Alasdair MacIntyre's Views and Biological Ethics
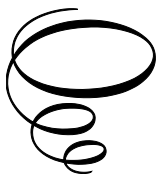
Alasdair MacIntyre's Views and Biological Ethics:

Exploring the Consistency

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PART THREE: MACINTYRE'S VIEWS AND BIOLOGICAL ETHICS: THE POINTS
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ABBREVIATIONS

a.	*articulus (article)*
AV	*After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*
DED	*Debunking Evolutionary Debunking*
DMA	*Dilemma Argument*
DRA	*Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*
DTE	*Darwin's Theory of Evolution*
EDM	*Evolutionary Debunking of Morality*
GDA	*Genealogical Debunking Argument*
HA	*The History of Animals*
IOQ	*The is-ought question*
lect.	*lecture*
MA	*On the Movement of Animals*
NE	*Nicomachean Ethics*
OHN	*On Human Nature*
PA	*Parts of Animals*
q.	*quaestio (question)*
SHE	*A Short History of Ethics*
ST	*The Summa Theologica*
TDM	*The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex: Volume 1*
TFE	*Touchstone for Ethics*
TRV	*Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*
WJWR	*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

INTRODUCTION

The broad context of this book is the field of virtue ethics. The origins of virtue ethics are traced all the way back to Plato and Aristotle. During the medieval period, Aquinas was a prominent philosopher of this field. He integrated the perspectives of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine and developed an account that emphasized the unity of the virtues[1]. Nevertheless, in the course of history, virtue ethics remained largely in the background during discussions on moral philosophy[2]. The significance of virtue ethics received a further setback during the period of Renaissance because of Kant, Hume, and Nietzsche[3]. But in the contemporary period, a paper published in 1958 by G.E.M. Anscombe, titled "Modern Moral Philosophy", brought virtue ethics back into prominence. In this paper, Anscombe proposed to abandon the concepts of moral obligation, moral duty, and the moral sense of ought, as these concepts did not respond adequately to contemporary moral problems[4]. Instead, Anscombe argued for a more central place for virtue in moral philosophy[5]. Some other philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Peter Geach, Martha Nussbaum and Alasdair MacIntyre have also made a substantial contribution to virtue ethics in the contemporary period. From among these philosophers, I have explored the thought of Alasdair MacIntyre in this book. I have in particular discussed MacIntyre's views on practical rationality.

A biographical sketch and intellectual journey in brief

With a view to understanding better MacIntyre's views on practical rationality, we shall consider his biography briefly, and, more importantly, we shall briefly track the overall development of his philosophical thought

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[1] For details, see A. MACINTYRE, «Virtue Ethics» in C.B. BECKER – L.C. BECKER, ed., *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 1757-1763.

[2] Many philosophers use the terms «ethics» and «moral philosophy» almost interchangeably. For details, see P. SINGER, «Ethics».

[3] For details, see A. MACINTYRE, «Virtue Ethics» in C.B. BECKER – L.C. BECKER, ed., *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 1757-1763.

[4] G.E.M. ANSCOMBE, «Modern Moral Philosophy», 1.

[5] N. ATHANASSOULIS, «Virtue Ethics».

right from the early years till the end of his academic life. MacIntyre was born in Glasgow on January 12, 1929, but was raised primarily in London[6]. He was baptised a Presbyterian, but his upbringing was largely non-denominational Christian. He graduated from Queen Mary College of the University of London. During his university years, MacIntyre found Marxist thought interesting and became actively involved in the activities of the Communist Party. Though he eventually grew disillusioned with the party, his association with Marxism continued. After his graduation, MacIntyre pursued an MA programme at the University of Manchester. After this programme, MacIntyre became an assistant lecturer at the same University, thus marking the start of his academic career. This career now spans about six decades and includes positions at prominent Universities, as well as numerous publications in the form of articles, books, and book reviews. MacIntyre moved to Notre Dame University in 2000 and retired in 2010 but continues to be based at the same University (at the time of the writing of this book).

