property or fact, say pleasure, so that good just meant ‘pleasure,’ as triangle just means ‘three sided plane figure,’ then the statement ‘pleasure is good’ will reduce to the statement ‘pleasure is pleasure.’ But the question whether pleasure is good is not a trivial tautology like the question whether pleasure is pleasure. On the contrary it is an open and significant question and it is never trivially tautologous to ask if pleasure is after all good. What thus holds for pleasure will hold, says Moore, for anything else proposed as the definition of good. So, he concludes,

³⁹ The words of John Maynard Keynes as quoted by MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 14, and see also p. 16.

good cannot have a definition. It must be simple and indefinable.⁴⁰

What this open-question argument actually proves, if it proves anything, became a subject of much debate among philosophers. Few of them followed Moore in saying good was a property, though they did follow him in saying it had no definition. For they agreed that good had the peculiar feature that whatever subject it was predicated of it could not be identified with, nor defined in terms of, that subject or any of its properties. Suppose, for instance, one calls a certain red, juicy strawberry good. One cannot say that that strawberry's goodness just *is* its redness and juiciness. For then to say this red, juicy strawberry is good will be like saying this red, juicy strawberry is red and juicy, which is not at all what one meant.⁴¹ In order to account for this feature of goodness, or the fact that goodness cannot be equated with the things it is predicated of, philosophers after Moore said that good did not signify any sort of property at all, not even a Moorean property, but expressed the attitude one took towards things. When one said the red, juicy strawberry was good, what one was doing was not predicating some special property of goodness of it, but expressing an attitude of approval or favor towards it.

This expressing of attitudes came to be understood in two basic ways. The first way was that of the emotivists, in particular A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson, who said that good expressed emotions or feelings.⁴² On this theory, to say of a red, juicy strawberry that it is good is like saying: 'this red, juicy strawberry, hurrah!' The second way was that of the prescriptivists, notably Hare their founder and chief, who said that good was expressive of something more deliberate and rational than feelings. It expressed rather one's choices or one's decisions. On this theory, to say of a red, juicy strawberry that it is good is like saying: 'this red, juicy strawberry, please!' The difference between the 'hurrah!' and 'please!' is meant to draw attention to the fact

⁴⁰ *Principia Ethica* (1903), pp. 15-17.

⁴¹ Hare, in *Language of Morals*, pp. 83-93.

that while emotions can be, and often are, arbitrary, choices can be deliberate and rational. Hare, in fact, made a significant advance in this respect over the emotivism of Ayer and Stevenson, who seemed to have reduced morals to the expression of arbitrary preferences. He was able to show instead that the making of moral judgments, when these were understood as expressive of choices and not of feelings, had to conform to some fairly strict rules and was very far from arbitrary.

It is not necessary, however, to pursue this difference between the theories of emotivism and prescriptivism. What does deserve noting is that the problem which motivated them, the problem about good uncovered by Moore's open-question argument, is a genuinely puzzling and important one. How it eventually gets solved has consequences for the whole of one's moral philosophizing. If 'good' really does have no meaning or definition, if its function in a sentence is not to state what is the case but rather to express attitudes, whether feelings or choices, then no moral theory that supposes good does have a meaning, or supposes that some things are good by nature or as a matter of fact, can be correct. For there will be no matter of fact that 'good' expresses. If, on the other hand, one does suppose that 'good' expresses some matter of fact, how is one going to account for that peculiar feature of it which was uncovered in Moore's open-question argument?

This problem about goodness went under the name given it by Moore, the problem of the naturalistic fallacy or the problem whether it was a fallacy, a misunderstanding of the use of words, to suppose that 'good' had a meaning or expressed some matter of fact about things. Because of its importance, and indeed because of its intrinsic fascination, it came to dominate the whole of Anglo-American moral philosophy and to be virtually its one and only focus of interest. But the naturalistic fallacy is metaethics, not ethics. It is about the meaning, the conceptual

⁴² Ayer *Language, Truth and Logic* (Second Edition, 1946), chapter 6; C.L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (1944).

analysis, of 'good' and moral words generally. It is not about what it is good or bad, right or wrong, for us to do. Moore's *Principia Ethica* proved indeed to be a beginning, not of a new heaven, but of a new preoccupation for moral philosophy, the preoccupation with metaethics. It did bring about that shift in the attention of moral philosophers after Sidgwick noted by Rawls. Even though Moore spoke as much about what it was good and right for us to do as any previous moral philosopher, nevertheless this part of his book was largely ignored. It may have been the part that impressed the Bloomsbury Group. It was not the part that fascinated the philosophers.

