

**MacIntyre's Theory of Translation and Enquiry, and Some Things That
Phenomenology Can Do For It**

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Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to interpret some of the thoughts of Alistair MacIntyre, especially with regard to enquiry and translation; to defend MacIntyre against some criticisms of a Davidsonian character; to interpret some of the thoughts of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, especially with regard to spoken and speaking speech; and to suggest how these strands of thought might usefully supplement and illuminate each other, and perhaps lead to a richer and more complete theory of enquiry.

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Declaration

The work in this thesis is my own (insofar as one can ever say that for this sort of a text). I have not submitted it or parts of it for examination before or in another institution.

Introduction

In the following pages, I will attempt to give an interpretation and defence of Alastair MacIntyre's theory of enquiry, what traditions of enquiry are, how translation between them is carried out, and how tradition-bound enquiry progresses. In the first chapter, I will consider objections drawn from the work of Donald Davidson, attempt to rebut them, and suggest that ideas from both Davidson and MacIntyre can profitably add to each other's theories. In the second chapter I will attempt to supplement both MacIntyre's and Davidson's theories with ideas and vocabulary drawn from the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty. In the third I will try to show that Merleau-Ponty and MacIntyre's positions are not destructive to each other, and that MacIntyre can sustain a view of truth which can ground his theory of enquiry. In the final chapter I will turn the conclusions of the preceding parts on to the area of moral enquiry and decision-making.

Much of my discussion will concern the matter of translation between traditions of enquiry, and it should quickly become clear that this thesis, which attempts to find worthwhile common ground and interconnections between the different traditions of philosophy inhabited by MacIntyre, Davidson, and Merleau-Ponty, is itself trying, in its humble way, to be an example of the kind of translation which it is investigating. Similarly, being part of an enquiry into enquiry, it must at least attempt to give form to the sort of thing that it says enquiry is and is like. Thus, I hope that some of what is necessarily missing from the account which I am able to give in the words and time allotted to me, might nevertheless be found by a charitable reader within the work's attempts to do what it says it ought to.

Chapter One

As far as I can tell, the easiest way into Alastair MacIntyre's theory of enquiry is to begin with his theory of translation and untranslatability; and the easiest way to illuminate that is to set it up against its most persistent criticism, drawn from the work of Donald Davidson. MacIntyre uses ideas such as conceptual schemes, incommensurability, and untranslatability frequently and in ways that are central to his arguments, in ways that, at first sight, look as if they are vulnerable to Davidson's objections to these ideas. Although he occasionally takes note of possible Davidsonian problems with his position, he tends to seem unconcerned about them; and this fact has worried commentators and drawn him back to respond several times. Here I will consider four such responses, with the aim of clarifying MacIntyre's position, and noting its development. First, however, I will set out the necessary background to understanding Davidson's own position.

That background is Davidson's theory of triangulation. Davidson thinks that beliefs and other propositional attitudes are about the things that caused those attitudes, and this seems intuitive: I see a mug, I believe a mug is there, and I believe this because of the mug. Similarly, when I interact with another person, I assume that their utterances and beliefs refer to the things or kinds of things which caused those beliefs. There are other kinds of case (I believe this because my teacher told me), but it is this basic variety of causal relationship which ensures that language is connected solidly to the world somewhere down the line.

However, there are a huge number of causes which we could latch on to when working out what caused a belief or utterance, ranging from objects such as mugs and chessmen, sensations picked up by my eyes or skin, or the past events which were responsible for putting the mug (or whatever) in my line of sight. So how do we narrow down our selection? Davidson thinks that we pick out the right causes by 'triangulating'. By interacting with another person, watching each other's responses to things and to each other, and responding to the other's

responses, we can latch on to this or that thing as the common cause of our beliefs and utterances, and work out that the other is also aware of the common cause as a common cause. This account leads Davidson to pick out objects rather than experiences or Quinean 'surface irritations' as the things that sentences and beliefs concern. We do not get the beliefs, and then work out that they are the same as our friend's by observing causes; nor do we first perceive causes, and then form beliefs about them.

The other person is not a dispensable part of this picture. For me to be correct in thinking that the belief I have just formed is a belief about (say) a picture, I have to think that I mean the same by 'picture' as the other person. If I am not using 'picture' in common with another person, another member of my linguistic community, there will be nothing to tell me when I am applying the concept in the right way and when my applications merely seem to me to be right. It will be a private word and so, on broadly Wittgensteinian grounds, a word without real content. This concern is also what underpins Davidson's argument that belief is intrinsically veridical: we cannot think that someone's beliefs do not match the world to too great a degree, because if enough beliefs go astray then we cannot have grounds to attribute contentful beliefs to them at all (see especially 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge').

Davidson most often talks about triangulation in the context of a mature reasoner attempting to work out what another person means by an unfamiliar term, but he also thinks (see especially 'The Emergence of Thought') that pre-linguistic children and at least some animals can triangulate to some degree, and that triangulation can form a basis or starting-point for a philosophical explanation of how language is acquired. He is also clear that all of the connections involved in triangulation are causal ones.

It is worth noting that Davidson does not believe that there is any sense to be made from the idea of correspondence as it is usually understood, the idea of there being something in the world which makes sentences or beliefs true, or the

idea of checking against the world to verify sentences or beliefs. Davidson's argument begins with the claim that there is no single thing in the world which the correspondence theorist can point to as *the* thing which makes the sentence or belief true (Davidson 2001, p.183). The objects which the sentence is about can be located, but they can only be picked out because of a huge supporting network of other objects, beliefs, causal connections, and contentful attitudes, which Davidson sometimes calls the 'frame of reference'. Without the frame of reference, there is no way to identify the content of the sentence, never mind a way to secure its truth. So the correspondence theorist must include the frame of reference in the material which is to be corresponded to. Davidson thinks that there is no context big enough to do the job except that of the world: there is nowhere to draw a line that will not seem arbitrary. But if we invoke the world as a whole in this way, we have failed to find anything that will function as a useful explanatory relation. We already knew that 'the world' makes our sentences true or false.

Davidson's particular argument against conceptual schemes turns on his denial of a distinction to be made between "scheme and content, organising system and something waiting to be organised" (Davidson 1974, p.11). The idea of a conceptual scheme implies something to be conceptualised, a layer of experience or world which is not as yet conceptually structured; there is some 'subjective' contribution to knowledge from the conceptualising subject, and an 'objective' contribution from the given (Malpas 2014). If the distinction between objective and subjective contribution, or between conceptual structured and unstructured world cannot be sustained, the idea of a conceptual scheme must be abandoned.

Davidson also argues against the possibility of another relationship which the conceptual scheme is supposed to have to the un-conceptualised world, the relationship of organising (Davidson 1974, p.14). If the world or experience is supposed to be organised by the scheme, we must think of experience as containing or being composed of smaller entities, as there is no sense in organising

a single continuous flow. But there is nothing for these entities to be save familiar objects, sounds, and sensations, the sorts of thing which are organised by our own language. And so other schemes for organising these will be similar enough to our own that we have no reason to invoke the idea: if there is only one conceptual scheme which everyone shares, the idea is meaningless.

It can, of course, be difficult to map another speaker's distinctions on to my own, and I will often find that concepts do not line up exactly. But if I cannot map another person's distinctions on to my own in any meaningful way at all, then I have no grounds to think that there is anything genuinely meaningful being said. We might note that there can be asymmetry here: we couldn't describe a new scientific paradigm in terms of the old one, or Thomist metaphysics in Hopi. But this can be explained in terms of the indeterminacy of reference. We may not be able to describe the difference between red, blue, purple and azure in a language with only two colour terms, but this does not represent an interesting fact about untranslatability: there is simply not enough 'resolution' in the second language to capture the distinctions in the first.

Davidson's rejection of conceptual schemes comes with a rejection of the idea of untranslatability of any kind stronger than that implied by indeterminacy of reference. I cannot think that a new word is completely untranslatable, because if I come across a new word and see it used in several different contexts, but I cannot relate it to the concepts I have available to me in any way that seems meaningful, then I have no grounds upon which to attribute meaning.

Davidson holds that there is no sense a scheme's fitting or facing experience which goes beyond the much simpler idea of being true, which we once again do not need the idea of conceptual schemes to make sense of. But the heart of Davidson's argument is the holism which leads him to deny the distinction between the 'objective' and 'subjective' contributions to knowledge. In Davidson's picture, our utterances and propositional attitudes, even our beliefs about ourselves, rely for their individuation upon connections to other speakers

and to the world: and so there is no way for a sharp distinction between objective and subjective, a theory which talks of an objective world which is encountered through the medium of subjective concepts, to get off the ground.

Davidson argues that there is a metaphorical incoherence at the core of talk about conceptual schemes. The idea of differing conceptual schemes only makes sense if there is a single un-conceptualised world which they all in some way refer to, but if there is such a single world, then it is not clear what sense we can make of claims of incommensurability: "The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common coordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability." (Davidson 1974, p.6.)

In his paper 'Relativism, Power and Philosophy' (published 1985), MacIntyre remarks, with "polite surprise" (p.6), on what he sees as the irrelevance of Davidson's attack on conceptual schemes. MacIntyre's "polite surprise" comes from his understanding of conceptual schemes, at least as he uses them (along with Collingwood, Vico and Hegel), as not needing to imply any such distinction, as not requiring a brute, un-conceptualised world or stream of sense-data to provide the material for conceptualisation. He compares Davidson's distinction with the form/content distinction which was attacked by Hegel, and notes that Hegel put the idea of conceptual schemes to work without it.

I'm not sure how much this should reassure us, as MacIntyre is not a Hegelian, and we cannot assume that he can help himself to the resources Hegel employs to make his conception of conceptual schemes coherent. (If he were more Hegelian about conceptual schemes, he would never have needed to write 'Relativism, Power and Philosophy'). Neither does he share Collingwood's antirealism (p.21).

One problem which MacIntyre attempts to deal with in the paper is to explain how, if there is no world of experience beyond different schemes which the schemes must explain and face up to, how it is that truth not relative to the schemes and the criteria for assertibility built into them, but which a scheme-bound enquirer can get at, can exist; and how one scheme is able to justify itself against its rivals.

MacIntyre's answer is one which will recur in later discussions (notably in 'Moral Relativism, Truth, and Justification', and 'Epistemological Crises and the Philosophy of Science'), and upon which much of MacIntyre's theory of enquiry seems to rest. It can be rational to 'convert' from one conceptual scheme to a new one when we discover that the new one can fulfil (at least) two conditions: first, that it can deal with problems which were acknowledged by our old scheme but which our old scheme was unable to effectively deal with; and second that it can explain why our old tradition was frustrated at just the points and in just the ways that it was.

Conceptual schemes do not justify themselves against each other as complete and ahistorical networks of ideas. Rather, we move between schemes in by seeing that the history of that area of enquiry up to now, its victories, difficulties, frustrations, and successes, can be better explained and improved upon by the new scheme; from the new perspective, we can tell a new story of the enquiry up to now, showing how each old scheme represented an advance over its predecessors, and how the new scheme represents the best account so far. (The line of argument is also elaborated in 'Epistemological Crises and the Philosophy of Science'.)

We can see how Hegelian ideas are at work, but again MacIntyre is not a Hegelian; and in particular, MacIntyre makes clear in his response to Graham in 'A Partial Response to my Critics', that he is "irredeemably anti-Hegelian in rejecting the notion of an absolute standpoint, independent of the particularity of all traditions" (MacIntyre 1994, p.295). Graham argues and MacIntyre apparently

agrees that the Hegelian has faith in this kind of historical enquiry because there is an independent ground from which we understand the concept of a tradition, individuate traditions of enquiry, decide what counts as a continuity or discontinuity in a story or a history of enquiry, recognise what it is for a concept to belong to a tradition, and so on. But for MacIntyre, all enquiry is tradition-bound, and so the history of an enquiry is only ever told from within some scheme. What is characterised as a success, a difficulty, a continuity or rupture, will be characterised according to the standards internal to the scheme which tells the story.

This is one face or element of a problem which I think runs throughout 'Relativism, Power and Philosophy'. MacIntyre might (I think does) argue successfully that it can be rational for a member of one tradition – by the standards of the old tradition – to move to a new tradition. And it may be rational – by the standards of the new tradition – to move to a third. However, the paper gives us little reason to think that this movement is towards some kind of substantive truth.

In particular, movement between schemes in 'Relativism, Power and Philosophy' seems to proceed in happy independence from anything which we might be inclined to think of as reality. The actual objects of enquiry which our enquiries are ostensibly about never appear. We appeal to the objects of enquiry, but only as characterised by this or that scheme; we appeal to the history of the enquiry, but only as told by one scheme or another. I think that we have good Davidsonian reasons to reject theories of enquiry which replace the real objects of enquiry with the scheme's presentation of such objects (elaborated in both 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' and 'True to the Facts').

And I think that we would have good reasons for questioning the account even without Davidson. MacIntyre seems to have presented us with conceptual schemes more or less as Davidson describes them, but without a purported ground of un-conceptualised reality to refer back to. Schemes are allowed to be

untranslatable because they have lost their common frame of reference, but at the cost of our never encountering anything that is not already part of some scheme. Once this move is made, we find it very difficult to avoid the conclusion that the end of enquiry is similarly internal or relative to scheme and tradition. Perhaps we can say that we have reached the truth when we have a theory which answers all of the problems which our previous theories took to be problems, and explains why all of the previous theories failed to do so. Pragmatically this might do very well, but it is not what MacIntyre said he was looking for; and I think at this point we have every reason to reject MacIntyre's account in favour of the Davidsonian account, which brings us back to the proper and familiar objects and sensations of the world, muddy boots, the feel of bark, the sound of oboes, and all the rest (Davidson 1974, p.20).

The apparent insufficiencies in MacIntyre's answers to Davidson have drawn him back to comment on them again in several places, and have worried several commentators (among them Paul Kelly and Robert George), but here I shall pick out John Haldane: his concerns strike me as especially interesting, because he thinks MacIntyre's answers to Davidson inadequate, despite being sympathetic to MacIntyre's Thomism. In 'MacIntyre's Thomist Revival: What Next?', Haldane (evidently thinking primarily of the theory of translation set out in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) wonders whether MacIntyre has coherent criteria for individuating cultures or communities, noting that "MacIntyre is dismissive of Davidson's interpretative argument but yet invokes a linguistic criterion of cultural difference: roughly, a culture is distinct from one's own to the extent that understanding what speakers are saying involves learning the meaning of their words as terms in a second language. But this suggestion invites a reapplication of the Davidsonian argument:" either the new language speaks about recognisably the same things as the old (perhaps with some indeterminacy of translation), in

which case there is no incommensurability; or the difficult parts of the new language cannot be matched on to the old language in any way, in which case we have no grounds for thinking that the new language is saying anything meaningful (p.95). Haldane also notes that MacIntyre is able to speak at length, and informatively, about alien words and cultures despite his claims of incommensurability. This leads Haldane to wonder whether MacIntyre can sustain a conception of tradition-transcendent truth.

MacIntyre's answer to Haldane in 'A Partial Response to my Critics' is that the standards which determine what is and is not meaningful are internal to each language. So I can say things in the old language which are meaningful in the old language, but incoherent when translated, and vice versa. Because of this, the standards of good translation are internal to languages, so that what seems from the point of view of language A to be an acceptable translation (perhaps with appropriate gloss) of a phrase in language B might not seem acceptable from the point of view of language B, and vice versa (p.296 and surrounding).

This, however, just seems to lead us back to another application of the old argument. Surely, all schemes must have some standards in common, such as basic standards of logic and consistency, or we would not be able to identify them as schemes of concepts. So where do we draw the boundaries between one set of standards and another? If the standards are sufficiently alike to our own that we can understand them as standards of meaningfulness, then are we really faced with incommensurable difference? If there is too much divergence, what grounds will we have to call what we are seeing a standard of meaningfulness at all? And there is the further worry that, if MacIntyre is correct in his assessment, it will be difficult or impossible for each scheme to enter into meaningful commerce with the others.

However, MacIntyre follows his defence of untranslatability by setting out an account of how translation between two incommensurable languages might in fact be possible – and this is not the only place in which he makes this move.

When MacIntyre talks about untranslatability, it is almost always the preface to a discussion about translation. In particular, MacIntyre in several papers and chapters gives accounts of how a speaker with a certain distinctive kind of talent will be able, by linguistic and conceptual innovation, to *create* ways to say in one language things which formerly could only be said in another language. He thinks, for example, that Aquinas did this for the Aristotelian and Augustinian philosophies.