MacIntyre, though primarily connected to the field of moral and political philosophy, has an inter-disciplinary approach in his works. Thus, in those works he draws on sociology and philosophy of the social sciences, as well as from Greek and Latin classical literature[7]. This inter-disciplinary approach will be clearly demonstrated when we will discuss MacIntyre's views on practical rationality in chapters I and II. MacIntyre's intellectual journey is interesting. MacIntyre himself describes this journey thus:

> My life as an academic philosopher falls into three parts. The twenty-two years from 1949, when I became a graduate student of philosophy at Manchester University, until 1971… From 1971, shortly after I emigrated to the United States, until 1977 was an interim period of sometimes painfully self-critical reflection. . . . From 1977 onwards I have been engaged in a single project to which After Virtue [1981], Whose Justice? Which Rationality? [1988], and Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry [1990] are central[8].

From 1977 onwards, namely, during the third part of his intellectual journey, MacIntyre rediscovered the significance of Aristotle. He also returned to the Christian faith and became convinced of Thomism, closely

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[6] The biographical details of MacIntyre cited in the paragraph are from T.D. D'ANDREA, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre*, xvi-xviii.

[7] C.S. LUTZ, «Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre (1929-   )».

[8] A. MACINTYRE, «An Interview for *Cogito*», in K. KNIGHT, ed., *The MacIntyre Reader*, 268-269.

following the Thomistic interpretation of Aristotle. MacIntyre holds
Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle in such high regard that he remarks,
"Aquinas was in some respects a better Aristotelian than Aristotle, that not
only was he an excellent interpreter of Aristotle's texts, but that he had been
able to extend and deepen both Aristotle's metaphysical and moral
inquiries"[9]. Thus, looking at MacIntyre's intellectual journey, one is struck
by the number of conversions that MacIntyre went through. He began as a
Marxist and a liberal Protestant philosopher of religion, then became an
atheist and a historian of ethics, and eventually ended up becoming a
Catholic Thomist[10].

A number of authors and philosophers have influenced MacIntyre's
thought, ranging from those of the ancient period right till those of the
modern one. Among these, Aristotle and Aquinas undoubtedly occupy a
prominent place, as seen above. Besides these two philosophers, some other
significant philosophers who have influenced MacIntyre are Karl Marx,
Wittgenstein, and R.G. Collingwood. Marxism especially has played a key
role in helping MacIntyre to highlight the essentially particular characteristic
of morality, namely, that every morality "is the morality of some particular
social group, embodied and lived out in the life and history of that group"[11].
Marxism also helped MacIntyre to make a scathing critique of the dangers
of modern liberalism, which promises individual freedom but leads to the
impoverishment of social and cultural relationships in the process[12].
MacIntyre questions the relevance of such a liberalism which attributes
excessive importance to individual freedom and which insists that human
identity is essentially individual rather than social[13]. For, according to
MacIntyre, human identity is nurtured within a network of social
relationships and every human being is obliged to promote the community
good while achieving his own. Moreover, there is no conflict between
individual good and community good in the MacIntyrean worldview. In
these views of MacIntyre, one clearly sees the influence of Marx, besides
those of Aristotle and Aquinas.

Marx's influence on MacIntyre is also seen in the importance MacIntyre
attaches to the theoretical and the practical aspects of rationality. Just as for

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[9] A. MacIntyre, *AV*, x.
[10] C.S. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism,
and Philosophy*, 2.
[11] A. MacIntyre, «Nietzsche or Aristotle?» in G. Borradori, ed., *The American
Philosopher: Conversations with Quine, Davidson, Putnam, Nozick, Danto, Rorty,
Cavell, MacIntyre, and Kuhn*, 143.
[12] A. MacIntyre, «Nietzsche or Aristotle?», 143.
[13] C.S. Lutz, «Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre (1929-   )».

Marx there is a reciprocal relation between theory and practice[14], for MacIntyre, too, both of the above aspects are equally important and inter-related. We shall consider the details of this inter-relatedness in chapter I. MacIntyre also agrees with Marx's critique of philosophy when philosophy turns into a purely contemplative activity. MacIntyre is convinced that philosophical thought emerges from concrete experiences and situations faced by human beings. There is an inseparable relationship between philosophy and life according to MacIntyre. Therefore, he is in strong disagreement with those by whom philosophy is "understood as detached second-order commentary upon first-order judgments and activity"[15].

The above influence of Marx on MacIntyre's thought notwithstanding, MacIntyre does not hesitate to make a critique of Marxism, pointing out its limitations. One of the most significant limitations that MacIntyre identifies in Marxism is that there is a subtle form of radical individualism in Marxism, despite its claims to be communitarian[16]. MacIntyre says this because Marx is completely silent about how exactly the individual will form relationships with others in the classless society. Given this silence, MacIntyre sarcastically refers to this individual characterized by Marx as a "socialized Robinson Crusoe"[17]. MacIntyre is also critical of the point that Marxism does not provide a viable alternative political and economic system to replace capitalism, thereby showing Marxism to be a failed political practice[18]. He also points out some other limitations of Marxism[19].