Still metaethics, for all its fascination, is not ethics and even something fascinating can become boring eventually. Misgivings about the preoccupation of moral philosophers with the problem of the meanings of moral words were already in the air when in 1958 G.E.M. Anscombe published her article 'Modern Moral Philosophy.'⁴³ This became perhaps the most influential of the protests against the prevailing state of moral philosophy. For our purposes it had two principal effects: the resurgence of virtue ethics and MacIntyre's theory of fragmented traditions. Anscombe argued that the problem of the naturalistic fallacy arose from the fact that people were using words in ways that no longer made any sense. She focused on the word 'ought' rather than 'good,' for this word too, not surprisingly, had come to the center of the debate about the naturalistic fallacy. Just as the followers of Moore contended that 'good' did not mean some fact or property of things, so they contended that no 'ought' could logically follow from an 'is'. Whether something or other 'ought' to be done seems as open a question as whether it is 'good.' If there is no fact that one is compelled, on pain of logical inconsistency, to call good, there can be no fact that one is compelled, on pain of logical inconsistency, to say ought to be done. Or, in other words, no 'is' judgment entails any 'ought' judgment.

⁴³ This article first appeared in *Philosophy* 33 (1958). It was republished in Hudson's *The Is/Ought Question* (1969). My references are to Hudson's anthology. Anscombe had already anticipated some of the points of the article in her

This slogan “no ‘ought’ from an ‘is’” was actually traced back to Hume rather than to Moore, though one may doubt whether it had the same significance for Hume as for the followers of Moore.⁴⁴ At all events the prominence that the slogan acquired in modern Anglo-American moral philosophy owes everything to Moore’s open-question argument. Only after that argument had itself come to prominence did philosophers discover in Hume, or read back into him, the famous ‘is-ought’ distinction. Anscombe’s charge against this distinction was that the ‘ought’ it used was empty, being only a hangover from a previous tradition of moral thought whose demise had rendered it meaningless. That previous tradition was the divine law tradition of Christianity which understood ‘ought’ to be expressive of what one was commanded to do by God. When the dominance of Christianity waned and the idea of a law-giving God was abandoned, this meaning of ‘ought’ should have been abandoned too. It was not, because it had become too deeply embedded in our language. The result was that there was now a word in common use which had lost its only intelligible support. All that philosophers could do when faced with this puzzle, short of giving up the use of ‘ought’ altogether, was to say that ‘ought’ had some special sense in moral contexts. It is this special sense, declares Anscombe, that cannot be inferred from an ‘is’ because it has only mesmeric force and no content and so cannot be inferred from anything at all.⁴⁵

This is an interesting story and one can readily see how it could have inspired MacIntyre’s theory of fragmented traditions.⁴⁶ But it is no more successful as an account of what was going on than is MacIntyre’s theory. For suppose that ‘ought’ does just mean ‘commanded by God.’ There is just as much an open-question, a question not closed by mere rules of logic or

book *Intention* (1957).

⁴⁴ As MacIntyre already suggested in Hudson, *The Is/Ought Question*, pp. 48-51. See also my remarks in *Goodness and Nature* (1987), pp. 117, 125.

⁴⁵ In Hudson, *The Is/Ought Question*, pp. 180-182.

word-usage, about whether one really ought to do what is commanded by God as about any other 'ought' judgment one cares to make. So if the same puzzle about 'ought' arises even in a divine law theory of ethics, the loss of such a theory cannot be what explains the rise of that puzzle within modern Anglo-American moral philosophy.

