MACINTYRE, NARRATIVES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

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Abstract
   While environmental philosophers have been striving to extend ethics to deal with future generations and non-human life forms, very little work has been undertaken to address what is perhaps a more profound deficiency in received ethical doctrines, that they have very little impact on how people live. Alasdair MacIntyre's work on narratives and traditions is explored, and a radicalization of his arguments is defended as a direction for making environmental ethics efficacious.

Introduction

   The environmental crisis challenges received ethical doctrines in two ways. Firstly, it challenges their limited scope. Received doctrines are criticised for their inability to encompass future generations, non-human life-forms and even inanimate nature. Much work has been devoted to extending received ethical doctrines, or more radically, to searching for new foundations for ethics which transcend the bias towards the present and towards humans, particularly Western, white male humans. This search has led to a re-examination of the philosophies of Spinoza, Whitehead, Heidegger, Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty, among others, of advances in the natural sciences, including quantum theory, the general theory of relativity and ecology, and of Taoism, Bhuddism, minor traditions within Christianity, and American Indian, Australian Aboriginal and Maori cultures. However there is a more fundamental problem with received ethical doctrines: their marginalization from the mainstream of culture, a marginalization which is reinforced by the marginalization of philosophy in general. People are more likely to turn to psychologists for guidance on how to live and to economists for guidance on how to organize society than to philosophers. And despite François Lyotard's claim that there is an incredulity towards metanarratives, the ultimate reference point for justifying any action, organization or endeavour is not the principles of any doctrine of ethics. It is the grand narrative of economic progress. Philosophers for the most part are regarded with a mixture of indulgent respect and contempt as clever people living in a world of their own. Furthermore, given the nature of environmental problems and their causes, even if ethics in its present form were taken seriously, it would be, to use Ulrich Beck's apt phrase: "like a bicycle brake on an intercontinental jet".[1] Its focus on individuals in abstraction from their engagement in society prevents the relationship between individuals and major problems confronting humanity from ever being understood. While these problems have been of concern to some environmental philosophers, environmental philosophy has not overcome the marginalization of the discourse of ethics and philosophy from everyday life, nor grappled with the issue of how ethics could be made efficacious. Not only has it failed to pay enough attention to the question of how to make decisions about what to do and how to live (as Janna Thompson has argued)[2], let alone questions

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[1] Ulrich Beck, "From Industrial Society to Risk Society", <u>Cultural Theory and Cultural Change</u>, Mike Featherstone ed., (Sage: London, 1992), p.106.

[2] Janna Thompson, "A Refutation of Environmental Ethics", <u>Environmental Ethics</u>, 12 (1990): 147-60.

of what decisions, actions and ways of living could be effective in the face of a global ecological crisis and the economic, political and social forces producing it, it has proliferated so many different points of view without moving towards a consensus that anyone turning to philosophy for guidance on environmental issues could only be confused.

Alasdair MacIntyre: Narratives, Traditions and Ethics

The philosopher who in recent years has been most concerned to address the marginalization of ethical philosophy in particular and philosophy in general has been Alasdair MacIntyre. Arguing that ethics in the modern world has failed to provide criteria for judgement and that philosophy in general has been trivialized by its fragmentation and inability to bring any argument to a conclusion,[3] he has argued for the revival of an ethics of virtues based on the philosophies of Aristotle and Aquinas. However what is most original in MacIntyre's work is his defence of the notions of "narrative" and "tradition". These notions have been deployed to solve the problem of relativism consequent to acknowledging the perspectival nature of knowledge, to clarify the nature of ethics and to show what is required of philosophy if it is to regain its position within culture.

MacIntyre first invoked narratives and traditions in his now famous paper, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narratives and the Philosophy of Science" in an attempt to meet the challenge of relativism. He argued that what enables radical developments in science, developments which break with past criteria of what science is, to be recognized as advances is that they facilitate the construction of a narrative in terms of which all rival claims to knowledge can be put in perspective and evaluated. For example:

> Wherein lies the superiority of Galileo to his predecessors? The answer is that he, for the first time, enables the work of all his predecessors to be evaluated by a common set of standards. The contributions of Plato, Aristotle, the scholars at Merton College, Oxford and Padua, the work of Copernicus himself at last all fall into place. Or to put matters in another and equivalent way: the history of late medieval science can finally be cast into a coherent narrative.... What the scientific genius, such as Galileo, achieves in his transitions, then, is not only a new way of understanding nature, but also and inseparably a new way of understanding the old sciences way of understanding... It is from the stand-point of the new science that the continuities of narrative history are reestablished.[4]

The re-establishment of narrative continuities effects the reconstitution of traditions - with greater coherence than had previously existed.

While the central role attributed to narratives in ethics was hinted at in other works, this thesis was fully elaborated and defended in <u>After Virtue</u>. MacIntyre argued that people can only orient themselves in society through being told stories which enable them to understand and take up their positions within the stories which are being living out. As he put it:

> I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters - roles into which we have been drafted - and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories ... that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the caste of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions and in their words.[5]

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[3] For a forceful statement on this see Alasdair MacIntyre, "Philosophy: Past Conflict and Future Direction", <u>Proceedings and Addresses of The American Philosophical Association</u>, Supplement to Volume 61, #1, (September, 1987), pp.81-87.

[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science." <u>Monist</u>, 60 (1977): 459-60 & 467.

[5] Alasdair MacIntyre, <u>After Virtue</u>, 2nd ed., (Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, 1984), p.216.