Considering the above points, one sees that MacIntyre's view of Marxism includes positive elements as well as elements of criticism. The following words aptly summarize MacIntyre's view of Marxism: "For I too not only take it that Marxism is exhausted as a *political* tradition,… this does not at all imply that Marxism is not still one of the richest sources of ideas about modern society…"[20]. These words simultaneously show the appreciation and objection with which MacIntyre considered Marxism.

As regards the process that MacIntyre went through in his intellectual journey, though the process went through a number of conversions, according to C.S. Lutz, two things remained constant through these

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[14] T.D. D'ANDREA, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 92.

[15] A. MACINTYRE, «Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues and Goods», 3.

[16] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 261.

[17] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 261.

[18] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 262.

[19] For details, see A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 261-262.

[20] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 262.

conversions. The first is MacIntyre's critique of modern normative ethics and the second is the significance MacIntyre attributes to the communitarian dimension in developing moral rational agents[21]. As regards the reason for the above conversions, it is the intellectual honesty which relentlessly stimulated MacIntyre to achieve coherence and consistency in his beliefs and to avoid contradictions. MacIntyre points out the danger of holding contradictory beliefs through these words: "[I]f you assert a contradiction, you are thereby committed to asserting anything whatsoever"[22]. The relentless quest for coherence and consistency in his beliefs also led MacIntyre to seriously reconsider some significant concepts of moral enquiry, practical reasoning or practical rationality[23] being one such concept.

Scope of the research

Practical rationality could be considered one of the core concepts in MacIntyre's ethics. A salient characteristic of MacIntyre's theory of practical rationality is that rationality is rooted in a tradition[24]. We shall consider the details of this theory in chapter I. For now, what is sufficient to consider is the emphasis which MacIntyre lays on the historical dimension for the development of practical rationality. This emphasis leads MacIntyre to reflect further, and, consequently, MacIntyre proposes that the starting point of the development of practical rationality is our initial animal condition[25]. He discusses this proposal in one of his later works, titled *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. In making this proposal, MacIntyre deviates from the conventional understanding of history. He subscribes to Darwin's theory of evolution to corroborate this deviation. Darwin has demonstrated that "human history is the natural history of one more animal species and that to understand such a history comparison with the history of certain other animal species may always be

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[21] C.S. LUTZ, «Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre (1929-   )».

[22] A. MACINTYRE, «Nietzsche or Aristotle?», 140.

[23] MacIntyre uses «practical reasoning» and «practical rationality» interchangeably in his works. Often, he uses only «rationality» or «reasoning» to refer to the same concept. But there are also some instances when MacIntyre uses «rationality» in reference to both the theoretical and the practical aspects of rationality. Such usage can cause confusion. Therefore, to ensure clarity, whenever MacIntyre writes «rationality» but intends «practical rationality», I will cite the same as practical rationality or as practical reasoning.

[24] A. MACINTYRE, *WJWR*, 7.

[25] A. MACINTYRE, *DRA*, x.

and often is necessary"[26]. Thus, MacIntyre interprets Darwin's theory as having a unified view of history. MacIntyre applies the above view of history to his theory of practical rationality.

We have now two aspects as regards practical rationality: the biological, natural aspect and the aspect of practical rationality as a tradition. It would be appropriate to say that the former aspect of MacIntyre's practical rationality represents nature, while the latter aspect represents culture. This statement inevitably reminds us of one of the prominent debates in philosophy, namely, that of nature versus nurture. Therefore, the question that arises is whether it is possible to bridge the gap between the two.

MacIntyre himself does not see any conflict between the two aspects. He realized that, in the earlier part of his career, he had committed an error by discussing an ethics that was independent of biology[27]. He sought to correct this error in *DRA* by reflecting on the human condition of dependence, as well as on animal rationality. Thus, he integrated the point of "human animality"[28] into his account of practical rationality. He maintains that our rationality as thinking beings is founded upon, but not completely determined by, our animality; rationality and animality are related to each other[29]. This inclusion of the biological aspect is, therefore, not a negation of the traditional aspect. On the contrary, the biological aspect reinforces the social character of human life, pointing to our dependence on other human beings on the way to becoming practical reasoners[30]. Thus, the two aspects of practical rationality are compatible with each other.