Anscombe also attacked the way modern moral philosophers were understanding the word 'good.' It is an implication of the open-question argument that anything at all can be called good. If 'good' has no meaning, or cannot be identified with any particular facts about things, then there is nothing about it that could render incoherent or logically impossible its predication of anything whatever. But, responded Anscombe, there are some things one cannot intelligibly call good, as for instance a saucer of mud. There are limits, she said, to the application of 'good' and this fact would be clear if instead of concentrating on the rather abstract and indefinite word 'good' one concentrated on words like 'courage' or 'justice.' These words have a definite content and show that definite things are morally good or bad and that not everything can coherently be called good. It was this suggestion, to focus on the concrete goods of the virtues, that was enthusiastically taken up by Philippa Foot, and it has been largely through Foot, thus inspired by Anscombe, that virtue ethics has come back into popularity in Anglo-American philosophy.⁴⁷

One would be mistaken, however, in supposing that talk about the virtues does anything by itself to resolve the puzzle of the open-question argument. One may certainly say, and Hare himself was quite happy to say, that it is foolish or bizarre to call certain things good. But that, he insisted, was besides the point. The issue does not turn on what it is foolish or sensible to do but on what it is logically possible to do. And the open-question argument shows, if it shows

⁴⁶ MacIntyre thus acknowledges his debt to Anscombe, *After Virtue*, p. 53.

⁴⁷ Foot, *Theories of Ethics* (1967), pp. 8-9, 83-100; *Virtues and Vices* (1978).

anything, that it is logically possible to call anything good. If someone calls a saucer of mud good, he may be crazy, but he is not offending logic or breaking any rules for the use of the word ‘good.’⁴⁸

This turn towards the virtues, then, does nothing to resolve the puzzles of the open-question argument. But it was both a sign and an instance of the increasing desire of moral philosophers to get away from questions of meaning to questions of moral substance. It was also a sign and an instance of the desire of moral philosophers to develop theories of ethics other than utilitarianism. For Hare, who had most stressed the importance of the conceptual questions and had developed by far the clearest and most coherent answer to them, also argued that this answer required, in the end, the adoption of utilitarianism.⁴⁹ Hare was as compelling and as subtle on this point as he was also on the conceptual questions. But the fact that he was so did nothing to hold back, and did much to encourage, the desire of philosophers to turn away from the conceptual questions and concentrate on the substantive ones. Certainly this was true of Foot.⁵⁰ It was also true of Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* was as much an attempt to get away from utilitarianism as to get away from mere conceptual analysis.⁵¹

Rawls was particularly clever in this respect. Both Hare and Foot, and indeed all those who had engaged in the debate about the naturalistic fallacy, were citizens of modern liberal democracies and evidently in fundamental agreement with the principles and goals of modern liberal democracy. Why not ignore the disagreements then, which were after all diverting attention from questions of substance, and start with the agreements? Why not begin with the liberal democratic convictions everyone already shared and try to work out what set of principles

⁴⁸ In Hudson, *The Is/Ought Question*, pp. 247-252.

⁴⁹ Notably in *Moral Thinking*.

⁵⁰ See in particular the introduction to *Virtues and Vices*.

⁵¹ *Theory of Justice*, pp. vii-viii.

these convictions best instantiated or what set of principles would enable us to put those convictions into the most coherent and satisfactory order? Why not regard moral philosophy, in partial imitation of Sidgwick, as the task of organizing the opinions we all already share?

This re-focusing of the task of moral philosophy promised to bring with it many advantages. It would relegate the conceptual questions to the background, where the lack of consensus about their resolution would cease to get in the way of asking and answering substantive questions; it would enable one to set about developing theories besides utilitarianism; and it would, at the same time, enable one to put to the test whether and how far utilitarianism was in fact an acceptable theory. For if utilitarianism proved not to be as good a way of organizing our opinions as some other theory, then it would, to that extent, be shown not to be as acceptable as that other theory.⁵² Such was in general Rawls' strategy and, as a response to the problems within Anglo-American philosophy that he was immediately confronting, it had no little justification. But it did not have enough justification, or not enough for Rawls to give the impression, at the same time, that that was all there was to moral philosophy. To escape one set of problems by promoting or countenancing others that are as bad or worse is not an improvement.