The narrative of one life is part of an inter-related set of narratives, defining the individual as a member of a number of inter-related institutions: a family, a city, a guild or profession, different organizations and a nation. As individuals, people belong to these and inherit from them a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. They find themselves part of a history of each institution with its traditions and associated practices.

While the narratives constituting these institutions are already there before people are inducted into them, and they are being lived before they are recounted, individuals are not merely cyphers for these stories. As members of communities individuals are engaged in the quest for a successful life. It is in this context that virtues must be understood. Virtues are those dispositions which will sustain practices and enable people to achieve the goods internal to those practices and, most importantly, will sustain people in the relevant kind of quest for the good. This involves firstly, that there is some idea of the ultimate good through which people can evaluate and order other goods and define the kind of life which is a quest for the good and, secondly, through this quest for the good there is a growing self-knowledge and growing understanding of the character of that which is sought. This quest is not separate from forms of community. In a centrally important way the common life of a form of community is constituted by a continuous argument as to what that institution is and ought to be. As MacIntyre put it: "A living tradition ... is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[6]

MacIntyre refined this notion of traditions in Whose Justice? Which Rationality? and later works, showing their relationship to philosophy.[7] A tradition, he argued, is constituted by a set of practices together with the understanding of their importance and worth for the maintenance of the tradition. By facilitating the quest for the kind of goods made possible through such practices, traditions are embraced and reproduced from generation to generation. A healthy tradition has within it the resources for self-criticism and for its self-transformation. In upholding certain virtues and ideas of the good, traditions almost invariably confront their members with what are essentially philosophical problems. Only systematic philosophy can provide the requisite means to provide determinate solutions to these. Philosophy is systematic

> when as large a range as possible of the problems, incoherencies and partial unintelligibilities of prephilosophical discourse, action and enquiry are made the subject matter of an enquiry in which the questions to be answered are of the form: How are all these to be understood in the light of the best unified and integrated conception of rationally adequate enquiry possessed so far?[8]

Systematic philosophy should not be understood as a fixed set of ideas but historically as a self-critical and self-transforming tradition of enquiry. Philosophers as participants in such traditions should strive to identify the aporias of common sense thought, aesthetic, legal and political activities, scientific and other forms of enquiry, and try to provide satisfactory answers to people who have become aware of these aporias.

It is possible, MacIntyre argued, not only to evaluate radical ideas developed from within such a tradition of enquiry, but to confront and evaluate rival traditions. It is possible to inhabit rival conceptual schemes, to know and utter the idiom of each from within, to judge each in its own terms, and then to judge between them according to whether one tradition facilitates comprehension of and overcomes the failures of the other.[9] When it is impossible to judge between rival traditions because of the different achievements and failures of each, it is possible to reconcile them without recourse to absolute standards by creating a new tradition of enquiry

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[6] Ibid. p.222.

[7] Alasdair MacIntyre, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

[8] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?", Philosophical Imagination and Cultural Memory, Patricia Cook ed., (Durham and London: Duke University Press), p.76.

[9] What is involved in this is most fully elaborated in Alasdair MacIntyre, "Incommensurability, Truth and Conversation Between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues", Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophical Perspectives, Eliot Deutsch ed., (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), pp.104-122.

transcending the limitations of each.[10] The potential of any tradition to justify and develop itself by putting in perspective other traditions can be evaluated through the narratives formulated from within that tradition to account for other traditions.

The Immediate Relevance of MacIntyre to Environmental Ethics

What relevance is this to environmental ethics? First and foremost MacIntyre provides the means to diagnose how people are oriented to living in an environmentally destructive way. At the same time this reveals at least some of the measures necessary for changing how people live. In developing the argument of his famous paper of 1967, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis"[11] Lynn White Jr. argued:

> The artifacts of a society, including its political, social and economic patterns, are shaped primarily by what the mass of individuals in that society believe, at the sub-verbal level, about who they are, about their relation to other people and to the natural environment, and about their destiny.[12]

If MacIntyre is right, the beliefs that matter for how people choose to live and act are those embodied in the narratives they are living out, narratives which underlie and constitute the unity of traditions and their associated practices on which institutions are based. Consequently, if people are to change the way they live, if they really are to live in a way which is ecologically sound, then their lives and the institutions and traditions of which they are part must be constituted by different narratives than they are at present. These will be associated with different practices, different virtues and ultimately, different ideas about what is the ultimate good and how to pursue it. Only by acknowledging this will it be possible for environmental philosophy to have a major impact on people and on society.[13]

But a new ethics, even if focussed on the narratives people are living out, their practices, the virtues they uphold and their ideas of the good, would not be enough in isolation from other discourses. It is also necessary to overcome the parlous state of philosophy which is no longer able to resolve disputes about ethical issues or any other issue. If philosophy is to cease its disintegration into a multiplicity of separate, local, piecemeal and interminable debates on increasingly abstruse topics divorced from everyday life and from other disciplines, if it is to be able to provide solutions to questions raised by non-philosophers, it is necessary to recognize the systematic connection between such topics, everyday life and other disciplines.[14] The large number of particular stances on philosophical problems, particularly ethical problems, would then be seen as particularised expressions of a small number of systematic disagreements between competing traditions of enquiry. These systematic disagreements could then be evaluated through the construction of narratives from the perspective of rival traditions of enquiry and the cultural and social traditions of which they are part, with each tradition attempting to account for the achievements and limitations of itself and of every other tradition.[15] If environmental philosophers are to illuminate environmental problems in a way that is likely to have any bearing on the lives of non-philosophers and society in general then it is necessary that they take up a position within a tradition of systematic philosophy and situate themselves in

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[10] On this, see Alasdair MacIntyre, <u>Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition</u>, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), esp. chapter 5.

