Officially Approved Dissent:
Alasdair MacIntyre's Strategic Ambiguity in His Critique of Modernity

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Preface and Acknowledgments

In graduate school, MacIntyre was a breath of fresh air. After being force-fed some of the most poorly argued liberal pabulum imaginable, discovering him finally permitted me to construct arguments against the Regime's official ideology. However, once I began reading others dissenting from official liberalism, I quickly became disillusioned. I realized that the Regime creates its own dissenters and this is designed to serve as a slight release on the pressure cooker.

"Officially Approved Dissent" simply refers to this phenomenon. MacIntyre is the best in the business when it comes to making harmless, ultimately meaningless and trite arguments seem like they are earth-shattering revelations against the totalist regime of official liberalism. After several decades in academia, I realize the pressures he is under to remain functional in a field as useless and jaded as academic philosophy.

Now, philosophy is the queen of the sciences, along with her consort, history. Even theology takes place in history. Academic philosophy is a hothouse of either useless word games or bad justifications of the present ruling class. This class is wealthy, capitalist, cosmopolitan and libertine in its bohemian dominance of the globe. Academics serving this class are often unaware of it, since to them, the occasional cynical look of derision is sufficient to show you're not really a conformist after all.

Academics are soft. They are at least in my field. They are surrounded by liberal and Marxist drivel all the time without exception. Most, if not all, in my field have

never heard an anti-modernist or nationalist argument made competently before in an academic setting. This permits them to concoct all manner of mythological, self-serving caricatures and, soon, to actually believe these are "nationalists." Because of this, they have no idea how to create counter-arguments against the likes of me and thus, firings and disciplinary action are all they have.

Most of these people, if they didn't make their careers in academia, would be very different. They certainly would be farther to the right politically and nowhere near as dogmatic about it all. To be successful in academia requires one thing: ideological conformity in one form or another. Everything else can be dealt with over time. This is why horrible teachers continue to be rewarded and promoted. This is why so many academics in my field don't really seem to know anything outside of the textbook cliches they repeat semester after semester.

In other words, American colleges and universities are the only places in the world where an employee can work very well, do his job at an A+ level and have students learning and happy, and still be fired for no clear reason. Its the equivalent of a stock analyst who forecasts events earning the company millions and still be the first to get canned when layoffs arrive. This hypothetical market analyst will be removed in favor of those whose track records have cost the company billions and continue to do so. They will not be touched and will be continually promoted, given raises and privileges regardless of their performance.

This is the world Alasdair MacIntyre lives in, and I have a certain degree of sympathy for him. As of now, he is long tenured, makes a six-figure salary, does very little work and is surrounded by a battery of graduate assistants

and secretaries that do whatever work needs to be done. As of this writing, the 88 year old is the Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Contemporary Aristotelian Studies in Ethics and Politics (CASEP) at London Metropolitan University, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. The man has been an academic success beyond my wildest dreams. But that's the problem.

Even a mid-level professor does little work, gets paid just under $100,000 on average, doesn't do much in the Summers and also, usually, has attractive graduate assistants and secretaries working for him as well. His students are today almost 60% female, and for a younger, slightly higher than average looking professor will be surrounded with beautiful girls "struggling with their homework." It is a dream job like no other. And if he tows the line, he will receive tenure within six years, making him unfirable outside of criminal acts. Of course, men would kill for a job like this. This also explains why professors, at least white male professors, are such servile whores.

This little book is meant to do a few things. First, provide yet another summary and introduction into his work. Second, show how "his work" has been done a billion times before, though that's not very hard to do. Third, show that his arguments, under no interpretation, threaten liberal hegemony in any possible way. Thus, he is the "court conservative," or the "officially approved dissenter."

The life that MacIntyre has enjoyed comes at a price, one that this writer refuses to pay. Sour grapes? Maybe a little, but I know for certain that I would be unwelcome in any university worthy of the name in the western world. Wherever I've taught, I've been – by far – the most popular professor. Students, through their

evaluation forms, nearly idolize me in contrast to their other professors. However, not for a split second has that ever benefited my career. Chances are, out subject has not taught a class in decades. For the millions that this man has made through his conformity, plagiarism and general whorishness, he deserves a book like this.

As always, my two boys, Michael and Gabriel, are the only reason I keep fighting this uphill battle. Michael especially has come to appreciate the nature of the Regime and fights by my side daily against it. It is to him that this book is dedicated. He's more than earned it.

Matt Heimbach and his father in law Matt Parrott need also to be thanked for showing me how important my work is. The same goes for Marius. Sven, my radio producer, works tirelessly for very little money, as does Paul, the graphic designer and general head of TBR in Washington, DC.

The late Willis Carto and Michael Collins Piper made my career at a young age. While both gone now, it is important that their role in my career be publicly mentioned. I'd be nothing without them.

My four cats, Stanley Jr, Manley, Sandy and Marcel are the reasons this book wasn't completed sooner. As I type this, Stanley is about a centimeter from the keyboard, staring at me and wondering why I'm not playing with him constantly. They have more personality than most people.

As for those who have stood in my way, those who have tried to derail my career, always in secret, the David Forsythes and the David Rehms of the world, you've failed to stop me. You've failed to destroy my spirit. Rather, you've given me the energy required to fight harder. I have more intellectual and moral integrity in a blackhead I

popped in 10th grade than you will ever have in 10 careers. I'm better than all of you combined and in every possible respect. You all know I'm right.

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Introduction

Alistair MacIntyre is best known for his work, After Virtue. He makes six basic arguments that will, more or less, typify the rest of his career. First, that postmodernity is unique in history because the nature of ethical disputes is over foundations that is, the very basis of judging whether a theory is correct or not. There is no "master language" within which all can operate.

Second, the Enlightenment project, speaking broadly, has led to non-rational, mechanistic and "managerial" forms of rule that belie its initial stress on reason and criticism. Third, the clear consequence of this is that power remains the only means to decide one from another. Media control, academic influence, big money or public relations is ultimately what convinces people to hold one view over another. Now, MacIntyre would not last long in academic speaking like that. Hence, he takes that view and collapses it into the general term "emotivism."

Fourth, Nietzsche is the philosopher that brought modernity to its proper consequence. Without foundations, all is flux. If all is flux, then it is power that can carve a "reality" out of that and convince the "herd" that it is "reality." this is the truth of ethical debate in the modern west even if MacIntyre himself winces at the suggestion.

Fifth, MacIntyre takes what he sees as an overlooked aspect of classical ethics that Nietzsche might have missed. It is the notion of a "practice" or a socially useful craft within which individuals can find their purpose and function.

Finally, it is in technology and bureaucracy that the

Enlightenment sees its destruction. When technical skill and commodity production become goods in themselves, it is very easy for a morality, long severed from its moorings, to wander into being a justification for "market demand." If this is true, than the bureaucratic and corporate organization of most social roles is destructive, conformist and unfree.

There is nothing new in anything above. It had been done many times before by GWF Hegel, Georges Sorel, Rousseau, Edmund Burke and even TS Eliot. MacIntyre is a latecomer in this field. He does accept the classical idea that there is a proper "operation" of the human self.

This self[1] can be explained as a single, integral personality that provides a needed service to the social whole and, in so doing, becomes a virtuous member of that body. This "service" is what is meant by a "craft" or "practice." These crafts, or socially necessary functions, mold characters and serve as the practical foundation for moral judgment. This thesis will be largely an extended essay in definition: MacIntyre's conception of the self and his own role in the academic environment that has largely declared itself for some form of liberalism.[2]

The essential purpose of MacIntyre's writing is to call attention to the problems arising from the marginalization of moral theory as an academic field separate from all others. Its vocabulary is idiosyncratic, and the ideas generated are almost totally unknown to the educated public. This implies that philosophy was little

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1   The self is far more complex than an ego – it is a socially mediated personality.

2   By "liberalism," this author is referring to a very general catch all term embracing all forms of "atomism" and "individualism." These are very often associated with the ontological concept of the Newtonian universe, the epistemological project of Positivism and the metaphysics of and nominalism

more than an eccentric hobby of misfit intellectuals rather than a reflection of actually existing societies with specific needs and problems.

Part of the reason for this is that the "social whole" is considered, by the mainstream of liberal, elite society, an artificial creation. Society is the creation of individuals (or less mystifying, powerful people) who seek their own advantage by organizing social relations and providing them with a language to reflect them. MacIntyre's cardinal argument is that this is untrue. This cardinal principle of liberalism is false. While his entire career has been based on making this argument, to go from there to the claim that he is an "anti-Enlightenment medievalist" is a little dramatic. He's no such thing.

There is no "abstract self." The self is crafted as an element of a social role in a society of greater or lesser integration.[3] Membership, not abstraction, is the key ingredient to the healthy self. Social bonds, in other words, are not hindrances to free action, but are necessary for serious, focused and socially important action of any type. Without such membership, the abstraction of the "ego" is a very slim and, in fact, content-less, fiction of the university.[4]

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3   MacIntyre, Alasdair. After Virtue. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981): 32
4   After Virtue, 35

The Main Texts in Brief

MacIntyre's After Virtue is really an extended analysis of human reason, that is, reason can only function as part of a social whole and that whole creates a self, a personality (rather than an individual). His argument is that, once objective standards cease to exist, the self becomes rudderless. Nietzsche's conception of the will to power remains.[5] From this, he concludes that there has never been a coherent defense of the "individual" in moral theory.

The self is a creation of the social whole and hence dependent upon it. The argument is simple: the breakdown of moral absolutes stem from the breakdown of a tradition (presumably in this case the western one). This leads to a situation where there are no standards by which one can weigh different moral theories or personal decisions. Therefore, naturally, the most powerful is able to fill this gap. The broader point is that a feedback loop is created as people do not see society as an objective moral norm or end, it is merely the random assemblage of persons.[6] It is therefore not worth defending.

If there are no stable norms, then there is no common good. People withdraw from society entirely, today justified in individualism, egocentrism or the Will to Power. The continuing problem for MacIntyre is that nothing here is original. This has been the conservative criticism of Enlightenment governments since the French Revolution. MacIntyre contributes nothing new.