Narrowness of Anglo-American Philosophy

I have told a long and complex story briefly and with simplifications. Indeed, in thus tracing the course of modern Anglo-American moral philosophy from Rawls and back again to Rawls, I have passed quickly over more than fifty years of philosophizing. I have omitted, perforce, many names and many ideas and movements that did not fit into my immediate focus. Certainly there was more to these years than the debate about the naturalistic fallacy and the figures who

achieved prominence therein. But since that debate was, by common consensus, the chief preoccupation of the mainstream of Anglo-American moral philosophy, it has necessarily been my chief preoccupation too. There will, however, be an opportunity to make good at least one of the omissions shortly. For the present I wish to stress that the fact that Anglo-American moral philosophers failed to come to an agreement on the questions at the center of the naturalistic fallacy debate, or even on the question of what was the best theory of substantive moral theorizing, does not mean that there was no answer to these questions, nor indeed that no one had found it. Perhaps there was and is such an answer and perhaps someone really did find it. Hare for one has remained convinced that this is so in his case, and of all Anglo-American moral philosophers he has perhaps the most right to be so convinced. Certainly no one has come up with an account of the meaning of 'good,' and of what theory of moral reasoning must thereby follow, that comes anywhere close to his in its grasp of the issues, its subtlety of analysis, and its cleverness of development.

That so few other philosophers have been persuaded to agree with Hare does not tell us that Hare is wrong. Nor does it tell us that Hare is right. In fact it tells us nothing at all either way. Disagreement, even on fundamentals and even on matters where the truth is to be had, has always been a feature of human reasoning and philosophizing. We might wish it to be otherwise, but the fact that it is not otherwise is no reason to doubt, with MacIntyre, the existence of a reason that is universal instead of bound to some particular tradition. The fault is in ourselves, not in reason, that we are unreason's playthings.

For it is not reason that fails; it is we who fail in our use of reason. We fail and can fail in many ways: in lack of native talent to begin with, but also in yielding to passions, or in making bad choices and developing bad habits, or indeed in the simple fact that we are all dying and

⁵² *Theory of Justice*, chapter 3.

suffer the weariness and decay of mortality. About some of these failings we can do nothing; they are what flesh is heir to. About others we can do something. We can refuse to give up on the use of reason for one thing. I have already indicated that a noticeable feature of more recent Anglo-American moral philosophy has been the giving up on universal reason, whether expressly in the relativism of group- and culture-centered theories and the historicism of MacIntyrean traditions, or indirectly and, as it were, by default in the retreat to unargued intuitions and superficiality of Rawls.

But to refuse to give up is only a start and, by itself, merely a rejection, the rejection of a certain sort of temptation. There is need of something more positive. One important thing that can be done is to take as much advantage as possible of the wisdom of those who have gone before us and marked out the path of understanding. Failings in this respect are older and more endemic in the mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy, and not just moral philosophy, than failings to persevere in reason.⁵³ For one of the features of this mainstream is that while remarkably clever it is also remarkably narrow. The range of options it has considered for solving the problems it raises has been confined within certain very restricted boundaries, and philosophers in this mainstream seldom allowed themselves to go, or be drawn, beyond these boundaries. MacIntyre, of course, went way beyond them, but it is not his sort of going beyond which we need. He gave up on universal reason and tried, and still tries, to cover too much ground, and too many thinkers, too quickly. Rather what we need is to go beyond and not yet give up on reason nor try to do too much at once. If philosophers in the mainstream had done more of this they would have found other solutions for their problems which, even had these

⁵³ Thinkers in the Anglo-American world who have tried not to fail in this respect have, by that very fact, generally put themselves outside the mainstream. Apart from those I refer to shortly, others who deserve a particular mention in this regard are those working out of the Catholic tradition, such as Vernon Bourke, Austin Fagothey, and Henry Veatch.

solutions still been rejected, would yet have cast much fresh light on the issues at stake.⁵⁴

The boundaries in question are guarded by certain key figures in the history of philosophy, such as Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Mill, Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein. To stray too much beyond these and the like guardians is eventually to incur a sort of ostracism. One can stray towards Hegel, perhaps, though not too much, and also towards Plato and Aristotle, though only to a Plato and Aristotle read in a suitably modern way. To stray towards Nietzsche is pushing it and to stray towards Heidegger is to have gone too far. To stray towards medieval philosophy, unless it be late medieval logic and unless one is really writing history, is something that only those do who have not properly distinguished between philosophy and their Catholic or Jewish or Islamic faith. Finnis went that way and so, in his own peculiar fashion, has MacIntyre, and if the first contributions of these writers attracted a lot of attention, their later ones have attracted rather less. As for such exotica as Chinese or Asian philosophy generally, to stray towards these is only what Chinese and Asians do and so unusual as to be quaint.

