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Science and Creation: Big Bang Cosmology and Thomas Aquinas
William E. Carroll

Thomas Nagel and the Problem of Aesthetics
Christopher Tollefson

The Incarnation and the Natural Law
Kevin A. McMahon

MacIntyre on Rationality and Tradition
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Saint Anselm the Student
Fr. John Fortin, O.S.B.

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Science and Creation: Big Bang Cosmology and Thomas Aquinas

William E. Carroll

Recent studies in particle physics and astronomy have produced dazzling speculations about the early history of the universe. Cosmologists now entertain elaborate scenarios which propose to describe what the universe was like when it was the size of a softball, a mere $10^{-35}$ second after the Big Bang. The description of the emergence of four fundamental forces and twelve discrete subatomic particles is almost common-place in modern physics. There is little doubt among scientists that we live in the aftermath of a giant explosion which occurred between fifteen and twenty billion years ago. A few cosmologists now offer theories which account for the Big Bang itself as a fluctuation of a primal vacuum. Just as subatomic particles emerge spontaneously in vacuums in laboratories, as the result of what is called "quantum tunneling from nothing," so the whole universe may be the result of a similar process. Are we on the verge of a scientific explanation of the very origin of the universe? The contention of the new theories is that the laws of physics are sufficient to account for the origin and existence of the universe. If this be true, then, in a sense, we live in a self creating universe which has sprung into existence spontaneously from a cosmic nothingness.

In such a self sufficient universe, exhaustively understood in terms of the laws of physics, it would seem that there is no room for the God of Jewish, Christian, or Muslim revelation. The traditional theological doctrine of creation seems obsolete in the face of the recent advances of modern science. Does the notion of a Creator represent an intellectual artifact from a less enlightened age? Perhaps the God of traditional theology is but a hypothesis now shown to be unnecessary.

Too often contemporary discussions about the relationship between religion and science suffer from an ignorance of the history of western civilization, and, with respect to the theories concerning the origin of the universe, an ignorance of the sophisticated analyses of the natural sciences and creation which took place in the Middle
Ages. In the thirteenth century, as a result of the translations of the scientific treatises of Aristotle and his Muslim commentators into Latin, scholars of the calibre of Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure wrestled with the implications for Christian theology of the most advanced science of their day. Following the tradition of Muslim and Jewish thinkers, Thomas Aquinas developed an analysis of the doctrine of creation from nothing which remains one of the enduring intellectual accomplishments of Western culture. Aquinas's analysis of creation, and especially his understanding of the relationship between physics and theology concerning the ultimate origin of the universe, ought to continue to inform our discussion of the relationship between science and religion.

It seemed to many of Aquinas's contemporaries that there was a fundamental incompatibility between the claim of Greek physics that something cannot come from absolutely nothing and the affirmation of Christian faith that God did produce everything from nothing. Furthermore, for the Greeks, since something must come from something, there must always be something, i.e., the universe must be eternal. Recent cosmological speculations about the origin of the universe reaffirm the ancient Greek principle that you cannot get something from nothing. For the "vacuum" of modern particle physics, whose "fluctuation" brings our universe into existence, is not absolutely nothing. It is only no thing like our present universe, but it is still something. How else could "it" fluctuate?

The eternal universe of Greek science seemed to be incompatible with a universe created out of nothing. The eternal universe left no room for nothing, allowed no absence, so to speak, in which the Christian God could create. At least so some Christians thought, and they urged that Greek science, especially in the person of Aristotle, its leading proponent, be banned, since it contradicted the truths of revelation. Must one choose between science and religion? Aquinas thought otherwise. Since God is the author of all truth, the truths of science and the truths of faith could not be in conflict with one
another. Any conflict had to be more apparent than real. Thus, Aquinas went to work to reconcile the truths of Aristotelian science and the truths of Christian revelation.

The key to Aquinas' analysis is the distinction he drew between creation and change. The natural sciences, whether Aristotelian or contemporary, have as their subject the world of changing things: from subatomic particles to acorns to galaxies. Whenever there is a change there must be something which changes. The Greeks are right: from nothing, nothing comes; that is, if the verb "to come" means a change. All change requires some underlying material reality. Today we call this ancient principle the conservation of mass/energy.

Creation, on the other hand, is the radical causing of the whole existing of whatever exists. To cause completely something to exist is not to produce a change in something, is not to work on or with some already existing material. If there were a prior something which was used in the act of producing a new thing then the agent doing the producing would not be the complete cause of the new thing. But such a complete causing is precisely what creation is. Thus, to create is to give existence, and the existence of all things is totally contingent; that is, all things depend upon God for the fact that they are. God does not take nothing and make something out of "it." Rather, anything left entirely to itself, separated from the cause of its existence, would be absolutely nothing. Creation is not exclusively some distant event; it is the continuing, complete causing of the existence of whatever it is.

Thus, Thomas Aquinas saw no contradiction in the notion of an eternal created universe. For, even if the universe had no temporal beginning, it still would depend upon God for its very being. There is no conflict between the doctrine of creation and any physical theory. Theories in the natural sciences account for change. Whether the changes described are biological or cosmological, unending or finite, they remain processes. Creation accounts for the existence of
a thing, not for changes in things.

Aquinas did not think that the opening in Genesis presented any difficulties for the natural sciences. The Bible is not a textbook in the sciences. What is essential to Christian faith, according to Aquinas, is the "fact of creation," not its "manner or mode." Aquinas's firm adherence to the truth of Scripture without falling into the trap of what we might call literalistic readings of the text would offer valuable correction for some contemporary exegesis of the Bible which concludes that one must choose between the literal interpretation of the Bible and modern science.

Aquinas did believe that the universe is not eternal; Aristotle, he thought, was wrong to think otherwise. But Aquinas argued that, on the basis of reason alone, one could not know whether the universe is eternal. Furthermore, if there were an eternal universe it still would be a created universe. To affirm, on the basis of faith, that the universe has a temporal beginning involves no contradiction with what the natural sciences can proclaim. Such faith only completes and perfects what reason knows.

The Big Bang described by modern cosmologists is a change; it is not creation. The natural sciences do not themselves provide an account for the ultimate existence of all things. A universe which is the result of the fluctuation of a primal vacuum is not a self-creating universe. The need to explain the existence of things does not disappear as a result of new explanations which propose to account for various changes, regardless of how ancient or primordial these changes are. Thomas Aquinas would have no difficulty accepting Big Bang cosmology, even with its recent variations, while also affirming the doctrine of creation from nothing.

Cornell College
Iowa
The Incarnation and the Natural Law

Kevin McMahon

The following paper was originally given at a Philosophy Colloquium in the late fall of 1985. My remarks concern the book that provided a focus for our discussion that afternoon, a book written by Francis A. Sullivan and called *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983). The term "magisterium" refers to the teaching office in the Church and to its occupants who exercise the function of teaching. The members of this office, Sullivan writes, are the bishops. One can speak of other teaching offices. One might speak of an academic teaching office, for example, composed of theologians. But theologians are subject in their teaching to the guidance of the bishops, and it is to the bishops in their teaching role that one is usually referring when one speaks of simply "the magisterium." Sullivan takes a number of very interesting and provocative positions in his book, but the one that I will be looking at in particular is the contention that the magisterium cannot teach infallibly on specific, concrete moral issues. By "infallibly" I mean propose a teaching that would be both certainly true and binding in all future circumstances. One important reason why, Sullivan states, the magisterium cannot teach infallibly on moral issues is that human nature is changeable. Human nature is not a finished and static given, that one’s actions may either correspond or fail to correspond to. It does have a determinate structure, which may be described as self-directive freedom to move towards or away from God as our final end. However, this freedom is realized in our daily lives as physical, psychological, social, cultural beings. In other words, we are historical beings that are always changing, sometimes through forces beyond our control, sometimes by our own actions. We change biologically inasmuch as we grow through time, shift from sickness to health, and may even affect our own physiology, from taking caffeine to stay awake to manipulating the genetic code. We change psychologically in terms of personal character and socially in terms of our values, attitudes and relations with others. What
remains the same is our freedom before God, and this is the one standard we have to determine the rightness or wrongness of an act. It is our nature that we are free agents, and it is our first responsibility to actualize our nature by carrying out free decisions. Our second responsibility is to always act for the ultimate sake of moving towards union with God. The difficulty, as we find ourselves, in our many dimensions, in constantly changing circumstances, is to know with any degree of certitude just what act will bring us closer to God, and what act will push us away. The only reliable guide is experience; and not just the experience of Catholics, but of all men and women of good will. And although we may condense the lessons of the past and present them in the form of moral norms, since, according to the famous adage of Hume, the past is no guide for the future, these norms will be subject to continual reformulation in the light of future experience. I have to say that this account does not come directly from Sullivan himself—he really isn’t so explicit in his explanation—but from the theologian Karl Rahner, on whom Sullivan relies in his treatment of the matter. It’s hard to be very clear about the sort of historically conditioned problems and moral norms that Sullivan is talking about because he doesn’t offer any specific examples, except the issue of artificial contraception, and then he says nothing about it. Rahner, in the article to which Sullivan refers, also mentions contraception as an example, and remarks that one cannot base universal precepts on the biological dimension of our nature because it’s something that we are free to change.