Now, despite discussing the connection between ethics and biology in *DRA*, MacIntyre does not explore this connection further on the basis of Darwin's theory of evolution. Thus, though the evolutionary dimension is closely connected to the biological dimension, MacIntyre has hardly discussed the former. The book attempts to study this connection. Thus, the principal question of the book is this: What are the points of connection between MacIntyre's theory of practical rationality and ethics based on Darwin's theory of evolution (DTE)? In other words, to what extent is MacIntyre's theory of practical rationality consistent with ethics based on DTE?

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[26] A. MacIntyre, *DRA*, 11-12.

[27] A. MacIntyre, *DRA*, x.

[28] A. MacIntyre, *DRA*, 5.

[29] A. MacIntyre, *DRA*, 5.

[30] J. Kinsey, «Review of Fran O'Rourke (ed.), *What Happened in and to Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century? – Philosophical Essays in Honor of Alasdair MacIntyre*», 151.

Research methodology and structure of the book

In considering the connection between MacIntyre's theory of practical rationality and ethics based on DTE, it is important to clarify that there is no single ethical philosophy based on DTE. On the contrary, there are diverse ways in which ethical norms and principles have been derived from DTE. These diverse ways are studied in-depth particularly in the fields of evolutionary ethics and human sociobiology. It is beyond the scope of the book to make an in-depth study of these various versions of evolutionary ethics. Therefore, we will primarily focus on the version of evolutionary ethics which is non-reductionist, non-deterministic, and does not debunk objective morality. As regards the version of evolutionary ethics which is reductionist and relativistic, we will only discuss the significant points with a view to demonstrating the limitations of such a version. Accordingly, the book is divided into three parts, besides the introduction and the conclusion. The focus of the first part is on understanding MacIntyre's theory of practical rationality. This part consists of three chapters. The second part of the book focuses on ethics based on DTE. This part also consists of three chapters. The third and concluding part of the book responds to the principal question of the book posed above by synthesising the major findings of the first two parts. This part consists of two chapters.

I have broadly followed the research methodology of historical enquiry from the philosophical perspective, since MacIntyre himself has largely followed such an approach in his writings. The historical dimension is evidently prominent in the evolutionary framework, too. Chapter I looks at how MacIntyre, as a NeoAristotelian, preserves the essential features of Aristotle's theory in his account of practical rationality. Nevertheless, he also rejects some elements of this theory, particularly Aristotle's exclusion of women and slaves. Then the chapter explores the inseparable connection between the virtues and practical rationality. Then the three stages in the development of the core concept of virtue, namely, practices, the narrative unity of life, and tradition, are discussed. Following this discussion, an historical enquiry is conducted as to how the dialectical process unfolds in practical rationality through a concrete example, namely, that of Aquinas. This enquiry looks at how Aquinas brilliantly reconciled two incompatible rival moral traditions, namely, that of Aristotle and that of Augustine, and redefined practical rationality in the process. A conceptual understanding of the dialectical process which includes MacIntyre's interpretation of the first principles follows the enquiry. The chapter also considers both the tradition-constituted and the tradition-constitutive aspects of MacIntyre's rational

enquiry. Both of these complementary aspects make MacIntyre's theory of practical rationality a tradition-dependent enquiry[31].

Chapter II considers MacIntyre's views on practical rationality, which concern primarily the biological nature of human beings. The term which MacIntyre uses to refer to the biological aspect of practical rationality is "animal rationality". MacIntyre integrates animal rationality into his earlier views on practical rationality to address the incoherencies and inadequacies in those views. Nevertheless, this integration does not lead to a new theory of practical rationality. Rather, there is a fundamental continuity between his early views that consider practical rationality as a tradition-dependent enquiry and his later attention to animal rationality. One of the significant ways in which MacIntyre brings about this continuity is by proposing that the starting point for the development of practical rationality is our initial animal condition. Thus, the proposal considers the possibility of a biological foundation for practical rationality. The chapter also discusses MacIntyre's views on human dependence and human disability, both of which are included in the animal condition of human beings. The chapter then shows how the virtues of care and just generosity (*misericordia*) are related to human dependence and human disability. On account of this relation, MacIntyre calls these "virtues of acknowledged dependence" and proposes to add them to the catalogue of traditional virtues.