[11] Lynn White Jr. "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis", first published in <u>Science</u> 155 (March 10, 1967) 1203-1207, republished in <u>Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Towards Nature and Technology</u>, Ian G. Barbour ed., (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1973), pp.18-30.

[12] Lynn White, Jr. "Continuing the Conversation" in <u>Western Man and Environmental Ethics</u>, Barbour ed., pp.55-64, p.57.

[13] This is a theme that has been taken up by Jim Cheney in "Postmodern environmental ethics: ethics as bioregional narrative", <u>Environmental Ethics</u>, 11 (Summer, 1989): 117-34.

[14] For a full development of this argument, see MacIntyre, "Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?" pp.65-82.

[15] This is to simplify MacIntyre's case somewhat. See ibid. p.77ff.

relation to competing narratives of the development of the rival traditions, and attempt to further the tradition to which they have committed themselves.

MacIntyre's work also has relevance to environmental philosophers in another way. He has provided a devastating critique of mainstream ethical philosophy, that is, ethical philosophy in the tradition of liberal individualism - the tradition which denies any validity to traditions. This "tradition" is the product of the Enlightenment project to develop an ethics based on the individual after the rise and secularisation of Protestantism and the casting of morality in a sphere of its own separate from the theological, the legal and the aesthetic.[16] Not only are the debates between contractarians, natural rights theorists, utilitarians and Kantians irresolvable, but each of these ethical philosophies has been developed in different and irreconcilable ways or has insoluble problems which have made them incapable of providing a basis for decision-making. As MacIntyre argued:

> ... in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in ... grave disorder. ... We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have - very largely, if not entirely - lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.[17]

If this is the case, then for environmental philosophers to draw upon mainstream ethical philosophy is a waste of time, except perhaps as a rhetorical exercise. And if MacIntyre is right, not much can be expected either of the genealogical tradition deriving from Nietzsche.[18]

Does this mean that, as MacIntyre has argued, the only hope for the future lies in the return to the Thomist tradition? I would like to suggest that MacIntyre's analyses and arguments can be taken further, justifying a more radical approach to deal with environmental problems, and that there is an alternative tradition of systematic thought not considered by MacIntyre with greater potential than Thomism for both transcending the limitations of the tradition of liberal individualism and for addressing the environmental crisis.

MacIntyre's limitations

MacIntyre has developed what amounts to an original social philosophy, elaborating and defending notions of "narrative", "tradition" and "philosophical system", and through these he has defined what it is to be an institution and what it is to be an individual. While he has made important contributions to all these topics, in each case there is more to be said.

To begin with, there is some vagueness in MacIntyre's characterization of tradition.[19] There are social and cultural traditions within which there can and should be traditions of enquiry. Apparently traditions of enquiry can divide and be reunited, as MacIntyre talks of a tradition beginning with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle culminating in the work of Aquinas, while elsewhere portraying Aquinas as uniting the separate traditions of Augustinian Christianity (itself in the tradition of neo-Platonism) and medieval Aristotelianism. However such anomalies are not the problem. The real problem is that MacIntyre does not do justice to the protean nature of traditions and the complexity of the relationships between them. Some idea of the simplification rendered by MacIntyre's analyses can be gained by contrasting his characterization of modernity in <u>After Virtue</u> with Charles Taylor's <u>Sources of the Self</u>.[20] Taylor reveals a much more complex structure to modern culture and reveals a far greater diversity and complexity of traditions of ethical enquiry than MacIntyre acknowledges.

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[16] Alasdair MacIntyre, <u>After Virtue</u>, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p.53.

[17] Ibid., p.2.

[18] For MacIntyre's appreciation and criticism of Nietzsche, see <u>After Virtue</u>, chapter 9 and <u>Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry</u>, chapter 2 and 9.

[19] This is suggested by several commentators on MacIntyre. See chapters by John Horton and Susan Mendus, Stephen Mulhall and Andrew Mason, along with a reply by MacIntyre, in <u>After MacIntyre</u>, John Horton and Susan Mendus eds, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

[20] Charles Taylor, <u>Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity</u>, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

MacIntyre has also ignored the relationship between traditions and power. To begin with, to use the terminology of Pierre Bourdieu, there are power struggles (represented by Bourdieu as efforts to accumulate various kinds of "capital") within and between cultural fields, and between cultural fields and political and economic fields, fields being essentially traditions functioning at a particular time.[21] While cultural fields can gain some autonomy from political and economic fields, this will always be limited so that the traditions of enquiry that are able to prevail and be fully developed in any society are likely to be those which articulate the interests and legitimate the privileged positions of those who have political and economic power. Augustinian Christianity was able to be developed as a tradition of enquiry because it legitimated, first, the authority of emperors, kings and the aristocracy, and later (with the growth of church institutions), the power of the church over temporal rulers. Rival traditions which were of no service to people with power were necessarily much more fragmentary. While Augustian Christianity was challenged in a minor way by Aristotelian philosophy, only with the emergence of alternative centres of power associated with the rise of autonomous cities, territorial kingdoms, and later a powerful new commercial class were radically alternative ideas and traditions of enquiry able to be fully developed; and then it was the traditions of enquiry which articulated and legitimated the interests of the rising commercial classes which came to prevail.