Clear or not, this, in summary form, is Sullivan’s argument. In denying that the magisterium can teach infallibly on moral issues, Sullivan does not deny that the magisterium can teach authoritatively. He emphasizes that the bishops have a solemn duty to offer guidance to the Church in moral questions, even if the guidance is fallible, and that members of the Church have a solemn duty to consider this guidance in forming their consciences, since it is a matter of faith that the Spirit guides the Church in morality through episcopal teaching.
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Now it seems to me that if one is going to argue effectively against Sullivan's position, one will first have to tie the biological, psychological and social dimensions of nature into that essential core of human freedom before God, and then make this entire complex of human nature our link with God himself. That way, our spiritual, biological, psychological structure will not only be passively open to, but will actually serve to lead beyond itself to participation in the nature of God; for this union, according to Christianity, realizes the perfection of the human person. The idea that the point of human life is participation as a distinct, created individual in the life of God is Christianity's unique contribution to Western thought. It originates in the claim that Jesus of Nazareth is God made man, and the mediator through whom we as human individuals may share, as St. Peter writes, in the divine nature. For this reason, the theologian cannot never speak of a purely natural law in the sense of a moral order that is directed to some end other than union with God, or that is animated by some principle other than grace. Likewise, since reason on its own can be no more clear about the end of union with God than it can be about God himself, any certain direction concerning this union must be revealed. And the source and center of this revelation is Jesus Christ. Thus, even though matters of prudence--such as how to best raise your child--may be largely governed by experience, moral norms (which prudence applies to specific situations) will have their ultimate ground in Christ, and the authoritative teachers of these norms will be the successors of Christ--the bishops. At this point you undoubtedly consider Sullivan to have been a clear as a bell compared with all this stuff. But I think that I can make some of these things a little clearer if I introduce some ideas of Thomas Aquinas as an illustration. Aquinas is a fascinating natural law theorist, both because he recognized the form a Christian natural law has to take, and because he failed to completely transform the classical natural law theory he received from Aristotle.
and Cicero. Thomas always maintained that there is no other final end for the person than union with God. And he insisted that the only truly moral act is the act performed through grace and directed toward this end. He often spoke of the shifts and changes in human nature. Some of these changes involve only a change in the human nature. Some of these changes involve only a change in the circumstances in which persons find themselves. Thus, the situation of every human being has changed with original sin. Whereas before sin, actions such as war and the acquisition of private property could only have worked against the objective goods to which we incline, now they may actually promote them. Individual situations may also affect the morality of acts, as in the question of whether you should return the property loaned to you by another if you know he intends to use it for an evil purpose. All that this means is that human nature is rational; man cannot act by instinct alone. He requires the virtue of prudence. Other changes involve human nature in itself; for example, changes in the basic inclinations that are the source of the precepts of practical reason. These inclinations--such as to act with rational consistency, to respect life, to worship God--can be distorted to the point that these goods are no longer pursued. These changes, however, even these internal changes, do not mean that there can be no universally binding norms, for the fundamental physical, psychological structure of man as created for union with God remains intact. It only means that, first, our inclinations need to rectified after the advent of sin, and second, that one has to determine in the situation what sort of act will adhere to these precepts.

Thomas looks to the grace of Christ for the needed healing of human nature. What he doesn't seem to appreciate is that our inclinations are not only wounded but incomplete. He's aware that they have to be intensified and focused through moral training and, of course, grace. But more than this, our inclinations as created are not sufficiently specified; that is, they direct us towards goods, but not
to these goods in all their dimensions. Nor can we depend upon reason to help in this specifying because the underlying good to which all the goods of our nature are joined is God himself, and his nature and our own as joined to his surpass human reason. Let me give as an example of this the good of marriage. Thomas writes that the goods of marriage as perceivable by reason are procreation, the education of offspring, and the community of work between a husband and wife. We can identify a very specific drive to procreate, and to enter into friendship with a spouse. But Thomas then goes on to use this description of marriage and these inclinations to explain why reason dictates that marriage must be indissoluble and monogamous. Now Thomas was the very first theologian to take on this task. And he doesn’t do very well. After all, how can you argue for the indissolubility of marriage, even in the case where one of the partners is sterile, if you maintain the primary end of marriage is procreation? He ends up saying that the natural law governs only for the species as a whole, and not for individuals. That isn’t much good in a Christian system where the moral act pertains to the individual’s salvation, not to the biological status of the race. The reason for the difficulty is pretty clear: the precepts of monogamy and indissolubility are revealed; they’re not conclusions of reason. Thomas draws them from the Bible, and then tries to argue back to their reasonableness on the basis of a purely natural view of marriage. But the Bible ultimately grounds them on the manner in which marriage, from the very beginning, has served as a sign of Christ’s union with his Church. Thomas, like his predecessors, could hardly deny that these precepts are part of the natural law. First, the Bible claims that they have been in effect since the moment of creation. Second, no moral precept can be alien to human reason, and reason is the source of the natural law. Third, our nature is supposed to lead us to our final end—which is union with God in Christ. But Thomas also felt compelled to assert that no sacramental meaning of a human good
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can have an influence on the law of nature. The reason is that nature refers to our human essence, and essence refers to the specific form that makes us to be what we are, namely, rational animals. Human individuals are material instantiations of the shared essence of the species. And both the final end of nature and the means to attain that end--grace--stand outside human nature.

This separation led some of Thomas' later commentators to posit a second final end adequate to man's given essence. This is not only a distortion of Thomas, it is also unnecessary--provided one modifies Thomas' understanding of nature. I'm not speaking here of nature as an abstracted idea, but of nature as actually created, the nature to which the natural law refers. Thomas himself makes this distinction between essence and existence. The problem is that Thomas does not see existence as adding anything to the created essence other than simply realizing it, placing it in the order of existent things. All individuating qualities are said to come from matter. But matter is potency, and the self is a dynamic agent. The only fully actual component in the individual is his received act of existence, and this, it seems to me, must be more than just another instance of a rational animal, a something more that he himself constructs. As for our final end, Thomas wrote that each and every person is directed to this end from the moment his soul is received, consciously sharing in or rejecting, as soon as he acquires the use of reason, the grace that is the means to this end. Now since Thomas describes grace as the presence of God, and since God is the pure act of existence, if God communicates himself it must be on the level of being. And this means communicating himself to us in our own act of existence.

What can we take as a model of this existential reception of grace? The Incarnation. The hypostatic union, Thomas states, raised human nature to the highest possible level. And its act of existence was the Son of God. Our own union with Christ, of course, is effected in terms of our received act of created existence, but this act
is made perfect by its relation to Christ's. Because the Incarnation is the model of human perfection, I think that instead of speaking of a natural law morality, it would be best to speak of a eucharistic morality. I am taking my lead here from a former professor at Marquette, Fr. Donald Keefe. In regarding morality as eucharistic, one would not only be reminded that actual human nature is related existentially, for good or ill, with God in Christ, and that this nature in its physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions is bound to God's, but one will also see that moral knowledge is grounded in the worship of the Church, in which we come to understand more deeply the dimensions of the Incarnation, and which is directed by the primary celebrants of this worship, the bishops.