MacIntyre also argues that traditions will not coexist forever in mutual unintelligibility, if they are in good order. A tradition of enquiry understands itself as true (or at least as sincerely approaching truth). Therefore, if the adherents of one scheme encounter a rival scheme, whose ideas and distinctions they currently lack the resources to adequately represent, but which they can understand as excluding the application of their own ideas and distinctions, then they will have rational motivation to work out how to represent those ideas, and get seriously to grips with the rival scheme, because only in this way will they be able to justify their own claim to truth against their new rival.

Thus, MacIntyrean untranslatability is not untranslatability *simpliciter*, but untranslatability *secundum quid*: not complete and unequivocal untranslatability, but untranslatability at a certain point in an ongoing historical or intellectual enquiry, which can be overcome with a certain distinctive skill, such as that possessed by Aquinas. Once this feature of MacIntyre's account is recognised, it is much less clear whether or in what way MacIntyre and Davidson disagree than the literature usually seems to take it to be. I think that this is why MacIntyre so often seems to be talking past Davidson in his replies.

Conceptual schemes are frequently talked about, are talked about by Davidson, as something that we possess and inhabit completely: I have mine, you yours. But if a conceptual scheme is tied to a language, a linguistic community, or

the community of a tradition, then it seems likely that I could inhabit several different schemes, perhaps in turn or to various degrees. I can talk of 'my conceptual scheme', the one through which I see the world all the time: but I can also talk about the provincial modern English conceptual scheme of my upbringing, the modern Spanish (and South American) conceptual scheme which I later learned to participate in to a much more restricted extent, and the Ancient Greek scheme which I inhabit to an even more specialised and uncertain degree.

If the concept of a total personal scheme is coherent, then it is clear that I cannot possibly escape it: there would be no sense to doing so. Perhaps I will be able to step some way into other people's schemes by empathy or reading very evocative fiction, but though this thought has a certain charm I don't think it is coherent, as I must consume everything I read and see through the lens of my own scheme.

However, I do not think that the concept of a personal conceptual scheme is coherent: the idea of a private, personal conceptual scheme will more or less immediately lead us down the Davidsonian path of wondering how we are to differentiate my scheme from your scheme (beyond the simple fact that it is 'mine'), and wondering how each such scheme can contain or employ contentful (i.e. non-private-language) concepts. The idea cannot stand up to the well-rehearsed Davidsonian objections. To have any real content, a conceptual scheme needs to be social, it needs to belong not to an individual but to a linguistic community.

If schemes are social in this way, then straight away it is clear that I can have more than one, inhabiting them in turns and by degrees. The most straightforward way I can do this is by being a part of several linguistic communities; but with the help of books, research, and imagination, I can acquire at least some understanding of a scheme and its community even when it is far away or long extinct. This understanding may not be perfect (it may not be very good at all), but it is good enough to perform at least one vital function, that of

giving me the ability to see some features of other schemes (including, for me, my native English one) in the light of other and different values and ways of thinking, and so to criticise them, and, with luck, move beyond some of the distortions and partialities which they cannot help but bring to my understanding.

I will make a brief and hopefully profitable sidetrack to address the issue of MacIntyre's commitment to radical falsehood, the possibility that a scheme could be completely mistaken in its central commitments, which is sometimes taken (i.e. by Haldane, by Kelly (1994, p.137), and by Lutz (2004, p.104)) to be in opposition to Davidson's claim that beliefs are intrinsically veridical. MacIntyre states this commitment in a number of places, but the discussion most directly related to our purposes is in *Three Rival Versions* (p.121 and surrounding).

Here, MacIntyre sketches out a caricature of a rival position. This caricature begins by making problems of incommensurability into problems concerning translation into our own language, and assuming that if another scheme, position, or argument cannot in principle be translated, then it is meaningless. From this point of view, says MacIntyre, "it will make no sense... to conjecture that one's scheme of concepts and beliefs could be as a whole in error, both because the very idea of an alternative conceptual scheme makes no sense, and because, since it is only in terms of the scheme that errors are identified, the notion of the scheme itself being in error, the notion of overall error could never find application."

MacIntyre argues that anyone who endorses this position "will have rendered themselves unaware of the radical particularities and partialities of their own standpoint." He goes on: "if one is compelled to enquire where the truth lies between alternative, rival, and incommensurable overall points of view, one cannot but entertain the possibility that either or both of these points of view are systematically false, false as a whole in its overall claims... just because and insofar

as one cannot but recognise that any such overall scheme of concepts and judgements may fall into a state of epistemological crisis.”

We recognise that a scheme might be in overall error insofar as we recognise that the scheme could find itself at a dead end, that its most deeply held commitments could come unstuck in the face of new evidence or new ideas, or that it might find itself unable to make progress on its problems and have no resources to understand where it is going wrong. The “insofar as” here is important. MacIntyre is united with Davidson in believing that a universal epistemological crisis is impossible: we can only put individual beliefs in question against a background of more beliefs, and attempting to put everything in question at once is either conceptually incoherent, or at best a short road to “philosophy as a means to mental breakdown”. (In ‘Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative, and the philosophy of science’, the former charge is levelled at Descartes, the latter at Hume (2006a, p.13 and surrounding)).

For MacIntyre, the possibility of radical falsehood is understood historically. We can imagine that a scheme might be systematically wrong, but we can only imagine seriously and sanely putting the whole scheme in question at once under the pressure of a rival scheme’s claim to being a serious alternative, a claim which we can only understand if enough is shared between the two schemes for us to recognise it as a serious alternative. Thus, the possibility of unmitigated epistemological disaster is no more coherent for MacIntyre than for Davidson. What MacIntyre does maintain is that any conceptual scheme, as embodied in a tradition of enquiry, could, as far as its adherents know, at any time be confronted with some truth which it is unable to speak about coherently, or some other scheme which can explain its own acknowledged failures better than it can itself, or for some other reason fall into confusion, resourcelessness, or irrelevance.

This discussion also brings out one matter which I noted before and which is of recurring importance: the idea that conflict between different schemes and points of view helps us to overcome the prejudices and partialities which each

view brings to its attempts to understand the subject matter of the enquiry. The image of epistemological progress as a steady overcoming of the partialities and distortions of particular schemes is vital to MacIntyre's theory of enquiry.

From here I will move on to the discussion of translation between traditions in chapters 18 and 19 of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* where Davidson, or rather a certain reading of Davidson, is again picked out as MacIntyre's interlocutor (p.371). I will not go through the whole argument, but there are points that I would like to examine.

First, MacIntyre's conception of the mind. MacIntyre often formulates truth in terms of the mind's adequacy to its objects, but the mind is not a Cartesian soul, or a materialist brain; rather, "the presupposed conception of mind is... of mind as activity, of mind as engaging with the natural and social world in such activities as identification, reidentification, collecting, separating, classifying, and naming and all of this by touching, grasping, pointing, breaking down, building up, calling to, answering, and so on. The mind is adequate to its objects insofar as the expectations which it frames on the basis of these activities are not liable to disappointment" (p.356-357). Throughout the discussion, MacIntyre emphasises both the social character of the mind and of beliefs, their expressions in social practices, and the necessary role of action in anchoring, expressing, and acquiring concepts and beliefs.

Second is the distinction which MacIntyre makes in the chapters between what it is to use a language as a second language, compared to possessing a 'second first language'. What is meant by this paradoxical phrase?

MacIntyre cashes out this distinction in several ways. A second language is known as if from a phrasebook, the speaker translating in her head; while a speaker of a second first language can understand without translating, as native speakers do. She has internalised its distinctions and style, participates in or at

least understands its characteristic beliefs and social forms. MacIntyre talks of acquiring a second first language in terms of an anthropologist living in a new culture; and in terms of becoming “a child all over again” (p.374): “Just as a child does not learn its first language by matching sentences with sentences, since it initially possesses no set of sentences of its own, so an adult who has in this way become a child again does not either.”

But the most striking characterisation of the difference draws upon a set of capacities to perform the kind of innovative and inventive conceptual work which MacIntyre calls “going on and going further”. It is best to approach this idea with a little background.

Quietly at work in these two chapters is a holism of interpretation noticeably similar to Davidson’s (it shows up most significantly on pages 381-382). When we translate, we are inclined to think that some part of the other language corresponds to some part of our language: the difficulty is working out which part. But the matching of phrases between languages, like the matching of phrases against the world, requires a context, a frame of reference.

For some purposes, the frame of reference need not be very large, and is determined essentially by pragmatic considerations. For example, if I am a stranger in a city, and I need to get a taxi from the station to a hotel, I only need the interpretative context required to get me through the interactions relevant to my purpose. This is the kind of translation which could be done effectively with a phrase-book, and the kind which MacIntyre calls knowing a second language. MacIntyre will argue that this kind of translation has some central limitations, though he is well aware of its ability to deal with complicated contexts and exchanges.

What is the frame of reference required to interpret in a context that is not determined by pragmatic considerations, such as the interpretation or translation of jokes, or poetry? How do we deal with word-games, malapropisms, or exchanges which seem simple but have symbolic or emotional significance? In

these sorts of cases, everything and anything relevant to understanding the behaviour of the other person (with their speech-behaviour taken as one element of their expressive and directed behaviour more generally), could quite happily be part of the frame of reference. There is nowhere to draw a line which does not seem arbitrary.

Further, the context of phrase-book translation is determined in large part by the purposes, expectations, and needs of the stranger or traveller in their encounters with the linguistic community. But in the other more open-ended kind of translation, an interpreter whose attempt to understand is sincere must allow himself to be guided by the contexts of each utterance as they are picked out by the community itself, the place that the utterances have in the total life of the community and the beliefs and actions that go with them. Thus, for the second kind of translator the language and the life of the community becomes a standard to which his translations must be adequate.

Pursuing this holistic line of argument will, I think, lead us towards a view of language similar to that sketched by Davidson in 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs'. Linguistic competence will not be a matter of sharing a sweeping prior theory, or having a recursive internal phrase-book. Rather, it will be an ability to converge on passing theories, a matter of imaginatively and skilfully interpreting other people, of understanding and making yourself understood by a wide array of tricks and strategies, drawing upon knowledge and educated guesses about the other person and the contexts of the exchange, and so on (p.265).

Where does this leave our idea of conceptual schemes? Conceptual schemes are often talked about as being something like a scientific theory or paradigm, a network of shared concepts and beliefs which goes along with a language, and which, like a language, exists as a kind of large, shared structure, much like what Davidson calls a prior theory. This way of talking is shared by social scientists as well as philosophers, by Davidson in his attacks on conceptual schemes, and by MacIntyre in papers such as 'Relativism, Power, and Philosophy.' So we may be

inclined to conclude that, just as 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs' prompts us to abandon our idea of a language as it is traditionally conceived, so it should prompt us to abandon conceptual schemes.

But the heart of the account of translation in *Whose Justice?* is the claim that what is essential to the possession and even more so the mastery of a conceptual scheme is not the possession of something like a prior theory (we could have that in a giant phrase-book), but rather a set of abilities to invent, interpret, cotton on, pick up alternative meanings, spot jokes, irony, and metaphor, negotiate changes in context, and most centrally the ability to innovate, to create and to recognise a new way of using a word or concept. MacIntyre writes: "What cannot be learned from the matching of sentence with sentence and of sentence with context" is "fundamentally how a grasp of language-in-use enables a competent language user to move from one kind of use of expression in the context of one sentence to another notably different kind of use of the same expression... and perhaps then go on to innovate by inventing a third kind of use for that very same expression... It is this knowing how to go on and go further which is the badge of elementary linguistic competence." (p.382)

Someone who has mastered a craft, tradition, or conceptual scheme has an ability to see what in the past of a tradition is a guide to its future, of knowing how to go further and how to teach and direct others in going further (MacIntyre 1990 p.66). This mastery is the most complete kind of linguistic and conceptual competence in a tradition.

It is this power that allows a member of a scheme or tradition to find new ways to capture realities which the scheme had previously had no way of speaking about coherently, and when such mastery is achieved in more than one tradition, it is the power which allows someone to create, by linguistic and conceptual innovation, ways to say in one tradition what formerly could only be said in the other. The other language is here importantly analogous to the material of enquiry itself: it has an existence beyond our dealings with it, and when we seek to

understand it we must deal with it on its own terms and by way of its own purposes and forms of life.

I don't think that there is a sharp distinction between MacIntyre's two modes of understanding. We do not learn a language as a second first language all in one go, and usually we have to move through the more restricted kind of competence to get there. Further, exchanges that could be adequately characterised in terms of phrase-book translation will still be an indispensable element of life after I have achieved competence in the language as a second first language. So what we are looking at is either a scale along which utterances can lie, or better yet two elements of linguistic competence which can be teased apart to some degree but which can neither be entirely separated nor collapsed together (perhaps like constative and performative utterances).

This account still leaves a variety of questions open, and there is still plenty of philosophical ground between MacIntyre and Davidson, especially on issues of nominalism and teleology; but it should also be clear how far we have slid from the conception of conceptual schemes which we are inclined to assume, which MacIntyre's earlier essays gave us no reason to move away from, and which seems to be present in much of the interpretative literature. It should also be fairly clear that the really interesting differences between MacIntyre and Davidson have almost nothing to do with the objections that we began by considering.

Of the many questions left on the table, here are three I take to be interesting, central, and closely related: first, the question still left over from Davidson's critique: What is the common frame of reference which conceptual schemes are different points of view upon, if it is not a brute, un-conceptualised world? Second, Haldane's question: What are the identity conditions by which we differentiate schemes or communities? And third: What exactly is this ability to go on and go further?

I do not think that MacIntyre himself gives entirely satisfactory answers to these questions. But we can get a start, and I think that we can be pointed towards

a way of answering the first question by a later critique of Davidson, in Chapter 4 of *Dependent Rational Animals*. Here, MacIntyre argues that we can coherently and justifiably attribute beliefs to animals, against Davidson's 'Thought and Talk'.

The starting-point of Davidson's argument is his more general conviction that the task of interpreting someone's sentences and the task of working out their contentful attitudes proceed interdependently, or rather, that they are the same task. Thus, if we cannot interpret a creature as being capable of contentful communication, we cannot interpret it as capable of possessing contentful attitudes, including that of belief. In particular, if I cannot speak with a creature nor assume that it deals with the world in largely the same way that I do, then I have no grounds to assign certain determinate beliefs to it: for example, a cat which is presented with several objects as toys, and picks one, might be expressing a preference for a certain colour, or a taste, or what is seen first, or interacted with most often, or most resembles a mouse, or any number of other things, and I have no way to decide which attitude to attribute.

Davidson also argues that we can only have a concept of belief if we are part of a community of speakers, and so creatures without language cannot have such a concept. Further, a creature which does not have the concept of belief cannot have beliefs: only creatures which can grasp the possibility of being mistaken can do so. Animals do not grasp this possibility. We learn how to distinguish between 'how the world is', and 'how the world appears to me' in part by understanding that others can have a different idea of how things are than us. A creature which lacks this idea (i.e. one which lacks a concept of true and false belief) cannot get a grip on the difference between how the world seems and how it is. And the requisite idea of false belief is unavailable to a non-linguistic creature.

I should say that Davidson makes clear not only in 'Thought and Talk', but also in 'Rational Animals' and 'The Emergence of Thought' that he is not attempting to say anything about the mental processes of animals. He is simply

noting what he takes to be a conceptual point about the idea of belief, and says we should not think it surprising that human concepts are such as to distinguish us from animals. MacIntyre, on the other hand, takes himself to be providing a corrective to analytic philosophy's neglect of the similarities between humans and animals, and so it is perhaps not surprising that he comes out with the opposite conclusion, and this disagreement need not represent a great philosophical rift.

MacIntyre has in previous chapters noted that humans can enter into the same kinds of relationships of mutual interpretation with animals as they can with humans. A trained dog can obey or clown, express unease or pain, reject a task as unacceptable, and so on; and a trained dog can respond in complex ways to its owners tone, body language, and instructions (p.16-17). This does not by itself justify a presupposition that we can attribute beliefs to animals, as Davidson is happy to attribute triangulation to animals to at least some degree. But it is worth taking note of.

MacIntyre's reply to Davidson begins by noting that animals do manifest an elementary distinction between truth and falsity: the distinction between "true" and "no longer true", a distinction which is embodied in the way an animal's actions respond to its perceived environment (p.36). The dog can perceive that the cat was in one place, but is now in another, and we can see that the dog has realised this by observing it. But just because we can characterise the dog's behaviour in this way it does not mean that the dog can; and jellyfish, snails and microbes respond to perceptible changes in their environment. So more is needed.