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5   After Virtue, 258
6   After Virtue, 263 in reference to the Fall of Rome

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Beyond this, Whose Justice, Which Rationality? Was meant to fill the large gaps in the basic outline of After Virtue. The programmatic statement is this:

> The conclusion to which the argument so far has led is not only that it is out of the debates, conflicts, and inquiry of socially embodied, historically contingent traditions that contentions regarding practical rationality and justice are advanced, modified, abandoned, or replaced, but that there is no other way to engage in the formulation, elaboration, rational justification, and criticism of accounts of practical rationality and justice except from within some one particular tradition in conversation, cooperation, and conflict with those who inhabit the same tradition. There is no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing, evaluating, accepting, and rejecting reasoned argument apart from that which is provided by some particular tradition or other.[7]

Relative to reason, the point is clear: thought is social and embedded in language (in the broad sense). It is almost a tautology to argue that for a moral debate to take place, words and arguments have to have an agreed-upon meaning. Certain important ground rules must be maintained for there to be any communication at all.

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7   MacIntyre, Alasdair. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (The University of Notre Dame Press, 1989): 350

To a large extent, this is a "tradition" in the rationalized and standardized conception MacIntyre uses. No one denies the argument thus far. Part of the reason for this is that "tradition" is defined (or not defined) in such a vague way and "conflict" in the tradition stressed to such an extent that the conception is useless. MacIntyre, in short, is the "approved" anti-liberal thinker among big names in philosophy without actually criticizing anything.

A modern liberal can find solace in the conflicts that render a tradition no more than a minimal background for cooperation while "conservatives" can see terms such as "tradition" reassuring. MacIntyre does not and will not go beyond such vague platitudes.

This begins to make more sense in Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry. Here, three approaches are described: Tradition, the Encyclopedia and the Genealogy. The "Tradition," in MacIntyre's sense of the term, is bound up with the subconscious. It is all that is taken for granted in any object of cognition. The act of focusing attention on an object implies that the manifold surrounding it, its environment, is also present to the mind. The tradition is this environment or the context within which any definition or idea makes sense.

Its anti-type is the " Encyclopedia," or the claim of timeless, objectivity so common among positivists and kindred groups. This is modernity writ large, it includes Kant and evolutionary ideology, but the substantial things they have in common makes it quite defensible.[8] Not the least among them is the idea that they have no vocational or financial interest in the research at all. In other words, they must convince themselves that they care little for the

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8   MacIntyre, Alasdair, Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990): 70-71

conclusion to come out so long as the method is value-neutral.[9]

As so many before him have said, these movements are part of an ideological tradition that indeed has various personal and ideological agendas. Repressing the notion that reason requires non-rational reasons for action permits some of the more blatant ones to go unchecked. Thomas Kuhn waxes eloquently about the various ways a paradigm enforces its standards on all who hope to make a living in a field. The one he refused to deal with was the more obvious – who had the most money.[10]

The Genealogy is borrowed from Nietzsche and is yet another form of the "emotive," non-rational or irrational label. This is referring any ethical view that refuses to make the relevant truth claims (other than for itself). Relativism is about power and is based on nominalism: reality is language and language is the product of immensely powerful forces who decide what is real.

Dealing with these fairly common themes in MacIntyre is important because he sees significant truths in each. As always, labels say very little and are often expressions of emotivism overcoming reason. These approaches are not mutually exclusive and can easily be attached to one another depending on agendas or circumstances.

Science certainly is interested – in fact solely interested – in taking power. The state was the supporter of the new physics that helped create the empire that dominated the seas. After all, extracting power from nature

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9   Three Versions, 78ff
10 Kuhn, T.S. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. University of Chicago Press, 1962; he is discussed in Three Versions on page 50-52

and manipulating it for the purposes of the elite of the Royal Society is the very nature of the Newtonian revolution.[11]

Nietzsche is to be admired, for example, for vehemently mocking the objective and scientific claims of the English scientific revolution. Random motion from Newton to Smith suited the usurper from the Netherlands quite well, and Newton was quote outspoken in his support of this "random" shift in power.

The point is that one can approach industrialization from both a Nietzschian or positivist standpoint and do quite well with the same consequences.[12] Capitalism can use Darwin for its stress on competition but stick to "rights" rhetoric when speaking of property and "free contract." These words and labels are always fuzzy at the edges. Quite often, they're just fuzzy.

Often viewed as a Thomist, MacIntyre has not a single significant commonality with him. Since he will not speak of the nature of tradition (such as medieval Christendom), there is no way to tell whether or not he is sympathetic to the synthesis of Aristotle and Augustine that Thomas achieved. This is the entire content of chapter 8, "Tradition against Encyclopedia." The anti-climactic conclusion is that MacIntyre is not speaking of morality, rules or action.

He is not even speaking of social norms. He uses names like "Thomas" or "Augustine" to refer to methods of thought, never content. A "Thomist" is one that summarizes the very best of his opponents arguments, as Thomas does in the *Summa*. Then, in disagreeing, the "Thomist" then creates a synthesis of the best of the old with his own view.

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11 Three Versions, 118-119
12 Three Versions, 33-45

In McIntyre's writing, t is the best of older moral philosophy (especially the classical era) and that of modern needs and requirements. The result is that the Thomistic synthesis was deeply progressive in that it preserved the best of Aristotle and Augustine and created a new theory synthesizing them both. This, for MacIntyre, is the purpose of moral philosophy.[13]

Dependent Rational Animals does not help matters. There are three variables around which the argument revolves: first, that the human being, the self, is fostered in an ethic of care that derives from man's natural state of vulnerability. Second, that specific practices, socially necessary crafts and skills, provide a foundation for judging the worth of one's labour and the nature of one's contribution. Finally, despite the communitarianism that is occasionally found in MacIntyre, the human person is seen as an "independent moral reasoner."

For those who know MacIntyre's corpus, these seem unsystematic. He writes this: "It is insofar as it is need that provides reasons for action for the members of some particular community that community flourishes"[14] It is significant that he distinguishes the state from this community, that is, that the government is not identical to this community or society. He says that "the shared public goods of the modern nation-state are not the common goods of a genuine nation-wide community."[15] This is fair enough, but how a society manifests this common good in a way that is rich in content is never, not once, discovered in MacIntyre's works. A "genuine, nation-wide community"

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13 Three Rival Versions, 180-181

14 MacIntyre Alasdair. Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues. (Open Court, 1999): 109

15 Dependent Rational Animals, 132

would be, prima facie, the ethno-national unit, the ethnic group united by language and custom. While he uses the phrase, he will not define it further for fear of the professional consequences.

The scientific and positivist side has important contributions as well, especially for the role of realism in evidence and thought. Emotions and self interest do far more harm than good and should not be encouraged. The simple argument, made consistently in MacIntyre's career, is that without a rational foundation in reality, there is no good reason to do anything. There is no reason to be moral. On the other hand, those who do not believe in such a foundation have little choice but to "ground" themselves in what remains: self-interest, presumably that which is pleasurable.

In Three Rival Versions, he states:

> The encyclopaedic, the genealogical, and the Thomistic tradition-constituted standpoints confront one another not only as rival moral theories but also as projects for constructing rival moral narratives. Is there any way that one of these rivals might prevail over the others? One possible answer was supplied by Dante: that moral narrative prevails. . . which is able to include its rivals within itself, not only to retell their stories as episodes within its own story, but to tell the story of the telling of their stories as such episodes.[16]

This is an exaggeration – they differ in their

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16 Three Rival Versions, 80-81

language, not in application or purpose. Like Thomas Kuhn after him and Strauss before him, the intellectual forces battling each other seem to come out of nowhere. Dante is wrong and quite possibly deliberately deceptive. Who decides when a "story" is worth telling or retelling? Who packages it as a "narrative" in the first place? Who interprets the key ideas? Who decides what "narrations" are important rivals and which are the work of cranks? While it is true that these specialized historical issues are far from the expertise of MacIntyre, Kuhn and other intellectual celebrities, it is a distortion of how "narratives" come to fight it out in the mythical public arena.

The Enlightenment did not accept the notion of epistemological poly-centrism. Truth was real, scientific and derives from a physical, determined universe. It is almost as if the scientist is more than human, having figured out a way to rise above the universal causality of all nature. All nature except the brain of the scientist that has risen above the mundane. The "individual" is a tiny speck of almost total ignorance and a prisoner of time and place. Most are not capable or not able to research the history of civilization full time in other to come to the truth of things. The result is predictable: the unreflective "truth" is "what is."

Some Boring Opinions

The critical literature on MacIntyre is large. MacIntyre is one out of many 20th century "communitarians" making the same set of arguments. It seems odd that he, among so many others, is taken as the "big name" or the leader in the field. This is especially problematic given the radical tendency to over-generalization that plagues his work.

Neil Levy points out that MacIntyre's use of postmodern idea of "pluralism" is hardly a substitute for medievalism and is not connected to Aristotelianism.[17] In a sense, to consistently argue from the standpoint of the mere existence of traditions with differing foundations leads to a cultural relativism that Aristotle would not recognize. MacIntyre never argues that there is a foundation upon which these traditions have a right to exist. There is an implications that they are all equal, but that is not ever laid out. They are mere pre-theoretical givens.

The problem is hat shifting the actor form persons to communities does not solve the problem of mural chaos and a lack of foundations for action. In other words, there is nothing morally special about the existence of an intellectual tradition in a historical culture. It has no grater claim to truth than one's personal desire or anything else. There still must be a standard that undergirds those traditions and peoples. This, according to Levy, MacIntyre does not or will not produce.

The concept of "tradition" that he uses is without content and overly formal. MacIntyre speaks as practices or

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17 Levy, N. Stepping into the Present: MacIntyre's Modernity. Social Theory and Practice 25, no. 3 (1999)

cultures as abstractions. Avoiding actual cultures and practices make his argument flaccid and hypothetical. Speaking of a "tradition" without reference to historical examples is like teaching one how to drive without ever having seen a car. There is reason for this. If MacIntyre commits himself to defending, say, classical Athens as a tradition worth accepting or defending, feminists – immensely powerful in academia – would immediately accuse him of accepting the males-only rule of the agora. Many liberals would grab onto the existence of slavery in that society. It is much safer professionally to rest content in the vague world of abstractions.