Once a more complex understanding of traditions and their relationship to society is allowed, the deficiencies of MacIntyre's notion of systematic philosophy become apparent. It is odd that while MacIntyre defends philosophical systems and deplores the separation of various branches of philosophy from each other, of ethics from politics and both these from theology, and while he defends the philosophies of Aristotle and Aquinas, he offers such a narrow view of what is systematic philosophy. His notion of this contrasts with that of Hilary Putnam, another philosopher who has transcended the parochialism of analytical philosophy. In the final chapter of his book, <u>Reason, Truth and History</u>, Putnam concluded

> that theory of truth presupposes theory of rationality which in turn presupposes our theory of the good. "Theory of the good," however, is not only programmatic, but is itself dependent upon assumptions about human nature, about society, about the universe (including theological and metaphysical assumptions).[22]

MacIntyre has only alluded to half of this; he has totally ignored the philosophy of nature, cosmology and metaphysics. Yet no philosophy could be called systematic without these. And it is impossible to fully understand the relationship between specialized traditions of enquiry and cultural traditions, cultural traditions and social orders and their power relations without this broader conception of systematic philosophy.

All this becomes clear when medieval and modern societies are contrasted. Medieval culture was suffused and constituted by a cosmology based on Neoplatonic metaphysics.[23] The traditions of enquiry which established themselves in the universities were centred on elaborating and defending this, either by reformulating it to incorporate challenging ideas or by attacking opposing ideas. Reformulating metaphysical ideas to meet the challenge of Aristotelian philosophy was absolutely central to the work of Thomas Aquinas. The metaphysical unity underlying medieval culture only disintegrated with the rise of cities and territorial kingdoms struggling against the papacy and with the rise of commerce. These provided the environment where more challenging ideas could be developed, culminating in the Renaissance and the Reformation, and finally with the development of a new cosmology based on mechanistic materialism. Mechanistic materialism gained support, mainly in societies dominated by commerce, because it enabled the rising commercial classes to articulate and legitimate their interests and define their goals. It then became the core and reference point for specialised

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[21] See Pierre Bourdieu, <u>The Field of Cultural Production</u>, Cambridge Polity Press, 1993.

[22] Hilary Putnam, <u>Reason, Truth and History</u>, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.215.

[23] The best short account of this cosmology is E.M.W. Tillyard, <u>The Elizabethan World Picture</u> [1943], (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978). For an analysis of the way in which it came to form the foundation of feudal society, see Arran E. Gare, <u>Nihilism Inc.: Environmental Destruction and the Metaphysics of Sustainability</u>, (Sydney: Eco-Logical Press, 1996), chapter 4.

traditions of enquiry. It has been at the core not only of the natural sciences, but of economics and psychology, and of the problems which have dominated modern philosophy, even where philosophers have sought to delimit its claims to knowledge or to reject it.[24]

It was the metaphysics underlying this new cosmology which enabled a complete rethinking of ethics and political philosophy. While MacIntyre acknowledges the origins of contractarian notions of rights defended by Rawls and Nozick in Hobbes, utilitarianism also has its origins in Hobbes' mechanistic philosophy. Having conceived of humans in accordance with a mechanistic metaphysics as totally self-serving mechanisms moved by appetites and aversions, the social order could only be accounted for in terms of a contract entered into by egoists to serve their own interests - hence the notion of rights and obligations. But if the only principle guiding rulers is also self-interest, and if rulers appreciate that this is what guides everyone else, the best way for them to avoid revolution and to serve their own long-term interests is to rule in the selfish interests of the vast majority. Utilitarianism was developed on this assumption by Helvetius and Bentham as a means for maintaining social order.[25] It is these ideas which underlie economics, psychology and the cost-benefit analyses of policy studies, and correspondingly, it is these traditions of enquiry which are providing the decision-making procedures on which governments and individual lives are based.[26] It is only the subtle elaborations of concepts of rights and of utilitarianism where their origins have been lost sight of that debates become insoluble. In their cruder and more robust forms notions of rights and utilitarianism are mutually supporting; but these provide no foundations at all for environmental ethics.[27]

This leads us to the limitations of MacIntyre's concept of narrative. MacIntyre is a pioneer in the field of narratology. No one has made a more compelling case than he for the role of narratives in orienting people for social action and thereby constituting the ethical order of society, in constituting traditions, in adjudicating between radically different ways of conceiving the world and in enabling the gaps between different traditions to be bridged. However there are some issues which MacIntyre did not examine. Firstly, due to his rejection of individualism, of which existentialism was taken to be an expression, he rejected the notion of "authenticity", the notion that actors are in some sense the authors of the narratives they live out. He argued that the narratives are already there, and individuals simply take them up. As a consequence, the role of narrative construction in facilitating creative responses to new situations, the role of these same narratives in making ethical choices and in justifying decisions, and more broadly the role of narratives in struggles against the decadence of old traditions and in creating or crystallizing new social and political movements and thereby constituting new traditions, was not considered by MacIntyre. Also, while alluding to the variety of narratives and the relations between them, MacIntyre has explored only some of these. He has not examined the narratives unifying cultural traditions on a broad scale, the grand narratives which dominate civilizations, and so has not looked at the relationship between such grand narratives, traditions of enquiry and systematic philosophy. He has not examined the eschatology dominating medieval society and its relation to systematic philosophy, nor has he examined the concept of progress dominating the culture of modernity and the relationship between notions of economic progress, scientific progress and the progress of humanity.