The heart of MacIntyre's argument is not that other animals are more like humans than writers like Davidson had supposed, but that humans are more like other animals. MacIntyre admits that we cannot be certain in our interpretation of animal behaviour, and so we may not be justified in either making very determinate interpretations of such behaviour, or in attributing very determinate beliefs to the animal. But this should not prevent us from ascribing any beliefs to animals at all, because much of our interpretation of the behaviour and utterances

of other human beings admits of a similar indeterminacy. MacIntyre uses the example of avoidance behaviours: "We may notice in someone else or in ourselves a tendency to avoid certain types of situation, or food, or travel. What kind of belief is presupposed in and by this behaviour? It will sometimes turn out to be a belief that is as indeterminate in respect of both quantifiers and mode of belief as the cat's." (p.38.)

Human ascriptions of beliefs, truth, and falsity rely on the same kind of prelinguistic responsiveness that animals have: "even when, as language-users, we become reflective and able to utter well-formed sentences about what we have learned through our perceptions, we still rely in very large part on just the same kind of recognitions, discriminations, and exercises of our perceptual attention that we did before we were able to make use of our linguistic powers... adult human activity and belief are best understood as developing out of, and as still in part dependent upon, modes of belief and activity that we share with some other species of intelligent animal" (p.40-41).

In the course of making this argument, MacIntyre also talks about pre-linguistic children. Human beings seem to start without any real beliefs at all, and as children grow and learn and respond to other people and to the world at large, we become increasingly able to attribute beliefs to them, and as we observe them, interact with them, and correct them, we become increasingly able to match their beliefs with ours, and to do so in increasingly determinate ways. Our limited but not insubstantial ability to interact with animals in the same kind of ways as we do with children – and here (p.41) MacIntyre calls upon such examples as dolphins and gorillas – should incline us to think of animals as being somewhere along this same scale.

In several of his papers Davidson brings up the question of how language is acquired only in order to note its great difficulty and announce that he will be approaching his main problem from an easier direction. In part because of this, I am not sure how much substantial philosophical ground there is between

Davidson and MacIntyre on this particular point, and I am inclined to suspect that the most trenchant differences in position come from the fact that Davidson's account of the mental states of animals shows analytic philosophy what its use of concepts such as belief commit it to, while MacIntyre is concerned with telling analytic philosophy that it is mistaken.

But my immediate purpose in bringing up this discussion is to show what I think MacIntyre uses the idea of a conceptual scheme in contrast to. It seems silly to talk of an animal's possessing a conceptual scheme, even an animal like a gorilla or a dolphin. Similarly, it seems problematic to attribute one to a small child and nonsensical to talk of a pre-linguistic child as having one. But the child and the animal (or at least some animals), have ways of going about the world, capacities for recognition and discrimination, invention and imagination, powers to direct attention and to recognise possibilities for action. Without such capacities the acquisition of language would be impossible.

Thus, there seems to be a something in between the world of the mature conceptual thinker which Davidson has investigated so thoroughly, and the blind undivided rush of experience or world which Davidson thinks conceptual schemes need for something to organise and face up to. The child's world already contains individuated but indeterminate objects, experiences, classes of object and lines of comparison, chains of cause and effect, alternative possibilities for action and attention, and so on. It is these not-yet-conceptualised, indeterminate but still to some degree recognisable objects which I think MacIntyre employs as a contrast to fully-formed conceptual schemes; and it is the continued existence and employment of these pre-linguistic powers which ensure that the schemes do not drift loose from the world.

This is only a start and it clearly requires a lot of elaboration. But it is a start that I want to hang on to.

Chapter Two

A nice way into the next section of the argument might be to consider the interesting and acknowledged gap in Davidson's theory concerning the child's acquisition of language; though a little more leading-up will be necessary to see why it is important. I am indebted to Mark Wrathall's paper, 'Motives, Reasons, and Causes' in the following paragraphs, although I disagree with him on a number of central points (in particular, I think he misreads Davidson).

Davidson's account of linguistic competence is a child of Quine's account, and in Quine's account, the connections between the world and beliefs are simply causal: a change in our perceived world causes a change in our beliefs. One consequence of Quine's position is an indeterminacy of reference (Wrathall 2005, p.124). No particular experiences are linked to particular beliefs: instead, the changes that we make in our beliefs as a result of the changes in our perceived environment will depend upon our other beliefs and our other causal relations to the world. By Quine's own admission, this leads to (or is) a belief in the indeterminacy of reference. There are no fixed linkages between the world and our beliefs: there is only a general equilibrium, in which changes in one produce causally related, but not determinate changes in the other.

This account seems to cause several problems. Such a complete dislocation of world and belief seems to leave a confused and attenuated idea of what the world is. For example, if I believe that I have seen an elephant, all this means is that something has caused me to believe that I have seen one (Wrathall 2005 p.124). This cause could be anything: indeed, for Quine it is most centrally the proximal causes, 'surface irritations' such as light hitting my eyes, which cause me to believe I have seen an elephant. There is (I hope) a difference between my having really seen an elephant and something else having caused me to believe it, but it is not clear that Quine can explain what this difference is. It will not help to ask 'Can I trace the causal chain back to a real elephant?' because we seem to have

no resources available to decide what a real elephant is, or to decide what is an acceptable causal chain, except for the fact that an elephant is the sort of thing which reliably causes me to have elephant-related beliefs: and relying on this looks dangerously circular. Some commentators, such as John McDowell, have taken this Quinean view to be so disastrous that it undermines the idea that our beliefs being about the world altogether.

McDowell's solution is to say that perception has the kind of propositional structures and content that would be necessary for it to stand in justificatory relationships with beliefs (Wrathall 2005 p.125). Davidson attempts to solve the problem with his theory of triangulation: according to Davidson, we pin down the connections between beliefs and the world by pinning down the common causes of our and other people's beliefs. In this way, more clearly identifiable relationships between individual parts of the world and individual beliefs can be pinned down.

Davidson's account is still a holistic one, and so this does not mean that we can do without the frame of reference. The point can perhaps be illuminated by considering Davidson's rejection of the distinction (employed by Quine) between observation sentences, justified just by experience, and theory sentences, justified only with reference to other sentences (Davidson 2001 p.145-6). Davidson rejects the possibility of sentences of the former type, because he believes that the idea of checking against reality is incoherent, on holistic grounds. But this does not mean that all of our sentences are of the latter type, only justified with reference to other sentences, because beliefs are themselves individuated in part with respect to their causal histories and relationships.

In all of his accounts of triangulation, Davidson insists that the relevant relationships are causal. How do we pick out the causal relationships that are really relevant to each occurrence of triangulation from the indefinitely many possible causal relationships which we could latch on to? The answer seems clear: by triangulating. And this should not surprise us: we can only explain what is

going on in triangulation in the linguistic terms that become available to us after we have become competent users of language. This shows up the fact that, for Davidson, there is a substantial interdependence between cause and belief, between causal and intentional sorts of explanation or enquiry. If we were to try to give an entirely causal explanation of something, without presupposing any justificatory or intentional material, then we would founder on issues of individuation; while if we try to give an entirely intentional explanation or description of something, we will find that our words have no content thanks to their lack of causal connections to the world and to other speakers.

This interdependence tends to be hidden by Davidson's way of talking. He frequently talks of the causal and rational domains as separate and exhaustive; and he is insistent that objects can stand only in causal relationships to each other, and beliefs in only causal relationships to the world, and only justificatory relationships to each other. This sharp dichotomy obscures the dense mesh of interdependent causal and conceptual relationships that allows us to individuate objects, beliefs, and relations at all. Nevertheless, it is hardly surprising that Davidson talks as he does, for the concepts of beliefs, causes, reasons, mental states, reference, and so on, have their original homes in theories and vocabularies in which this sharp distinction is taken as given.

From this background, I want to ask whether we should understand the pre-conceptual responsiveness to the world and to others which the child and the animal possess in causal or conceptual terms. Davidson always talks about the relationships involved in triangulation as causal; they result in concepts and beliefs but are not themselves concept- or belief-laden. But the child's concepts and beliefs do not appear all in one go; they appear gradually as part of the development of a system of attitudes and capacities, a framework of rationality and

social commerce. What account do we give of a child's actions, beliefs, and other contentful states while this framework is under construction?

To describe the actions of a child in the process of learning language in purely causal terms seems to lead to a rather stunted idea of what a child's capacities are like; but talking about them as if they were fully rational adult speakers seems equally mistaken. The child correlates the reactions of other creatures with things going on in the world in ways which can be mapped on to our own beliefs and attitudes with increasing certainty and stability. We have to recognise an incipient rationality in the behaviour of the child.

Davidson thinks that causal connections imply strict laws, but laws which are linguistically defined, so that they hold only under this or that description (Malpas 2014). Does the pre-linguistic child have a grasp of such causal laws? Not as we know them; but neither does the world of the child seem to be entirely devoid of causal relationships. If inquisitive toddlers had no notion of causality at all, they could not conduct themselves as agents in the ways that they manifestly do.

The actions, distinctions and beliefs of the child are somewhat and increasingly intelligible and determinate. The beliefs and behaviours of the child are indeterminate, the material which will later be transformed into the determinate beliefs and behaviours of a mature speaker. Other indeterminate beliefs persist in adult life, played out in indeterminately intelligible actions, such as MacIntyre's avoidance behaviours.

Such concerns are not directly harmful to Davidson's theory, in the sense that they do not undermine his claims to be able to describe what he has set out to describe. But I want to claim that there is a reality here about which Davidson's resources of language and philosophy leave him no room to speak comprehensibly. He has inherited from a more or less Cartesian or empiricist tradition a language of causes, reasons, mental states, and so on, which he has already pushed so far as to be frequently misunderstood. Once the distinction between the conceptual and

empirical elements of knowledge and the distinction between observation sentences and theory sentences have been thrown out after Quine's two dogmas of empiricism, we have already brought concepts like 'belief' and 'cause' a very long way from the philosophical theory and vocabulary in which they were originally at home. Attention to the uses of the words in natural language can help, but such uses are not necessarily free of philosophical influence themselves, and one cannot use words in a philosophical context without expecting philosophers to assume that they carry at least some of their philosophical baggage. The words can only be pushed so far before misunderstanding becomes inevitable.

The child's actions and contentful states are not, I think, the only ones which Davidson's language is unequipped to talk about coherently. For example, a rush of blood to the cheeks can be caused by exertion or embarrassment. But a blush can *express* embarrassment, and a flush cannot express exertion. Embarrassment might give a reason for blushing, but it generally doesn't. So what is the relationship between blushing and embarrassment? Davidson must say that it is only causal, but this is to leave out its expressive aspect. Likewise, I think it is the expressiveness of the behaviour of animals and children which Davidson cannot talk properly about.

We understand blushes, a child's way of talking, a dog's clowning, as belonging to and comprehensible in terms of wholes, the wholes formed by the life and action of the person, child, or animal. But these wholes and the relationships between their parts cannot be captured only by causal or only by rational explanation. We might be able to capture them by continuing to extend the old Kantian and Cartesian terms, and Davidson goes some way towards doing so. But I think that this would be a mistake, for there is already a language which can do the requisite work, and do so without modifying ideas such as cause and belief so much that they become unrecognisable. This language is the philosophical language developed by the Husserlian phenomenologists.

In particular, I think that what is missing in Davidson's account is the phenomenon of motivation. The term is used by many different phenomenologists, in ways that do not always perfectly mesh, but I will be drawing primarily upon the account of motivation given by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which of the accounts I've read and read about seems to me to be the best-developed, and the most capable of shedding light upon the questions at hand.

Before I talk about Merleau-Ponty's account of motivations, it will be useful to give an overview of its background in his account of sensation. Merleau-Ponty argues in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Perception* against the possibility of understanding sensation in either purely physical or causal, or in conceptual or Kantian terms. He calls the first position 'empiricist', and the second 'intellectualist'.

Merleau-Ponty has a number of arguments against a physical or causal understanding of sensation; I will not attempt to go through them all here, but there is one line of argument which is repeated in several different forms, and which is key to his way of understanding things. He argues against what he calls the 'constancy hypothesis', the hypothesis that a single cause – generally understood as a single quale – will always result in the same sensation in the same subject. Merleau-Ponty argues, against this, that the basic unit of perception is the meaningful gestalt, not individual qualia. I do not infer or construct the speckledness of a speckled hen from seeing its individual speckles and working up; I see the speckledness first, and it is only when I pay closer attention that I see the individual speckles. Further, I do not construct or infer the presence of a scene, a room, or a landscape from its parts, because without the scene to provide background and structure I would not be able to perceive the parts. If I look into my kitchen for example, I can only pick out the plates, oven, taps, and so on because I have some grip on the spatial relationships between them, their sizes in

relation to each other, which blocks of colour are in the foreground and which the background, what is a real difference in colour and what is a shadow, and so on, and all of this is available to me only because I am confronted in the first place not by isolated qualia but by a whole scene. When I look at a landscape painting (even a very bad one, by a child for example), it never occurs to me to imagine that the artist has depicted a concave space, including very small trees and sheep that are floating in front of the surface in such a way that they look as if they are on the ground. But there is nothing that the empiricist can point to in any of the things that prevents me from interpreting the picture this way.

This would not be a problem for the empiricist if they could drop their atomism; but Merleau-Ponty argues that they cannot do so while remaining empiricists. If some kind of organisation by the judging mind is brought in, couched in terms of concepts, we have moved into intellectualism: the empiricist can rely only upon causal explanations. So either the empiricist must think either that chunks of data, rather than individual qualia, cause certain sensations, or else that the sum total of all our sensations is active in each perception. In the first case, we will be brought back to the first problem, as there are no chunks of context big enough to do the job except that of the world; but if the world is taken all in one go as the cause of sensation, we have failed to find anything that will function as a useful explanation. We already knew that 'the world' was the cause of experience. Problems along these lines are already familiar to us from Davidson, and I think that the resemblance is more than incidental.

So empiricism must be supplemented by further hypotheses. Merleau-Ponty finds the most compelling of these in the position he calls 'intellectualist', which can be identified with the neo-Kantianism of the time. The intellectualist maintains that, after experience is gathered up by the senses, it is interpreted by the mind, by means of organising concepts. Again, Merleau-Ponty has a number of arguments against this way of understanding things, but I want to pick up on one thread in particular: Merleau-Ponty's arguments against the idea of the mind

picking out resemblances between sensations, and against the idea of the mind making use of memories to interpret sensation.

The intellectualist claims that it is acts of judgement which structure and make sense of perception, and one of the central mechanisms proposed to do this is one by which the mind makes sense of sensations by relating them to other sensations or to memories.

But how is it that the mind knows which other experiences or which memories to relate to the current experience? When I am confronted with a plate, why do I get the memories relevant to interpreting white objects as plates, and not the memories relevant to interpreting white objects as seagulls? To appeal to simple similarity between experiences is a step backwards, because Merleau-Ponty has already argued that similar atomic qualia do not necessarily produce similar sensations. Appeal to memory will get us no further, as it must either rely on such untenable similarities, or else posit that experiences have some power to call up the right memory. But this seems to presuppose both that there is a 'right memory' to be called up, and that experiences have the power of calling up such memories. If this is the case, then it seems that experience must be meaningful or normative before the interpreting mind gets to work: and so the intellectualist ends up presupposing the phenomenon which he was trying to explain.

It is often tempting for a philosopher to explain the way we seem to organise sensations in terms of the mind making use of theories or inferences to transform the inputs to our sensory organs into the full-fledged continuous world of experience. But if what I am doing in such everyday cases is using a theory, judgement, or inference, then what is it that I am doing when I *actually* use I theory, judgement, or inference, for example, when I try to work out the purpose of an unfamiliar machine? It is tempting to reply that, in the usual cases, the judgement or inference is 'subconscious'. But what is the real difference between understanding a subconscious operation in terms of a theory or judgement, and

understanding it in some quite different way? We are stretching the words so far that we are making a quite new concept.

If we take the intellectualist route here, inference and judgement will be everywhere: we will never have a perception which has not been structured in this way. If all perception involves inference, it no longer means anything to say that any one of them does, for there is nothing to contrast inference against, as there is in the usual use of the word. Second, and partly as a result of this fact, it is unclear what it means to say that I 'had a subconscious theory' or 'made a subconscious inference'. Any competent user of the words can see the difference between my consciously using a theory and my not using one. I think that we can also make quite straightforward sense of some cases of someone's unconsciously using a theory, for example when a well-practiced doctor diagnoses a common complaint, making use of a theory which practice and habit had made so familiar that it did not need to be explicitly thought about at all. But there is no obvious way to get a grip on the intellectualist's use of the word, as something that turns up everywhere. Further, continuing to use the vocabulary of theory and judgement will inevitably mislead, both because people will read in ordinary uses of the word, and also because it will make it difficult to see what we mean when we use the words in their ordinary way.