St. Anselm College
Manchester, N.H.
MacIntyre on Rationality and Tradition

Paul Santilli

Much of contemporary philosophy and social theory casts a suspicious eye upon the moral and intellectual tradition of the west. Neo-Marxism, feminism, deconstructionism, and even a Rorty-like liberalism, having sniffed out the biases and interests underlying the construction of moral and even scientific theories, no longer believe in the objectivity of reason or reason's capacity to expose the foundations of all knowledge. In contrast, we have in the recent work of Alasdair MacIntyre an attempt to rehabilitate the rationality contained within the western philosophical tradition and to defend it against its post-modern critics. In this paper I shall first convey the essential features of MacIntyre's concept of a tradition-bound rationality, especially as they are found in his new book, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, and secondly comment on what I take to be a central problem with this concept.¹

The major thesis of Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, as suggested by the title itself, is that concepts of practical reason and of justice which are coherent and powerful enough to enlighten conduct and govern communities are always embedded in some historical tradition. MacIntyre shares this much with the post-modern critics of tradition, that there is no such thing as Reason itself or Truth itself but only truths and reasons as they are found in quite specific and distinct historical contexts. Against Kantian and utilitarian ethicists he argues, "The neutrality advocated in the name of rationality covertly presupposes one particular type of justice, that of liberal individualism...and ignores the inescapably historically and socially context-bound character which any set of principles of rationality is bound to have."(p.4) To confirm this "contextualism" of rationality, MacIntyre spends many hundreds of pages in his book examining the philosophical traditions of Greeks, Christians, writers of the Scottish Enlightenment, and modern liberals, revealing how the fundamental premises and procedures for judging moral conduct and for rational decision making vary from tradition to tradition. So,
Aristotle’s practical syllogism begins from entirely different conceptions about the good of human life, the passions, the relation of reason and virtue, than do the arguments of Hume. Likewise, definitions of justice which are tied to desert within a polis are incommensurable with liberal notions of egalitarianism among the preferences of individuals. Any theoretical statement about rationality or justice, therefore, requires us to specify to whose justice and which rationality we are referring.

MacIntyre wants to say more than that as a matter of fact there happen to be these conceptual gaps between traditions. He wants to rule out any ideal, a priori procedure for commensurating and assessing these differences. It is an illusion characteristic of modern thought, he claims, to believe that we can understand and evaluate the basic beliefs of all traditions on some neutral objective scale. One reason for this is the linguistic nature of communal beliefs. Moral concepts like idioms and all attempts to translate such concepts into another language are either going to be biased and prejudicial or so neutral that the power and historical vitality of the tradition being translated will have been drained. In either case there will be a mistranslation and mistransmission of tradition (pp. 378-379, 385).^2

Having argued for the diversity of moral traditions and for the incommensurability of concepts of rationality, MacIntyre then must face the challenge of relativism, or as he sometimes puts it, perspectivism, for nothing MacIntyre has said about the localization and temporalization of moral concepts would be entirely unfamiliar to either a post-modern or earlier type of relativism. One way of looking at relativism is to see it as a problem for those who are not committed to any one tradition but find themselves outside of all traditions, or split among the fragments of broken traditions, in short like most of us in western society (especially as we have been described by MacIntyre himself in After Virtue).^3 For such people, the title of MacIntyre’s book takes on a more straightforward and
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perhaps anguished request for guidance in making a reasoned, reflective choice of a principle of justice and a model of practical reasoning. How can we choose among the contending justices, moral truths, and reasons at our disposal in the absence of objective, universal criteria transcending historical and linguistic communities? Whose justice and which rationality are we to adopt? The postmodern responses to this request have been varied and interesting. We have been invited by Nietzsche and Sartre to create or invent new tables of values, by Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein to choose in silence or leaps of faith, by feminists to recover and redeem the lost voices stifled by the dominant powers within traditions, and by Derrida to indulge in a kind of serious and not so serious intellectual play, and by Rorty to opt for "a criterionless muddling through."4

MacIntyre opts for none of these "solutions". What he does instead is extract from the traditions he studies something like a core concept of rationality (similar to what he did with virtue in the earlier book). "Notice," he says, "that the grounds for an answer to relativism and perspectivism are to be found, not in any theory of rationality as yet explicitly articulated and advanced within one or more of the traditions with which we have been concerned, but rather with a theory embodied in and presupposed by their practices of inquiry, yet never fully spelled out..."(p.354) In what does the rationality presupposed by traditions consist?

Before giving MacIntyre's answer to this, it is important to make clearer what he means by a tradition. The range of traditions embodying this notion of rationality will turn out to be for him rather narrow, encompassing several western and highly philosophical cultures. At the minimum, any tradition consists of ongoing social practices and beliefs of a fairly coherent sort, centered around canonical, often poetic texts and authoritative readings of those texts. A tradition, furthermore, not only has a history but is also constituted by a narrative account or retelling of that history. Some traditions
progress to a highly sophisticated philosophical level when recasting this history and become, as MacIntyre names them 'traditions of enquiry'. In a tradition of enquiry one finds debates about reason and morality and conflicts of interpretation over authoritative texts. MacIntyre regards such a tradition as "an argument suspended through time." and it is from such a tradition that he extracts a concept of rationality to refute relativism.

A tradition of enquiry has within itself a capacity for the self-criticism of its own historically earlier concepts of justice and of practical reasoning and for gauging its progress with respect to those concepts. In MacIntyre's view traditions evolve in much the same way as research programs within scientific communities do, that is, dialectically. In his essay "The Relation of Philosophy to Its Past," MacIntyre contends that "no natural scientific theory is ever vindicated as such; it is vindicated or fails to be vindicated only relatively to those of its predecessors with whom it has competed so far." A better scientific theory is precisely one which identifies the "incoherences, omissions, explanatory failures" of its predecessors and formulates arguments which fend off objections which the inferior theory cannot handle. (p. 144)

The same process can be seen operating in the history of ethics, for example in the relation of Aristotle to his predecessors in a tradition going back to Homer. Despite the manner in which they are often treated by philosophers, Aristotle's ethics cannot be argued for or against outside of the dialectical contest and the types of arguments characteristic of that contest which constitute the tradition of moral enquiry or, if you will, the research program of ancient Greek moral philosophy. From MacIntyre's standpoint, it would be senseless to test Aristotle's positions against some a-historical essence or law of rationality, because, first of all these do not exist, and secondly, this would be to ignore the way his arguments function in
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a tradition of enquiry. Aristotelian truth claims can only be assessed with respect to the way they withstand dialectical questioning and objections from rival claims, and vindicate themselves as superior to their historical predecessors. (p. 359)

In this respect and only this respect, therefore, is it permissible to speak of some moral theories as rational and true, and others as not. Although a moral theory does express the interests and practices of a particular culture and period, its logic can not be reduced to such interests and practices, as many post-modern critics argue. There is a certain autonomy to the history of concepts in which some theories are proved to be rational dialectically and historically and which then in turn may transform interests and practices. The concept of rationality interior to the development of tradition, allows MacIntyre to suggest that while history does not march on its head, it does not do so merely with its feet, either.

This, however, does not quite cancel the question of relativism. A relativist could accept the existence of debates and tests of rationality in so far as they are interior to ongoing traditions of enquiry and still question the possibility of making rational choices among or between such traditions. If we were solidly implanted in some tradition or other, then perhaps we would have the resources to allow us to determine when we were making progress in our understanding of moral conduct and in our relevant practices, relative that is to our past. But since we today at best straddle traditions and must enquire about moral truth, justice, and reason without such resources, how is the rationality of traditions as conceived by MacIntyre to address our questions? Or, to use Dan Sperber's phrase, how are we to avoid a kind of "cognitive apartheid."

One way to think about this is to frame the issue of rational theory choice in terms of what MacIntyre calls "epistemological crises." Both in the history of science and in the history of traditions of moral enquiry the "normal" ways of handling problems and
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carrying on debates sometimes breaks down, to the point that the
most basic conceptual schemes of a programme or tradition are
placed in doubt. MacIntyre defines such crises in science along the
well known Kuhnian model and illustrates them with standard
examples like Newtonian and quantum physics. He then transfers
this pattern of crises to the history of ethics claiming that similar
events can be found there:

At any point it may happen to any tradition-constituted
enquiry that by its own standards of progress it ceases to make
progress. Its hitherto trusted methods of enquiry have become
sterile. Conflicts over rival answers to key questions can no
longer be settled rationally (p.362).