Here is a representative example: "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."[18] Part of MacIntyre's problem is that he must stress that these traditions generate many debates and alternatives. They are not restrictive at all. It does not take long for him to abandon the concept entirely in a seeming rush to reassure liberals he is not requiring a real ethnic communitarianism.

He stresses that changes and confrontations within a tradition are always present. Yet, this is unremarkable. The only caveat is that the change and debate must be internally generated. It is an unremarkable observation because human beings will not obey alien laws except by force. Only a law that derives from their own experience has any chance of being taken seriously. Yet, MacIntyre is a relative latecomer to this very old argument and worse, most of academia will not take any tradition seriously.

JB Schneewind makes a similar point concerning the nature of the self when he stresses that MacIntyre wants

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18 After Virtue, 222

individuals in their social roles to always be questioning and deepening their connection to those roles and society at large.[19] This is an idiosyncratic statement of MacIntyre's liberalism and is far from any communitarianism or "Thomism."[20] MacIntyre could not but have been shaken by the initial round of indignation hurled upon him when his heretical views were fist published.

Functioning in the academic environment requires a certain compromise that can stave off some professional discomfort. MacIntyre seems to go out of his way to state an opinion that is clearly paleo-conservative and communitarian, only to quickly water it down with sufficient verbiage to make it properly academic. This is a very plausible reason for MacIntyre's strange inconsistencies and insistence on using a vocabulary defined by his opponents.

Schneewind, for example, makes the point that the nature of social roles and cohesive societies in general are illiberal. That is not controversial. Then, MacIntyre, concerned about the implications of this professionally, will negate it by arguing that these illiberal institutions must be as liberal as possible, questioning their own foundations and purposes. This criticism is conveniently provided by the customs of the society. Dr. Schneewind is unquestionably aware of MacIntyre's minority status in academia and, making things more complex, the nature of academic celebrity status. His position is public and very influential. If one were to abstract these professional requirements and be sensitive to his fairly embattled

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19 It is also debatable if "questioning" and "deepening" are part of the same process.

20 Schneewind, JB Virtue, Narrative, and Community. The Journal of Philosophy 79, no. 11 (1982)

minority status in academia, these formulaic statements and pious retractions can be put in their proper place.

MacIntyre makes it worse when he refuses to accept the notion of abstract logic without reference to history. Meanings, ideas and the content of words are all such products, but his own work fails in this regard. While claiming that historical circumstances give rise to new ideas and manifest a tradition, there are precious few references to this in his corpus. Abraham Edel makes an argument almost identically to Frankena by saying that MacIntyre overuses formal, analytic language to the extent that words like "tradition" have no real meaning.[21]

Lyle and Thigpen point out the obvious problems with the idea of the social self manifest in practice: that it does not eliminate the real problem of McIntyre's career: how to overcome fundamental ontological disagreement.[22] The response could only be historically generated, one such as two vehemently opposed ethnic groups in one state such as 1990s Yugoslavia or Ukraine today. Partition is not an acceptable answer her, so MacIntyre will not address the question and remain at the level of formal analysis.[23]

Marcus Otte, writing in an unpublished undergraduate thesis from the University of Central Florida (2009) brings these considerations into a highly original synthesis that is highly useful for this topic. His argument is also very similar to the one presented here. The argument is that in privileging epistemology, knowledge and "dialogue" then can dominate foundational ontology. This is to say that MacIntyre, by being so concerned with "dialogue" and

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21 Edel, Abraham. Review of After Virtue. Zygon 18 (1983): 343-349
22 Lyle, Downing and, Thigpen, Robert B. Review of After Virtue.
     Social Theory and Practice 10 (1984): 40
23 An example of this can be found in After Virtue, 276-277

making his "Thomism" palatable to the American and English university, he's undercut his theory in a way he might not have considered.

> Metaphysical notions of "nature" and "natural end" have a significant role in MacIntyre's later writings. But if there is a clear lesson from the history of modern philosophy, it is that, if epistemology dictates metaphysics instead of vice versa, then traditional metaphysics cannot get off the ground. Instead, metaphysics becomes, at most, a matter of "conceptual analysis," with little reason to suppose the contents of our ideas track reality, except in trivial respects. Thomistic ethics cannot survive without Thomistic metaphysics.[24]

MacIntyre will not say that the traditions he defends, nebulous as they are, are true. They merely are. They are epistemological realities, "language games" that offer a minimal constraint to thought rather than based in ontological truth. He cannot tell us of these "language games" are about things that actually are.

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24 Otte, M. A Thomistic Critique of the ethics of Alastair MacIntyre. (Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis. University of Central Florida, 2009): 2-3

Nominalism and Empty Concepts

MacIntyre attempts to combine both science and ethics, or more accurately, epistemology and moral philosophy, is part of his main contribution to the story of human reason. Part of the problem is his constant use of vague abstractions that never get defined. For example, there is no real definition of "tradition" in his works and certainly, no definition of "reason." This might be a part of the critique in that a neat, easily referenced definition would be inappropriate for such large, meta-linguistic concepts. However, the attempt to unite the moral and intellectual life is a fundamentally important endeavor.

This is because the tradition, the civilization which produces a specific form of reason as normative, cannot be "defined" because it is precisely this tradition that makes any definition intelligible. Epistemological detachment is not possible while all modern science is based on it. One or the other is true. However, detachment is not only impossible, but undesirable.

Nominalism is essential to his view of language. He writes:

> A central thesis of contemporary nominalism
> is that there is no ordering of things
> independent of the human mind and of its
> conceptual conventions. There are no natural
> kinds. And these two theses complement
> each other, providing support for the view
> that intelligibility is a mental artefact, that to
> understand some phenomenon is no more
> than to assign a place to it within some

scheme which we have constructed.[25]

This also means that language is totally fluid and has no stable meaning. There is no dialogue here, since alternatives to nominalism are extremely hard to find. It is identical with "common sense." Language is what Plato feared it had become in the *Gorgias*, a tool of the wealthy to manipulate those who do not have the means to worry about misusing language. The mystification, the use of the phrase "we have constructed" might be tongue in cheek, since only the very powerful have the ability to decide what a word means or, what amounts to the same thing, what is real.

If words are separated from their referents, that is, if there is no intrinsic connection between the thing and the word, then words are reduced to arbitrary sounds denoting something of importance to us. This also means that in changing the definition of words, a whole vocabulary, reality itself is altered. Nominalism might sound abstract and "academic" but it is ultimately about what "real" is.

In MacIntyre's eccentric "Seven Traits for the Future" (1979) a fairly obscure article, lays out what essentially is required for any kind of moral regeneration. The first is the ability to deal with uncertainty. Not all problems can be solved and not all problems are essentially scientific. Certain things will not be foreseen since there is no method by which they can be. Secondly, the ability to lay down roots and to be at home in the world in a substantive way. "Substantive" here means having real content and not ultimately based on abstractions.

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25 MacIntyre, A. Philosophy Recalled to its Tasks: a Thomistic Reading of Fides et Ratio. In: The Tasks of Philosophy, Vol I (Cambridge University Press, 2006): 191

Connected to this is the ability to find and live according to one's vocation, meaningful work, the third element. This, rather than serving market demand, is the means to make one's specific good the common good and vice versa.

Fourth, the ability to live without exploiting others, that is, to act with them rather than manipulate them. Modern market economics is based on manipulation – convincing people they need products they never needed before, for example. Competition might work for certain areas of economic life, but this is not a healthy thing to exist within societies as a whole. Fifth, the acceptance of one's own death. Sixth, to have hope that is based on non-empirical or super-empirical grounds. Finally, that the above virtues will make you enemies and to be prepared for this.[26]

These are seven things that the Enlightened idea has tried to paper over. At least in its formal expression, all things are predictable since all things are caused. Death and pain will be conquered, and labor is what market demand legislates. Now, these are wild oversimplifications, but a quick re-reading of Bacon's New Atlantis or even LaMettrie show these are parts of the Enlightenment idea.

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26 MacIntyre Alasdair. Seven Traits for the Future. The Hastings Center Report 9, No. 1 (1979): 5-7

The Incoherence of Individualism

MacIntyre makes enemies by his occasional claim that liberalism is an ideology that has as its end (that is, its proximate end) the dissolution of all communal ties. As a matter of history, this is incontrovertible. He also stated the fact that liberalism is almost always imposed at the barrel of a gun: the murder of King Charles I, the French Revolution, the cultural revolution in the US in the 1960s, the US Civil War, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in the 1990s and many other examples show that liberalism is rarely chosen, but almost always imposed.

Given this, he states, " Liberalism, while imposing through state power regimes that declare everyone free to pursue whatever they take to be their own good, deprives most people of the possibility of understanding their lives as a quest for the discovery and achievement of the good."[27]

Another less abstract way of putting it is that liberalism always serves the interest of the powerful faction that imposes it. The process of breaking traditional ties does several things: it removes the primary foundation for rebellion; it destroys solidarity; it forces one into a dependent relationship on the state and capital; it renders people more suggestible; in removing traditional goods, the system substitutes its own; it renders a specific people an inert mass. This is what is meant by "impoverishing social and cultural relationships."

When liberalism is imposed on a population, it meets a society where there are already powerful people who are positioned perfectly to take advantage of this

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27 Quoted from Hibbs TS. MacIntyre, Aquinas, and Politics. The Review of Politics 66, No. 3 (2004): 357-383

"freedom" to take over new institutions and expropriate the capital of the old. No one goes to the barricades for abstractions. No one demands revolutionaries die for "procedural justice" or "line-item vetoes." The use of "procedural" language to refer to more substantive ends is a form of manipulation.