A central element of Merleau-Ponty's own account of sensation is the phenomenon of motivation. A motive is a relationship that is neither a cause nor a reason, and which holds between two experiences, actions, or states on account of their meanings.

For Merleau-Ponty, linguistic meaning is one amongst a larger class of kinds of meaning. Meaning for Merleau-Ponty is found in any experience "in which one thing arouses an expectation of another" (Wrathall 2005 p.114). When I reach out my hand to pick up a book, I am already prepared for the weight it will

have in my hand. When I am walking along a path, my feet are ready for the little ups and downs as I see them. When I sip my cup of tea, I am already prepared for the taste and the warmth of it. Most of these relations operate beneath the level of conscious thought: my fingers hit the right keys when I type, my tongue goes in the right places when I eat, I don't fall over when I walk and talk at the same time. My body just finds its own way about. Merleau-Ponty calls these everyday, experiential significances 'motor significances'. Most of these meanings are beneath our attention most of the time, so many of Merleau-Ponty's examples come from their misfires. I am never more aware of how my experiences usually inform each other than when I go to pick up something and find it much heavier than I expected, or I step on a rock and it gives way under me. (One of Merleau-Ponty's favourite illustrations is optical illusions).

Merleau-Ponty believes that motor significance can be explained only with reference to the body. Here, he differs from or at least goes beyond both Husserl's accounts of motivation, and the various accounts given by the members of the Munich circle who originally adopted 'motivation' as a technical term. In this respect, the predecessor he is closest to is Edith Stein, and it is Stein's account of motivations that he cites when he introduces the concept in *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

Motives for action, as the term is used in English, is one fairly representative type of the more general kind of explanation, in which one thing prompts us or predisposes us to do, think, or experience another thing; Stein explains motivation as one thing giving rise to another, the second existing on the basis of, and for the sake of, the first.

A motivation does not function as a reason: when I see an optical illusion, the Müller-Lyer Illusion for example, the additional lines motivate me to see the central lines as being different lengths, but they do not give me a reason or justification to see them this way. Similarly, I might believe, thanks to an inflated ego, that my friend has come to York primarily to see me: here, my view of myself

helps to motivate the belief, but again does not justify it. Further, motives can be subtle and tenuous, even ambiguous, existences and there is no guarantee that we will be able to smoothly translate motives into propositional terms.

On the other hand, motives are not simply causes, as a motive operates only by virtue of its significance. While causes are usually thought to be extensional, motives are not (Wrathall 2005 p.114); this can be very clearly seen in the example of motives for action. Motives also admit of indeterminacy, in part because they are not necessarily linguistically or conceptually constituted. It is not only motives for action that have this quality: it can be seen quite clearly in motives for belief, for example, and even in perception. When I automatically adjust my balance for the weight of my rucksack and the bumps on the path, I do this because of – for the sake of – the weight and the bumps, not for the sake of, say, the changes in my eye caused by light rays hitting it, or nerve signals from my inner ear, even though these are part of the set of causes for my adjustments of balance. Motives need not be and frequently are not transparent either to myself or to others, and in any case becoming aware of every one of the motives involved in an action or perception would be an endless task. Motives also do not collapse into causes if Davidson's account of causes as intentional and holds, for no law-like regularities are necessary for attributing motivations.

Because motivations operate for the sake of their grounds, the objects of motivation have, for Merleau-Ponty, a built-in teleology, which depends upon how they are picked out. For example, when I go to check if a door is shut, I stand a certain distance away from the door, or within a certain distance-range. I do not try to check from very far away, or peer at it very very closely. There is a 'right distance' to see the door, and a different 'right distance' to see the house, or to see the grain of the wood. What picks out objects and to some degree explains their teleology is the use of my body, with its proportions, limitations, and possibilities for action, as a point of reference.

The phenomenon of motivation and the phenomenon of gestalts, which I talked about earlier, are to be understood alongside each other. A motivational relationship holds between two experiences in virtue of the place which they both have within some whole, the gestalt with reference to which they are to be correctly understood. If the world of perception were fundamentally composed of atomic sensory qualia and organising ideas, as Hume takes it to be, then there would be no sense to their standing in relations to each other beyond those of cause and reason.

Each thing is to be understood in its place within some gestalt, and attention to certain objects or perceptions causes us to privilege one gestalt over another: when we focus on a landscape, we perceive its hills and fields as structured and related so as to get the maximum sense or meaning from the whole, and it is this criterion of finding sense, of the teleology of objects and of wholes, that brings motivations into existence. If I focus not on the landscape but on the nearby leaves, the landscape will recede into the background, and the trees and branches will become the central context of the perception. Understanding what motivations are at work in a gestalt and understanding the nature of its unity are one and the same task.

Both Merleau-Ponty and Stein usually talk of gestalts and motives as holding within the experience of a single person, but it is clear from both of their accounts that a gestalt, the unity with reference to which each part is intelligible, can include multiple people and their perceptions and beliefs, and, similarly, motivational coherence can hold across the beliefs, actions and perceptions of multiple people. The things that I do and say can motivate your acts and emotions, and the things that I do and say might in turn only be intelligible with reference to others or to you.

To get a grip on the phenomenon of expressiveness, it might be useful to begin from some remarks in one of MacIntyre's papers, 'What is a Human Body?'; the paper was published in the same year as his book on Edith Stein, and it is strikingly marked by the influence of Stein's phenomenological reflections. In 'What is a Human Body?' MacIntyre argues that the movements of human bodies, in contrast to the movements of stones or rivers, must be understood as directed and undirected. Some of the states and movements of human bodies are directed towards ends. This is plainly true in the case of intentional actions, but it is also true of, for example, fevers, and breathing; such states and movements are correctly understood only when we see them in their place as parts of the proper functioning of the organism; and this proper functioning involves movements which are fully intentional and end-directed. But the directedness of the body's movements, and the unity which this directedness is understood with reference to, comes tied up with its expressiveness. How I frame my intentions, and so my ability to frame intentions and to exhibit intelligible directedness in my actions at all depends upon the possibility of those intentions and actions being interpretable by others. Human bodies, their movements, and their states more generally, are what they are in part because they are interpretable and interpreted by other embodied selves (p.89).

Merleau-Ponty uses the idiom of a single operative world or operative life which different embodied agents all participate in. We do not only learn our language from others, but also our patterns of affective response, our sense of what is outrageous, what funny, what beautiful; we learn how to exercise our imaginations, how to relate to others, and how to relate to the world more generally, from other people. Further, the operative world is meaning-laden, and a meaning cannot be private: at least the possibility of other perceivers coming to understand the way we see things is indispensable. When we see a cup, a pencil, or a similar artefact, we experience it as to-be-used, not only by us, but "anonymously", by other embodied creatures with behaviours like our own. The

operative world is not essentially private, like the Cartesian world of perception, but essentially common. One of the implications of this is that perception, too, is not private: before I have reflected philosophically about the matter, I do not imagine that I see a coloured surface, I imagine that I see a pencil: and pencils are the sort of thing that can appear in your perceptions as well as in mine.

Let us return to the example of blushing. If someone is embarrassed and blushes, the blush is for the sake of the cause of the embarrassment. If I do not grasp the blush as expressing embarrassment I do not understand it; I will also mischaracterise the blush if I am mistaken about what the blushing person is embarrassed about. We blush for the sake of what the embarrassment is for the sake of, not for the sake of – for example – the widening of blood vessels next to the skin, though this is one of the causal contributors to the blush. Neither is the blush for the sake of the embarrassment itself; the reaction of embarrassment is the whole of which blushing is a part, and with reference to which the blush is to be correctly understood. Further, the blush is not related to the embarrassment causally; there is not a second, inner entity, embarrassment.

In explaining triangulation, in explaining the actions of small children and animals, and in explaining expressiveness more generally, any language which makes a strict separation between cause and reason difficult to get away from will never do as well as a language which makes use of cause, reason, and motivation as interrelated, overlapping, and complimentary terms.

Thus, I would encourage anyone seeking to give a Davidsonian account of language acquisition to switch from talk of identifying the common causes of beliefs, to talk of identifying the common motivations of beliefs. We do not identify the causes of belief simply extensionally, but as elephants, boxes, oboes, and other familiar objects, the kind of objects which our language is about; neither do we think that law-like regularities hold between such objects and beliefs or

utterances about them. But we cannot identify them just or only according to the conceptual structures we will have to hand when we are mature speakers, or else genuine learning of new words and concepts – including the learning of the child – would be impossible. Rather, the child, and the adult learning a second first language, is motivated to pick out this or that as the probable prompt of this or that kind of utterance. Grounded in my bodily existence, and with my body as a reference point, I have an unformulated, but not simply causal, grip on what is like and unlike me, what is big and small, what is and is not made for human hands, what is dangerous or terrifying or kind. The child exists in a world which is not just a network of brute causes, nor the fully conceptualised and determinate reality captured by a mature conceptual scheme. Rather, the child's world is an ambiguous and indeterminate mesh of gestalts, related motivationally to each other and to their parts.

Further, when we triangulate, we do not just assume that utterances and beliefs are caused by the object of those utterances and beliefs, but also that the utterances and beliefs are for the sake of the object. The central constituent of motivation is already at work in the central relationship of triangulation. Introducing the concepts of motivation and operative intentionality do not damage Davidson's account of triangulation: they complete it.

A conceptual scheme does not organise, interpret, and face up to an entirely disorganised stream of sense-data, nor is it the free-floating intellectual structure suggested by 'Relativism, Power and Philosophy'. Rather, a conceptual scheme organises what the phenomenologists call the operative world, the meaning-laden but not fully determinate world of unreflective perception.

Imagine that I am standing in a wood. I have been looking around me for a little while, and have a clear view of my surroundings. I see the wood as containing objects such as 'beech trees', 'woodpecker sounds', 'nettles', and similar

such things. Perhaps as part of a child's game, I am asked to imagine an animal, say a squirrel or a nuthatch, in the wood, and to imagine it moving around the space in its characteristic ways. When I look around the wood, seeing it in terms of the activities of the nuthatch, as well as nettles and beech tress, the wood also contains 'hiding-places', 'predators', 'food', and so on. There are perhaps better examples for illustrating how conceptual schemes can be laid upon the world, but I will use this one, as it captures what I take to be the mundanity of what is going on.

The first thing I take this example to illuminate is what sense there might be to the idea of 'organising experience' or 'organising the world'. Davidson insists that it is not experience as a whole that needs to be organised and classified, but individual experiences and things, the familiar experiences and things which our language deals with. But in this example I am neither just applying concepts to an un-conceptualised given, nor just reclassifying the same set of objects I had around me before. This can perhaps be seen most clearly with the example of hiding-places. It might be that, when I say that the wood now contains 'predators', what I am doing is giving a new organisation or classification to a set of things that I had already picked out in determinate ways: but the things that I now identify as hiding-places, I had not previously picked out as 'things' at all. 'Things' appear only when I distinguish them from a background, and I had not yet distinguished what now appear as hiding-places; they were just part of the background, part of 'the wood' or 'the tree'. When the animal is introduced, the wood resolves itself into a new structure of figure and background, a new gestalt. The new gestalt presents new objects for my attention. The new objects are not of any special or mysterious kind, but they were not there in the old gestalt. Our starting-point is neither a meaningless and undivided stream of empirical data, nor a fully-fledged conceptually and linguistically structured world, but a fabric of figure-background structures, organised and situated around our bodies by motivational relationships.

This example also helps to show what facing or fitting experience might be. I cannot just interpret the wood in any way I please: I cannot will good hiding-

places into existence. Some things just will be good hiding-places for a squirrel or nuthatch, some things just won't be, and I can be mistaken about something's being a good hiding-place in much the same way as I can be mistaken about something's being a beech tree. The possibility of being mistaken remains, quite unproblematically.

An adherent of Davidson's views might at this point argue that I have mischaracterised matters. When I pick something out as a hiding-place, I am still organising such things as leaves, moss, holes in trees, and so on, and all of these are things of a quite ordinary kind. The fact that, until my attention was drawn to them, they happened on this occasion to pass before my eyes as background is quite irrelevant.

Let me try to rebuff this argument with a second example. I once watched an extended interaction between a mother and a child of two or so, in which the child was, with the immense seriousness sometimes demonstrated by small children, matching up objects of different colours, naming them as she went. She had no problem with red or green, but every once in a while she would put a yellow object in with the blue ones, saying 'blue'. The mother would then say, no! that's yellow, and the child would look at her in astonishment, and then very carefully put it with the yellow objects. Eight or nine matches later, the child would do the same thing again, and appear equally astonished upon being corrected.

When we describe the interactions of two mature speakers, we may be able to rely on objects already picked out by concepts, but the child has to learn *everything*, up to and including object permanence. The child learning to speak has no objects of the 'ordinary kind' to refer to. Rather, the idea of an 'object' (and for that matter a 'kind') are built up slowly from more uncertain grounds. A child who has not yet learned that water poured from one container to another retains its volume does not have 'objects of an ordinary kind' in the way that a mature reasoner has them; and the objects that we have and reason about grew from the

same roots, the same pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic grip on the world which the child has as it learns language, and which is retained by the adult, albeit transformed, in her operative engagement with the world. All objects are operative; and so though the sorts of objects that appear in the operative world may be ambiguous and of ambiguous significance, less determinate or more obscure than the named objects that figure in the world which we are used to speaking about, there is no essential difference between objects picked out by operative sense and objects picked out by words; they are the same in kind.

Merleau-Ponty does not regard the operative world as static, a childhood acquisition underlying the rest. My operative world can be altered by new acquisitions, including conceptual ones. As an adult, when I learn what a nuthatch is and how it moves around a wood, to tell the difference between corniced snow and solid ground, or how to think about the play of light in Turner's paintings, I find myself once again in the position of a child. I am presented with one gestalt, and told that there are things in it that I need a new gestalt to see. I am taught how to pick out such things not by translation, but by practice and guidance, as the child is taught them. There are differences: the child is learning its entire scheme at once, and the idea of a child's actions being intelligible to itself only gains application as the child learns: in the case of a mature speaker, on the other hand, the new concepts, gestalts and modes of attention which I am dealing with must bear enough relationship to my own for my own actions to be intelligible to me and for me to understand what I am doing as learning. This puts limits on the extent to which I can grasp a conceptual scheme as a rival or an alternative to my own. But these are not limits which allow me to assimilate everything I come across into familiar terms by requiring all other schemes to be translatable into the language of my own. Rather, I must bend to the other scheme: I must make my mind adequate to it.

We do not seem to be any closer to a good criterion for differentiating identity conditions, but we may be closer to seeing why we don't need one.

Haldane reads MacIntyre as claiming that it is linguistic criteria, and specifically criteria of untranslatability, by which we distinguish conceptual schemes. But, as I argued earlier, MacIntyrean untranslatability is not untranslatability simpliciter. It is possible to translate between different conceptual schemes given sufficient resources of context, skill, and ingenuity. Further, even radically innovative conceptual translation and synthesis, such as that performed by Aquinas, is an example of the exercise of a power to go on and go further that is one of the basic elements of linguistic competence. Aquinas simply exercises these powers with an extraordinary degree of competence and ingenuity. Thus, there is no clear distinction between the kind of translation required to bridge the gap between rival conceptual schemes, and the kind required to interpret and respond to language generally.

In the phrase-book kind of interpretation, the relevant context is dependent upon my purposes, while in the other, more extensive kind, the context is indefinitely large, and picking it out depends upon serious engagement with the other language (though there is no sense in my going about such an enquiry without any reference to my own purposes at all, or it would not be intelligible as an engagement or enquiry). So we have, as a possible starting-point, a criterion of how much we are inclined to latch on to the same or similar things as being directly relevant to interpreting this or that utterance. We also have some grip on how much we have to make use of inventiveness in an act of translation and how much is routine, how extensively we must understand the context, how much and how far we share with others our instincts about how to go on and go further, how to respond to stock phrases, how to recognise what is an achievement and what is a failure, how to string together utterances into an intelligible sequence,

and so on. We can use these rough and ready measures to tell, to some degree at least, how far another person's scheme differs from our own. But there is no sharp boundary between schemes and there is no strict criterion of identity to distinguish between them. This does not mean that the idea has no application: the idea of a species of animal, for example, works in a similar way.