I am indulging, I admit, in caricature, but not too much. Certainly those who focus on philosophers beyond the boundaries, and who try to generate a serious discussion of doctrines that are expressly drawn from or expressly based on these philosophers, find it hard to get much of a hearing. One suspects they would have found it easier had they been silent about their sources. But if so, that only confirms the narrowness they had to confront. This narrowness, moreover, is not just a function of which philosophers of the past are read or taken as sources of inspiration. There are philosophers thoroughly within Anglo-American philosophy who could have been brought in to broaden things out but whose unusual interests or unusual conceptions of philosophy have left them standing on the margins. I think of Paul Weiss, Charles Hartshorne, Richard Collingwood, and Alfred North Whitehead (the Whitehead of other fame than as co-

⁵⁴ See the last chapter of Rorty's *Consequences of Pragmatism*.

author of what is often misleadingly called Russell's *Principia*). I think too of John Dewey, whose name is now regularly ranked by historians of philosophy with the famous names of the past.

Dewey is, in fact, an interesting case in point. In 1939, three years after the first publication of Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*, five years before the publication of Stevenson's *Ethics and Language*, and thirteen years before the publication of Hare's *Language of Morals*, Dewey published a book entitled *Theory of Valuation*.⁵⁵ This is a striking book in many respects, but there are three things about it in particular that are of importance for my present purpose. First, Dewey pointed out that the problem of valuation, that is of the status and meaning of value-judgments including moral ones, had only become problematic within contemporary philosophy because of prior changes in epistemology and metaphysics, and notably because of the elimination, or attempted elimination, of value-conceptions from science. Classic philosophy by contrast, he declared, "identified *ens*, *verum*, and *bonum*, and the identification was taken to be an expression of the constitution of nature as the object of natural science. In such a context there was no call and no place for any *separate* problem of valuation and values, since what are now termed values were taken to be integrally incorporated in the very structure of the world."⁵⁶ In other words, the problem of value as this had arisen within the naturalistic fallacy debate was not a problem of logic or the meaning of words, as everyone then took it to be (and as Hare still takes it to be), but of knowledge and the nature of nature. Or it was only a problem of logic because it was first a problem of knowledge and the nature of nature.⁵⁷

Second, Dewey pointed out that Ayer's theory of moral terms as merely ejaculatory, like

⁵⁵ It was published by Chicago University Press in the same series in which appeared, in 1962, T.S. Kuhn's enormously influential *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

⁵⁶ *Theory of Valuation*, pp. 1-3.

⁵⁷ MacIntyre made this point in *After Virtue*, chapter 5, as I also did in *Goodness and Nature*, pp. 108-110, 129-131,

‘boo!’ and ‘hurrah!’, either involved a flawed subjectivist psychology (Dewey attacked talk of irreducibly private feelings in the same way as Wittgenstein was then trying to do, but with far more sureness and clarity), or made sentences containing these terms into straightforward empirical statements.⁵⁸

Third, Dewey pointed out that the same emotive theory, which allowed that sentences about means could be empirically true or false but denied that sentences about ends could be, was supposing a separation between the valuation of means and ends wholly false to actual life, was confusing mere impulse with choice (a point Hare was to make his own many years later), and was describing a condition of mind that could only be true of those who had failed to grow up.⁵⁹

Had these points and others made by Dewey already in 1939 been read and taken seriously, they would have short-circuited a great deal of the naturalistic fallacy debate and, if not brought it to a conclusion, at least have made clear just what set of other ideas the opposing sides in that debate were necessarily buying into.