There is a breakdown, as he says, of "historically founded certitudes."
How is such a crisis resolved?

A paradigmatic example of such a crisis occurs in the thirteenth
century when the problem of reconciling Augustinian Christianity and
Aristotelian philosophy becomes intractable. Aquinas, according to
MacIntyre, is able to resolve the crisis because he supplies a "new and
richer conceptual and theoretical framework" (p.362) which is able to
"identify, to explain, and to transcend" the limitations and defects of
his Averroist, Neoplatonist, and Augustinian rivals, "While preserving
from them everything that survives dialectical questioning." (p.174)

In short, Thomism represents something like a conceptual revolution
in which a new tradition of moral enquiry has reconstituted the old.
The shift to Thomism is rational for three reasons, according to
MacIntyre: 1. It furnishes a solution to the hitherto intractable
problems facing the Christian tradition: 2. It provides a powerful
explanation of how the tradition ended up with these problems and
why its attempts to solve them had to fail; and 3. It preserves the best
of the tradition it has superceded or aufgehoben. (p.362)

It may also happen that a crisis is not resolved in quite this way.
A tradition, first of all, may not be able to rejuvenate itself and simply
die out. But it may also find in some alien tradition a conceptual
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framework which is fertile enough to resolve its outstanding problems and to provide a better narrative of the history of those problems than it could itself. This then would be more like a Kuhnian paradigm shift than the Thomistic synthesis, for in this case a tradition would have to undergo a massive theoretical conversion to its rival's system, a system whose linguistic-conceptual scheme had been in its heart incommensurable with its own. The important thing for MacIntyre's case against relativism is that such a shift or holistic conversion to an alien point of view would be rationally motivated.

Although there is no neutral universal standard for directing theory choice across traditions, nevertheless there is a standard to be applied in times of crisis which is internal to the tradition in crisis. That members of one culture can come to see another's viewpoint as superior to their own, as a more "cogent and illuminating" account of their problems, is due, says MacIntyre, "to the very same standards by which they have found their tradition wanting in the face of epistemological crisis." (p.364)\textsuperscript{7} To illustrate this, take the case of a school of Marxist theoreticians who, after many years of frustrating attempts to reconcile their theories with other theories come to something like an epistemological crisis in which they lose confidence in their previous ideas and modes of thinking. They could try to make adjustments within the framework of Marxism itself, but they may just as well decide to abandon the whole thing and convert to what had been hitherto an utterly incompatible brand of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, finding in it a body of thought richer and more coherent than their own and not only more capable of solving their problems but also of accounting for how they got into that state (overactive superegos?).

That at any rate is how I think MacIntyre would interpret such an example. If he is correct, then moral traditions and large-scale theories are not closed off from one another, locked into their conceptual schemes and world-views just because an epistemological crisis can provoke the kind of rationally inspired conversion or
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reconstitution we have described. The answer to relativism and to the anti-rationalism of post-modern criticism is to point out how one culture can encounter another and, applying its own forms of reason find in the other a richness and truth that it knew to be missing in itself. Does this response work?

The answer to that, I think, depends first of all on whether or not the standards by which rationality is defined within a given tradition are themselves in a crisis. If they themselves are foundering, as MacIntyre sometimes suggests they are, then they cannot be relied on to verify that some other body of knowledge contains successful solutions available to the system in crisis. One way of emphasizing this difficulty is to look at MacIntyre’s recommendation to the post-modern individual who is required to make decisions about justice without the security of tradition sanctioned norms. MacIntyre urges such an individual to first ally himself or herself with that tradition of inquiry which best explains his or her own fragmented and incoherent state, asking "in which of these rival modes of understanding he or she finds himself or herself most adequately explained and accounted for." (p. 398) What one must ponder here is how are criteria of "best" and "most adequate" explanations to be defined when such an individual is describes as having only remnants of norms and incoherent fragmented standards of rationality and there are no transcultural standards of appeal. The recent history of the United States suggests that any number of belief systems and mythologies from those of the Unification church to those of an exotic Hinduism are capable of serving as coherent solutions and compelling narrative histories for some people who are bereft of their own standards of rationality. Either MacIntyre has to agree that all conversions to such belief systems and mythologies are rational or that the criteria for moral choices are not yet articulated well enough by him to demonstrate that these are not rational options.

Suppose however that epistemological crisis does not reach all the way down to the criteria of rationality themselves, or at least not to
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some of the most fundamental. Presumably some criteria must remain in tact in order for tradition to interpret itself as being in crisis. Someone who had utterly no confident way of distinguishing what did or did not make sense would not possess enough rationality to understand how badly off he or she was, let alone how these deficiencies might be remedied. Could these undisputed criteria serve to motivate the shift to another large-scale moral tradition and thus to another way of framing rationality?

What is important here is how radical the incommensurability is between two moral traditions. At times MacIntyre seems to hold a very radical incommensurability thesis indeed. Each tradition offers "mutually incompatible conceptualizations of natural and social reality." as well as its own standards of truth and justification. Not all but certainly some core moral concepts and ways of framing moral questions are untranslatable, MacIntyre believes. Even some proper names are so weighted with political and moral values that "to use a name is at once to make a claim about political and social legitimacy and to deny a rival claim," so that it is problematic to translate even a place like 'Doire Comcille' in Irish by the English 'Londonderry'. (p. 378) The dilemma that this creates for MacIntyre concerns how the deep paradigms of the other tradition are to be understood in the first place. If the framework of my understanding and evaluation are to be my own tradition's paradigms how am I going to get non-distortive and helpful readings of the other tradition, particularly in such a way as to find it superior in crucial respects to my own?

MacIntyre does deny that incommensurability entails the impossibility of understanding, for one can also learn the rival tradition's language as a second first language and thereby come to understand the web of beliefs rooted in that language, including those beliefs which do not carry well to other traditions. (p. 370)¹⁰

Notice, however, that immersion in another culture so as to understand its linguistic-conceptual scheme will not solve the problem
of a rational comparison and evaluation of two alternative schemes. Learning another language may allow me to comprehend from within a foreign cultural paradigm its own ways of validating truth claims, but it will not be sufficient for me to transfer and apply that paradigm to my own epistemological and moral problems. What is required is some kind of translation of core concepts of justice and rationality from the alien tradition into my own which would allow me to test them and perhaps find them superior to my own. But MacIntyre seems to have ruled out just this sort of translation.

I say "seems" for there are passages where he suggests that traditional contexts of rationality may not be so deep and alien to other contexts that there may not be at least some significant common concepts. But in these passages his analysis is most tentative and opaque and difficult to reconcile with other texts opting for a strong incommensurability thesis. For instance, he states in the Postscript to _After Virtue_ that there are "types of consideration which are already accorded weight in both the competing traditions," that they must share "some common features," and that "It will thus sometimes at least be possible for adherents of each tradition to understand and evaluate by their own standards the characterization of their positions by their rivals." (Emphases added) Unfortunately, MacIntyre has not specified with more detail in later work what exactly these "types of consideration", "common features" or times of cross-cultural understanding are or how they are possible given his historicist and contextualist outlook.

There is, I think, good reason for his hesitation to spell out much further the conditions for cross-cultural assessments of morality and rationality. In order to rank one tradition as superior in crucial respects to another there must, in my opinion, be some way of commensurating the two systems of belief. If, for example, I am to find Thomism a powerful, rich alternative to the modern liberalism in which my present moral beliefs are grounded then it would have
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to appeal to modes of justification and concepts of decency and a good life which it shares with me at some points. If its concepts of happiness, selfhood, etc. were utterly untranslatable into my scales of value then I do not see how I could possibly interpret it as resolving my problems. It may appeal to me on many grounds, but rationality would not be one of them. Interpretation and the quest for truth require a meeting of worldviews along some underlying themes if progress in rationality is to have any meaning. But of course, if MacIntyre were to admit that then he would have to retract at least in part not only his incommensurability thesis but also his anti-universalistic contextualism of rationality and justice. He would have to allow some sort of meta-contextual idea of reason.