One way to see this is that any political community is based on opposition and conflict. This does not remove the notion of the common good from these societies, but there are aspects of it that are controversial. The problem is that each faction in these debates is self-interested. It is very easy to fall into the trap that one's self interest just so happens to be the universal good. Alternatively, that one's self interest is only an interest because it is a road to a greater understanding of the commonwealth.

This is why the market needs to be resisted. There are many reasons why this is so, but a few relevant to this paper are that markets relativize everything. Something is only because its been demanded. Second, all is reducible to money and profit. Third, self-interest has the added engine of profit that distorts judgment and leads interested parties to believe that the common good is identical to their financial consideration. Fourth, that moral laws can never be based on market demand or on any demand. Fifth, that what is demanded is not obedient to any moral law. Heroin can be in demand as much as health insurance can be. The market recognizes only cash, not actual things.

It should be noted that these also fit the above discussion as to what occurs when traditional institutions are swept away by liberalism and modernity. Neither list is comprehensive, but it is clear that the latter list is part of the reason why liberalism always is supported by a moneyed elite seeking a justification and legal framework

for their self interest. For MacIntyre, the market, taken abstraction, is the negation of morality. It is what morality

One means by which MacIntyre seeks to solve, or at least comprehend, this problem is to move to the Aristotelian virtue tradition. One need not even systematize it as Aristotelian or Thomistic, but it is required only to say that virtues exist only because of language. Social interaction takes determinate forms over time.

The ethnos, a product of many centuries of daily give and take, is encoded in daily rituals so minute as to defy analysis.[28] Among modern intellectuals, he is already treading on dangerous ground. To go even further, one need not even use the formal language of "virtue ethics," but only to recognize that there s no contradiction between culturally situated conceptions of good and bad and universal values that derive from human nature itself.

He writes, "What I am therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present."[29] In a different time this would be considered an uncontroversial truism that makes any action intelligible at all. Moderns, always fearful of what they repress, immediately raise red flags and often, name calling begins. The "individual" is different from the person. The former is a quantitative thing, a worker, voter or taxpayer. A person is the result of acculturation. They are opposites. They are at war and yet, under nominalist assumptions, they are seen as the same.

Famously, MacIntyre follows the nominalist idea to the end: if only "individuals" exist, then society cannot. The only reply is to guarantee "procedural" forms of justice that permit as much individual flourishing as is consistent with

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28 After Virtue, 258
29 After Virtue, 221

social normality. Of course, the last two words are landmines and are the cause of the repression in the first place.

What "narrative history" means for MacIntyre's is identical to ethnic traditionalism.[30] Ethnicity is the source of language and tradition, while the tradition is its expression over time and the forces that make it change. The individual person changes, learns, forgets and moves on. So do families. So do nations and communities. That sort of terminology is verboten, and so a different vocabulary is required to express it.

It is too easy to make the connection between the nasty and messy creation of the capitalist revolution in Europe and the ideology where its condemnation loses all force. "Independent" or rational justifications of morality assume a cultural and historical space. That the ego can do this is untenable, since there must be a strong foundation from which one can make a reasoned decision. Morality, along with poetry and theology, have been safely pushed aside and rendered relatively harmless to the "real world." The rule of quantity over economics also removes all moral praise or blame.

Nominalism assumes that there is no truth, since what constitutes an "individual" is a matter of utility and practice, not logical certainty.[31] Only those entities with the power to coin words have the ability to decide what is "real." Yet, making a moral claim, one that uses any sort of logic at all, implies or rejects this point of view. Positivism claimed to avoid metaphysics by siding with the nominalists. This is sort of like rejecting Christianity by

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30 MacIntyre, A. *A Short History of Ethics* (Touchstone, 1966): 124-125

31 *History of Ethics*, 125

becoming a Lutheran.

Platonic realism begins with a very different method if one begins with the notion of universals are substantive and more real that the sense impression that surround the actor. Discovery is the purpose, not invention or rationalization. Rejecting Platonism (or being ignorant of it) already presupposes the conclusion. Every moral judgment, no matter how trite, assumes a system of ontology and the final purposes of the human soul.

Kant and Hume were the initial pathologists autopsying the body of the Enlightenment mythology MacIntyre feels the need to pronounce dead. Hume, despairing of rationalism in general, sought to maintain an emotivism and skepticism itself based on the rejection of any "human nature" or any "nature" at all.[32] A nominalist must reject human "nature" since that is an immensely important universal notion. This means that all talk of "ends" must end. Every object in the universe has a purpose and role – all except modern man.

The confusion seems to lie in the methodologically incorrect assumption that "scientific advancement" has ontological repercussions beyond its field. In other words, because so much has been discovered using basic empirical methods and assuming universal causality, this is all that exists.[33] The success of technology means that poetry has no further purpose. Words do not point to anything nor are they universals and thus, such hobbies have no rational or ontological truth. The broader point being is that discovery based on materialist assumptions does not imply that material reality is all that is. This is a fairly impressive example of taking an "ought" from an "is."

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32 After Virtue, 229-233
33 Virtue 24-25

Natural Law as a Cover

In his 1996 essay "Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas," MacIntyre seeks to remedy his often total refusal to deal with actual traditions or historical cultures. The results strongly suggest that his critics are correct: the abstract verbiage is designed to be vague and amendable to any content whatsoever.

This article seems directly designed to placate critics and ensure his continued professional status. In it, MacIntyre makes the dubious and extremely tenuous argument that Thomas Aquinas' conception of law was really about "education." This is ambiguous because the older conception of the term is identical with the upbringing and cultural immersion of Aristotle. The historical claim made here is that natural law has nothing to do with formal enactments and is often not even capable of any sort of formalization.[34]

The historical events he is dealing with are the legal reforms of two monarchs, Frederick II and St. Louis IX. The claim is that the tradition and its natural law basis MacIntyre is advocating are not really a matter of sanction or prohibition, even secondarily.

It is uncontroversial to say that natural law is not formalizable. It is quite another to say that irrational behavior cannot be prohibited and that natural law will be no help to anchor such laws. MacIntyre switches the formal categorization to then say that these laws were little more than decrees and that morality and the precepts of natural

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34 MacIntyre, Alasdair. Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas. The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 26, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 61-83

law cannot be interpreted by rulers and made into formal laws and prohibitions. In brief, he argues that natural law is partly a matter of "communal deliberation" a notion largely rejected in the rest of his work. Since those involved in these reforms were monarchs, they cannot be "communal" in any sense.[35]

This article, initially buried in an obscure journal but more recently part of a collection of essays, suggests that his moral reasoning outlined briefly here has no real social application except as a matter of "education."[36] Two years earlier, MacIntyre confused his critics more when he identified his own views with that of JS Mill.[37] His communitarian rejection of the modern state has morphed into the liberal rejection of any legislation of morality, especially from medievalists, though not from moderns.

Liberal critics such as Hinchman write: "MacIntyre himself, as a man if not as a philosopher, accepts far more of the Enlightenment position than his theories, as they now stand, could justify."[38] This is a remarkable statement, not merely because it confirms the suspicions of this writer, but it says far more than it seems to. It says that his positions are deliberately vague so as to keep him from committing

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35 This incoherent argument exists in no one place n the article, but is scattered throughout.

36 Matthew Freytag makes a similar argument except to say that he retreats into moral authority rather than liberalism. MacIntyre seems to belie this here. cf. Freytag, Matthew. MacIntyre's Conservatism and Its Cure: The Formal Structure of Traditions. Philosophy in the Contemporary World, 1 (1994): 1-10

37 MacIntyre, Alasdair. Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophers: What Can We Learn from Mill and Kant? Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Delivered at Princeton University April 6 and 7, 1994: 330

38 Hinchman, LP. Virtue or Autonomy: Alasdair MacIntyre's Critique of Liberal Individualism. Polity 21, No. 4 (1989): 648

to a political or social system. It is tantamount to saying that this theories are not really what MacIntyre believes "as a man." Given the monstrous salary he takes home each year, calling him a professional fraud is not going too far. This lengthy essay is an attempt to justify that harsh claim.

Concerning nominalism, MacIntyre "The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts" (1973) revolves around the conception of political or social groups and their beliefs over time. For example, to refer to the "freedom" of Roman citizens is, quite often, considered a viable topic for discussion with the assumption that modern and Roman conceptions of "freedom" are essentially the same. Even more, that different social groupings (such as parties or movements) seeking greater freedom all had – internally – the same conception of what constitutes "freedom."

One might even say that the conception of "freedom" cannot be used in reference to both modern and Roman societies because one of the underlying assumptions of the modernist view is that freedom is something that can only adhere to persons. Without a firm conception of the individual, ideas such as "freedom" cannot be used historically. Far worse is the assumption that the growth of the idea of the person, and hence "personal liberty" is a "good" thing and shows historical "progress."

MacIntyre uses the common claim that there is a connection between "freedom" and the availability of "education." His claim is that there would be no way to objectively show what an example of "freedom" or "education" would be across civilizations and historical epochs. The definition of both has changed fairly radically over time. The important conclusion is that one cannot make historical generalizations at all about such topics because, as definitions of such things have differed

radically over time, there is no way to know if education contributes to personal liberty. If that's true, then what chance do historical questions such as "progress" have?

The broader point MacIntyre is making here is that the practice in question has to be engaged in by those that basically know that they are promoting or manifesting a specific state of affairs. If the "individual" in the modern sense was not considered an important or relevant variable in Augustan Rome, then any historical analysis of "freedom" cannot ever apply to it.

Now, why is this a problem for nominalism? It is because a political party, a social movement or a goal are all universals. To claim that education contributes to personal freedom is to a) insist that these definitions are basically the same historically, b) that there is an end goal that all parties have had over time and c) that there is an ideal of "freedom" that history is aiming towards. Yet, social science and historical analysis cannot and does not (at least in modernity) accept any universals at all.

The reason nominalism needs to be included in any discussion about MacIntyre is that this metaphysic is needed to make sense out of emotivism. The argument might go like this:

1. Universal entities do not exist;
2. (Therefore) universal definitions of things do not exist;
3. Nothing that is meaningful morally or otherwise can be a universal,
4. Therefore, all truths are particular and thus,
5. All truths are contingent.