But to give a better account of this, and of the idea of going on and going further more generally, more resources are needed. I have already noted that the operative world is not static, and that the relationships between the operative and thematised levels of intentionality run in both directions. When I walk around my room in the dark, I do not generally bump into things, and I can find doors and light-switches, not because I think about where things are, but because my hands and feet remember where they need to be. Similarly, I rarely need to explicitly consider whether a gap is large enough for me to squeeze through, an item out of reach, or a plate of food too large to eat in one go. I possess this kind of knowledge not primarily by intellect, but in and through my body. I make tea and drink it without thematised thoughts about it; I see doors as open-able, books as read-able, my lover as touchable. I experience the world as shot through with saliences, solicitations, and possibilities for action.

Merleau-Ponty uses the general term 'a way of gearing into the world' to capture the complex array of experienced possibilities for action, affective responses, tendencies to believe this or that, to interpret others in one way or another, to attend to this or that, and so on. The phrase has a figurative sense meaning to adjust or adapt, and is meant to give the sense of a fit which is accomplished in action (endnotes to the *Phenomenology*, p.479).

One day, I wake up, and for no particularly good reason I feel happy. As a result of my mood, everything seems a little brighter; I attend to the birds and the sunshine, I am charitable in my interactions with other people, I shrug off minor inconveniences, I whistle, I do this or that small job without thinking. Another day, something makes me miserable, I notice the bad things, I think badly of well-

meaning people, minor inconveniences frustrate me, every small task seems like a thankless chore. A whole variety of elements of perception, of modes of action and solicitation to action, of my reactions to others, my affective states, the whole complex of my way of engaging with the world, involve themselves in this simple change of mood.

Merleau-Ponty makes wide use of the idea of gearing into the world: it is modulated or changed by different moods, by falling in love, fatigue and frantic energy, new beliefs and reactions to misfortune. Many disorders of the mind, major and minor, can be characterised in terms of it (paranoia, phantom limbs). Interpreters have extended the idea still further: Mark Wrathall (2007), for example, uses the idea to explain the grounding of social rules. I think that the idea can be used to help express what a virtue is (a kind person, for example, differs from an unkind, an akratic, and a well-meaning but thoughtless person, in the whole network of perception, affection, action, interpretation, and response).

But none of the operative meaning involved in my going about the world (or at least very little of it) was built in at birth, or appeared spontaneously later. When I move into a new room, I do not immediately know how to move around it in the dark: I have to acquire a bodily grasp of how my room is laid out, by habituation and by inhabiting the space in the course of different activities and with different purposes in mind. Until I have the right habits, I have to think actively about where I put my feet. (The same thought holds, in more complicated form, for moral and other kinds of action.)

Merleau-Ponty uses the term 'acquisition' for new habits, new concepts, new lines of significance, and in general changes in my way of gearing into the world. These acquisitions gradually become second nature, 'sedimentations', the familiar, habitual, and largely unexamined background and structure of my operative world. Sedimentations, once more, are not fixed and unchanging, but are in turn altered by new acquisitions. So, for example, when I am learning to use a bow and arrow, at first I must pay attention to everything, learning to pick out

what is a good or a bad stance, or arm position, or way of releasing with the help of conscious thought: these distinctions become available to me through teaching and practice, and so become parts of my operative world. These are acquisitions. When I am very well-practiced at archery, the basic stance, shapes and movements become second-nature: sedimentations. From the basis of these sedimentations, it becomes possible for me to make new acquisitions, changes to stance and release to suit my particular body shape and style, the use or relaxation of this or that particular muscle or set of muscles, and so on, which I would not have been able to make were it not for my existing ground of sedimentations, and the distinctions and modes of attention which they have made possible.

Although the simplest examples of acquisition and sedimentation are found in this kind of example, in which operative significance and the body are obviously in play, the same structure holds, in modified forms, for more complicated examples of everyday activity (such as in learning the virtues), and in the domain of language and intellectual enquiry.

In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty talks of linguistic expression as being one kind within a larger class of bodily gesture or expressive act, a class which also includes gestures, paralinguage, painting, music, dance, and in general any act meant to be interpreted (we might also have grounds to include acts that are parasitic upon other interpretable acts, such as the act of writing notes to oneself). Merleau-Ponty is insistent that I do not infer another person's thoughts or emotions from his gestures; rather, I experience those thoughts and emotions as embodied in gesture; and I grasp the signification of these gestures because of the operative life which both me and my interlocutor participate in. This holds for a shrug, a laugh, a sketch or a tune hummed in essentially the same way as it does for language. (Though Merleau-Ponty does think speech has a greater determinacy and a more intimate relation to thought than other kinds of gesture.)

In the chapter on expression and speech, Merleau-Ponty draws a distinction between 'spoken speech' and 'speaking speech'. The heart of the distinction is, I think, between speech that relies upon operative meanings I already possess, and speech that creates new operative meanings so that I am able to understand it, or else brings to my attention operative meanings that had previously lain unnoticed.

Spoken speech is speech that I can understand easily and straightforwardly, because my world is already structured in the right way to grasp it. I experience spoken speech as a tool or an expression of my purposes; my attention passes straight through the words to the things which they are about, in the same way that when I type I attend to the words rather than to the individual movements of my fingers.

Speaking speech either gives determinate expression to operative realities for the first time, or else gives expression to possible modulations of my operative world that I do not yet grasp, but can be led to by means of the speech. One of Merleau-Ponty's examples of speaking speech is that of a lover recognising his feelings for the first time. (A man is pacing up and down, waiting with impatience for the arrival of his friend, his thoughts full of her, thinking over his reactions in the last few days or weeks, examining his current feelings, when all at once he realises – I am in love. A score of little incidents fall together into a new whole, a new gestalt.) The words which the lover uses need not be new ones – indeed, he himself may have said them before – but they express a change in the way he sees and gears into the world. Other examples of speaking speech given by Merleau-Ponty include pieces of poetry, paintings, good phenomenology, and certain mathematical formulae, though his favourite examples are those of Balzac and Cezanne (the example of Cezanne will be returned to later). What for our purposes is key to his characterisation of speaking speech is its intimate relationship with acquisition. We take up spoken speech on the basis of existing sedimentations, existing habits and existing strategies of attention and

interpretation. Speaking speech, on the other hand, always requires innovation or extension in such strategies, as it always involves either the new articulation of some part of my world, some experience or distinction which I had not previously been able to give determinate expression to, or else the creation of some operative sense which previously had not been a part of my world, but which the speech requires me to look for or create in order to understand it.

Merleau-Ponty thinks that the philosophers of empiricism and intellectualism, the neo-Kantians, positivists, and other adherents of 'objective thought', take spoken speech to be the essential form of language, and this in turn leads them to the view that truth consists simply in the meanings of statements corresponding neatly to the world as it objectively is. Speaking speech then becomes either a separate 'poetic' category, unsuited for expressing truth (as Sartre has it in *What is Literature?*) or else it is a sort of deviant form of spoken speech, expressing meaning parasitically, in roughly the way that intelligible malapropisms are supposed to do.

For Merleau-Ponty, however, the existence of speaking speech, and its relationship to spoken speech, shatters this picture. Spoken speech seems to correspond neatly with a world which was there before it and which can be neutrally perceived, characterised and understood. Speaking speech, on the other hand, is intimately connected with changes in our operative world, the world of perception and action in which we habitually exist. To speak speakingly or to take up new speaking speech is to 'crystallise' or make determinate an operative sense which previously had no determinate existence. Thus, speaking speech does not even appear to correspond neatly to a pre-existing world amenable to neutral characterisation.

Further, spoken speech is, to some degree at least, parasitic on speaking speech (rather than the other way round). The operative senses which are at work when we grasp the meaning of spoken speech were learned at some earlier point: as children learning language, and as adults extending it, we acquire new operative

meanings and new ways of giving them determinate articulation. These new acquisitions, at first speaking, eventually grow habitual, and at last become so familiar and appear so indispensable that they become all but invisible (we are apt to forget that – for example – object permanence, people, and yellow were once novel ways of making sense of the confused world of our perceptions). Because these sedimentations become so stable and so constant in our perception, we imagine that our spoken language, which draws upon them, has a simple and transparent relationship to a determinate and already fully constituted world.

In speech as in archery and virtue, my acquisitions gradually cement into stable sedimentations, and these in turn become the ground for new acts of speaking speech. If I am to grasp the sense of an act of speaking speech, I need to begin with operative structures which are capable of the right kinds of development, the starting points and strategies which will allow me to get from where I am to where I need to be, and in usual situations this implies a capacity for spoken speech. In addition, speaking speech can only be genuinely meaningful if it has the capacity to become spoken: the changes it effects must have a chance of sticking and making a permanent change to how the listener sees the world, and the structures it brings with it cannot be private to me alone; it must be possible to pass them on.

The grounds for positing an interdependence between speaking and spoken speech can already be seen in this account, and in some of Merleau-Ponty's later writing, the distinction between spoken and speaking speech is broken down (Baldwin 2007 p.98). Instead, each act of expression is supposed to have both spoken and speaking elements (although some will have more of one and some more of the other). Only the most banal sentences will make no difference at all to how you see the world, while a sentence that is 'too speaking', which asks the listener to inhabit a world of significations too alien or too incoherent to be grasped, will be meaningless. (The very fine treading of this line can be seen in, for example, *Finnegan's Wake* and *The Hunting of the Snark*).

It should, I hope, already be clear that there are significant connections between the account of speaking and spoken speech that I have outlined here, Davidson's account of interpretation as it is set out in papers such as 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', and the idea of 'going on and going further' which appears in the work of MacIntyre. The ability to move between interpretative contexts, to come up with new uses for old concepts and phrases, and to come up with new vocabulary for describing some reality or translating some other language, which is fundamental to mastery of a language as a first language, and which is part of the basic apparatus of linguistic competence, is the ability to speak speakingly (even if in only a small way) and to interpret speaking speech.

It may not seem obvious at first sight that large projects of translation and interpretation between mature traditions of enquiry, such as Cicero's translations of Plato, Aquinas' synthesis of Aristotle, or Edith Stein's phenomenological engagement with Aquinas, involve the same kind of intimate connections to the operative world, or the same structures of acquisition and sedimentation, that are involved in learning archery or practicing the violin. But such attempts at translation are and cannot help but be intimately connected to the operative world. Our beliefs about the subject matter of any enquiry, even the most abstract moral or metaphysical ones, or enquiries about entities which we never come into real contact with, such as individual atoms or past events or God, rely upon our pre-linguistic abilities to imagine possibilities, direct attention, make distinctions, match causes to effects, and so on. I can only understand what a virtue or a substance or an electron is because of the place that the concept can take in my operative world, or the analogy it has with concepts which have such a place. And the same is true in various ways for any concept insofar as we are genuinely able to grasp it.

Some translation, characteristically translation between sentences which are a long way towards the spoken end of the spectrum, such as 'snow is white', or 'how much is this mango?', will rely on operative senses which are already shared between speakers of both languages: and so they will appear on initial investigation to work straightforwardly and without loss of meaning. At the other end of the spectrum are cases like 'Jabberwocky', where a need for inventive interpretation borders upon nonsense, and translation is pathologically difficult if not impossible. In between there will be all manner of interpretations and translations, technical and poetic ones, mistakes and malapropisms, stock phrases, in-jokes, and so on. Towards the speaking end lie those difficult translations which require significant linguistic innovations which create or draw attention to those features of the operative life which underlie the first utterance, language, or conceptual scheme, but which are not shared in the second.

Cases such as the Jabberwocky are instructive, for even though the poem is largely comprehensible on first reading, it is almost impossible to think of any standard by which we might judge whether a translator has got it 'right', and ideas of same-saying struggle to find application. Even MacIntyre's criterion of whether someone who speaks both languages as first languages would translate a translation back into the same words as the original is highly questionable. Recognising that language in a general way tends towards the condition of texts like 'Jabberwocky' shows us the provisional nature of any kind of criteria for success in translation or same-saying, and the indispensability of inventiveness and intelligent judgement in translating and in judging such success.

There is no clear standard against which we could hope to judge translations of Jabberwocky; but it is also clear that one can translate 'Jabberwocky' badly, or even mistranslate it deliberately. Translating it is *difficult*, and if I am to do well, to make my translation adequate to the original, I cannot simply put down whatever I want. There is no determinate way to translate 'Jabberwocky' into Spanish or French, but at the same time there is little place for

arbitrariness in the translator's work. Similarly, when I seek to find new terms in which to capture some reality which at the moment my tradition of enquiry cannot speak adequately about, there is no pre-existing standard of success, there is no existing, determinate way of talking about it, and yet there is little place for arbitrariness in the way that I define and explain my new terms.

Thus we find in translation a need for creativity and inventiveness coupled with a demanding requirement of adequacy, to make the translation adequate to the original, which is not reducible merely to determinate same-saying. I have already suggested that translation here forms an example or analogy of enquiry into reality more generally; and I will attempt in the following chapters to take this thought into the explication of traditions of enquiry, and the realm of moral action.

The idea of adequacy I am employing here is, or is analogous to, the familiar Thomist or Aristotelian adequacy of the mind to its objects, and so this line of thought will, I hope, give us the bones of a characterisation of truth. It is the requirement of adequacy, that is, to truthfulness, that seems to ensure that innovation, though it goes beyond or transforms the standards of intelligibility current in a tradition, does not become arbitrary. And so the question of truth will need to be dealt with more thoroughly.

Chapter Three

I think and hope that the standpoints and vocabularies of Merleau-Ponty, Davidson, and MacIntyre can work together profitably, but by this point we may wonder whether deeper theoretical clashes make the kind of eclecticism that I am cheerfully advocating only workable on the surface, with the deeper issues still dividing the philosophers and any who wish to follow them. So here I will attempt to defend Merleau-Ponty against MacIntyre and MacIntyre against Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty takes his account of speaking and spoken speech to seriously undermine classical accounts of truth, and it seems on the surface that MacIntyre's Thomism, with its idea of a 'God's eye view' on a universe that is intelligible prior to any human enquiry, will be damaged profoundly by the introduction of Merleau-Ponty's account of speaking speech. I will attempt to show that it is friendlier to Merleau-Ponty than it appears.

MacIntyre, on the other hand, sets out a sustained attack on Husserlian phenomenology in his biography of Edith Stein, interweaving it with his reflections on Stein's life and work, in which he argues that phenomenology is fundamentally incomplete, requiring supplementation from another philosophical standpoint (unsurprisingly, this turns out to be Thomism). I will attempt to show that Merleau-Ponty is unaffected by his arguments.

As I think it will help to get us into the later discussions with our focus in the right places and with some possible misunderstandings dealt with, I will begin with the second of these.

In *Edith Stein*, MacIntyre makes a series of related criticisms of phenomenology as conceived by Husserl, arguing that phenomenology systematically lacks the resources to solve the questions to which it leads its

adherents. He subtitles the book 'A Philosophical Prologue': the most straightforward sense of this comes across in MacIntyre's picture of Stein's early life and work as forming a prologue to her conversion and her later work on Aquinas and on St John of the Cross. But MacIntyre is also concerned with arguing that Stein's phenomenological philosophy itself formed a prologue to her Thomism: it gave her the ability to formulate interesting and central questions which it did not give her the resources to answer, and by this incompleteness led her to Christianity and then to Thomism. MacIntyre paints Stein's philosophical progress as including a gradual realisation of the incompleteness of phenomenology, and its need for the supplementation and correction which she would eventually discover that Thomism could provide. MacIntyre does not separate these two strands: both are part of what is needed to understand Stein's life-as-a-philosopher.

MacIntyre certainly does not think that phenomenology is valueless; in particular, he praises Stein's ability to raise and reformulate important questions, and other essays, such as 'What is a Human Body?', show that MacIntyre was happy to draw argument and insight from Stein's work. But phenomenology is incomplete: it can take us a certain distance, but no further. It can raise interesting questions, and find new and useful starting points, but it cannot follow on, it cannot answer the questions which it leads us to: "What Thomism clarified for her in a new way was what Thomists have taken to be – and I believe rightly – the necessary incompleteness and one-sidedness of the phenomenological enterprise." (p.178) In the end, what she found she needed to clearly formulate the questions and to solve them is the philosophical standpoint and vocabulary of Thomist Aristotelianism: "in order to go beyond Reinach, Stein needed to go beyond phenomenology" (p.186).