This is assuming that he really wants to repudiate relativism. He has said that "something like the relativist charge would hold of any self-contained mode of thought which was not developed to the point at which epistemological crises could become a real possibility." (p.366) He admits that sometimes there are no rational ways to settle disagreements between two rival moral and epistemological traditions which, consequently, have nothing to say to each other. Where traditions, therefore, have not met normative conditions for self-development, then he is indeed willing to concede the floor to a post-modernist relativism. But for him this kind of relativism now becomes irrelevant; it has power only in isolation from traditions of enquiry. Outside of all traditions and unable to reach conclusions, the relativist can only transmit energy and the only thing to say to such a person, as MacIntyre himself once put it, is "Go Away!"

To sum up: MacIntyre’s historicist theory of knowledge requires that all moral concepts and standards of rational justification be situated in the context of the arguments of an ongoing tradition of enquiry. It appears that some traditions at some times -- at times of epistemological crisis? -- can engage other traditions in a kind of moral-epistemological contest with the result that one side or the
other accedes to the superiority of its rival. I have argued that MacIntyre has not provided us with a self-consistent way to show how the understanding which must underlie rational choices is possible, especially given his thesis of the radical incommensurability of natural languages. He does at times leave open the possibility that there must be some common sense of the good, the just, and the rational if cross-traditional understanding is to take place, but he leaves this topic undeveloped, in a kind of floating grey area. The result of this is that relativism is not dismissed by argument after all, but with a kind of annoyed wave.

Siena College
New York
Rationality and Tradition

NOTES

2. See also MacIntyre, "Relativism, Power and Philosophy," Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association, 59, September 1985, 10.
8. Georgia Warnke has recently pointed to affinities between MacIntyre's view of tradition bound rationality and Gadamer's advocacy of dialogic-hermeneutic experiences which are open to challenge and revision through the encounter with other forms of life. Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1987) pp. 171-173. I think that while she is right to press the comparison, Gadamer supplies a far richer analysis of historical understanding than one finds in MacIntyre.
10. Ibid., p. 10.
12. Ibid., p. 277.
Academic Freedom

Paul O'Reilly

Daniel Maguire, professor of theology at Marquette University, has recently asked "can a university be Catholic?" His answer to this question is curious: to the extent that we can return to the medieval ideal of the university, it is indeed possible to have a Catholic university. But if "the Vatican has its way" the term Catholic university will soon become "an oxymoron."

According to Maguire, we owe thanks to St. Thomas Aquinas, among others, who fought the "despotic control of thought" and brought the medieval ideal of the university to early fruition. Typical of this ideal is that a professor's teaching depends "not on formal authority but rather on the force of reason." Hence men like Fr. Charles Curran are actually continuing the tradition of St. Thomas and the medieval university, Maguire asserts.

As Maguire sees it, the ideal of the medieval university has "enjoyed a renaissance after the Second Vatican Council." However, that renaissance is now in crisis. "Prior to Vatican II, the Vatican had a tight grip on Catholic theology and the effect was numbing." But "this renaissance has not sat well with the keepers of orthodoxy in the Vatican." Ultimately what undermines this renaissance of the medieval university is subjecting academics to non-academic authority, notably the authority of the Church. In short, a university can be Catholic and still remain a place of learning only if it does not allow the Vatican to interfere with the classroom; if it does not allow the Church to inhibit academic freedom.

Maguire has chosen the wrong man in pointing to St. Thomas as a patron of current unorthodoxy in Catholic schools. Furthermore, his notion -- which is indeed the prevalent notion of academic freedom -- rather than permitting the Catholic university to exist, actually subverts it. St. Thomas is not hesitant to say that authority has an essential part to play in the formation of the Catholic mind. Authority is particularly necessary in theology. St. Thomas makes this
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clear in the first question of his Summa Theologiae.

To argue from authority is especially proper [to theology], in that the principles of this doctrine are acquired through revelation. Thus it is necessary that one believes because of the authority of those to whom revelation has been made. Nor does this take away from the dignity of this science. For although an argument (loco) from authority which is based upon human reason is the weakest, nevertheless an argument from authority based upon divine revelation is the strongest (efficacissimus).³

When Maguire suggests that St. Thomas was one of the pioneers of the autonomous university because he recognized that teaching relies not on formal authority but on the force of reason, he fails to distinguish the kinds of authority St. Thomas notes in the above passage. An argument from an authority which has no possibility of error would indeed be the greatest aid to teachers, not an impediment.

Moreover even if the individual fails himself to understand how this authoritative doctrine can be true he ought to proceed from the belief that it is true and endeavour to understand why. St. Thomas insists that the truths revealed to us by the Church, since they have the force of divine authority, cannot be contrary to any other truths.

Although the truth of the Christian faith exceeds the capacity of human reason, nevertheless the truth which reason is naturally disposed to have cannot be contrary to the truth of faith.⁴

Hence, according to St. Thomas, the truths of the faith cannot be opposed or refuted by any arguments that men can devise. That is
why it is appropriate, in theological matters, to first accept these truths and then seek to understand them. That seems to be the proper order of procedure in theology. The Catholic scholar goes one step further; he believes the doctrines of the faith as they are revealed and expounded by the Church. And he looks to the Church because she is divinely inspired; hence he knows her doctrine is true.

It is manifest however that he who adheres to the doctrine of the Church, as an infallible rule, assents to all that the Church teaches: otherwise, if concerning the things which the Church teaches, he accepts that which he chooses to accept and rejects that which he chooses to reject, he no longer adheres to the doctrine of the Church as an infallible guide, to his own will.

St. Thomas maintains that to pick and choose beliefs does not belong to faith properly speaking. He who does so no longer looks to God and His Church for instruction and, consequently, loses any guarantee that his positions are absolutely true.

Finally, St. Thomas not only insists that we look to the Church, but that we look to the successor of St. Peter.

The Lord said to Peter, whom he made the Supreme Pontiff; ‘I have prayed for thee, Peter, that thy faith fail not, and thou, when thou art converted, confirm thy brethren.’ The reason for this is because there should be one faith for the whole Church, ‘that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you,’ but this cannot be ensured, unless questions that are raised about the faith be determined by him who presides over the whole Church.
These few texts of St. Thomas indicate that Daniel Maguire is mistaken when he chooses St. Thomas as a model for unorthodoxy. Maguire has also failed to understand St. Thomas' position on the role of authority in the pursuit of knowledge; particularly the search for understanding in the context of a Catholic education. Clearly when it comes to the propositions of faith, even to matters that are indirectly related to the faith,¹⁰ St. Thomas insists that authority is the greatest aid to the academic.

Not only does Maguire fail to appreciate the Thomistic view of authority in Catholic education, but his argument concerning the absolute inviolability of academic freedom ultimately undermines the very nature of a Catholic university.

As Maguire sees it, academic freedom is the essential principle of the teaching profession. In his own words, "...the truth is best served by many minds competing freely together." Who would be so unreasonable as to deny such a commonplace of modern education? Apparently the Church is just that unreasonable. For she insists (at least in principle) that thinkers who challenge the Church's doctrine ought not teach their unorthodox views in Catholic universities.

Maguire gives some examples of the kind of "discussion" he believes the Church is repressing. "One thinks here of the twenty-four nuns, professional women one and all, who called for a dialogue on the open question of abortion." And later he adds,

Theologians are saying that Jesus did not found a church distinct from Judiasm but merely started a religious movement that, under varied influences, became the Christian church. Jesus himself is being described as a Jewish messianic figure and a prophet rather than as a divine person, development that is known by the code name of 'low Christianity.' Liberation theology in Latin America is applying it sociological and theological criticism to the
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abusive powers of the Church as well as those of the state. All of this represents a massive threat from theology to the hierarchy and its power. Understandably the Vatican is ill disposed at this time to sing canticles to academic freedom.

Maguire applies the notion of academic freedom to theology and to truths central to our faith. To the extent that the Church authoritatively declares views opposed to her own as false and pernicious, he claims that she has violated the fundamental freedom of Catholic educators.

Let us examine the principle of academic freedom a little more closely. As it is commonly understood today, one is academically free when one is able to pursue any line of inquiry without restraint from an external authority. Academic freedom requires that one be able to question any proposition or any doctrine and, further, be able to reject it. Without this option there might exist a position to which one objects and yet, is not free to deny. As a matter of principle, academic freedom demands that one be able to reject any doctrine except, of course, that of academic freedom itself.