Taking this a step further, one can conclude that all things are merely words where words are far more

important than things. This is so because objects are arbitrarily taken out of a context and isolated in the mind. These are "objects" that nominalists might call "things" or "particulars." There is no reason – other than utility – to so remove them and therefore, they are just chunks of the external world that are given a name. They are not universals, but neither are they particulars. Ultimately, all that matters is utility. Given this, we can continue:

6. Since all truths are contingent, then
7. There is no abiding reality, what is "real" is an artifact;
8. All acts need to be grounded either in reason or some conception of pleasure (ie motivation must be from one or the other broad causes)
9. There is no rational reason to be moral other than utility
10. Even utility is not stable, since the term does not adhere to any real thing. "Utility" is nothing but a shorthand for what might seem to be pleasurable for a moment.[39]

The above shows why nominalism destroys morals. They destroy any motivation for acting morally since it cannot provide reasons for doing anything. There can be no truths for the nominalist since any "object" seen in space and time has no real meaning other than shifting utility. It is what MacIntyre means by emotivism.

One consequence of the nominalist idea is the conception of a "moral dilemma." It takes on a very different form in such a world. It is this way for one important reason: that there is an assumption that, regardless of whatever else is happening, that there is a

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[39] This is not an attempt at a formal logical progression. It's just an attempt to keep ideas in their proper order.

right action to be done. Put differently, that one is
responsible for a moral act – doing the right thing –
regardless of what reason and the facts seem to be
suggesting. This suggestion is that there can be no single
correct action given that there is more than one rational
conclusion that derives from the premises and both are
equally solid.[40] The problem is that, all other things being
equal, the system itself is a problem. This system here
being that which has led to these two moral conclusions of
equal validity. It is based on the notion that the system is
correct.

These sorts of issues often help create the familiar
and cliched problem of "relativism." This is to say that, as a
practical matter, two civilizations do not see moral issues in
the same way and therefore, there is no correct way to see
them. This is often the hidden assumption of moderns when
dealing with thorny moral issues they would rather just
ignore. From the point of view of both, their opposite or
opposing conclusions all come from rational and common-
sense logic. However, MacIntyre gives a set of ingredients
as to how this problem can be overcome:

1.That there has to be a third language that can encapsulate
   both but not have any allegiance to either;
2.It must also be able to show both sets of ideologies and
   conclusions equally vividly to both parties;
3.Since the language will have to be neutral between both
   parties, the third language itself have any
   ideological baggage or a literature of its own;
4.Finally, that both competing parties will have to realize
   that their own languages are conceptually

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40 MacIntyre, A. Moral Dilemmas. Philosophy and Phenomenological
    Research, 50, no 1 (1990): 373

inadequate to express the absolute truth on these matters.

Ultimately, 4 above is the essential idea. The problem has been that liberalism, deriving from the western Enlightenment, has long though this question to be unimportant since the "third language" has long since been found: that of "science." Yet, MacIntyre says:

> Ever since the Enlightenment our culture
> has been far too hospitable to the all too
> plainly self-interested belief that,whenever
> we succeed in discovering the rationality of
> other and alien cultures and traditions, by
> making their behavior intelligible and by
> understanding their languages, what we will
> also discover is that n essentials they are just
> like us.[41]

It would be something along the lines of the modern, liberal relativist that sees other points of view as equal, however opposed, except that language that has led them to believe this. The "power" and "self-interest" embodied in this is the condescending idea is that other cultures (the speaker not himself being part of a culture at all) are simply too benighted to see the limitations of their particular context.

One example of this can be found in E. Gill's (1992) Rationality and the Liberal Tradition. Her argument is that liberalism is itself a tradition. She seems to undermine this

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41 MacIntyre, A. Relativism, Power and Philosophy. Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 59, No. 1 (1985): 19

with arguments that work solely in the academic world where liberal ideology is rarely questioned, and if it is, it's from a leftist viewpoint. She writes: "Popular governance, religious tolerance, the rule of law, and other liberties were means to the specific ends of peace, prosperity through economic growth, and intellectual progress."[42] She is writing this within an argument that these are, in fact, positive goods rather than means to an end.

As if adding content to this, she states that since these all aim at "liberal ends" they are goods in themselves. Yet, even a quick read of this list suggests that these terms are defined in highly conflicting ways. "Popular" government is not government that is popular, but government that promotes liberal causes, regardless if this government is hated by most of its constituents. Vladimir Putin is one of the most popular politicians in the world, yet the continuing popular demand for his rule is termed "undemocratic" by modern academics.

Liberal institutions promote "prosperity" and these lead to "intellectual progress." "Peace" here can only be defined as a state of affairs where liberalism rules. These are not merely goods, but "substantive" goods. Yet, nothing can be substantive that is this vague, suggesting that the author does not know what "substantive" is or is actively hiding the real content to these vague conceptions.

One proof of her view is that to say that

I suggest that what would prevent liberalism from qualifying as an authentic and resourceful tradition is not its inclusion or exclusion of some essential element, but

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42 Gill, ER. MacIntyre, Rationality, & the Liberal Tradition. Polity 24, No. 3 (1992): 449

> rather the failure of these inclusions or exclusions to gain significant support from persons recognized as liberals by other liberals.[43]

This cryptic passage suggests that the critique above is correct: there are no essential definitions to those words, but if enough elites or power brokers say that "popular government" is one that promotes liberalism, then "popular" is identical to "liberal" or "leftist" regardless of the total lack of consent involved. ER Gill has inadvertently shown the importance of one of MacIntyre's cardinal ideas, namely that nominalism is an immense danger: it can provide no substantial definitions or accept reality at all. It can only be filled with the demands of those in power. They get to decide what is "real" and what is imagination.

Gill's argument is all too common. MacIntyre's overriding desire to please the majority in academia leaves him open to this criticism. Institutions embody practices which themselves embody ideas. This is substantive. However, since these also have conflicts and problems that are normally solved internally, she jumps to the conclusion that these are essentially filled with conflict and hence are "fluid" as the US Constitution is.[44]

Whether deliberately or not, Gill has completely destroyed the very foundation of any institution at all. They have no definition and no inherent purpose. All that is left is power. She has exploited a glaring weakness in MacIntyre's argument and, as always without a single historical example, ended up eliminating his view altogether with her very acceptance of it. However, there is

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43 Gill, 454
44 Gill, 456

a reason for her total lack of historical examples, and that is to disguise how selective it would be. "Criticism" and "fluidity" apply to only some historical or political institutions or ideas.[45]

Hinchman suggests a far more defensible variation of this approach. He states that individualism as an ideology posits only an abstract person devoid of any historical context. This is true. However, once installed as a social system, it almost has to take on specific contexts and "traditions" that adhere only to itself. This is almost like arguing that atheism is form of theology or that anarchism is a theory of government. Liberalism cannot be a tradition because its very existence is to make war on it.

One might envisage a tolerant person that will avoid passing moral judgment on others, even those he disagreed with, with the intent of creating societies and communities that run smoothly. This is to say that toleration at the individual level is really about maintaining social peace. Of course, if such a person had read Gill, he might say that toleration is "fluid" and hence, so long as many agree with me, it can be as selective as it wants.

This section has revolved around a single notion: that the consequences of abstract metaphysical ideas such as nominalism are immense. Modernity has removed tradition as something to be taken seriously. In morals, science or politics, "tradition" is not relevant. Science, critique and production are what matter – dollars and cents,

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45 For example, her view would not apply to mainstream accounts of the Holocaust, the American Civil Rights movement or the French Revolution. There is and will be a single, rigid interpretation of these that is not open to "fluid' readings. This explains her refusal to use historical examples and a total reliance on vague terms.

the quantitative, is what produces results and in fact, is the very form that a "result" must take.

Reason develops due to human needs in a community. It never exists on its own and is inconceivable outside of language and other social norms. Truth is available, so the modern project says, in science, production and organization. This is the whole of modern life. There is only one area curiously left out of this drive to truth: morals. It sticks out as a strange anomaly that the rationalist, so strict with the canons of proper empirical methods, is reduced to emotional appeals and relativism when it comes to the most basic human actions.

Truth is available when it comes to building a bridge and planning for its raw materials, labour and methods. There, little room for "relativism" is available. Efficiency and economy demand a single basic way of approaching the project. However, when asking why it is important that a bridge be built at all, modernity is silent. That is a matter of individual preference in a way that no other class of issues is. It is an odd situation.

Virtue and the Self

The self is not radically distinct from reason. The self is the entity that reasons and is just as much a social product as the language and meanings that he uses in reasoning. The problem that separates them is the modern idea: many strands of Enlightenment thought wanted to "liberate" the individual from the "shackles of tradition and superstition." It was as if the ego existed in and of itself. Predictably, MacIntyre's approach is that the self is a social product and fills a role. If this is the thing that reasons and thinks, then thought it equally social. This implies virtue, since reason and its conclusions will have meaning only relative to the human condition at a specific time.

MacIntyre defines a "virtue" as "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."[46] This means that a virtue is never abstract, but the perfecting of the self as a productive member of a community. Given that each specialization maintains its own standards, virtue is then measured accordingly. This is very much a "guild" idea of the later middle ages and similar to the arguments of GK Chesterton before. In addition, it is similar to the "Spheres of Justice" notion of Michael Waltzer.[47]

A historical analysis will generate at least three conceptions of a virtue: first, that it permits the holder to discharge a certain important social duty or to fulfill his

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46 After Virtue 191
47 Waltzer, Michael. Spheres of Justice. Basic, 1983; After Virtue was
   published two years earlier

social function. Second, that it permits, in so doing, the holder to go from the specific social role to the final end of human life, the end of all rational beings in society. Finally, it permits the holder to gain some important form of earthly success.

The first is the view that MacIntyre will generally accept in that it is specific enough to have real content but general enough to be the subject of philosophical analysis. It places the holder as part of a practice – some social role – that has developed its own standards of good and bad performances.

