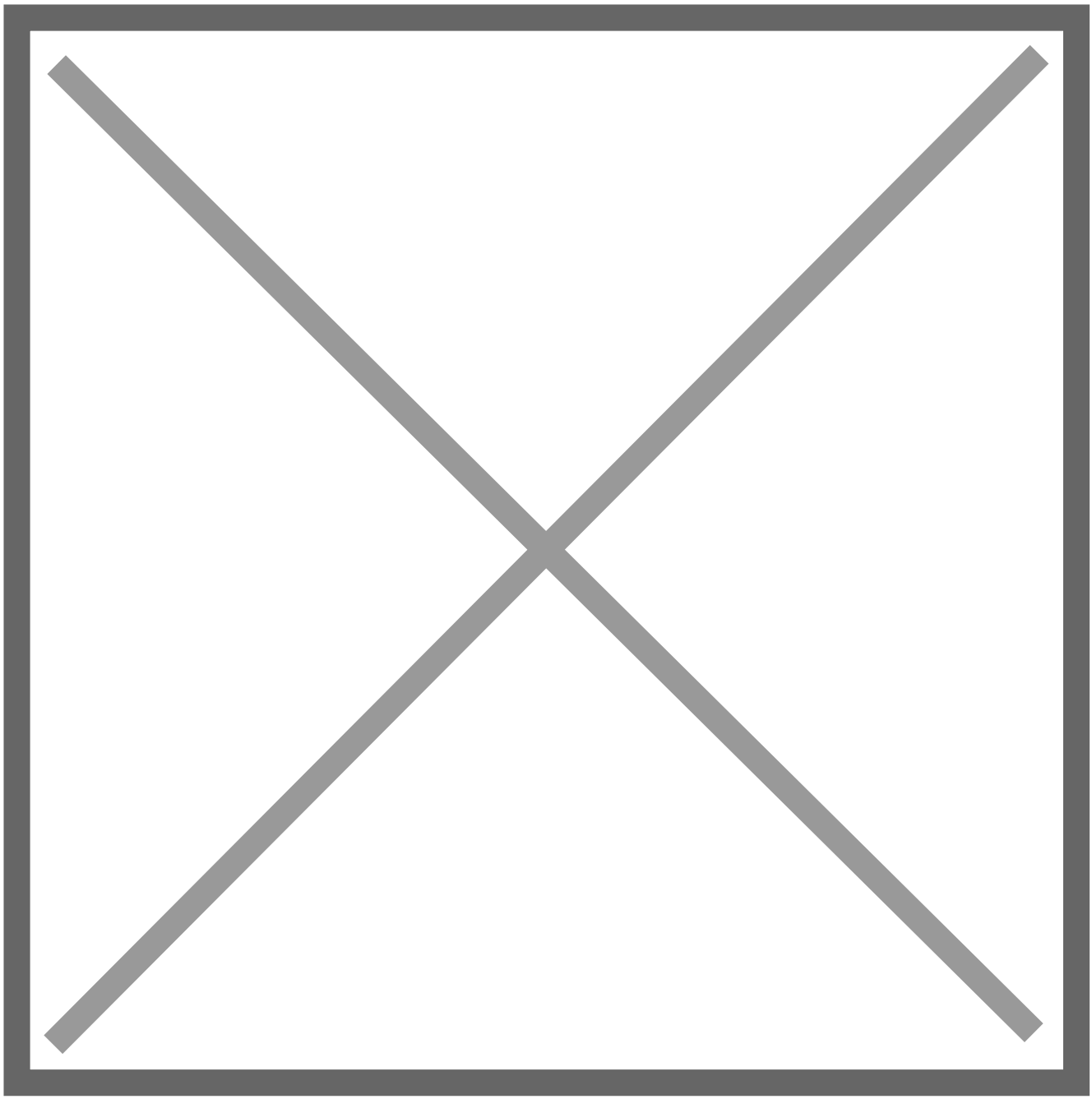
News



Alasdair MacIntyre, emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, gives the plenary lecture at the university's de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture's 2019 fall conference Nov. 8, 2019. MacIntyre died May 21 at age 96. (OSV News/Matt Cashore, courtesy of University of Notre Dame)



Kimberley Heatherington

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Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre, a philosopher renowned for his study of virtue-based ethics, and his work across the disciplines of philosophy, theology and politics, died May 21 at age 96.

For MacIntyre, ethics and morality weren't merely a dusty collection of abstract rules, but a living tradition meant to vigorously inform and guide the individual and collective pursuit of the common good.

The de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame, where MacIntyre was a permanent senior distinguished research fellow, confirmed MacIntyre's death in a May 23 announcement.

"Widely regarded as the most important philosopher in modern virtue ethics, Alasdair MacIntyre demonstrated scholarly rigor and an alpine clarity of thought," said Jennifer Newsome Martin, director of the de Nicola Center and an associate professor in the Program of Liberal Studies and the Department of Theology.

"He was also a generous friend of the de Nicola Center," Martin said in remarks she sent to OSV News. She said it was "an honor" MacIntyre chose the center "to be the locus of his scholarly work after retiring from the philosophy department at Notre Dame."

His legacy, she said, will continue at the center, "especially in its historic emphasis on traditions-based inquiry, in the habits of virtuous thought and practice cultivated in our integral student formation program, and in the rich intellectual community and vigorous exchange of ideas for which his voice was so fundamental."

Born Jan. 12, 1929, in Glasgow, Scotland, to Gaelic-speaking Presbyterian doctors, MacIntyre flirted with communism and analytical philosophy, became an Anglican and then an atheist. In 1983, MacIntyre became a Catholic in the mold of what he termed a "Thomistic Aristotelian" — a hybrid of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas.

MacIntyre taught at numerous prestigious institutions — among them Brandeis, Boston, Duke, Princeton, Vanderbilt, Yale and Wellesley — but Notre Dame, where he was also an emeritus professor, was his final scholarly tenure.

"Alasdair MacIntyre's widespread impact on the world of ideas is impossible to overstate. We will be reading and learning from him for centuries to come," O. Carter Snead, former director of the de Nicola Center, who is a professor of law and concurrent professor of political science at Notre Dame, said in remarks he sent to OSV News.

Snead said he owed "a deep personal debt of gratitude" for MacIntyre's generosity as a mentor and colleague. He recalled "Alasdair's beautiful and inspiring personal concern for the flourishing of the people in his daily life."

"In our many conversations over the years, he never missed an opportunity to inquire with genuine concern about my family and, in particular, our children," Snead said. "I will miss him dearly."

American book critic George Scialabba once observed of MacIntyre's seminal 1981 work *After Virtue* — a philosophical critique applying classic Aristotelian thought to the ills of the modern age — that "no one, including MacIntyre, could have expected that such a difficult and abstract book would be so influential."

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After Virtue became a cornerstone volume of the restored school of virtue ethics — morality as related to the habits and knowledge of how to live an intentionally good (virtuous) life. The third and most recent edition was published in 2007 with a new prologue.

After Virtue was among more than 20 books and 200-plus scholarly articles MacIntyre wrote.

"I think he was one of the most important figures of the 20th century in moral philosophy," said John Garvey, president of the Catholic University of America 2011-2022 and author of *The Virtues*, a 2022 book examining the role of moral formation in education.

"When I was in college, the study of ethics was divided between analytic philosophers who shied away from reaching important conclusions, and nihilists who thought there was nothing worth finding," he said. *After Virtue* presented an attractive alternative."

McIntryre's philosophy — while densely packed and requiring intellectual rigor to approach — is nonetheless grounded in eminent practicality.

"I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' " he wrote in *After Virtue*, "if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' "