MacIntyre brings out a few central areas in which Stein identified problems or limitations in Husserl's methods. Husserl claims that the account of perception given by phenomenology is independent of and prior to any account

given by the natural sciences, and he rejects any phenomenological attempt to generate causal or quasi-causal laws for capturing the workings of perception or intellect. Stein thinks otherwise. Her early work contains reflections on fatigue, nervous energy, injury, and the effects of drugs on perception and action, drawn in part from her work as a nurse in the Great War; attending to these phenomena lead her to claim that one element of experience which the phenomenologist can and should reflect upon and talk about is that of the causal relationships which the self bears to the world around it, its embeddedness in the world and its vulnerabilities to outside influence; and she entertains the possibility of coming up with quasi-causal laws to describe some of them, analogous to the empirical generalisations of folk psychology (MacIntyre p.112-3). This disagreement makes possible an interchange between phenomenology and psychology, which is impossible for Husserl. This in turn shows up a deeper disagreement: for Stein, causal and intentional levels of description can run together and influence each other, as they cannot for Husserl. Further, it points to a matter on which Stein's divergence of focus or attention from Husserl is evident throughout her work. Stein is interested in the body, in the embeddedness of the body in the world, its role in interacting with other people and especially in empathy, in a way which Husserl is not.

In her later critiques of Husserl, Stein focuses on what she takes to be the limits of human reason (p.180). Kant thought that reason could determine its own limits, but since Hegel we have had reason to doubt that this. Then again, what outside standpoint could there be from which the limits of reason could be determined?

Stein pictures Husserl as seeking secure grounds for his philosophical project by limiting his starting-points to what is immediately evident in perception. However, Stein argues that these grounds do not grant the security

that Husserl thinks they do. Husserl takes human beings to be capable of viewing the world in a way that, in fact, only God can view it: for God, being and knowing are one and the same, whereas humans come upon all the knowledge they have piecemeal and over time, always vulnerable to the possibility of new upsets and difficulties. To God the world appears as transparent, complete, without instability or ambiguity, but to the mortal this is not so, and this lack of transparency, instability and ambiguity undermines the phenomenological reduction as a secure starting-point for philosophy.

Stein instead argues that supernatural reason, reason founded upon the knowledge granted by the supernatural virtue of faith, has the finality and certainty that natural reason does not have. (Stein takes herself to be setting out Aquinas' view; MacIntyre, I think, thinks that Aquinas believes that no reason available to humans before the Resurrection itself has that kind of finality and certainty (see *Summa* First Part, Question 16, Article 5; referring also to Question 1 of the First Part of the Second Part, and Chapter 34 of his commentary to the *Posterior Analytics*). Stein presents this argument as if it took the existence of God as a premise, but MacIntyre argues that it does not need to do so: even if there were no God, human beings would still not be capable of the kind of view on the world which Husserl takes them to have (and, similarly, MacIntyre argues that Husserl is wrong about phenomenology being able to get at certainties even if Thomism can't get at them either, as Stein thinks it can).

However, we might have some reason to think that phenomenology is not as resourceless as Stein and MacIntyre take it to be, for Merleau-Ponty disagrees with Husserl at many of the same junctures that they do, and manages to carry on his project from a standpoint that is manifestly still phenomenological. And Merleau-Ponty manages to bring the resources of phenomenology to bear on problems such as that of truth, the other person, and the transcendence of the

world, in ways and in directions which MacIntyre seems to take, in his discussions on Stein, to be impossible.

First of all, Merleau-Ponty, like Stein, takes attending to the causal effects of the world upon the mental life to be part of the domain of phenomenological enquiry. Husserl insisted that phenomenology had its own subject matter, and that this subject matter was not only entirely separate to the subject matter of psychology, but also that, as it was supposed to be the ground and basis of the sciences, it could not draw upon the sciences' conclusions. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, is happy to draw upon them; and *Phenomenology of Perception* is embroidered with many examples and illustrations drawn from psychology. He does not take the results of the psychologists as given, but argues with the interpretation of case studies and experiments, making psychology into a source of illustrations, foils and suggestions for his phenomenological attention.

Merleau-Ponty also joins Stein in his commitment to Husserlian realism, a commitment set out explicitly in the preface to the *Phenomenology* (p.lxxvii), along with some of his central points of divergence from Husserl, and his account of what he calls Husserl's "disagreement with himself".

This discussion centres on two related things, the nature of the phenomenological reduction, and the problem of other minds, with the second providing a way into understanding the real nature of the first. According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl often wrote of the reduction, in both published and unpublished writings, as achieving or tending toward a clarity which Merleau-Ponty thinks is characteristic of a Kantian rational consciousness: "For a long time and even in his final writings, the reduction is presented as the return to a transcendental consciousness in front of which the world is spread out in absolute transparency..." (p.lxxiv) (This "absolute transparency" is, I think, the clarity of view which Stein argued was available only to God.)

For a consistent transcendental idealism, says Merleau-Ponty, there could be no problem of other people's points of view on the world. A transcendental

philosophy explains the world just insofar as it appears necessarily to the consciousness of a transcendental subject, a Kantian rational ego; and insofar as each one of us is such a subject we are interchangeable. There is no sense to worrying about how the world might look from the point of view of another transcendental ego, beyond the relatively trivial question of how things look from a different spatiotemporal vantage point.

But this account of things leads directly to the well-known problem for the Kantian of how to talk coherently about how we encounter other consciousnesses in the world. We never encounter other transcendental consciousnesses in the phenomenal world; how could we? We only ever come across bundles of the same empirical matter that makes up everything else.

Thus, says Merleau-Ponty, we can only genuinely encounter another self if the self appears within the world of experience: "I must be my exterior, and the other person's body must be the other person himself." (p.lxxvi) He complains that "the Cogito has... devalued the perception of others; it has taught me that the I is only accessible to itself". He continues: "In order for the word 'other' not to be meaningless, my existence must never reduce itself to the consciousness that I have of existing; it must in fact encompass the consciousness that one might have of it, and so also encompass my embodiment". It is a corollary of my ability to genuinely encounter others that I am myself in the world, an object which other people can have a view on. Merleau-Ponty notes that Husserl, despite his tendency towards idealism, does regard the other person as being within the world, a possible object of experience as well as a subject; and so he must also consider the subject to be an object in the world for others.

"Phenomenology", says MacIntyre, "is the practice of disciplined self-awareness of embodied human consciousness. But such embodied consciousness can also be viewed from without as the consciousness of a natural and social being interacting with other such beings. To acknowledge this is to acknowledge that phenomenological enquiry is always by itself radically incomplete." (p.117) For

Merleau-Ponty, however, the phenomenologist's consciousness includes other people in their wholeness, my interactions with them, and their interactions with each other. It also includes their responses to me, their views on me; when my friend is annoyed with me his annoyance-at-me is there, evident and undeniable within the world, my lover's love for me appears in her gestures, and the curate's pleasure at my quickness in his quiet smile, and all of these are where I can see them, open to my phenomenologist's disciplined attention. And the same is true, in more rarefied form, for the sociologist's or neurosurgeon's view of me: it is something within the world. And because both I and other people's responses to me and to each other appear in the world, there is no radical incompleteness, no dimension of what I am that cannot be subjected to this disciplined attention by a philosopher living in the world with others.

Merleau-Ponty, like Stein, thinks that Husserl is mistaken in thinking that the contents of perception can give the secure grounds for enquiry which Husserl seems to think they can. Although he does not mention God, his reasons for thinking this are noticeably similar to Stein's. "If we were absolute spirit," says Merleau-Ponty, "the reduction would not be problematic." (p.lxxviii.) But because we are creatures within the world, within a temporal flow which we cannot get out of and within a fabric which contains other perceivers as well as myself, a complete reduction is impossible.

I grasp and deal with the world around me by ordering and structuring it around my body and my practical and habitual life; the essences of the reduction "bring with them all of the living relations of experience." (p.lxxix). The phenomenological reduction interrupts our habitual and active ordering; we "rupture our familiarity" with the world in order to see it as in fact existing independently of our ordering, our habits and our purposes. But all that this rupture gives us is "the unmotivated springing forth of the world", the world as "something strange and paradoxical", not a clear and solid foundation, but a well of inexhaustible plenitude, to be startled by and wondered at; the well which the

phenomenologist, the good artist, the speaker of speaking speech draw upon in their creative work.

Merleau-Ponty's subject does not have or attempt to have the clear and steady view on the world which Stein argues belongs only to God; nor is his subject a consciousness prior to causes and invisible to science. It is engaged in the world through and through, and so are the other people alongside whom it lives; and by this means Merleau-Ponty does with phenomenology, with its careful, disciplined, wonder-attention to the contents of consciousness, what MacIntyre claims that phenomenology cannot do.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty says little about truth, but he is clear that the concept of speaking speech, and the dependence of spoken speech upon it, undermines the classical (i.e. empiricist and intellectualist) view of it. The philosophers of objective thought set out truth as if it meant the correspondence of statements to a world that existed prior to and independently of them and their speakers, as if spoken speech, taken by such philosophers to be the paradigmatic and central form of language, were adequate by itself to give an exhaustive description of the world and all its contents.

His positive suggestions concerning truth are relatively few, and cryptic. Only in his last, fragmentary and unfinished work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, does he give the bones of a more complete account. There Merleau-Ponty elaborates a simple example of a person who, walking on the beach, thinks that he sees a piece of driftwood, but coming closer realises that it was in fact a rock. This is expanded upon to illustrate several points about truth, reality, or 'the world'.

First of all, Merleau-Ponty rejects the collapse of truth into probability or assertibility. If, on the basis of past failures to get at the truth, I say that the current outcomes of my enquiry are doubtful or only probable or only the best outcome so far, I can only mean that, on some new and more thorough inspection,

things might turn out differently. Things are replaced not by something more probable but “under the pressure of a new “reality”.” (p.40) The driftwood is only a possible rock insofar as a closer inspection might reveal it to be a real rock.

We are guided in our enquiry by a basic faith that what we are faced with is not a series of images which will forever melt one into the other, or a brute given which we can interpret as we please by pure force of will (Sartre) or style (Malraux), but rather with a thing which has its own existence and its own normativity, which solicits this perception or attitude rather than that. Each perception contains the possibility of being replaced or cancelled out by a new reality, but the truth of perception is never reduced to probability, illusion can only give way to something which appears as reality, and we never doubt that at the bottom of things the reality is there. This holds both for individual things, and for our understanding of the world more generally: “Our point of departure... there is being, there is a world, there is something; in the strong sense in which the Greek speaks of *to legein*, there is cohesion, there is meaning.” (p.88)

However, though we cannot help but believe that the reality is there somewhere, we never have absolutely indubitable grounds upon which to attribute reality to any given perception: “reality does not belong definitively to any particular perception, that in this sense it lies *always further on...*” (Merleau-Ponty’s italics) (p.41).

The central metaphor in the account of knowledge in *The Visible and the Invisible* is that of attention, of looking closer; and I think this also holds for Edith Stein, and, to a lesser extent, for phenomenology more generally. The ‘real world’ is most centrally and most fundamentally something that I can attend to and that will reveal itself in different and characteristically unexpected ways; I can look closer and look around, consider objects from new angles, look inside things, take things apart, and so on, and the same is true analogically for real (i.e. ‘authentic’ or

'speaking') emotions, and for other people. Merleau-Ponty sometimes speaks of the "inexhaustible plenitude" of the world. It is this plenitude, this endlessly surprising amenability to attention, which dreams, imaginations, idle wishes, and even hallucinations lack.

Because of this same plenitude, however, the metaphor of attention can, if we are not careful, lead us astray. The world of familiar things, of pins and cars and houses and fields and clouds and ecosystems and other such things appears for us, as it does not appear for brown bears and newborn babies, because of our operative structures of body, habit, and intent which shape our perceptions into a whole which we can understand and make our way around. Our habitual understanding of the world presents it as being amenable to a spoken-speech description, and so to a spoken-speech kind of understanding in the mind.

Rather, the world in its plenitude is most visible in the moment of uttering or understanding speaking speech, for it is at this moment that our familiar, habitual world is broken to let in something new, and we are shown that what we are used to thinking of as unshakeable reality in fact maintained its meaning and structure only by the tenuous bonds of our own habits, desires, and situation. The world that is shared by us now and us before the latest piece of speaking speech and brown bears and babies and everything else lies underneath this familiar world; it is that from which all of these various familiar worlds, the world familiar to me and to the baby and to the bear are drawn, and so it is itself familiar to nobody, and it cannot be talked about for long without it disappearing. It is the silence which must be there to precede and follow words, if they are to be words. Perfected attention is manifested not in perfected spoken descriptions but in speaking speech or speaking acts, in speech that connects others to that well or spring which lies beneath speech and from which speaking speech must always come.

MacIntyre and Stein, in their different ways, often talk of Thomistic realism as if it were one of those views which Merleau-Ponty is hostile to. For the Thomist, it is said, the world is a certain way objectively (from the divine point of view, so to speak), and is this way independently of our engagement with it. The *telos* of enquiry is to explain the world in the terms in which it really can be explained, terms which look, in Merleau-Ponty's language, to be spoken rather than speaking. I hope to show that MacIntyre's view of truth, which he takes (I think correctly) to also be St. Thomas's view, is not this kind of view.

There is no single book or paper in which MacIntyre sets out a complete view on truth. However, I think that it can be worked out in reasonably complete form by putting together, with some interpretation, pieces from various chapters and essays, the most central of which are probably 'Truth as a good: a reflection on *Fides et Ratio*' and his *Aquinas Lecture*.

Back in chapter four of *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre argues that my abilities to make true statements and true judgements are grounded in my pre-linguistic abilities to engage with the world. If I can truthfully say 'snow is white', then this is only through my wider understanding of the world, of snow and whiteness and the sort of contexts in which it is appropriate to say 'snow is white' and mean it truthfully. Some of this understanding can be cashed out in terms of determinate beliefs, but it need not be, and even the contents of such beliefs are grounded upon my unformulated engagement with the world: the truth or falsity of my utterances is parasitic upon what truth and falsity exists within me as an embodied mind. I take this to be central and keeping it in mind will help to avoid misunderstanding later. Truth, adequacy of intellect, as bears and children and philosophers can all possess it, is most fundamentally not a set of beliefs or anything of that kind, but a way of gearing into the world; and the more obviously thetic sorts of understanding grow from this sort and are grounded in it.

In 'Truth as a good' MacIntyre sets out his most complete characterisation of understanding, which he takes to be the central use of the word truth, and the truth which is the goal of an enquiry. Other truths, such as truths which are established as part of an enquiry, are secondary to truth as understanding and parasitic upon it. Merely being able to state many facts about a subject matter is not the same thing as to understand it. Understanding requires appreciation of *why* things are as they are. A mind adequate to its objects not only can present the subject matter as it is, but can also present it as intelligible, explain what about it is essential and what is accidental, what exists in it as potential and what is present because of decay, and how it relates to other things, and to the wider context of our theories. It is in this comprehensive grasp of things that the excellence of the intellect consists (*The Tasks of Philosophy* p.205). This, however, is only a preliminary characterisation of understanding, and I will come back to the idea.

MacIntyre also insists that for the mind to possess truth, a certain kind of causal link must hold between the mind and its objects: we must believe that things are as they are because they are that way and not because of, say, wishful thinking. However, MacIntyre is clear (2006a p.145) that he is not talking about brute efficient causation: it is not that objects causally impact the brain and determine the appearance of one thought rather than another. Rather, it is cause in the sense of *aitia* or *causa*, something which is both cause-specifying and explanation-affording. MacIntyre says that a *causa* expresses a coincidence of thought with reality: the explanation given in a *causa* refers not to a thought but to the actual things in the world, but understands the things as they appear in the context of our theory. The objects of enquiry, the rocks and trees and so on, are understood as meaning-laden and theory-laden, encountered not as un-conceptualised but in their places in our total understanding of the world. Because *causae* are theory-laden entities, we can only give a complete account of a *causa* if we have a completed theory; and because examples of *causae* are understood only in their context of theory, they will appear obvious and necessary only to one who

has a good grasp of the theory: in Aquinas' terms, to the wise. At the same time, insofar as our enquiry is complete, the place which we have given these objects in our theory will match reality as it is properly to be understood. (This can be seen most explicitly on 2006a p.206, and it is more elaborately spelled out in the related discussion in *First principles, final ends, and contemporary philosophical issues*, p.145 in the same anthology.)

Similarly, an *archē* or *principium*, which again refers to the reality of which it speaks, but refers to that reality as intelligible and conceptualised, does not express a causal relationship between its objects, but an intentional and conceptual one, correctly understood in a certain determinate way, within the context of a certain determinate theory. At the same time, a principium does not organise the world by itself: it articulates an organisation that is already present (though we can understand it only as articulated by the principle). Its justification does not lie entirely in other beliefs, but also in the reality of which it speaks. A principium exists on the basis of and for the sake of its object.