The second is not radically different than the first. It is just to say that in the process of fulfilling one's social role, one is approaching the good life: the life in accordance with virtue. One is living a self-disciplined life where reason rules the passions, but is doing so for the common good. Thus it might be said that these two are very similar and almost the same, except seen from two different levels of analysis.

The third has no relation to the first two and seems to have no connection to virtues at all. It is a conception of "virtue" that says in order to achieve what society calls "success" (for moderns, it really means money and power), one must have specific traits. A good businessman must think objectively, read markets, predict changes in demand and seek forms of advertising that will show the public that your product is really, crucially needed. The big difference is that the first two are objective: there are real social roles and real common goods for different societies. The third is not objective at all: for success defined as money, power or prestige, it comes down to manipulating people. If "success" be defined as socially righteous, then it need not be seen as a separate form of virtue at all. It is seen as

separate because it is not righteous.[48]

The third conception of "virtue" (or motive for action, to be more accurate) is the enemy that MacIntyre has spent his whole career fighting. It is based on self-interest rather than the good of the whole. It leads to a system of law that has nothing to do with objective right and everything to do with power. He writes:

> Unfortunately, there are harmful consequences deriving from this systematic cultural inconsistency in our thinking about the law. When law is thought of in the first way [the former above], the primary reason for supporting and identifying with the law is that the law is part of the life of the community to which we belong. If you like, in terms of eighteenth-century republicanism the motive for obeying law is civil virtue. But when the law is thought of in the second way, as a device for the protection of one against another, then fear or self-interest become the dominant motives. We obey the law either because of what the law will do to us if we disobey it, or we obey the law from self-interest.[49]

This is why nominalism is such a problem. If universal truths do not exist, then self-interest is all that is left. If universal truths do not exist, then, by definition,

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48 This analysis can be found in MacIntyre, A. The Nature of the Virtues. The Hastings Center Report 11, no 2 (1981): 29

49 MacIntyre, A. Regulation: A Substitute for Morality. The Hastings Center Report 10, No. 1 (1980): 32

there can be no "common good" and hence, no "moral virtue" that both derives from it and serves it. When Plato speaks of the "relativism" of the Sophists, he's making the claim that the rejection of universals is very convenient for those dedicated to making a profit. Since there are no universal truths, one product, one argument, one regime is as good as another.

Epistemology and the Self

The Enlightenment project, speaking broadly, repressed the notion that rationalism and nominalism cannot function without the tradition that undergirds their society. Repression is very real in MacIntyre since nominalism (and "liberalism" as its very broad expression) would corrode the very social bonds that permit the very expression of any selfhood at all. One can debunk reason's grandiose claims in the philosopher's study, but no one wants to live in a world of irrational beasts serving their every whim and appetite.[50] Nominalism and modernity denied that things had "natures." They only had names. Definition were only a means of communication and had no specific ontological truth. They are merely useful and it is too much work to re-create a language for each generation.

MacIntyre depicts this as a distinction between the "ordinary agent" and the "social scientist." The former is not free from his social contexts, biases and traditions that have been inherited. He might not be aware of them, or even if conscious, cannot avoid having them involved in any of his moral conclusions or ideas about the world. The social scientist claims to be above or beyond such things and hence, comes to conclusions that are to be taken far more seriously than what is popularly believed.

Without pulling any punches, MacIntyre rejects this common belief about rationalist social science. One way he does this is to show that the social scientist is usually wrong.

Unlike racing correspondents they do not

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50 History of Ethics, 51-55

appear to keep scores and they certainly do
not publish them. It may be an unworthy
suspicion that, if social scientists were in
fact successful social predictors they would
publish such records; for the predictions that
they do make publicly are not very
successful. Demographic and economic
forecasting provide numerous examples.
The only appropriate conclusion is that the
philosophical arguments, which ought to
have led us to suspect that all claims to
predictive expertise of a kind not available
to ordinary agents would fail, have not in
fact led us astray.[51]

To empirically verify this would be easy. One
depressing, but colossally important example is the collapse
of the USSR. Experts in the USA, especially in the CIA,
were, as late as 1988, overestimating the might of the
Soviet empire and not a single prediction of the system's
imminent collapse can be found. His comment above that
social scientists do not publish "scores" is a wry way of
wondering how those involved in this field managed to
keep their jobs for failing to see such an immense event
even right up to the moment of its occurrence. Certainly in
other aspects of professional life, there would be a purge of
"experts." Academics seem to be curiously immune to the
consequences of their own mistakes.
The phenomena MacIntyre calls "epistemological
self righteousness" and is founded on the notion that the
scientist is superior to the ordinary person in that his

51 MacIntyre, A. Ideology, Social Science, and Revolution.
   Comparative Politics 5, No. 3 (1973): 321-342

objectivity and methods lead to superior results. He is an "expert" and should be deferred to by the common herd.[52] MacIntyre remarks:

> The expert, whether professional social scientist, industrial manager, or revolutionary, claims a special right to be consulted and a special right to be maintained in a position where he is available to be consulted. The ideology of expertise embodies a claim to privilege with respect to power.[53]

This is uncharacteristic in that it is a departure from his normally objective and detached form of writing. Importantly, he states that the positivist or behaviorist ideologies of the social scientist are what gives some content to his "precarious existence" or in other words, gives him some sense of actual superiority. This also means the "expert" here cannot be trusted since he is trapped by these same ideologies. Because the expert is more "objective" than the ordinary person, he must maintain some adherence to positivism. The paradoxical result is that the objectivity so important to the social scientist is based on the dogmatic adherence to an ideology with no foundation in reason.

The eccentric aspect of modern rationalism in that it places "reason" in contrast to reason's purpose, or the uncovering of truth. If this were accepted, then Realistic essences would be also. Rejection of the Aristotelian concept of man as a being endowed with a natural goal was

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52 MacIntyre, 338
53 MacIntyre, 342

the first casualty of rationalism. Reason was to take apart and tear, rather than cohere and assemble. The moral consequence of the short term was that "morality" meant the utility of specific appetites being satisfied or postponed.

The self and subconscious are implied in all acts, especially ones with moral overtones. One of the more significant problems with emotivist irrationalism and subjectivism is that the self as an object is no longer significant as a free agent. A capitalist encloses acres of English farmland for the sake of "improving English manufactures." That it has destroyed villages, traditions and countless families is not momentous since the emotivist has no real control over preferences of their final ends. Reason alone is that slender thread. As MacIntyre says, emotivism "entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations."[54] Once established, no truth claim can be made, so all that remains is bureaucratic positivism.[55] MacIntyre's essential argument is that in the rejection of essence and nature, truth is now a matter of fashion.

Stanley Hauerwas writes in a recent article on MacIntyre's epistemology:

> MacIntyre understands himself to be a
> metaphysical realist. Truth is the relation of
> an adequated mind to its object, but
> MacIntyre insists that the activity of enquiry
> is the necessary condition for the discovery
> of first principles. This is the metaphysical
> expression of his understanding of action—
> or, perhaps better put, his defense of first

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54 After Virtue 23-26
55 After Virtue, 26-27

principles helps us see how his account of action has been metaphysical from the beginning. Thus his agreement with Thomas Aquinas, against Aristotle, that the proper object of human knowledge is not essence qua essence. Because we know essences only through effects, for MacIntyre there is no place to begin but in the middle.[56]

This approach to the world is utterly critical to understand his rejection of the Enlightenment project. The nominalist has no reason to believe that the mind has a "customized" capacity to reflect the external world. As mentioned above, all acts have a metaphysical root. All acts have their foundation in theological ideas taken for granted.

To ask someone why they decided to go back to school, the normal answers such as "to get a job" or to "be more marketable" are too specific. On what grounds are they reasons for anything? When asked why these matter, they might respond "to become happy" or "to become socially accepted." These will not do either. Cutting to the chase, one might ask "Why should you be happy? Maybe that money should be spent making someone else happy. Why you?" This often leads to blank stares, but is a strong reminder of the fact that if these cannot be answered, then the intrepid student has no idea why he's going back to school.

Moral notions are not concepts in a formal sense. This does not mean they are devoid of truth. Moral traditions exist before moral theory does. Concepts are – at best – glib abbreviations of immensely profound historical

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56 Hauerwas, S. The Virtues of Alistair MacIntyre. First Things, 2007 (online edition)

experience. A word can only capture a minute bit of this, but the daily life and interaction in the society provides the remainder, one that is intuited. It might be noted that this interaction also serves as the origin of "custom," broadly speaking, or manifestations of universal principles such as fairness, family or loyalty. Few societies celebrate promiscuity or cowardice.

Natural law, or a specific, socially founded manifestation of essences in realism, places limits on all things, including the mind itself. Human nature implies that there are many behaviours that are inhuman.[57] Rejecting these limitations has consequences. Mathematical truths are easy because numbers are also a universalized particular: these too are only names and hence, have no objective validity. Darwin's famed work might be called Origin of the Species, but it should also be remembered that species as such cannot exist in Darwin. These are only linguistic commonplaces with no truth value.

The ends of human life, mundanely speaking, are to perfect one's social person. A practice, or what Michael Oakeshott called a "Mode of Experience" in 1933, is to make one's individual effort meaningful and social.[58] This was also essential to Hegel's political view a century before. The connection here to the self is unmistakable: human beings are social, dependent and seek relevance meaning and social standing. Practice, whether it has been ideologically systematized or not, is as close as a single human being can get.

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57 Cf History of Ethics, pg 154-156

58 Oakeshott, Michael. Experience and its Modes. Cambridge University Press, 1933. This work is very close to MacIntyre's and is rarely quoted in his corpus, if at all.

The self has the same desires and the same means of attaining them. This is where the similarities end. The beauty of Oakeshott or Hegel, later made more explicit my MacIntyre, is that the gap between cultural relativism and universal standards are bridged. It is both self seeking and ascetic as it is both motivated by profit and social prestige on the one hand, but must be earned by useful labour and discipline, on the other.

