he writes, having come to see "Web journalism for what it is becoming: a machine moving at the speed of the [news] wires, in terms of content, and in the direction of television, in terms of form. Experiments in storytelling are on an indefinite hiatus."

Houston's job originally was "to create feature stories that push the technological and interactive envelopes, working with a graphic designer, two producers, a photo editor, and, usually, a video producer." Early in 1997, for example, after IBM's Deep Blue computer bested chess champ Garry Kasparov, Houston and his colleagues prepared a feature about Cassie, an experimental robot equipped with artificial intelligence that was assembled at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Combining video and text "in a new way," he says, the feature—complete with links to various explanatory sidebars and "a meticulously accurate graphical representation of [the robot's] thought processes"—proved one of their most popular feature stories, getting some 7,000 "page views" during the week it was on the site.

But top online news stories get that many page views in mere hours, Houston notes, and most people, research has found, spend only seconds visiting a news Web page. Not surprisingly, he and his colleagues soon found the Web moving away from costly and complicated features. "Technology's thrust, it turns out, is to satisfy the need for speed. The emphasis shifts to shorter, more frequent stories and breaking news"—a trend evident not only at Fox but at its .com competitors, CNN, MSNBC, and ABCNews. The result:

between late 1997 and late '98, daily page views on the Fox site as a whole roughly doubled—from 600,000 to 1.2 million (and reached 2.2 million on one particularly hot news day).

In their unquenchable thirst for breaking news, ironically, the Web sites have turned to the established wire services, such as the Associated Press and Reuters. The broadcast owners of online news sites lack the staff to compete with the wire services—and, in the absence of substantial Web ad revenues, the willingness to spend money to develop one. Newspaper owners of Web sites give priority to their newspapers and aren't accustomed to publishing on the frenetic schedule of the wire services, with their continual stream of updates, adds, and new leads. "When an Amtrak train crashes . . . the *New York Times* and other newspaper sites go with wire copy on their home pages," Houston notes. Only after the newspaper's reporters have written their stories for the paper's next edition are the wire stories on the home page replaced with the "homegrown" ones.

One way that Fox and other news organizations have tried to distinguish themselves from the wire services, Houston observes, is by providing, on big stories, a wealth of background material, from interviews to interactive maps. But "appending a library" to breaking wire stories, Houston says, is hardly the same as innovative journalism, with fresh insight and compelling stories. For now at least, he sadly concludes, Web technology's own imperatives seem to be driving out that kind of journalism.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Antiliberal Philosopher

A Survey of Recent Articles

Imagine a world in which the whole scientific enterprise has been virtually destroyed by a vengeful public maddened by a series of environmental disasters. Eventually, enlightened people try to revive science, but all they have to work with are shards of the past, devoid of the theoretical context that gave them meaning. They have

no way of coherently reassembling the surviving fragments, yet they connect them anyway—and almost no one realizes that what now comes to pass for "science" is not proper science at all.

That, according to philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, is much the situation in which moral discourse is conducted today, with

words such as *good* and *moral* reduced to relics of a lost past.

Currently a professor at Duke University, MacIntyre, author of the influential *After Virtue* (1981) and other works, "is possibly the greatest moral philosopher of the last 50 years and certainly the most unyielding critic of liberalism writing today," observes Adam Wolfson, executive editor of the *Public Interest*, in the *Weekly Standard* (July 26, 1999). "You can violently disagree with MacIntyre, as many do, particularly on the socialist left. Or you can violently agree with him, as many do, particularly on the Catholic right. But you can't get away without knowing about him."

Born the son of a doctor in Glasgow in 1929, MacIntyre studied at the University of London and other British universities, then began teaching. In 1947, after "hanging around at the edge of the Catholic Church," he told *Lingua Franca's* (Nov.–Dec. 1995) Paul Elie, he joined the Communist Party. In his first book, *Marxism: An Interpretation* (1953), Elie notes, MacIntyre "espoused the Marxist creed while . . . lamenting 'the death of religion.'"

Leaving the party well before the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, he became involved with a Trotskyist group, the International Socialists. "As MacIntyre explains it now," writes Elie, "Marxism was most valuable to him as a critique of liberalism," with its arbitrary moral judgments.

In 1969 MacIntyre moved to the United States, where he would teach at a succession of universities and make a philosophical journey from Trotskyist to Aristotelian to Thomist—a pilgrim's progress that would leave many on the left aghast and some on the right uneasy.

Discussing *After Virtue* in the *New Criterion* (Feb. 1994), Maurice Cowling, an emeritus Fellow at Peterhouse College, Cambridge University, says MacIntyre contended "that moral inquiry had been impoverished by the destruction of Aristotelianism in the 17th century and the disconnection of ethics from divine law in the 18th century. Existing 'languages of morality,' in his view, were merely fragments of a conceptual scheme which was no longer present in its entirety."

For MacIntyre, says Edward T. Oakes, a Jesuit professor of religious studies at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, "emptying moral discourse of teleological concepts [i.e. concepts of final causes and ends] because of the perceived impact of Newton and Darwin has been . . . *the* catastrophe of our times." In the Aristotelian tradition, MacIntyre has written, "there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature." Were this distinction restored to ethics, observes Oakes in *First Things* (Aug.–Sept. 1996), then describing something or someone as "good" would not express a merely emotional judgment but would convey facts about the thing or person. For MacIntyre, notes Elie, "the moral choice is between Nietzsche and Aristotle, between nihilism and a life and world teleologically ordered."

In 1983, two years after the acclaimed *After Virtue* appeared, MacIntyre converted to Catholicism. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), he argued that truth emerges from the conflict of traditions. He proposed Thomism, which reconciles Aristotelianism with Christianity, as the most truthful tradition, "rationally superior" to all its rivals. The book was given a hostile reception on the left, and the reviews, says Elie, "were fragrant with anti-Catholicism." Philosopher Martha Nussbaum accused MacIntyre of "recoiling from reason," of being "in the grip of a worldview that is promulgated by authority rather than by reason."

Uncowed, MacIntyre went on in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), Wolfson notes, to try "to show how the Thomistic tradition can defeat its two main rivals: the liberal Enlightenment and postmodernism."

Though conservatives find much to admire in *After Virtue* and the subsequent works, some are disturbed by what Wolfson calls MacIntyre's "root-and-branch antagonism towards the liberal tradition, which dates back to his Marxist past." MacIntyre confuses real liberalism with what passes for it in academe, in Wolfson's view, and overlooks "the moral resources within [the] liberal tradition."