Can we attribute knowledge of a principium to a pre-linguistic child? The overwhelming majority of MacIntyre's characterisation of principia suggests that we cannot: a principium is a conceptually articulated structure, and grasping one requires a grasp of theory and language. But I think that the insights of *Dependent Rational Animals* should give us pause. When a small child explores the world, using its powers of movement and perception, imagination and responsiveness, it is engaged in the business of understanding, and its understanding, like ours, is measured as its mind becomes more adequate to its objects. The most general and, I think, the most fundamental characterisation of principia that MacIntyre gives us (in his *Aquinas Lecture*, p.145) is in terms of the mind's movement towards its *telos*. The attainment or formulation of a principium represents a certain kind of achievement in this movement: as we come to understand the world, the forms of our thoughts come to match the forms of their objects. Although we cannot unambiguously articulate the child's thoughts, the child is seeking to understand

the world; and not all of an adult's understanding of the world is thetically articulated. Further, a theoretically articulated *principium* has the sense that it does for the people who talk about it only because of a background of operative senses, manifested in their way of going about the world.

Principia are most definitely theoretical and conceptual entities, and it would be a mistake to use the name for the structures which inform the child's or higher animal's grip on the world. But there is something akin to *principia* which can be attributed to the child, and if there were no such thing then *principia* could not exist for mature reasoners in the way that MacIntyre supposes them to. *Causa* and *principia* are most fundamentally motivational relationships, existing on the basis of and for the sake of their objects and by virtue of the significance of those objects, not determined by their objects as entirely theory-constituted, nor determined by simple efficient causation.

According to both MacIntyre and Aquinas (commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, chapter one), at the start of any enquiry we have some understanding of what it is that we are enquiring into, or else we would not be able to seek to understand it. However, the end of enquiry cannot be demonstrated from the starting-points; it must be argued to dialectically, with tentativeness, inventiveness, and jumps of intuition. It is only insofar as we already grasp the end of the enquiry, those first principles and causal/explanatory structures which ground understanding, that we are able to argue demonstratively, back towards a full explanation of the evidence which we started with. This enquiry presupposes that there is something there to be understood, that at bottom the material will be intelligible.

They also both claim that we are not necessarily certain of what we know, and we do not necessarily know that we know what we know. At any point in an enquiry – and even in an enquiry widely thought to be perfected – it is possible

that some hitherto unknown argument will appear to break down what had previously been thought to be bedrock, as hyperbolic geometry did for Euclidean geometry in the early 1800s. This constant openness to the possibility of refutation and revision from previously unseen quarters should not lead us towards a relativistic conclusion. Rather, openness to correction is the necessary counterpart of a metaphysics of *esse*, of a reality over and above what can be said about things by adherents to this or that conceptual scheme: if truth were relative to the starting-points, linguistic community, or purposes of the enquirer, or the standards of warranted assertibility internal to their scheme, then there would be no sense to the idea of discovering that your entire conceptual scheme or mode of enquiry could turn out to be radically and fundamentally mistaken. It is because there is a reality beneath and beyond the scheme which the scheme must make itself answerable to that the scheme can founder in ways that are genuinely radical.

The Thomist project is not an epistemology in the usual sense; it does not attempt to address questions of scepticism. It does not try to find first principles which are perfectly apparent at the start of enquiry and which enquiry can be based on (commentary to the *Posterior Analytics*, Chapter 34), nor does it respond to the lack of such principles by trying to collapse truth into coherence or into warranted assertibility. But if Aquinas, and MacIntyre following him, are not presenting a first-person epistemology, what are they presenting?

As has already been noted, truth according to Aquinas is primarily a property not of propositions but of minds, possessed insofar as that mind is adequate to its objects. This adequacy is understood in turn as the excellence or perfection of the intellect. Enquiry and intellect do not exist in isolation. Rather, enquiry is one of many concerns which make up a life, and the intellect achieves its perfection in the wider context of the perfection of the whole person: indeed, it means little or nothing to speak of 'the perfection of the intellect' without this context. (The gestalt whole, the knowing person or the life lived, is what is required to make sense of the parts and their significations.)

What do people think they are up to, when they go about an enquiry? This will surely have a whole variety of answers, but if they are intelligible then the enquiry must be pursued either for some end, or for its own sake as good: and where the pursuit of enquiry goes on for the sake of no good, it will be unintelligible. There cannot be an explanation of what an enquiry is – and hence there cannot be an explanation of what truth is, insofar as truth is something that enquiry can aim at – which does not make reference to what an enquiry is, contained within the life of an enquiring person. Thus, Aquinas's explication of truth is one element of a wider moral and theological project.

It is here that we can see why understanding as the excellence of the intellect is something fundamentally more and other than the collecting of facts or the ability to make accurate judgements. The elements of understanding which are tied up with a deep and genuine appreciation of structure and teleology, *causa* and *principium* are important, but the Thomist account of truth as understanding, and understanding as the perfection of the intellect, will always look disjointed and implausible until it is fitted into its wider context, the context of a human life directed towards certain goods.

The external products of an enquiry are those resources of fact and judgement which allow for effective and efficient action, and when measured by these external standards a person can achieve a very high level of competence as an enquirer without great possession of virtue; as for example, Wernher von Braun was a very effective rocket scientist. Understanding is not reducible to these goods of efficiency partly because it is an internal good of enquiry. I can know a very large number of facts or be very astute in judgements without being virtuous; but without at least some virtue I will not be able to enjoy the good of understanding.

A good enquiry, an enquiry worth pursuing, is more than just an enquiry that comes up with many facts. A really good enquiry must be a good within and for the human life (and the wider life of the community) within which it is embedded, and insofar as it is not such a good or does not result in such goods, it

may be an effective enquiry for this or that purpose, but it will not be a good enquiry.

Thus, like other practices, the practice of enquiry requires the virtues. If theoretical enquiry is to be sustained in good order, if its internal goods are to be achieved, and if it is to take its place in my life without damaging the whole, I must have relevant virtues, of patience, constancy, integrity, courage, and so on. If I lack relevant virtues, if I am dishonest with myself, or jealous of my colleagues, or petty, or easily tempted, or prone to diving into things without thinking, then I will be kept from my good in one or more of these ways.

As it was noted above, the enquirer can always discover that she was wrong in the most fundamental ways about her enquiry, and this is true because things have an essential existence beyond enquiry. Aquinas thinks that if our knowledge of God could be complete, then we would be able to demonstrate perfectly how all of the objects of our enquiry were ordered, and enquiry could come to a solid end. However, our knowledge of God must remain incomplete: a finite intellect can neither fully grasp the mind of God, nor fully grasp what it means to say that things and truths are copies, derivative of the divine intellect. Our knowledge of God will be certain at the Resurrection, but up until that point we are always travellers, pointed in the right direction by faith and hope, but unable to settle securely into a truth entirely grasped and entirely satisfactory. The possibility of radical revision is permanently maintained.

I take this elaboration to make it clear that MacIntyre's Thomism does not fall into any of the obvious traps of 'empiricism' or 'intellectualism'. An account of something very like operative senses and motivational relationships is presupposed by MacIntyre in his explanation of *causa* and *principium*, and in his explanation of truth in statements as parasitic upon truth in the embodied mind. Nor do either Aquinas or MacIntyre make the Cartesian move of replacing real seeing and

sensing with the thoughts of seeing and sensing (Merleau-Ponty 2012, p.36), in order to secure certainty in an epistemological project.

Whether MacIntyre's position is damaged by the appearance of speaking speech is more difficult. It is clear that Aquinas takes a completed enquiry to set out everything as it really is, and this looks like it makes spoken speech the central and privileged kind of speech, with speaking speech secondary to it, necessary in order to argue dialectically towards completion but eventually to be abandoned. But I think both Aquinas and MacIntyre are saved from this by two related elements of their position. First is that a completed enquiry is impossible for finite human beings who live within the flow of time, and will remain so, at least until the resurrection, when eternity and the vision of God in his real form gives us what we need to get beyond these limits. During the ordinary span of human history, there is no complete enquiry just as there is no complete reduction, and for reasons that I take to be analogous. Second, a completed enquiry written down on paper is of no great worth without accompanying understanding in the embodied mind of some enquirer, and this understanding is not of a spoken-speech kind; it is *inventive*: one who has great fullness of understanding has in great fullness the ability, which we earlier found was a basic part of linguistic competence, to move between contexts and into new contexts, to create and recognise new uses of words, and to teach others to do the same. In our limited lives on earth mastery of a tradition shows itself not only in the ability to give a complete and structured account of the spoken grounds that that tradition carries along with it and by which it situates itself, but also in an ability to make use of those grounds to speak speakingly; indeed, this ability to innovate effectively and to lead others to innovation just is what it is to have genuine mastery over the ground. In this I think that Aquinas is perhaps more balanced and comprehensive in his idea of what truth is like than the Merleau-Ponty of the *Phenomenology*, who tends to sideline the contribution of the ground of spoken material to the ability of the speaker to speak.

If MacIntyre is right about truth as it can be accessed in ordinary life and ordinary enquiry, it contains an ineliminable ethical element; and so the next step of the account will be to turn to ethics. This element of ethics also poses a possible problem for Merleau-Ponty, who does not write ethics or bring ethics into his discussion of truth or perception in any substantial way. However, Merleau-Ponty certainly thinks his work compatible with an ethics of some kind. I think the natural place to look for what sort of ethics he had most in mind is in the work of St-Exupéry, who he calls upon as the voice of the hero at the end of the phenomenology, and from whom he borrows the image of the human being as a knot of relations, embedded by commitment and responsibility within the world. St-Exupéry is a novelist and not a philosopher, and so most of his ethics appears, so to speak, in the action. But in a few places, most notably in Chapter 22 of *Flight to Arras*, he attempt to set out a more cohesive and philosophically-worded version of his thoughts. And in that place, he draws argument, images, and vocabulary, from none other than St Thomas Aquinas. The person most obviously presented as a kind of moral hero within Merleau-Ponty's own work, though, is Cezanne, and it is in his writing on Cezanne that I think we should look for the heart of Merleau-Ponty's ethics.

Chapter Four

I think that the best way into this part of the argument will be by examining moral dilemmas. Big, tragic, dilemmatic situations are places in which the difficulty, creativity, and restriction of moral agency is writ large and so might be seen where in more ordinary situations it is easily missed. MacIntyre has written a fair bit on moral dilemmas, so I will begin there. After I've looked into that a bit, I will talk about Merleau-Ponty's moral hero, Cezanne, use his example to illuminate some problems, and then try to show that an ethics by another name appears at the root of his philosophy.

The background to MacIntyre's theory of moral dilemmas is an Aristotelian account of intention and practical truth along the lines of that set out by Anscombe. Actions are understood as essentially intelligible or as failing to be so, and the descriptions under which they are intended and understood are essential to characterising them correctly, so that we cannot pick out an action correctly without reference to the history, intentions, and context of the agent. For example: Joe is on his way to the bank. The bank used to be a courthouse, and was the scene of an infamous trial. I know this, but Joe has no idea of the fact. I am walking with a mutual acquaintance, Bill, and we pass Joe. Bill asks me, 'what is Joe doing?' and I reply, 'He is on his way to visit the scene of an infamous trial.' I have not told a straightforward lie, but I have not given a good answer to the question. The answer that is needed is not merely one which is true, but the one that contextualises the action correctly, making use of Joe's history, and his reasons for walking.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre elaborates this into the claim that decisions, and especially decisions of moral significance, are to be understood with reference to the unity of a human life, a unity which MacIntyre argues has the character of a medieval quest narrative, specifically in that it is an ongoing search for self-knowledge and for knowledge of the good, guided at first by the minimal

conception of the good which we must have if we are to set out to look for it, and later by an increasingly more developed and more adequate idea of what the good is (p.219) The virtues are to be understood in part as those faculties that allow us to gain in self-knowledge and to gain in knowledge of the good, and to overcome the various challenges which might frustrate this quest. Thus, a good life for a human being is the life constituted by an ongoing enquiry into the good.

By the time an agent makes its first genuine moral decisions, the self is already the bearer of one or more traditions, along with the standards of excellence and virtue which are partly constitutive of those traditions. It must engage with the conflicts and difficulties which the moral life throws up – the difficulties and dangers of the quest for the good – from the starting point provided by this conceptual inheritance. Without the initial characterisation of the good granted by such a starting point, the quest wouldn't be able to begin.

Unlike Aquinas, however, the MacIntyre of *After Virtue* does not believe that the good, that for the sake of which the quest is carried on, is unified or perfectly hierarchically ordered. He reads both Aristotle and Aquinas (correctly, I think) as holding that the perfect good is unified and hierarchically structured, with one highest element, supplied by *theoria* in Aristotle and by the beatific vision in Aquinas, which the others serve and with reference to which apparent conflicts between values can be resolved. Thus, any irresolvable dilemmas which seem to appear as a result of the tug of different needs or values are the result only of imperfect knowledge or imperfect virtue. In *After Virtue*, however, there is no perfect unity of goods, duties and virtues; rather, there are multiple incommensurable goods and duties, and the pursuit of one will on occasion be incompatible with the pursuit of others. Thus, the self can find itself caught in tragic, dilemmatic choices, in which all courses of action lead to some good lost or some duty undone: "By choosing one I do nothing to diminish or derogate from the claim upon me of the other; and therefore, whatever I do, I shall have left undone what I ought to have done." (p.224)

Even though he believes that such conflicts between goods are real and irresolvable, however, MacIntyre nevertheless maintains that such conflicts can be lived though more or less well: "it is clear that the moral task of the tragic protagonist may be performed better or worse, independently of the choice between alternatives that he or she makes." (p.224)

This is a confusing thought. How can I do well or badly at negotiating a moral dilemma except by choosing rightly or wrongly? It may simply be that MacIntyre's characterisation of tragic dilemmas contains some confusion, and indeed he later abandoned the characterisation of moral dilemmas which *After Virtue* sets out. MacIntyre describes moral dilemmas as being a clash between two goods or duties, the claims of both of which must be acknowledged but which cannot both be fulfilled. But decisions are not usually thought of as being between kinds of good or duty, but between different courses of action. So would we not do better to understand the choice simply as being between many courses of action, some of which are straightforwardly better than others? The metaphors which MacIntyre employs to help characterise his tragic decisions, most notably his metaphor of medical treatment (p.224) seem to support this thought, and so to undermine the rest of his characterisation. MacIntyre is insistent that the tragic dilemmas he is describing are of a quite different kind than, for example, the dilemma that would face a utilitarian when faced with two equally happiness-causing alternatives. But there is nothing in his account of them to make a radically different reading intelligible. I negotiate the dilemma well or badly by choosing better or worse courses of action, and where there are genuinely incommensurable values I cannot choose rightly or wrongly so long as I choose one out of the set of optimums. In no case do we seem to have come across anything especially interesting.

However, I might do the wrong thing for a nurse to do, or the wrong thing for a father to do, or the wrong thing for a citizen of Florence to do, or the wrong thing for a professed follower of Kant or of Mill to do, by and in doing what is

right by the standards of one of the other roles which I inhabit; and it is part of the thesis of *After Virtue* that I can only understand myself as a moral agent with at least some reference to such roles and standards; there is some idea of good for a human being as such in play, but it can only do any work when it is made more specific by being embodied in particular practices and social forms (p.223). So perhaps I meet a tragic dilemma when the different roles which I inhabit, which up to now I had understood as complimentary to each other or as fitting into some larger unified scheme, suddenly bring me to an impasse.

However, the moral self portrayed in *After Virtue* is not entirely limited and contained by the frameworks provided by its society, practices and traditions. Rather, the self has a limited freedom to get beyond the starting points of its inherited roles, duties, and conception of the good, a power which will turn up in MacIntyre's later works as one element or application of the power to go on and go further. As *After Virtue* describes them, tragic dilemmas can act as pivots of moral progress, allowing the individual and the traditions he or she is part of to overcome their previous limitations.

The *After Virtue* discussion of tragic dilemmas adds to this picture by bringing in and briefly characterising the virtue of 'having an adequate sense of the traditions of which one is part' (p.223). This is characterised as the virtue which allows a moral agent to select from and apply the stock of relevant terms, maxims and generalisations which their tradition provides to particular cases, including those of tragic dilemmas. I am not sure that this is a good characterisation of that virtue (MacIntyre's remarks on it are brief (less than two paragraphs of p.223) and frustratingly opaque), and I will return to the issue below. MacIntyre attributes this special virtue to the Great Montrose and Cardinal Pole (in contrast to Mary Tudor and Charles I).