An excellent summary of his ideas in this respect can be found yet again in Hinchman:

> Besides the morality of law, any political community must establish a table of virtues as well. Virtues, e.g. justice or courage, are those qualities that enable individuals to contribute to a common project, of which political life itself is the supreme example. While the morality of law is predominantly negative, forbidding absolutely certain destructive actions, the table of virtues offers to individuals the hope of achieving recognition and self-fulfilment by doing well the things that the community requires. Failure to be virtuous may earn reproof or even punishment, as in the case, say, of cowardly soldiers or incompetent public officials, but not the severe punishment visited on offenders against the morality of law. There is a difference between letting one's community down by falling short of its standards of excellence and betraying it by an essentially antisocial action.[59]

59 Hinchman, 638-639

The difference between virtue and administration is that the former is about building. The latter is creating structures that act repetitively. They are putting a law into action that is a set of prohibitions with an end to bringing about a specific good. Laws of this sort assume that cooperation can exist only by coercion, since of themselves, human beings will not cooperate.

MacIntyre also argues that law and politics are two very different things. The former is mere prohibition, while the latter is about the community, acting within the tradition, making the community better and better through concerted action. Without virtue, no cooperation is possible. Without virtue, law becomes supremely necessary, albeit ineffective.

This is the climax of MacIntyre's conception of the self. It expresses the social purpose and origin of all moral actions. Social virtue can only be such when it is actually something people need. This is a substantive conception of true representative politics and a real social "conversation." People act with social importance when engaging in socially necessary tasks (often unpleasant ones) with a high degree of skill. This is the functional existence of any society and can never be reduced to slogans about "empowerment." In this way, while each craft or practice is seen as equal to every others, those engaging in them are not equals. Internally generated standards, set down by experts in the field long gone, are the criteria for unequal rewards. Michael Walzer called this "complex equality."

MacIntyre argues forcefully that modern, media driven mass politics is a total rejection of the self and the negation of virtue and knowledge. This is a difficult statement to reject. Social problems in the EU or modern

Britain often take the form of a demand for an administration to create an other administration that will "deal with" the problem at hand. Once established, the next problem will be tackled. This is not a caricature, but is the very nature of dis-empowerment.

The human self is impoverished in modernity and under the nominalist dispensation. MacIntyre's view of "narrative continuity" is that a self is only such when it is situated in a community and given a determinate and concrete sense of what the common good might consist in. To make sense out of human actions there needs to be a strong, "thick" sense of the self. There are no abstract actions, since there are no abstract selves.

Choices and ideas only make sense when the array of possibilities and their social ranking are understood. Understanding the common good as such requires its comprehension as first situated in history. Now, in After Virtue, he makes the claim that traditionalists "contrast tradition with reason and the stability of tradition with conflict." Almost as if to reassure his academic, liberal readers his harmlessness, he makes a statement that he knows is false. From Burke to Bonald, there was never much of a distinction between reason and tradition, since the latter was a congealed version of the former. MacIntyre clearly knows this to be true.

Regardless of this strange lapse, MacIntyre says there are two conceptions that must exist in order for the self to be seen as continuous. First, that the person is seen as part of a personal history, not ahistorical on the one hand or swallowed up by history on the other. If one does not have a sense of personal history, then life has no purpose and is not connected by any overarching conception.

He uses the medieval literary form of the quest to

make this clear. Here too there are two specific aspects of this that make it intelligible. First, that there is some sense of the final end. It cannot be laid out in detail, but pieces of it must exist. The second comes from the first: it is a search for something that only becomes clear when the search commences. Even if initially stated in general and vague terms, it only takes on determinate forms when struggle, deprivation and homesickness take over.[60]

It is clear that the virtues develop as ends for man as they are utilized in dealing with suffering. Needs have to be met because if they are not, pain will result. This obvious conclusion does have the virtue of stressing that there is an imperative involved that itself is not amenable to logical analysis: it just is. Struggle and deprivation take the vague ends of the immature and turn them into detailed purposes in union with the common good.

There is no separation of the self from that of moral agency. In fact, its one of MacIntyre's major contributions in psychology. One important issue is his insistence that agency and self-hood, while molded by roles and institutions, needs to have a conception of itself separate from these. There has to be a self that is deeper than roles. If roles were the sole manifestation of the self, there could not be any ably to reflect on that role or its contribution to the common good.

Secondly, the person has to be rational. He has to be reflective not only of social roles and his specific role, but that he can also reflect on these in general. Finally,

> Moral agents have to understand themselves
> as accountable, not only in their roles, but
> also as rational individuals. The

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60 After Virtue, 206-207

> responsibilities that are socially assigned to roles are defined in part by the types of accountability that attach to them. For each role there is a range of particular others, to whom, if they fail in their responsibilities, they owe an account that either excuses or admits to the offence and accepts the consequences.[61]

Thirdly, this is based on the assumption of freedom as autonomy. This is to say that autonomy – synonymous with freedom for our purposes – requires the faculty of deliberation and the ability to follow through. It is about making choices without instinct or passion. Only then is accountability a permissible expectation. This also implies that moral selfhood is difficult to achieve and fairly rare, especially in a crisis-ridden, relativistic and nominalist universe.

It might also be noted that opportunity for this use of reason has to be plentiful. In other words, there has to be a recognized place for this sort of accountability. Agency requires a certain political freedom too where errors as well as victories are the fault of the actor, and not just dismissed as the result of the actor's social class or race. At the same time, a recognition that freedom is not an inborn trait, but something that has to be worked towards and fought for is important as well.[62]

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61 MacIntyre, A. Social Structures and their Threats to Moral Agency. In: The Tasks of Philosophy, Vol II (Cambridge University Press, 2006): 190-191

62 This is my specific argument on free will, that, while an inborn trait, it is extremely difficult to cultivate. "Freedom" is meaningless if it just means the "ability to do what you want." How this has any philosophical meaning is beyond me.

What is required for an action to be free is a strong sense of self. No moral abstraction can answer any of the questions above. An isolated individual cannot act, since such a being does not exist. "Free" action exists only in civilization. That is, in an environment whee many generations of worked to create a stable universe of action and the surplus production that can finance thought.

He writes: "I can be said truly to know who and what I am, only because there are others who can be said truly to know who and what I am."[63] This is also a matter of identity. The nation and the community it engenders allows one to see oneself in the other. To make the other less alien. The egocentric individualist will lecture to his audience all about the long list of writers, activists and philosophers that fought for the freedom he is currently displaying. This is often uttered without the slightest hint of irony.[64]

Thought requires language for the same reason MacIntyre says that I am not a self unless others recognize me as such. Language is the medium of this recognition. Thus, the notion of the ethnolinguistic nation (or the "nation") is necessary for moral selfhood and identity. He will never say this, however, fearing the inevitable name calling from the "apostles of openness" in the academy.

Context requires language. Moral action requires context. If someone who knows nothing about art visits The Met, all this person will see is a mass of more or less attractive pictures. Abstract art will be absolutely meaningless. However, someone who knows the language of the symbols – one who has been initiated into the language – will see entire conversations lining the walls. Those not knowing the language, outsiders, will see very

63 Dependent Animals, 95
64 The Unconscious, 77ff

little and understand less. Such a person has no knowledge of the thoughts of the various artists, thus showing that thought in context requires language, since language is a critical aspect of any context.

The Idea of Community

There is no community without a basic agreement on moral norms. There is no community without a single language (in the broad sense of the term) and certainly no community unless its members see themselves as a "family" of one type or another. These are the very general sets of agreements that differentiate a community from a random gaggle of people. Hence, communities are, by definition, nations.

MacIntyre, in 1984, delivered a lecture "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" Depending on how it is defined, loyalty to the community requires all the above, plus a basic sense of commitment to its continued existence. Nothing can be more minimal than that, so a certain pride in the group's achievements must also be included.

For someone to be a communitarian without being a "nationalist" in its ethnolinguistic sense is a contradiction. If MacIntyre denies this, then what is the nature of this community? What are the ties that bind them? The notion of the nation as an ethnolinguistic unit marked by a functional consensus on basic issues of morality and faith is both necessary and sufficient for the existence of any community. It is also the utter minimum for any reasonable debate on ethics. The amorphous "shared values" does not drop from the sky, but is the result of historical experience. Usually, these "shared values" are meaningless in that they are procedural.

Community requires many important commonalities for it to be a form of "communion" or "communication" in any way. Being quite consistent, MacIntyre says "It follows that I find my justification for allegiance to these rules of

morality in my particular community; deprived of the life of that community, I would have no reason to be moral."[65] He, without saying so, is committed to the ethnolinguistic conception of community.

If I cannot see myself in others, then there is no good reason to be moral. I have no obligations to abstractions for the same reason I have no obligations to ghosts. Such things do not exist and hence, can maintain no claim on any action of mine. Rather people are largely constituted by language, religion and historical tradition. This is an immensely important component in the construction of the self.

Denuding the self of anything that actually makes it a person destroys its existence entirely. Liberalism has to state that the ego have no intrinsic connections to institutions, nations or peoples. To be detached from any and all connections that might preclude an "objective judgment" of one's society and its choices is absurd. Other than the fact that they are excepting the mentality of individualism, the possibility of an abstract self, and the belief that nationalism is inherently evil and other dogmas, their self is non-existent. It is a cypher, an ideological creation of the university office and not reality.[66] Yet, this is implied by liberalism itself and MacIntyre's vague critique.

Liberalism and modern individualism are highly dogmatic ideologies. When it comes to itself, it is anything but tolerant. Yet, what are the sources of its absolute truths? From whence comes these moral arguments and dilemmas? Individualists of all sorts have to believe that the abstract self is real and the Cartesian self is the foundation of

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65 MacIntyre, Alasdair. Is Patriotism A Virtue? (The Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas, March 26, 1984): 10
66 MacIntyre, Patriotism, 12

thought. The truth is that such ideas come from the experience of specific people and their struggles.

The context of that people's history. The abstract forms of "freedom" and "rights" outside of context are not sources of identity because they are not substantive goods. They are not anything. "Freedom," taken in the negative way many Englishmen might define it, it not substantial. Freedom to do x is also not substantial. Without content, all that remains are procedures. Content is from the social order and its ethnolinguistic history. That the bulk of academics are alienated from this does not make this tradition disappear.