Chapter III discusses three points of criticism as regards MacIntyre's theory of practical rationality. The first point is that MacIntyre's theory entails moral relativism. The second point is that MacIntyre's philosophy is not Thomism. The third point is that MacIntyre's views are communitarian. The chapter discusses the views of representative authors who raise the above points. The chapter then discusses the response to these points as given by MacIntyre, as well as that by Lutz, who supports MacIntyre's views. Besides these responses, I propose how a unified account of practical rationality, namely, an account which integrates both the aspects of tradition and biology, could contribute to addressing the relativist critique made with regard to MacIntyre's theory. Such an account could also confront the critique that MacIntyre's philosophy is not Thomism because this account highlights the point that, though practical rationality is tradition-dependent, it is also universal through the biological dimension.

With chapter IV, the second part of the book begins and the focus shifts to evolutionary ethics. The chapter provides us with an adequate understanding

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[31] C.S. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism, and Philosophy*, 149. Though this is Lutz's description of MacIntyre's theory, I think that the description aptly expresses the essence of MacIntyre's theory. Therefore, I subscribe to the same.

about the origins of evolutionary ethics and the major points in favour of and against having an evolutionary approach towards morality. It presents a brief historical overview of evolutionary ethics from a thematic perspective, the purpose of which is to understand the background for the diversity of views that characterizes current evolutionary ethics. The chapter helps to understand this background through considering the views of the various authors, beginning from the pioneers, such as Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, and continuing through the others, such as Henry Sidgwick, Peter Kropotkin, Julian Huxley, and G.E. Moore.

Chapter V addresses the contingency challenge, which is expressed through the following question: Does evolutionary ethics debunk objective morality? A related question that the chapter considers is this: Is morality purely an adaptational phenomenon determined by biological natural selection? Another way of expressing the same question is this: Do our genes totally determine the way we perceive morality today? The chapter studies the major arguments through which various authors claim that morality is adaptational and genetically determined and that evolutionary ethics debunks objective morality. The chapter then discusses the views of authors who argue against human morality being merely adaptational or genetically determined. This discussion is followed by one which shows how evolutionary ethics does not debunk objective morality.

In discussing the biological roots of human morality, chapter VI aims to explore the characteristics shared between humans and some social species of intelligent animals in the sphere of morality. This exploration is done from two perspectives, namely, the proto-morality perspective and the neurobiological perspective. The third and final part of the book begins with chapter VII. The chapter considers the points of connection between Aristotelian and evolutionary ethics. Considering this connection is significant because MacIntyre acknowledges himself a NeoAristotelian. The points of connection are considered in the areas of desire, virtue, and teleology.

The final chapter of the book, namely, chapter VIII, extends the scope of chapter VII and explores the connection between MacIntyre's theory of practical rationality and biological ethics. The chapter also looks at some differences between MacIntyre's views and those of biological ethics. Considering both the points of connection and difference, the chapter then concludes by responding to the principal question of the book posed above.

PART ONE:

MACINYTRE'S VIEWS ON PRACTICAL RATIONALITY

CHAPTER I

MACINTYRE'S EARLY VIEWS ON PRACTICAL RATIONALITY

Practical reasoning or practical rationality could be considered one of the core concepts in MacIntyre's ethics. One can observe two stages in the development of MacIntyre's theory of practical rationality. In the first stage, MacIntyre explored practical rationality as a tradition. MacIntyre has primarily expressed this aspect of practical rationality in *AV* and *WJWR* and has further reflected on this aspect in many articles. We could consider this stage, therefore, as that of MacIntyre's early views on practical rationality. Nevertheless, as his academic career progressed, he realized that his theory did not take into account the biological dimension, the animal nature of human beings. The significance of this dimension led MacIntyre to incorporate the biological aspect into his theory of practical rationality. Thus began the second stage of MacIntyre's theory, which can be considered that of his later views on practical rationality. We shall discuss the later views in the next chapter while in this chapter, we shall consider MacIntyre's early views.

At the outset it is important to note that, though MacIntyre discusses primarily practical rationality, he considers as significant both the theoretical and practical aspects of rationality and claims that these aspects are inter-related in the Aristotelian Thomistic framework. The philosophical theoretical part enables us to identify and discuss about the *telos*, and the practical part enables us to identify the right action in each particular time and place[1]. MacIntyre stresses further the inter-relatedness between the two parts: "There is then no form of philosophical enquiry… which is not practical in its implications, just as there is no practical enquiry which is not philosophical in its presuppositions"[2].