Why demand this liberty to reject any position? Underlying this demand is a belief that there are no privileged doctrines, that all are open to question. The truth will be attained by unrestrained human inquiry, and by that alone. But in fact, if one arrives at the truth about a certain matter, it is no longer open to question. After all, inquiry exists for the sake of truth. It seems that even Maguire might allow free inquiry to end when the truth is achieved. Yet to say that free inquiry must end at some point violates the principle of academic freedom. It follows, then, that the current notion of academic freedom ultimately depends on the ideology of skepticism.

Paradoxically, Maguire's assertion that a university can be Catholic only if it preserves this notion of academic freedom is a virtual claim that if a university is to be truly Catholic it can no longer
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be a place to learn truth. His view of academic freedom commits him ultimately to skepticism—that the truth can not be known. Maguire's insistence on academic freedom would subvert the educational process.

Perhaps a yet more damning criticism of this view of education is that it attacks the very nature of Catholicism. As Catholics we must believe certain principles to be true and, as St. Thomas has pointed out, we must look to the Church to determine these. Otherwise, our faith is resolved by personal preference. The view that the Church ought not determine what belongs to orthodox Catholic doctrine, that instead this should be determined by free inquiry, supposes that the Church's view is questionable and able to be rejected. Maguire’s argument proceeds on the assumption that the Church's view is not necessarily true. His view is, at bottom, not Catholic.

On the other hand, if the Church has the guarantee that its teaching is guided by the unerring intellect of God, then the truth is best served by submitting to the doctrine of the Church. One may then ask, "What precisely is the Church saying here? And why is it true?" On this level there can be disagreement and debate. Yet Catholics must ultimately submit their minds and wills to the Church. This fundamental Catholic belief ought to govern the Catholic university. And it is only a Catholic institution that would—or could—claim that the argument from authority, from divine authority, ought to guide teachers and students alike. Thus the truth can be known certainly and without error, and therein lies freedom. Indeed, this is a view of education that is directly opposed to that espoused by the academic freedom fighters. But it is one which Christ Himself commended to us.
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If you continue in my word, you shall be my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

St. Anselm College
Manchester, N.H.

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NOTES

1. Daniel C. Maguire, "Can a University be Catholic," *Academe* (Journal of the A.A.U.P.) January-February, 1988. (All quotes from Maguire are taken from this article.)
3. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Pars Prima, Question 1, article 8, ad. 2. (Translations of St. Thomas are my own.)
5. Many texts in St. Thomas make this clear, v., e.g., *Summa Theologiae*, Secunda Secundae, Q. 5, article 3.
Saint Anselm the Student

Fr. John Fortin, O.S.B.

Of all the students of the middle ages, perhaps the best known is Chaucer's Oxford Clerk:

An Oxford Cleric, still a student though,
One who had taken logic long ago,
Was there; his horse was thinner than a rake,
And he was not too fat, I undertake,
But had a hollow look, a sober stare;
The thread upon his overcoat was bare.
He found no preferment in the church
And he was too unworldly to make search
For secular employment. By his bed
He preferred having twenty books in red
And black, of Aristotle's philosophy,
Than costly clothes, fiddle or psaltery.
Though a philosopher, as I have told,
He had not found the stone for making gold.
Whatever money from his friends he took
He spent on learning or another book
And prayed for them most earnestly, returning
Thanks to them thus for paying for his learning.
His only care was study, and indeed
He never spoke a word more than was need,
Formal at that, respectful in the extreme,
Short, to the point, and lofty in theme.
A tone of moral virtue filled his speech
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.¹

For our purposes, it is important to note the centrality of books in the life of this student: they are his constant companions and the objects of his devotion and respect. He keeps them near his bed
and spends what money he can on them. Indeed his devotion to them is mirrored in his tale of the faithfulness of the beautiful Griselda to her husband.

Books and texts written by the accepted authorities of pagan and Christian antiquity were the objects of study by the medieval student. Not for him the task of making an "original contribution" in his field to gain recognition as a scholar or a doctor; his task was to acquire a clear understanding of the knowledge handed down through the centuries. Thus a Saint Thomas Aquinas, as did his contemporaries seeking a degree in theology at the University of Paris, writes for his doctoral dissertation a commentary on Peter the Lombard's Sentences, which is itself an ordered compilation of authoritative texts and citations on a number of theological questions.

Helen Waddell has noted of the medieval poet:

The scholar's lyric of the twelfth century seems as new a miracle as the first crocus; but its earth is the leafdrift of centuries of forgotten scholarship. His emotional background is of his own time; his literary background is pagan, and such furniture as his mind contains is classical or pseudo-classical.  

The point to be taken here is that the basis of learning and study, of all the intellectual arts, was that found in the books which had been handed down, commented on, copied, re-copied, glossed and re-presented since antiquity. Writers of the middle ages unashamedly acknowledge their sources and are most happy to show how their knowledge emerges from and is consistent with the tradition. They tell us what they have read. St. Thomas Aquinas and John of Salisbury immediately come to mind as students and scholars whose sources are clearly acknowledged and decidedly respected.
St. Anselm the Student

Given this general tenor of medieval learning, we might direct our attention to St. Anselm and ask of him: who were your book-teachers? What texts were the objects of your study? What were the "twenty books in red and black" which you treasured and made use of in your philosophical and theological work?

The question of the book-teachers of St. Anselm can be divided into two parts: namely, the Christian sources and the secular writers. In regard to the former, the vast majority of the intellectual historians of the middle ages agree that St. Augustine forms the basis of Anselm's thought. Anselm himself acknowledges the place of Augustine as the principal theologian of Christian doctrine of the Trinity (Monologion, pr). It is from Augustine that Anselm draws his strong neo-Platonic philosophical position.

But the part of the question which we would like to pursue here deals with St. Anselm's secular sources. Who were those writers from classical antiquity who made an impact on his study and reflection? There are four places where the answer to this question can be sought: the curriculum of study in the medieval schools, the library of the Abbey of Bec, the biography written by Eadmer, and the writings of Anselm himself.

First, then, is the curriculum of the day, the texts which made up the education of the young as they advanced in their study of the liberal arts: grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. The history of education in the middle ages yields up this list, and we can rightfully assume that Anselm was exposed to many of these significant authors: Priscian, Donatus, Cicero, Boethius and so on. As Eadmer says, "He went to school, he
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learnt his letters and in a short time made great progress.\textsuperscript{6}

Another possible source for discovering Anselm's book-teachers is the library at the Abbey of Bec, where he first studied under Lanfranc after three years of being a "wandering scholar." Lanfranc was noted for his rich and diverse collection of books. It is likely that Anselm availed himself of the opportunity to ponder the knowledge which these texts presented. Unfortunately, as R.W. Southern notes,\textsuperscript{7} the library at Bec is gone. Nonetheless there exists a catalogue of the books which Lanfranc had collected for the library at Canterbury, a library modelled on the one at Bec. Thus a study of this list would help identify possible sources for Anselm's own study.

Thirdly there is the evidence which can be garnered from Eadmer's biography of his friend Anselm. While Eadmer, as we would expect, makes several references to Anselm's scholarly pursuits in Book I, which deals with the Anselm's life up to his departure for Canterbury, he is silent about the book-teachers which Anselm used. Although he was a good student as a child, Anselm did give up academics for the amusements of his youth. Once under the tutelage of Lanfranc, however, he re-discovered his love of learning: "He gave himself up day and night to literary studies, not only reading with Lanfranc those things which he wished, but teaching carefully to others the things which they required."\textsuperscript{8} Even at night, we are told, "he corrected the books, which in all countries before this time were disfigured by mistakes."\textsuperscript{9}

Even though Eadmer gives a careful listing of all his friend's work in chapter nineteen, he does not mention the sources or authors which inspired or guided Anselm in his study or writing.

Finally, then, we come to the last of the sources which can tell us of Anselm's secular book-teachers: namely, his own writings. We should note at the outset that Anselm, unlike St. Thomas and others, left no commentaries on any work of an accepted authority, pagan or Christian. Even Anselm's correction of books, mentioned
above, does not appear to have involved any glosses of merit, such as brought recognition to Lanfranc.

Here too we will be disappointed if we are looking for the explicit mention of classical authors or texts.

