

# **MacIntyre's Project in *After Virtue***

Work and the Human Condition: Spring 2009

## **I. MacIntyre's Position and Method**

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## **III. Emotivism as Philosophy and Social Condition**

# MacIntyre's Position and Method

“We possess ... simulacra of morality.... But we have ... lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality” (2).

## A Historical Position:

- A position about not just philosophy but our society and the philosophy it embodies
- Concerns our society at a *historical moment*
- Concerns our society as resulting from a *historical sequence* (narrative)

## The Historical Narrative

1<sup>st</sup>: The language and practice of morality flourished.

2<sup>nd</sup>: Morality in society suffered a catastrophe

3<sup>rd</sup>: The language and practice of morality were restored in damaged form.

## **Some Features of MacIntyre's Method**

MacIntyre views philosophical theories and positions in relation to their social context.

Cf. his criticism of the “persistently unhistorical treatment of moral philosophy” (11)

MacIntyre views philosophical theories as developing historically, along with the historical development of societies.

Cf. his discussion of emotivism, ch. 3.

Central to MacIntyre's project is the construction of a historical narrative that makes sense of the philosophical development that has brought us here.

# Overview of *After Virtue*

**Ch's 1-3:** Where We Are Now: Emotivism as a Philosophical Theory and as a Social Condition

**Ch's 4-6:** History of the Failure of the Enlightenment Project, and How it Led to Emotivism

**Ch's 7 & 8:** Critiques of Managerialism (i.e., applied emotivism)

**Ch. 9:** The crux – Premodern Virtue or Emotivism?

**Ch's 10-13:** History of Premodern Virtue

**Ch's 14 & 15:** MacIntyre's Own Account of Virtue

**Ch's 16 & 17:** The degeneration of virtue today

**Ch. 18:** The Closing of his Argument

# Emotivism as a Philosophy and as a Social Condition

A Theory of the *meaning* of moral language

## Meaning:

Ordinarily:

“cat” *means* → (Hand-drawn  
pictures were  
here — you  
had to be  
there... )  
“The cat is on  
the red mat” *means* →

What do “good,” “bad,” “right,” “wrong” mean?

According to emotivism, they don’t mean *anything*.

*What do these sentences mean?*

“Go geoducks!”

“Close the door!”

“Ugh.”

They don’t *mean* anything – they merely *express* various emotions or preferences.

“Stealing is wrong.”

“Stealing – rrr...”

“You were wrong to steal that money.”

“Rrr... you stole that money!”

“Gandhi was a good man.”

“Ahh, Gandhi... hm-mm...”

# Problems with Emotivism

- Fails to distinguish between *meaning* and *use*
- Fails to account for the justificatory structure of moral language.

“You should’ve gone and helped Sal move.”

“Why should I have?”

“Well, you promised to, and you should keep your promises. Besides that, Sal needed your help, Sal’s your friend, and you should help your friends.”

# **Emotivism as a Social Condition**

An Important Feature of Emotivism:

Ordinary views of morality (like Kant, p. 23) distinguish between manipulating someone and not doing so, by giving them moral reasons.

Emotivism claims that *all* moral language is manipulative. So, all our social relations are manipulative.

**So, what does an emotivist society look like?**

According to MacIntyre: Like ours!

Cf. p. 25-27.

And, looking ahead, p. 74.