In MacIntyre's picture, good for Montrose means good for Montrose as engaged in a quest for the good; by encountering and overcoming the difficulties of his quest, he makes progress in self-knowledge, and knowledge of the good, a

kind of progress which must be intimately tied to a increasing understanding of what it is to be, and what it is to do well or badly as a Scotsman, clansman, aristocrat, and so on.

If a hierarchical ordering of goods is already ruled out, what justifies Montrose (or anyone else in a similarly complicated position) in thinking that he (or she) has got it right or wrong? From the account as it stands in *After Virtue*, and from how MacIntyre talks about such problems in papers such as 'Moral Relativism, Truth, and Justification', it seems that the only thing we have to refer to are the standards already implicit in the societies and traditions in which the questions arise. This thought can take us quite some distance: clashes between traditions are resolvable because a tradition can be found wanting, or resources from another tradition found useful, by its own rational standards, and, similarly, some innovations within a tradition can be justified with reference to standards that are already in play.

But in cases such as that of Montrose, it seems that the point at which we really begin to worry about justification is exactly the point at which the justifications already implicit in the scheme or tradition give out. Montrose must step beyond the justifications he has to hand and create or discover new ones: and it seems to be exactly this which is involved in the exercise of that virtue which MacIntyre calls having an adequate sense of a tradition. But how can someone engaged in extending, creatively interpreting, and moving beyond the existing standards and modes of justification which are available to the members of a tradition justify themselves, judge themselves successful or unsuccessful, rational or irrational? We cannot appeal to the standards previously implicit in the tradition, and appeal to a neutral standpoint outside of any tradition has already been solidly ruled out of any MacIntyrean enquiry. MacIntyre sometimes talks as if a tradition has a set of standards for judging changes to standards, but this is obviously no help. He sometimes talks as if the other members of the community of the tradition will be good judges, so that we can rely on them to judge whether

an extension to a standard is a legitimate one or not, but in most places this seems to be the job of the master, or of the person who possesses Montrose's special virtue; and leaving it to the crowd seems to rule out the possibility of genuine steps forward being unrecognised or misunderstood, whereas we know quite well that they can be.

It is not only MacIntyre's account of tragic dilemmas that stands and falls on how we answer this question. In the account of practices which MacIntyre gives in the postscript to the second edition of *After Virtue*, the provisional character of the ends and the kinds of excellence which each practice pursues, their recreation and rediscovery, is made central to the idea of what a practice is.

Considering the question of what distinguishes practices from other sorts of common and organised human activity – architecture from bricklaying, for example – MacIntyre first sets out the assumption that “all human activities are either conducted as means to already decided ends or are simply worthwhile in themselves or perhaps both”, and claims that “What this framework omits from view are those ongoing modes of human activity within which ends have to be discovered and rediscovered, and means devised to pursue them... those modes of activity generate new ends and new conceptions of ends. The class of practices, defined as I defined it, is the class of those modes of activity...” (p.273). Thus, it is essential to practices that they are the kinds of enterprises in which going on and going further is both at home, and indispensable.

MacIntyre's thought that tragic situations are pivots of moral progress is one example of his more general habit of portraying ongoing traditions as arenas of conflict or argument which produces progress: “when a tradition is in good order it is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose.” (p.222) Thus, if real progress is to be made in practices – which comes to the same things as, if

practices exist as MacIntyre characterizes them – then conflict and especially tragic conflict must create, extend, and justify standards, especially standards of excellence and of intelligibility. There is, as far as I can tell, nothing in the account given in *After Virtue* which can account for such a thing, beyond the very brief and tremendously obscure invocation of this special virtue.

MacIntyre's later discussions of these issues are importantly continuous with those in *After Virtue*, but he also changes many of his positions. By the writing of 'Moral Dilemmas', MacIntyre has come to affirm the unity of the virtues, and along with it the unity and hierarchical ordering of goods and the good life. Thus, he denies that there can be tragic dilemmas in the way that they were conceived in *After Virtue*.

According to 'Moral Dilemmas', there are no tragic or dilemmatic choices from the perspective of a saint, or of a completed moral system. Apparent dilemmas can appear, but they are only apparent. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre had taken the guilt involved in choosing any option presented by a moral dilemma to speak of the genuine multiplicity and irreconcilability of things worth pursuing. In 'Moral Dilemmas', on the other hand, he argues that it is because people implicitly or explicitly take there to be some right course of action which they are unable to see that they take guilt to be appropriate. (I would like to note in passing that this Thomistic denial of real tragic dilemmas does not rule out the possibility of certain people in certain circumstances being unable to act well: in particular, people of erring conscience will always act in a blameworthy manner; I owe much of my understanding of this point to Foot's discussion of Aquinas on the goodness and badness of actions in *Natural Goodness*, p.74 and surrounding).

'Moral Dilemmas' also notes that many situations which are frequently taken to be tragic or irresolvable in the literature on moral dilemmas, such as that of Antigone, did not appear at all irresolvable to their original protagonists.

Montrose is not notable for angst over any irresolvable dilemma, or for the guilty conscience which might be thought a natural result of abandoning some perceived duty.

To get a proper grip on what is going on in the case of Montrose, and in other dilemmatic situations like it, I want to return to Merleau-Ponty's idea of speaking and spoken speech. Once again, a concrete example will, I think, be profitable, and the outstanding example in Merleau-Ponty's work is provided by Cezanne. Cezanne is a kind of hero and exemplar for Merleau-Ponty, and examining what Merleau-Ponty has to say about Cezanne, particularly in his paper 'Cezanne's doubt', gives us some clues which I think will be indispensable.

Merleau-Ponty's love of Cezanne's work is apparent throughout the paper; but its core and its motif is Cezanne's doubt. Cezanne was an astonishingly innovative painter: his work, judged by the standards of the classical painters, the impressionists, or any other school or movement that had come before him, must be considered a failure, a work of madness. He painted after his own manner, and with an extraordinary doggedness and persistency. But there is nothing in Cezanne of the great and lonely creative artist pictured in one way by Sartre, in another by Malraux. Despite all of his originality, all of his persistence in his methods and in his constant new attempts, Cezanne struggled and doubted. He "hung upon the glances" of others, he questioned his pictures and discarded even the best as failures. He could not ignore the judgements of others: "It was on the approval of others that he had to wait for the proof of his worth..." (p.25).

Why, then, must he wait on the recognition of others, hang upon their glances, despite his determination, carried out every day, to paint in his own way no matter what reception he got? The core of Merleau-Ponty's argument is that Cezanne doubts because he cannot be certain that his work expresses anything more than the givens of his life, the essentially meaningless outcome of his mental

disorders, his problems of perception, his physical powers and inclinations, and the events of his life. Before other people have understood his work, Cezanne cannot be certain that it has any meaning; he has no way of knowing that it expresses anything at all, for expression implies the possibility of recognition, of interpretation:

“Because he returns to the source of silent and solitary experience on which culture and the exchange of ideas have been built in order to know it, the artist launches his work just as a man once launched the first word, not knowing whether it will be anything more than a shout, whether it can detach itself from the flow of the individual life in which it originates and give the independent existence of an identifiable *meaning* either to the future of that same individual life or to the monads coexisting with it or to the open community of future monads.” (p.19)

But the particular brilliance of Cezanne’s best work lies, at least in part, in its ability to create, in the person who comes to it with seriousness and humility, the operative senses necessary to understand it.

In this account there is what I take to be a central truth about speaking speech, a truth which is not found or at least not brought out in the account in the *Phenomenology*. To understand and take up any act of speaking speech is to have your world changed in some way, for speaking speech just is speech that articulates a new operative sense. But speaking speech, if it is to be genuinely speaking, must necessarily go some way towards effecting that change: if it did not need to do so, it would be merely spoken; while if it could not effect such a change, it would be simply unintelligible. It is because speaking speech must change the listener’s world – perhaps all at once, perhaps only by laying seeds or stepping-stones – that it cannot be understood straightforwardly or straight away,

as spoken speech is; and it is because it must be able to effect this change, on pain of meaninglessness, that it is differentiated from nonsense.

“It is not enough for a painter like Cezanne, an artist, a philosopher, to create and express an idea; they must also awaken the experiences which will make their idea take root in the consciousness of others... A reader or spectator who follows the clues of the book or painting, by setting up stepping stones... will end by discovering what the artist wanted to communicate.” (p.19-20)

This expressive power is at once the very centre of Cezanne’s achievement, and the source of his doubt; it is because he is engaged in a marvellously innovative creative and expressive work that he must doubt his own powers, that he must wait upon others to recognise and understand, and the greater his innovation, the more he must doubt.

Merleau-Ponty is adamant that, before Cezanne’s work is created, “The meaning of what the artist is going to say does not exist anywhere – not in things, which as yet have no meaning, nor in the artist himself, in his unformulated life.” Cezanne’s work is not the articulation of a thought that could already be expressed; “conception does not precede execution”, and he cannot explain the ‘motif’ of the landscape before painting it. To give the right characterisation of an action or perception, you must possess, in your operative world, the structures, senses, and lines of significance which allow you to latch on to what is salient in it; and Cezanne’s work *creates* those structures in the person appreciating it. Before the work, the operative meanings are lacking, and so the possibility of correct characterisation. We might be able to say that the structures exist in Cezanne as he paints: but from our point of view the only concrete meaning we can give to this thought is, that he was able to paint it.

Thus, attempts to describe the work in terms that exist before it does, and which were developed to describe other works of other kinds, must inevitably fail. The scheme and standards of excellence of the impressionists, for example, were only ever able to capture Cezanne's work in terms of failure. This failure of characterisation is an essential one: the act of painting is an act that can be interpreted or misinterpreted, made intelligible, and fail in practical truth, just like acts such as posting letters, pumping water, and walking to the bank; and attempts to characterise it can fail in the same sorts of ways.

How does this help us to understand and correctly characterise tragic situations such as that purportedly faced by Montrose? Montrose's understanding of himself is tradition-bound: the moral choices which appear to him as inescapable are choices which can only be understood in terms of his particular placement and perspective, his history, his social roles. He perceives, negotiates, and deals with the decisions involved in playing his part in the civil war as a Gordon, a poet, an aristocrat, a Scotsman, and so on. But any characterisation of the relevant moral facts which is available to him, in any of the languages and idioms of communities and practices which he has to draw upon, will either cut out elements of his predicament which he cannot avoid attributing importance to, or else show him as trapped in an insuperable dilemma. He cannot escape the predicament by appealing to some neutral ground of value or rationality outside his traditions, but his traditions give him nowhere to hold on to. However, a person confronted by such a situation, a situation in which all of the resources of language and tradition currently available to them lead them into wrong action might still be able to perform an action which none of these resources can correctly characterise, just as Cezanne was able to paint pictures which the existing terms of classical and impressionist painting were unable to describe except in terms of failure; and in this way they might be able to transcend or get

beyond their initial situation. The person may not be able to articulate quite what they have done (as Cezanne was evidently unable to). In such situations, the agent and his contemporaries cannot properly describe what must be done in advance; he must create the right course of action in and by performing it, and only afterwards will a description of the action which captures what is essential to it become possible. If we attempt to describe such an innovative action in the terms which are built into the traditions and society in which it is embedded, we will only be able to mischaracterise the action, to characterise it as a failure or as unintelligible. But at the same time it is impossible to correctly characterise such actions without the background of just these traditions and just this society, and the agent's particular place within them. This is, I think, to say that the descriptions by which such actions are essentially characterised are speaking rather than spoken, relying on a spoken ground but breaking and remaking that ground as it appears.

The virtue of having an adequate sense of tradition, which was attributed to Montrose and Cardinal Pole, cannot be at heart concerned with so simple a business as selecting and applying available maxims, as MacIntyre characterises it in *After Virtue* (p.223). Rather, it is this virtue which ensures that an agent's acts of innovation and creation, the decisions which take them beyond the standards and the resources already available to the tradition so as to act in ways that are speaking rather than spoken, extending the resources of their tradition and doing so in such a way as to allow others to grasp what has been achieved and to take it up themselves. This is the virtue required to live successfully through what appear at first to be tragic dilemmas, situations in which the resources presently available to your traditions will get you no further.

I think that this same virtue appears again in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* as the mark of the master of a craft-tradition:

“a matter of knowing how to go further and especially how to direct others towards going further, using what can be learned from the tradition afforded by the past towards the telos of fully perfected work. It is in thus knowing how to link past and future that those with [rational] authority are able to draw upon tradition, to interpret and reinterpret it, so that its directedness towards the *telos* of that particular craft becomes apparent in new and characteristically unexpected ways. And it is by the ability to teach others how to learn this type of knowing how that the power of the master within the community of a craft is legitimated as rational authority.” (p.65-66)

Returning to what was said in the first and second chapters, it should be clear that this ability to innovate is not only at work in tragic dilemmas and other moments of crisis, but also in the basic elements of everyday moral competence, just as it appears as a basic element of linguistic competence. The everyday, ‘spoken’ cases of the exercise of virtue, the keeping of promises and small kindnesses to friends, doing the washing up on time, saying what you believe in discussions, and so on, involve at least the small amount of speaking-ness involved in negotiating new context and changes of context. Besides which, such cases must allow us to exercise these powers to at least some small degree, because it is the practice afforded by the simple cases by which we learn to exercise the discriminations necessary to deal with the difficult cases. The richness of these small decisions (do I do the washing up now or later? do I read for another half-hour, or write, or meditate?) and the number of small concerns which go into deciding them is, I think, easily overlooked; and I take the habit of overlooking them to be analogous to the habit of overlooking the complexity, skill and inventiveness involved in everyday language which Davidson complains about in *A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs*. Examples of moral decisions in the literature of moral philosophy (especially questions of justice and utility) often seem to be liable to a

straightforward spoken-speech answer at least in part because they are so threadbare.

Let us return briefly to Cezanne. Merleau-Ponty's project of phenomenological reduction and reflection is supposed to be Cezanne-like: "Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valery, or Cezanne – through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state." (Merleau-Ponty 2012 p.lxxxv.)

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reflection and reduction is not a simple intellectual exercise but an intellectual and moral discipline. Phenomenology is an attempt to see like Cezanne paints, and as with Cezanne this is not just a matter of intellectual or technical skill but of a more thoroughgoing transformation of vision. The good phenomenologist must be patient, honest, humble, "devoted to the visible world" (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p.11), in the sort of way that Cezanne is these things.

Merleau-Ponty's idea of what it is to look at the world rightly is in some sense already ethically loaded; we are not just looking for what is the most accurate or effective view on the world for this or that end or in this or that sphere, but for an honest view, a wondering view, a just view, and insofar as we lack such virtues in our work as enquirers and bearers of traditions we will be led astray.

To return again to the analogy between translation and enquiry into reality, we are apt to imagine, or at least to talk as if somewhere we imagine, that we have been given a 'book of nature' to be deciphered or translated into a language or form which we can understand and work with. This book is of a

straightforward type, like a shopping-list, and our aim is to translate it into English and get it right, or at most to write a phrase-book for the translation of shopping-lists. If I am right, enquiring into reality is more like being sent, with no understanding of the language, to Germany with a copy of *The Hunting of the Snark* and instructions to come up with an original translation which will delight a German professor of English. And this is so, *mutatis mutandis*, for traditions such as painting, traditions of enquiry, the little enquiries of everyday life, and the quest-enquiry of the moral agent.

At the centre of our idea of what a tradition of enquiry is stands the figure of the master-craftsman and the endeavour to become such a master-craftsman, who has a great understanding of the spoken ground of resources which partly constitute a tradition, and can deploy them to come up with speaking improvements and advances on that tradition, and teach others to recognise such advances and to accomplish them themselves. This figure is understood by MacIntyre primarily with reference to Aquinas, by Merleau-Ponty with reference to Cezanne, and both, I think, have value.

At least for finite beings such as ourselves, living within time and the world, truth, in enquiry or in ethics, does not appear as a completed, systematic spoken-speech description of how things are. Rather it appears in the exercise of the powers of the craft-master or the good man, in that movement, in that mastery of a tradition's inheritance demonstrated in and by constant creative recreation and advancement upon that inheritance, and the leading of other people into that mastery, which, even if somehow perfected and completed, would reveal its perfection not in a finished explanation of everything, like a giant phrase-book, but in the continued exercise of a creative mastery turned to understanding and responding to an endlessly intelligible, endlessly surprising world.

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