Two of Aristotle’s logical works, On Interpretation and Categories, were available at the time of Anselm through the translations and commentaries of Boethius. These texts were commonly known and were in effect all the Aristotle at that time in Latin. A cursory reading of Anselm in Schmitt’s edition reveals seven references to Categories in Anselm’s De Grammatico and one reference to On Interpretation in Cur Deus Homo, all of these indirect and without mentioning either Aristotle, Boethius or the title of either text.

Further, while Anselm exhibits in De Grammatico his understanding of the syllogistic style of reasoning, his preference is for a style which utilizes equipollent propositions, as for example in Proslogion. Thus Aristotle’s influence is not clearly measurable.

Outside of the translations and commentaries on Aristotle, Boethius appears to find his way into Anselm in the definition of eternity given in Monologion: compare Boethius’ phrase “Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio” (Eternity then is the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life) in V,vi prose of The Consolation of Philosophy with Anselm’s "interminabilem vitam perfecte simul totam obtinere" (...eternally, that is, it possesses interminable life, as a perfect whole at once) in chapter XXIV.

One might also see in Anselm’s definition of person in Monologion LXXIX, "persona non dicitur nisi de individua rationali natura" (person is applied only to an individual, rational nature), the influence of Boethius’ definition of person in Contra Eutychen III, "naturae rationabilis individua substantia" (an individual substance of a rational nature). Yet there is not to be found an explicit mention
of Boethius or his works in any of Anselm's writings nor are the two references mentioned proof of any dependence on Boethian thought.

Of another great figure from antiquity, Plato, there is little or no evidence. First, the only work of Plato available at the time of Anselm would have been the Timaeus, translated into Latin and commented on by Calcidius. Indeed while that text may have been available to Anselm, there is no direct evidence of Anselm's use of it. Second, any neo-Platonic strains in Anselm, as has been stated above, can be accounted for in his reading of St. Augustine.11

One can read carefully the extant and extensive correspondence of Anselm and find implicit literary references to Virgil, Terence, Livy and Lucan, which Schmitt has noted and Southern has discussed.12 This evidence indicates something of Anselm's breadth of reading, but it does not answer the more serious question of Anselm's dependence upon or use of secular book-teachers. None of these writers appears explicitly anywhere in Anselm's scholarly works, nor is the thought of any of them prominent.

There is, finally, one startling use of a secular author which needs to be mentioned. Again, the author is not acknowledged by name, nor is his work. In fact, no indication at all is given by Anselm that he is borrowing from any source whatsoever. We refer to the celebrated definition of God in Proslogion III: "aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest" (something than which none greater can be conceived). While a thorough search through the writings of Augustine will yield similar phrases, one can in Seneca's Naturales Quaestiones I, pr. 13 find what would appear to be the most likely source of Anselm's definition. There Seneca writes: "Quid sit deus?...Sic demum magnitudo illi sua redditur, qua nihil maius cogitari potest" (What is God?...Thusly is he given due credit for his magnitude, than which nothing greater can be conceived). Seneca's work was available to Anselm; it is not illogical to conclude that he
used it. But again the manner of his overall presentation in
Proslogion does not reflect any other dependence on Seneca’s text
or thought.

What are we to make of all this? Certainly it is clear that
Anselm had at his disposal a wealth of learning from classical
antiquity. It is also clear that he used some of that learning, though
without explicit acknowledgement of the sources, in his writings. Did
Anselm feel that his readers would recognize his sources without his
having to name them explicitly?

Perhaps. But another way to understand his use of secular
sources, his classical book-teachers, is to understand something of his
philosophy of education. Eadmer recounts for us that view:

He compared the time of youth to a piece of wax of the right
consistency for the impress of a seal. ‘For if the wax,’ he said,
‘is too hard or too soft, it will not, when stamped with the
seal, receive a perfect image. But if it preserves a mean
between these extremes of hardness and softness, when it is
stamped with the seal, it will receive the image clear and
whole.’

Perhaps Anselm saw his own reading and study of the
classical authors, as well as of the Christian writers, as his being
impressed with the seal of knowledge and truth. The truth becomes
for him the all-important goal of life: faith seeking understanding,
study seeking understanding, reading seeking understanding; and
understanding seeking union with the holy and omniscient One Who
is Truth. The wax of the right consistency and properly sealed will
then become a candle which sheds the light of truth.
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In his work On Truth, Anselm defines truth as follows: "rightness perceptible only to the mind." This truth is a transcendent truth: it goes beyond all times and all ages. Therefore wherever truth is found, it is the common right of the mind, of any mind, to grasp it, hold it, examine it. No author is in full possession of it; each glimpses a part of the truth in its entirety. Only the Supreme Truth is omniscient. Anselm focused his mind and study on the essence, the substance of a theological point: all the learning which he had acquired was in the service of his search for its truth.

Chaucer’s Oxford Clerk had only one care, study; when he spoke or taught, he did so with the modesty that comes from one who has respect for the truth and for those who, as his book-teachers, conveyed truth to him:

He never spoke a word more than was need,
Formal, at that, respectful in the extreme,
Short, to the point, and lofty in theme.
A tone of moral virtue filled his speech....

St. Anselm used his secular book-teachers to help him understand the truth of God and of man, and convey that truth to those who would read his own humble works. And in doing so, he himself has become one of the book-teachers for later generations of students and scholars: his works, bound "in red and black," are companions for those whose faith seeks understanding.

St. Anselm College
Manchester, N.H.
NOTES

10. Southern, p. 22.
12. Southern, p. 5., and p. 17, n5.
Thomas Nagel and the Problem of Aesthetics

Christopher Tollefsen

In his book, *The View From Nowhere*, Thomas Nagel explains what it means for things to have objective value, and discusses the possibility that there exist objective reasons for action. In light of this discussion Nagel finds an objective account of aesthetics problematic, even though he does believe there to be objective aesthetic values. In this paper, I will attempt to explain some possible ways in which aesthetic value can fit into Nagel's conception of objective value and how the problems he points out may be handled. I will summarize some of Nagel's points concerning value in general, then I will deal with the main problem with aesthetic values, as Nagel sees it. Finally, I will consider some of the reasons this problem arises for Nagel.

Nagel sees, quite rightly, I believe, that the problem of objective value is tied up with "the view that propositions about what gives us reasons for action can be true or false independently of how things appear to us and that we can hope to discover the truth by transcending the appearances and subjecting them to critical assessment." We aim, in this, at "the truth about what we and others should do and want." That is, in spite of whatever reasons we personally may have for doing or wanting something, there must be some reason such that it is the right reason for doing something -- and this reason may or may not conform to our own existing reasons or motives.

Corresponding to reasons there must be values--the objects of our reasons. Similarly, corresponding to the right reasons, there must be the right, or objective, values. These values, Nagel hopes, may be discovered from the "external"
standpoint; thus discovered, we may "reorder our motives" in accordance with what we perceive to be real values. The question we are trying to answer, as Nagel sees it, is, "What is the reason to do or want (a value), considered from the impersonal standpoint?" (p. 140)

Nagel views the process of coming to conclusions in this matter as beginning with reasons which are evident from the subjective point of view. If we want or need something, we have a reason for acting so as to do or acquire that which we want or need; I desire to be rid of my headache, says Nagel, and this is a reason for taking an aspirin. (p. 152) Reciprocally, there is a value in the cessation of my headache. (In aesthetics, the beginnings might be similar— I enjoy looking at a painting; thus I have reason to continue doing so.) Our requirement for objectivity, however, means that we must generalize. We ask not what 'I' should do, but what 'this person,' any person, should do. (p. 141). As with all formulations in Nagel-like terms, we must come up with something which may be accepted from an impersonal point of view. This is not, I think, a generalization which makes the reasons acceptable from every point of view, but one which would be accepted by every person if they took up the same impersonal point of view. It is neither a view from somewhere, nor a view from everywhere, but the view from nowhere. A value which is objective should be such that it provides objective reasons for anyone to discount subjective values with which it may conflict, although it does not necessarily mean that the two points of view will conflict. Thus, Nagel asks how does or can a reason which we have initially fit into a more general reason which is applicable to all? The "search for generality" is what Nagel sees as one of
the primary drives in the "construction of an objective view." (p.152)

It is within this context that Nagel discusses the problem of aesthetic value. Nagel outlines three types of generality which may exist in value issues.² It is the third type with which aesthetic values are concerned. Nagel says, "...reasons may vary in their degree of externality, or independence of the concerns of sentient beings." (p.153) Nagel points out that while most reasons are closely connected with interests, desires, and experiential satisfaction, there seem to be objects of intrinsic value, "which are not merely a function of the fact that anyone wants them -- a value which is not reducible to their value for anyone." (p.153) Such values are problematic for Nagel: How can an objective value exist in an object which is completely external to human beings? This is not problematic for values such as life and health, for these are valued by, and values of human agents. However, it is most problematic in the case of beautiful things and aesthetic values. Nagel wishes to believe that there is an objective value to the beautiful, but does not know how to avoid what he considers to be unacceptable consequences of that view, specifically, that an object should retain its value, even if it were impossible for any agent to respond to that value. Nagel does not think it reasonable that the survival of a work of art after the destruction of all sentient beings is good in any way.