More fundamentally, MacIntyre has done little to examine just what narratives are and why they can play the role he ascribes them. The works on narrative most relevant to illuminating the role he ascribes narratives are those of Paul Ricoeur and David Carr. Ricoeur argues that narrative is the fundamental structure of the human experience of time: "[T]ime becomes human

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[24] For an excellent short historical analysis of modern philosophy, showing how coherent it is when the centrality of the rise of science to philosophy is acknowledged, see Herman Philipse, "Towards a Postmodern Conception of Metaphysics: On the Genealogy and Successor Disciplines of Modern Philosophy", <u>Metaphilosophy</u>, 25:1 (1994): 1-44.

[25] On this see Eric Voeglin , "Helvetius and the Genealogy of Passions", <u>From Enlightenment to Revolution</u>, John H. Hallowell ed., (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975).

[26] I have traced the evolution of these doctrines in Gare, <u>Nihilism Inc.</u>, chapters 5, 6 & 7.

[27] On this, see Gare, <u>Nihilism Inc.</u>, chapter 2.

to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal experience."[28] Narrative is central to human creativity. To begin with, life is lived as an inchoate narrative. We have a pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character which prefigures narrative. Innovations in ways of living a made by inventing plots by means of which "goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of whole and complete action."[29] That is, through emplotment, life is configured in new ways. In receiving a narrative people are confronted with and drawn into a quasi-world of characters and actors, revealing and challenging their taken for granted horizon of expectations. This facilitates the appropriation of the new narrative structure to refigure their lives and to embrace the projects defined by the new narrative. David Carr's contribution to this analysis is to stress that the structure of human action is already a narrative structure and that people as individuals and as members of a diversity of communities are engaged in a hierarchy of actions or projects by virtue of the narratives which constitute their lives and cultures.[30]

If this is the case, then the narrative associated with a major advance in scientific theory, or more broadly, in systematic philosophy, is a narrative of characters and actors and their projects, their failures and successes in these projects and the further problems they must confront.[31] The projects are about advancing enquiry, and at the same time, about advancing understanding of what enquiry is. As an emplotment it challenges people's taken for granted horizons of expectations and facilitates the transforming of these horizons and the refiguring by people of their lives so that they can participate in these research projects. Reception of this narrative involves people coming to experience themselves and the world differently, and reforming the narratives of which they are part, that is, the projects in which they are participating. It is for this reason that such narratives cannot be regarded as merely about ideas, but constitute, integrate and transform traditions of enquiry. But it is not only traditions of enquiry which are affected. Reception of such narratives challenges the narratives constituting the broader cultural traditions of society, and beyond these, the narratives defining and constituting the forms of life embodying such cultural traditions. Since lived narratives are projects of action, their reformulation requires, and provides the means for, a re-evaluation and transformation of the broad social projects people are engaged in and in terms of which all particular projects must ultimately be defined and justified. The broadest social projects are essentially those defined by the grand narratives which dominate civilizations, and through formulating the particular narratives defining their own lives in relation to broader narratives which in turn are formulated in relation to grand narratives, individuals come to participate in these ultimate social projects.

It is through the development of new narrative emplotments that metaphysical speculations of systematic philosophies are eventually embraced and articulated into social life. This is illustrated by the cultural revolution of the seventeenth century. Reception of the narrative of the triumph of Galilean and Newtonian physics involved people's horizons of expectations, formed by an entire culture which was being reproduced by a society still partly feudal, and justified by an earlier tradition of enquiry, being brought into question. This narrative of intellectual achievement, resonating with the interests of and legitimating the struggle for power by new social classes, facilitated the eventual reformation of the dominant narratives, bringing into question and delegitimating old, legitimating new, and transforming the more particular narratives people were engaged in living. It was through the replacement of old narrative

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[28] Paul Ricoeur, <u>Time and Narrative</u>, vol.I, [1983], trans Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.52.

[29] ibid. p.ix.

[30] Carr has developed his ideas in <u>Time, Narrative, and History</u>, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). His differences with Ricoeur were elaborated in a discussion with Ricoeur. See <u>On Paul Ricoeur</u>, ed. David Wood, (London: Routledge, 1991), 160-74. For Ricoeur's reply see p.180ff.

[31] This has also been argued by Joseph Rouse in "The Narrative Reconstruction of Science", <u>Inquiry</u>, 33 (1990): 179-96, although he has drawn different conclusions than I from this.

emplotments by new narrative emplotments that the virtues and goals celebrated in medieval society were finally debunked or transformed, and new virtues and goals came to be celebrated.[32] Embraced by the rising commercial class, the new cosmology was incorporated through this new grand narrative into everyday life so that each individual and each institution came to be defined as a participant in the ultimate social project of Western civilization: making everything in the world into predictable instruments of the economic machine.[33]

Beyond MacIntyre

Once MacIntyre's limitations are acknowledged and addressed, the potential of his ideas for environmental ethics becomes far greater. From the perspective of an augmented social philosophy, the ecological crisis is the product of a culture, originating in Western Europe, which now dominates the world. This culture is not merely a set of ideas, but is a complex of practices, narratives, institutions, traditions - including traditions of philosophical and scientific enquiry, and emergent dynamics. Despite the postmodernist celebration of diversity and fragmentation, it is still unified by the systematic philosophy of Descartes and Hobbes, the mechanistic world-orientation (oscillating between its dualist and monist forms), articulated into a science of nature and a grand narrative of progress, equated with the narrative of economic development and the triumph of Western civilization, and more generally with the evolution of humanity.[34]

Overcoming this culture to address the ecological crisis will require an identification of the alternative cultural traditions and their systematic philosophies, where these are understood to include not only ethics and political philosophies, but social philosophies, conceptions of humanity, cosmologies, philosophies of nature and most fundamentally, metaphysics. These should not be identified only with particular thinkers but should be seen in relation to traditions of systematic enquiry and as the foundations of more specialized traditions of enquiry and research. Ultimately, they are the foundations for cultural traditions and grand narratives which potentially could constitute civilizations. But neither Augustinian Neo-platonism, Thomism nor mechanistic materialism offers much to environmentalists; each has been shown to be implicated in the ecological crisis.[35] An alternative systematic philosophy to any of those considered by MacIntyre will be required to put in perspective and provide a response to the environmental crisis.