Dewey was a comprehensive philosopher who wrote and thought deeply about all departments of philosophy and who would never have dreamt that moral philosophy could be just a matter of analyzing the meanings of moral terms. Neither would he have tried to reduce the making of moral judgments to some utilitarian calculation. On the contrary, in his own moral writings, which range over the whole terrain of moral philosophy, he took great pains to discover what is good, if partial, in each of the rival doctrines, utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue.⁶⁰ In

though in complete ignorance, I am afraid, of Dewey’s work.

⁵⁸ *Theory of Valuation*, pp. 6-12.

⁵⁹ *Theory of Valuation*, pp. 23-33. Stevenson thought this point of Dewey’s deserved particularly serious attention, *Facts and Values*, p. 116.

⁶⁰ *Theory of the Moral Life*, published by Holt, Rinehart, and Wilson, New York, 1960, which is the central section, written entirely by Dewey, of a larger work, *Ethics*, jointly authored by Dewey and Tufts and first published by the same press in 1908.

this respect he bears some resemblance to Sidgwick, who, like Dewey, was, be it noted, as fully aware of, and as emphatic about, the importance of virtue as any contemporary proponent of virtue ethics. Perhaps if Rawls had paid more attention to these aspects of Dewey's writings on ethics,⁶¹ he might have been able to present in *Theory of Justice* a less dangerous way to overcome the dominance in modern moral philosophy of conceptual disputes and of utilitarianism that he found so objectionable.

I do not wish, by these remarks, to say that Dewey's thought is without fault or to recommend a return to his philosophy. I merely wish to point out how an Anglo-American philosopher, a great Anglo-American philosopher, of whom no Anglo-American philosopher could have been ignorant, was nevertheless ignored, and ignored precisely when and where he could have been of most help. But Dewey is not the only philosopher to have been ignored. To some extent, indeed, we should not complain too much. We cannot all read everybody. We must all limit ourselves somewhere. *Non possumus omnia omnes*. Still, if we cannot all do everything we can all at least do something, and specifically we can all do something to stop ourselves and others becoming too narrow. The mainstream of modern Anglo-American philosophy is, and has been for a long time, too narrow. It badly needs to open itself to fresh ideas and fresh perspectives from outside. Whether it will so open itself I am inclined to doubt. For if the mainstream is not a MacIntyrean tradition possessed of its own peculiar rationality, it is certainly, through its hold on the major positions in the major universities, an institution with its own way of perpetuating itself and of passing on its habits to the next generation. Still, it is not a monolith, and renegade ideas and renegade professors are always floating around its edges ready to break, if only temporarily, into the center.

At that center, even if there is narrowness, there is also cleverness, a cleverness that at

⁶¹ He notes only one of Dewey's works in a footnote, *Theory of Justice*, p. 400, n2

times approaches genius. Without such cleverness, and without patience and persistence in the use of reason, broadness can spell disaster whereas narrowness can, by contrast, spell safety. Too much undisciplined and unschooled knowledge can plunge one into worse errors than a little schooled and disciplined knowledge. Certainly if Anglo-American moral philosophy had stayed focused on the naturalistic fallacy debate it would not have strayed, or encouraged others to stray, into the wildness of multiculturalism. What it said would, to be sure, have had little effect, but better no effect than a bad effect. Still, narrowness is a failing all the same, and it would not take much to overcome. The resources exist in abundance, for it is a feature of philosophy in America, if not in other parts of the English speaking world, that everything gets studied by someone somewhere sometime. Every possibility gets actualized here. Of course the bad ones get actualized too and, looking at some of them, one may be tempted to wonder if Armageddon is not already upon us.

Rawls and MacIntyre are not Armageddon, to be sure. They represent, nevertheless, in their different ways, a giving up on the timeless task of philosophy, the pursuit of wisdom and of a wisdom that is itself timeless. They have become part of the much larger tradition of despair that may be the first shocks of Armageddon. They are not the best of Anglo-American moral philosophy during the last one hundred years, even if Rawls in particular now stands out so prominently. The best, at least of the mainstream, is represented rather by Hare and others in the naturalistic fallacy debate. There was sometimes better on the edges, as the case of Dewey helps to show. But if there is to be better in the future it will be because those who come after have, without giving up on universal reason, learnt to sit at the feet of a greater and more varied range of teachers from the past. We can hope anyway. For if even Pandora did not take hope from us, neither surely can MacIntyre and Rawls.