The question, then, is how there can be value in something external to us, when value seems to be so intricately bound up with our concerns. How could something be of value if it is possible that it could give no reasons at all, as would be the case for the Mona Lisa in an uninhabited world?
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The answer lies in more clearly defining what reasons and values are when predicated of beautiful things. There are some crucial differences between the status of reasons and values in aesthetics as opposed to anything else, but these differences can, I think, be reconciled with each other.

The first is touched upon by Nagel. It is rather odd that value should exist in something so completely external to human beings. A look at other values will show why. Say, as in the earlier example, that I take an aspirin to relieve my headache. Subjectively, not having an aching head is a value, and it gives me a reason to act. More generally, we might say that health is an objective value for everyone, which gives one reason to do such things as take aspirin, as a way of promoting the value of health. What is different in this case from all cases of aesthetic value is that the value is, in a sense, inseparable from the persons who have reasons for acting on that value. If all sentient agents were removed, health, as a value, would be absolutely removed--there would be no such thing as health. Likewise, were all agents capable of actualizing the good of play, or friendship, removed absolutely, those values would disappear as well. If one looks at values, disregarding the problem of aesthetics, it seems that values are properties or attributes of the agents for whom these values give reasons. But this does not seem to be the case with beautiful things, if there is objective value in the artifact itself. If this is so, all sentient creatures could be removed with no damage to the value in question.

The second difference, closely related to the first, is that most values give reasons to act, and that in the action, the good is actualized. The active experience and the good itself seem almost inseparable. (One can, however, speak of these goods with no reference to the experience of them).
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Aesthetic experience, on the other hand, is passive--we are acted upon. Our reasons do not induce us to act, but to experience. Again, if Nagel has correctly formulated the problem, the experience is very different from what we consider to be the value.

The solution to the problem, I think, is to say that Nagel has in fact not formulated the problem adequately. In aesthetics, one must distinguish between two types of value, and isolate the value which is pursued in aesthetic experience. The two types of value which may be pursued by an agent are the value of a work of art as it is in itself, and the value of an experience of interaction with that work of art. If the value pursued is the latter, Nagel's problem is solved.

A work of art certainly has a value which is intrinsic to it. This value, I think, is its formal perfection--this formal perfection is good in itself. As an example of this formal perfection, one might take the relationships to be found in a Gothic cathedral. One finds, in the towers, supports, and ornaments, a certain symmetry, balanced by diversity. The parts mirror the whole. Finally, there is a unity in the cathedral, a unity which includes all other relationships. Now for aesthetic values to be objective, and real, it is certain that these relationships must be real relationships; they exist in the structure of the cathedral. Moreover, there is a real value to the formal perfection of that cathedral -- it is good that something be ordered, and well ordered. However, and this is my response to Nagel, the value which we pursue is not the value which is the formal perfection of the object. It is, rather, the value of the experience which those properties cause us to have. That is, we do not pursue symmetry as a value to be had ourselves; we pursue the
value which is the experience which that symmetry causes us to have, the experience of aesthetic enjoyment. And this value is very much like those other values with which Nagel would have no such problems. It is a value inseparable from the agents who have it -- without those agents, the value would disappear, as surely as the values of health or play. What does not disappear, and this should not be a problem for Nagel, is the value of formal perfection, which is not experience, but that which is experienced. Thus it would, in fact, be good if the Frick Collection survived all sentient creatures, but not good in the same way that a sentient experience of that collection would actualize.

Thus Nagel's problem is solved, the problem of how to account for external values in a way which allows beautiful objects to retain their value, "even if no one will ever be able to respond to them." (p.153) There is, however, an addendum to this problem. We have seen how the properties of a work of art cause an experience of aesthetic enjoyment. There is value both in the work of art, and in the experience of that work of art. How does one arrive at the reason for that aesthetic experience? That is, one may know why the work affects one in a certain way, but how does one know why one should pursue that experience in the first place? Are there normative reasons for enjoying a work of art? The answer, in aesthetics, is interesting. If one knows the formal perfection of a work of art, one's reason for pursuing the experience of that perfection is just that perfection. When one experiences aesthetic enjoyment, one's object and reason are before him -- yet it is only afterwards that one may separate in thought one's experience of the object and the reasons which that object gives to anyone for pursuing this experience: its delightful and unique play on
symmetry and proportion, for example. In an attempt to come to an appreciation of a beautiful work of art, one may give subjective reasons, or one may give the objective reasons which are instantiated in the work itself. Consider, as an example, the following dialogue, taken from Coleridge. In this dialogue, Milton has taken up the objective view of the York Cathedral, but his companion, a Puritan, has not yet done so.

P: ...it is not the beauty of holiness.
M: True, but yet it is beautiful.
P: It delights not me. What good is it for? Is it of any use but to be stared at?
M: Perhaps not! But still it is beautiful.
P: But call to mind the pride and wanton vanity of those cruel shavelings, that wasted the labor and substance of so many thousand poor creatures in the execution of this haughty pile.
M: I do. But still it is very beautiful.

The dialogue continues, but this is enough to make the point. The Puritan is acting irrationally because he is not acting in accordance with the reasons which exist in the work of art for its contemplation. Rather, he brings to it a list of subjective demands, which the cathedral does not serve to fulfill, nor is it intended to fulfill -- at least as it is considered precisely as a valuable work of art. Even if 'P' stood for the Pope, who enjoyed the cathedral because it brought glory to the Church, or because it allowed the "poor creatures" who built it to spend their life in the service of God, the reasons would still be of the subjective mode. When one takes up the "view from nowhere" when contemplating a work of art, one is guided by that work of art to the value of aesthetic
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experience. This is the only way, it seems to me that aesthetic experience can truly be objective. One is responsible, because one knows what the right reasons are for placing himself in the required relationship to that work. Our interests may "change in light of the amount of attention which we bestow upon the object," (p.153.) because we may come to realize that the reasons to be given are not our own: we may begin to see the objective value of the work and discard our subjective baggage. A man who cries at a symphony because it reminds him of his lost wife has a hope to be able to enter into a meaningful relationship with the symphony itself, by attending to the symphony, rather than to the memory of his wife. In this way the value of aesthetic experience is actualized, a value which is caused by, but not the same as, the value of the formal perfection of the work of art itself. These distinctions, I think, clear up the problem of which Nagel is aware, while maintaining, as Nagel does, that aesthetic value differs from other types of value.

Student
St. Anselm College
Manchester, N.H.
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NOTES

1. *The View From Nowhere*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 1986), p.139. All further references to this book will be found in parentheses.
2. The other two ways in which values differ is in their breadth of reason for action, and in their relativity to specific agents.
3. Frequently it will be the power of the work itself, which so affects the viewer, listener, etc., that he will not be able to maintain his subjective reasons, in the face of what is actually happening. Thus, the Puritan might actually come to enjoy the work of art, despite his objections. However, it is unlikely that he will come to realize why he enjoys it: he is likely to continue to chalk it up to some sort of religious significance. This seems to be the case of the majority of those who enjoy the beautiful, and have a special sensitivity to it; caught within the aesthetic mores of contemporary culture, they are likely to account for the value of the work in terms of its truth. However, it seems to me that this also is an example of bringing one's own subjective reasons to the work: the structure of the work just does not allow for it to be a medium of truth.