Given the power relations operating in societies inimical to any fundamental challenge to the cultural traditions supporting those with power, a genuinely new tradition of enquiry will always be more fragmented than any of those examined by MacIntyre. To counter this, one of the most important requirements for the development of such a new tradition is the elaboration of a narrative which puts the culture of the past in perspective, which identifies the unities and linkages between ideas, thinkers and sub-traditions, on the one hand, and the fundamental divisions between such ideas, thinkers and sub-traditions on the other. The first task is to identify what needs to be opposed. Then the problem is to integrate the work of diverse oppositional thinkers into the unity of a tradition. In their nascent state traditions are constituted by recognizing the common purpose in a diversity of thinkers working independently of each other. At this stage there can be no institutionalized practices of the kind described by MacIntyre. Some of what is involved in such emergence is exemplified in the development of ecological economics. The foremost representatives of this today are Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and Herman Daly. However no less important for establishing the tradition of ecological economics was Juan Martinez-Alier's history of all those critics of mainstream economics, mostly working

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[32] One of the best characterizations of this is still Paul Harzard's <u>The European Mind: 1680-1715</u> [1935], trans. J. Lewis May, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973).

[33] I have described in detail the process by which this occurred in <u>Nihilism Inc.</u>

[34] I have argued this ibid. ch.7.

[35] Apart from the work of Heidegger and Lynn White Jr. on this, see Gare, <u>Nihilism Inc.</u>

independently of or with little knowledge of each other, who took seriously the second law of thermodynamics.[36] It is through this work that all the achievements and limitations of these diverse thinkers were recovered, comprehended and put in perspective so that the work of Georgescu-Roegen and Daly could be appreciated as part of a tradition. The development of philosophical systems as traditions is more complex than this, requiring narratives that not only integrate a greater diversity of philosophical work, but also sub-traditions of enquiry (such as ecological economics) and alternative cultural traditions.

Traditions of opposition to the dominant culture

Apart from the great traditions of pre-capitalist civilizations, there are two major traditions of philosophical opposition to the mechanistic world-view, sometimes conflicting with each other and each containing within it further conflicts. However there are also deep relations between these traditions.

The first of these traditions is associated with the way humanity is understood. It involves conceiving humans as essentially cultural beings.[37] This tradition began with Vico and was developed through Herder, Hegel, Marx and the tradition of hermeneutics, including most of the phenomenologists. Despite his defence of Thomism, MacIntyre himself can be seen as advancing the hermeneutic tradition, having discovered a way between the pan-rationalism of Hegel and Nietzschean genealogy, and having provided a solution to the problem of cultural relativism.[38] This tradition is important to environmental philosophy because it implies the possibility of, and shows what is required for, a fundamental transformation of the relationships between people and between humans and the rest of nature and, more fundamentally, of what has been taken as fixed "human nature". What is required is a cultural transformation.

The second is a tradition of metaphysics and natural philosophy. This tradition originated with John Scotus Eriugena in opposition to Augustinian Christianity in the ninth century, was developed by the Heretics of the Free Spirit in the Middle Ages and by Nicholas Cusanus and the Hermetic philosophers in the Renaissance, and reformulated by Giordano Bruno and the Nature Enthusiasts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Bruno and the Nature Enthusiasts celebrated nature as divine; and it was in opposition to this that mechanistic materialism was developed.[39] After the elaboration and success of the new mechanistic philosophy this radical tradition was revived and further developed by Spinoza and Leibniz - the ultimate source of virtually all successful anti-mechanistic trends within the natural sciences.[40] This tradition is important to environmental philosophers because it justifies the ascription of intrinsic value to nature and the need to recognize and fit in with the dynamics of nature.

Many philosophers associated with the first of these anti-mechanistic traditions have distanced themselves from the second, accommodating themselves to mechanistic science by trying to circumscribe its claims to knowledge. However there have been notable exceptions to this tendency, and such thinkers are particularly significant to the environmental movement. Herder stands out here. Attacking the enlightenment celebration of European rationality, he was the first to refer to "cultures" in the plural, and called for respect for the diversity of cultures and the value

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[36] Juan Martinez-Alier, Ecological Economics: Energy, Environment and Society, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

[37] For an historical analysis of this tradition, see Arran Gare, Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis, (London & N.Y.: Routledge, 1995), chapter 2.

[38] For further elaboration of this point, see Arran E. Gare, "Understanding Oriental Cultures", Philosophy East & West, 45:3 (July 1995): 309-328.

[39] On this see Margaret C. Jacob, The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689-1720, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Brian Easlea, Witchcraft, Magic and the New Philosophy, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980); and Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution, [1980], (London: Wildwood House, 1982).