Therefore, MacIntyre errs when he writes, "Thus liberal morality does after all appeal to an overriding good, the good of this particular kind of emancipating freedom." This is not a "good" at all, but a means to a good. "Emancipation" into what? Freedom to do what? Only these answers offer substance. As always, MacIntyre refuses to answer them, and for the very same reasons this paper has made obnoxiously clear.

MacIntyre then concludes:

> And once we recognize that typically moral agency and continuing moral capacity are engendered and sustained in essential ways by particular institutionalized social ties in particular social groups, it will be difficult to counterpoise allegiance to a particular society and allegiance to morality in the way in which the protagonists of liberal morality do.[67]

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67 MacIntyre, Patriotism, 9-10

The Enlightenment idea, uncontroversially, insists that reason (either ideological or utilitarian) can rule alone. The parentheses shows the problem: using the same term to denote the daily tool of the human person with the ideology of Enlightenment mechanism is damaging to even fundamental moral consensus or discussion. MacIntyre was a latecomer among the large choir saying that this is self-interested linguistic trickery. "Rationalism" was a means – to be overly glib – to destroy competing ideologies of Catholic monasticism or peasant communitarianism to make way for the "new men" of the Capitalist global order centered in London and Antwerp.[68]

In modern conditions, the moral differences caused by the clash of competing and incommensurable conceptions of rational morality lead to an insoluble war of ideas. Ultimately, an arbitrary act, or more seriously, those with the most media access or cash decide on which one wins. This sort of non-rational approach is termed "emotivism" This view, basically a refusal to believe such consensus is possible, states that moral consensus costs far too much to be contemplated.[69]

This view argues that, in contrast to a rational approach, moral judgments, being the expression of feelings or attitudes, can be neither true nor false. These exist only in the domain of science. "Reason" as in "logic" is only a secondary attribute of moral belief. The notion that previous means to develop consensus have failed suggests that the issue has been misstated. Preferences and interest – not truth or falsehood – are at the root of moral ideas. Of course, MacIntyre rejects this sort of self-interested special

68 MacIntyre, Alasdair. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (The University of Notre Dame Press, 1989): Ch XIX
69 After Virtue 12

pleading. On the other hand, the emotive idea has succeeded in exposing the fact that "objective" or "rational" forms of language in political or moral discussion is a form of deception.

The problems of this view are too exceptional to even be briefly listed. Humanity has developed methods to predict the implosion of stars, but has no idea why this should be important or why anyone should be taxed to support this. This is sloppy reasoning: the very rigor that can map the human genome suddenly becomes flaccid when the question as to why any one should care is too convenient. It seems suspiciously arbitrary to speak of the advances of modern science and the "control over nature" while claiming that the very motives of this method are mysterious and will always be so.

The world is totally transparent to the most advanced modern science, or so one is daily told. The sole exception is in the purposes or goodness of human behavior. The only area of the transparent world where truth has no meaning is just the one that might put a limit on scientific endeavor. This is not and cannot be a coincidence.

In Whose Justice? Which Rationality? MacIntyre takes up the thankless task of asking what will replace the vacuous Newtonian universe. To think that the abstruse ideas of chaos or string they can have the simplistic punch of universal and consistent cause and effect are mistaken. MacIntyre, regardless of his flaws, rubbed salt in the wounds of a crippled modernity: it is based on nothing.

Nietzsche is compelling so long as there is no one that is stronger than the actor. Since the Will to Power deprives the self of any foundations, the stronger actor can seek his own will at anyone's expense. "Expense" of course, being the language of the defeated. "Logic" here is

incommensurable with that of Aristotle or Locke. A society that – for example – is divided between those following Lockean empiricism and Nietzsche's Will in the face of the flux have nothing in common.[70] There is no common language or universe of being that they share. This is because reason can never legislate its own ends.

The use of reason in any given circumstance assumes the existence of a brute given upon which reason works. Rationalism denies this, but so does Nietzsche and Hume. Politics is impossible, since words like "right" or "just" have no common foundation. They are mere sounds made by people referring to completely different things, or not uttered at all. Whether one calls it a "language game," "ethnic tradition" or "Tradition" in the more formal sense, this serves as the "given" of reason, since something must exist, a problem, for which reason becomes a worthwhile tool at all.

This second part has revolved around the idea that MacIntyre cannot reconcile the radically illiberal notions of epistemology to the liberal, abstract self he feels constraints to support. Much of MacIntyre's restatements, vague references to communities and continually shrinking notions of what a "tradition" is leave him incoherent. He believes in an epistemology based on a tradition and its historic development. However, liberal notions of criticism and individual "rights" are essential to his view of the self. MacIntyre tries to have it both ways.

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70 After Virtue, 129-130

Conclusions and White Elephants

In his *Whose Justice?Which Rationality?* MacIntyre summarizes his general program:

> we need to recover … a conception of rational enquiry embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition.[71]

This is a well-reasoned philosophical position that takes quite a bit of work to argue against. The problem with it is that it was also Edmund Burke's view. It was also GWF Hegel's view, that or Georges Sorel and Theodore Dostoevsky. It is a cardinal argument among those communitarians (often on the right, but not always) who reject the "liberal consensus" in global politics. MacIntyre provides very little that is new.

One thing that might be gleaned from his writings is that the real "content" of the writers listed above is gone: it is a "traditionalism" for those who have to make their living in an academic environment that is liberal and eternally hostile to opposition. This, unfortunately, lies at the root of MacIntyre ideas. This is precisely his agenda. He has created an intellectually harmless traditionalism that

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71 Whose Justice?Which Rationality? 7

uses some of the rhetoric but contains none of the content.

      This sort of criticism, that of professional necessity, is not something MacIntyre avoids. It is a reasonable critique of MacIntyre in particular because he brings the issue up at the very end of Three Rival Versions. He chooses his words carefully so as to avoid condemning his colleagues. He states first that, during the Enlightenment, there were "enforced exclusions from the universities and colleges of points of view to much at odds with the consensus. . ."[72] For the first time, this sensitive topic has been broached.

      Then, he notes that, given such a policy, to be promoted within the university, one had to conform. "Nonentities were appointed on occasion" was the result, since conformity rather than objective ability was considered significant. He then states that such problems "occur with some frequency in every known type of system of higher education."[73]

      This is clearly not a condemnation of the present university system in an ideological sense, but he does note with some vehemence that European universities did take a dogmatic view of science and methodology in the Enlightenment, leading to the exclusion of opposition rather than its intellectual defeat. More importantly, these comments bring MacIntyre's criticism of modern individualism to the level of the daily grind of university hiring, teaching and promotion. Hence, it is not merely ethereal set of disconnected ideologies doing battle on campus, but rather the "increasing disarray" of liberal universities is also connected to real, practical policies that

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72 Three Rival Versions, 223
73 Three Rival Versions, 224

coerce a consensus.[74]

In his more recent work, we read:

> So dialogue rescues us both from inadequate scrutiny of the grounds for our beliefs and from insufficient awareness of the fact that our answers to questions are contested by others. By so doing dialogue returns us to our condition as reflective questioning and self-questioning animals, rather than as those helplessly in the grip of their own particular beliefs. Philosophical dialogue is a remedy for that loss of questioning and self-questioning which characterizes so much of belief in secularized societies, whether it is the unreflective and complacent unbelief of those who are tacitly and complacently dismissive of religious belief or the unreflective and complacent loud-mouthed belief of fundamentalists of every faith.[75]

Thus, the anti-modern tenor of his earlier academic work has been overthrown by a liberalism that is not even being restated. It is uttered in its official form. MacIntyre becomes an example of his own critique. As a young man, he fumed at the refusal of hacks to stand with Nagy. Today, the rewards and prestige of decades in academia have forced him to admit a debt that requires him to maintain the vaguely liberal status-quo.

Apart from those considerations, MacIntyre's basic

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74 Three Rival Versions, 225
75 Ends of Phil Inquiry, 140

conception of human reason comes down to this: When no objective standard for moral action exists (or believed to exist), all that remains is power. If truth clams are not at issue, then language use, meaning and double-speak is also acceptable and expected. Without truth, MacIntyre says that power is all that remains and is all that could remain. It succeeds because it is successful.

The problem is that if the modernist idea has failed and the medieval idea is hardly known, how fair was the "battle" between medieval and modern in the time of Hobbes? The promises made by the Newtonians, followers of Bacon and the Royal Society did not come true. This might mean they were wrong in the first place. This truth also means that the medieval idea has been slandered and without it, nothing but Nietzschian flux and existential dementia remains.[76]

MacIntyre writes in a very succinct way perfectly suited for any conclusion:

> The conclusion to which the argument so far has led is not only that it is out of the debates, conflicts, and enquiry of socially embodied, historically contingent traditions that contentions regarding practical rationality and justice are advanced, modified, abandoned, or replaced, but that there is no other way to engage in the formulation, elaboration, rational justification, and criticism of accounts of practical rationality and justice except from within some one particular tradition in conversation, cooperation, and conflict with

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76 Virtue 114

those who inhabit the same tradition. There
is no standing ground, no place for enquiry,
no way to engage in the practices of
advancing, evaluating, accepting, and
rejecting reasoned argument apart from that
which is provided by some particular
tradition or other.[77]

The argument of this elongated essay has been – in effect – that MacIntyre, in saying this, has said absolutely nothing. If anything, the above states that shared meanings are presupposed in any moral discussion. Much of his writing is taken up in offering reassuring exceptions to all this, speaking of the battles, confrontations and changes in these ethereal "traditions." The sources of these debates remains obscure.

Either MacIntyre accepts the nature of the ethnic nation and its historical struggles within a civilization as the foundation for thought, or he falls into liberalism nominalism and arbitrariness. His attempts to use "traditionalist" rhetoric while ensuring his professional reputation has destroyed his theory. His notoriety as an anti-modern or "Thomist" are wildly exaggerated.

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77 Whose Justice, 350

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