[40] Ivor Leclerc provides a good history of this tradition of metaphysics along with a history of the emergence of the mechanistic tradition. See The Nature of Physical Existence, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972).

of trying to understand other cultures in their own terms. Vigorously opposing imperialism, both ancient and modern, he wrote in his <u>Letters on the Advancement of Mankind (1793-7)</u>:

> Can you name a land where Europeans have entered without defiling themselves forever before defenceless, trusting mankind, by the unjust word, greedy deceit, crushing oppression, diseases, fatal gifts they have brought? Our part of the earth should be called not the wisest, but the most arrogant, aggressive, money-minded: what it has given these people is not civilization but the destruction of the rudiments of their own cultures wherever they could achieve this.[41]

This implies that people are not by nature greedy, arrogant, aggressive and money-minded; these are distinctive characteristics of people formed by European culture. Different characteristics could be cultivated. At the same time, under the influence of the early work of Kant, and beyond that, of Leibniz, Spinoza, the Nature Enthusiasts and Bruno, Herder attacked the mechanistic conception of the world as an expression of this defective culture, arguing in opposition to Newtonian mechanics that nature is active and creative; that it is a unity in which dynamic, purpose seeking forces, the interplay of which constitutes all movement and growth, flow into each other, clash, combine and coalesce.[42] Humans were conceived of as part of and participants within this creative nature. On the foundation of his concept of culture and his philosophy of nature Herder then defended a new form of ethics, an ethics of what Isaiah Berlin has called "expressionism". He argued that humans can only develop as members of culture, and that each culture is different. It is the challenge of a people to discover their own centre of gravity and bring to fruition their own unique potentialities. He argued:

> that every form of human self-expression is artistic, and that self-expression is part of the essence of human beings as such; which in turn entail such distinctions as those between integral and divided, or committed and uncommitted (that is, unfulfilled), lives; and thence lead to the concept of various hindrances, human and non-human, to the self-realization which is the richest and harmonious form of self-expression that all creatures, whether or not they are aware of it, live for.[43]

This is an ethics compatible with recognizing and fitting in with the dynamics of nature rather than dominating it, and recognizing the value of societies which are not pervaded by the drive for "economic growth".

Herder thereby began a tradition which united the two anti-mechanistic traditions. He had a major impact on the study of history, the anti-mechanistic human sciences, including linguistics, social psychology and anthropology, a less dramatic but equally significant influence on the natural sciences, and a significant impact on ethics through his influence on Hegel and subsequent influence on Heidegger and the existentialists. The difficulty of spanning both the natural and the human sciences has limited the appeal of this tradition. But in the twentieth century this tradition has been revived - mainly by process philosophers. Mechanistic science is failing and being replaced by a science based on process metaphysics, with nature conceived as creative and with humans conceived as parts of and participants within this creative nature.[44] Now scientists influenced by process philosophers are succeeding in bringing to fruition what Herder began, uniting the two great oppositional traditions. This is made clear by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers' work, <u>Order Out of Chaos</u>, a work originally published as <u>La Nouvelle Alliance</u>.[45] The new alliance is between science and the humanities and "humanistic" social

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[41] Quoted by Isaiah Berlin, <u>Vico and Herder</u>, [1976] (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), p.160f.

[42] On Herder's natural philosophy, showing who he was influenced by, see H.B. Nisbet, <u>Herder and the Philosophy and History of Science</u>, (Cambridge: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1970).

[43] Berlin, <u>Vico and Herder</u>, p.153.

[44] There is also a challenge to mechanistic thinking coming from field theorists, but this is also failing and was only ever of any significance to physics.

[45] Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, <u>Order out of Chaos</u>, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1984). For another popular work on a similar theme see David Bohm and F.David Peat, <u>Science, Order and Creativity</u>, (Toronto: Bantam, 1987). Prigogine and Bohm have defended their views in more technical works.

sciences, and as Prigogine and Stengers point out, this is of immense significance for those striving to address the environmental crisis.[46]

Conclusion

Initially I suggested that existing environmental ethics is like a broken bicycle on an intercontinental jet. This paper began by examining the bicycle brake to see what was wrong with it. In conclusion it is necessary to examine the intercontinental jet to see what is required to stop it.

The main impetus for environmental destruction is the unrestrained dynamics of the global market and the powerful organizations associated with this which now dominate the world,[47] while it has been shown by the example of the Soviet Union that a centrally planned economy based on orthodox Marxism provides no solution to environmental problems.[48] However the dynamics of the market, major organizations and socialist bureaucracies are founded on particular cultural and social traditions, and for their continued functioning they must reproduce and facilitate the development of these traditions. To begin with, the traditions of enquiry serving and advancing the prevailing culture of domination and egoism - reductionist science and mainstream economics and psychology and the grand narrative of economic progress they uphold - need to be challenged. Ultimately this will involve challenging the systematic philosophy which is justifying and augmenting these traditions of enquiry and this grand narrative. Postmodernist critiques which merely promote the disintegration of the dominant world-orientation are unlikely to be of much use in this regard.[49] What I am suggesting is that to effect the cultural and social transformation of the magnitude required to address the ecological crisis it will be necessary to develop an integrated anti-mechanistic tradition of enquiry, a development of the tradition fusing the two major oppositional traditions to mechanistic metaphysics, cosmology and science and the cultural and social traditions legitimated and sustained by these. This needs to be developed as a systematic philosophy able to provide the foundations not only for a new tradition of scientific enquiry, including a new psychology, social science and economics, but also for new cultural and social traditions which can form the foundation for a new civilization. It is necessary to rewrite history, beginning with the history of traditions of enquiry, and redefine the goals of humanity from this perspective. That is, it is necessary to create a new grand narrative. The grand narrative dominating the world based on a reductionist, mechanistic world-orientation and projecting the total technological domination of nature must be replaced by one based on this integrated anti-mechanistic world-orientation projecting the creation of a social order which, as Aldo Leopold put it, would "tend to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community."[50] To be effective this grand narrative will have to be articulated to articulate the interests and relate the concerns and goals of individuals, groups and regional organizations to global issues and goals, and thereby to integrate the environmental movement into an effective social and political force. The aim should be to reconstitute and become a major component of the most powerful political and economic organizations of the world and the lives of the majority of the world's population. Ultimately the new cosmology articulated into a grand narrative needs to be embodied by individuals and institutions so as to define the virtues and goods aimed at by people not only as private individuals, but as members of traditions of enquiry, cultural traditions, political and economics organizations, nations and civilizations.

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[46] Order out of Chaos, p.312f.

[47] For a defence of this, see Gare, Nihilism Inc. ch.8.

[48] On this, see Philip R. Pryde, Environmental Management in the Soviet Union, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1991) and Gare, Nihilism Inc. ch.8 & 11.

[49] I have argued this at some length in Gare, Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis.

[50] Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic", A Sand County Almanac, [1949] (Oxford: O.U.P., 1968), p.224f.

What then should environmental philosophers be doing? What I am suggesting is that among philosophers grappling with environmental problems a new orientation is required, an orientation which resists the fragmenting tendencies of academia. Ethics cannot be treated as an independent field of enquiry within philosophy alongside epistemology, philosophy of mind and language, metaphysics and logic. If environmental ethics is to become effective, it must centre on the ideas which actually determine how people choose to live, and these are, as Lynn White argued, what people believe, often at the sub-verbal level, about who they are, about their relation to other people and to the natural environment, and about their destiny. This is the core of systematic philosophies, the traditions of scientific enquiry they engender and the narratives which unify these and define their goals, and it is these which sustain the broader cultural and social traditions which in turn reproduce people's subverbal beliefs. The truly great works of ethics, the works which challenged existing traditions and actually changed the way people subsequently lived, such as Plato's Republic and Hobbes' Leviathan, did not confine themselves to working out abstract principles to guide particular actions but offered their readers total world-orientations together with the principles for their elaboration. The traditions of systematic philosophy and specialized enquiry they engendered subsequently formed the core of the cultures of civilizations. Environmental philosophers need to appreciate that it is world-orientations of this kind which they should be offering and striving to defend.

While environmental philosophers need to continue the study of the great philosophers of the past, advances in the sciences and non-Western traditions, these should not be treated with deference, as authorities who or which can be invoked to uphold environmentalist prejudices. They should be seen in relation to traditions of systematic philosophy and enquiry, and in terms of narratives which define the achievements and failures of each contribution to the development of and the struggles between these traditions - and the broader cultural and social traditions of which they are part and which they support. Extending from this, it is necessary for them to define their work in relation to the grand narratives competing to define civilization. However oppressive grand narratives may have been in the past, mere skepticism about them is not going to undermine their influence. What is required to overcome their oppression is the creation of an alternative kind of grand narrative. In place of a "monological" or "modernist" grand narrative which simply assumes its own validity and defines all other ideas as defective in relation to it, what is required is a "dialogical" or "postmodernist" grand narrative, a grand narrative which takes into account the diversity of rival cultural traditions and grand narratives and accepts its own provisionality, that it must maintain dialogue with alternative cultural traditions, continually question its own assumptions, and acknowledge the possibility that it may eventually have to be abandoned for some other grand narrative.[51]

Defining their work in relation to and committing themselves to one of the competing traditions of systematic philosophy does not preclude environmental philosophers from defending different ideas. The exploration and clarification of such differences is part of any healthy tradition of enquiry. But it is necessary to bear in mind that the broader task confronting environmental philosophers is to forge and develop an integrated and effective alternative tradition of systematic philosophy to that which now dominates humanity, spelling out its implications for the natural and human sciences as well as for ethics and political philosophy narrowly conceived.[52] When entering into debates it is necessary for them to acknowledge that the crucial issue for ethics is over which systematic philosophy is to prevail, and thereby what kinds of natural and human sciences are to prevail and what grand narrative is to prevail. It is necessary to differentiate minor from major disagreements and to take up a position in the

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[51] I have elaborated this notion in more detail in Gare, Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis, p.140ff.

[52] The work of John Cobb Jr. is exemplary in this regard, having promoted process philosophy as a systematic philosophy and contributed to the philosophy of nature, ethics, environmental philosophy and environmental economics. See John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, Mind in Nature: Essays on the Interface of Science and Philosophy, (Washington: University Press of America, 1978); Charles Birch and John Cobb Jr., The Liberation of Life, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., For the Common Good, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). See also Gare, Nihilism Inc., esp. chapters 13, 14, 15 & 16.

unfinished complex of stories of a nascent grand narrative projecting the overcoming and replacement of the dominant traditions of systematic philosophy and scientific enquiry and the social and cultural traditions sustained by these with traditions conducive to a new relationship between humanity and the rest of nature. By situating themselves in this way, defining each study and each debate in relation to this broader project, environmental philosophers will be in a position to provide the new narrative forms to refigure the lives of people in their everyday lives, communities, organizations, societies, nations, civilizations and humanity itself; that is, to provide an ethics and political philosophy which cannot be marginalized and which can be effective against the global forces of environmental destruction.[53]

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[53] On this, see ibid. chapter 17, and Gare, <u>Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis</u>, chapter 5.