As MacIntyre is a NeoAristotelian, we shall begin by looking at the basic features of Aristotelian ethics which MacIntyre has incorporated into his theory. Then we shall discuss the inseparable connection between the

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[1] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 162.
[2] A. MACINTYRE, *TRV*, 128.

virtues and practical rationality. This discussion will inevitably include two
key concepts of MacIntyre's theory, namely, "practices" and the "narrative
unity of life". Then we shall discuss the central point of MacIntyre's theory
of practical rationality, namely, rationality as a "tradition". We shall see
how MacIntyre discusses practical rationality as a tradition-dependent
enquiry (p. 8). We shall also consider how practical rationality is a
dialectical process, because of which the possibility of modifying and
refining the principles of practical rationality always remains open.

1.1 The basic Aristotelian features of MacIntyre's theory

MacIntyre interprets Aristotle as having a Grand End conception of
practical reasoning[3]. According to this conception, human beings justify
their actions rationally by evaluating their decisions against the ultimate
standard required for *eudaimonia*[4]. MacIntyre expresses this conception
thus: "[T]he conception of a single, albeit perhaps complex, supreme good
is central to Aristotle's account of practical rationality"[5]. In *NE*, Aristotle
expresses this conception in the following words:

> In all the states of character we have mentioned, as in all other matters, there
> is a mark to which the man who has the rule looks, and heightens or relaxes
> his activity accordingly, and there is a standard which determines the mean
> states which we say are intermediate between excess and defect, being in
> accordance with the right rule[6].

Now the *telos* of human life is so inextricably linked to the supreme good
that Aristotle equates the two: "[S]ince the end, i.e., what is best, is of such
and such…"[7]. The teleological dimension is so significant that MacIntyre
describes Aristotelian ethics as a threefold scheme in which "human-nature-
as-it-happens-to-be" has the possibility of transforming itself and of
realizing its *telos* through the precepts of practical reason and experience[8].
Each of the three elements of the scheme requires the other two for a clearer

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[3] C.J. WOLFE in «Alasdair MacIntyre on the Grand End Conception of Practical
Reasoning» clarifies that some interpreters of Aristotle prefer to use *summum bonum*
instead of «Grand End». Nevertheless, like Wolfe, I prefer to use «Grand End».
[4] C.J. WOLFE, «Alasdair MacIntyre on the Grand End Conception of Practical
Reasoning», 312.
[5] A. MACINTYRE, *WJWR*, 133.
[6] ARISTOTLE, *NE*, 1138b20-22.
[7] ARISTOTLE, *NE*, 1144a32-33.
[8] Unless otherwise stated, the views of MacIntyre cited in the paragraph are from his
AV, 52-53.

understanding of its status and function. Thus, ethics is envisaged as a human endeavour to move from potentiality to act. The virtues play an indispensable role in this movement, because without the virtues one cannot engage in sound practical reasoning[9]. We shall explore the significance of the virtues in the next section. As for the *telos* of human life, it is inextricably linked to the specificity of human nature in Aristotle's worldview. Human beings move towards a specific *telos* on account of their nature[10]. Thus, Aristotle's ethics is based on his metaphysical biology[11].

Nevertheless, MacIntyre points out a limitation in Aristotle's ethics, as well as in his metaphysical biology, namely, that Aristotle does not consider women and slaves within his politico-ethical framework. Aristotelian ethics fails to take into account the radical social and ideological conflict that existed in society then[12]. MacIntyre terms this failure the "blindness of Aristotle"[13]. This blindness was partially due to Aristotle's failure to realize the influence of his culture on his thought. Under this influence, Aristotle considered women and slaves as having a nature different from that of Greeks and that the nature of each was fixed. MacIntyre says that this limitation brings out the ahistorical character of Aristotle's understanding of human nature, a failing that MacIntyre opposes. Thus, being a NeoAristotelian does not prevent MacIntyre from pointing out these limitations in Aristotle's ethics and in Aristotle's metaphysical biology.

1.2 The nature of the virtues

One of the significant features of MacIntyre's theory is the inseparable connection between practical rationality and the virtues. MacIntyre is firmly convinced about this connection. He claims, "There is no practical rationality then without the virtues of character… Only the virtuous are able to argue soundly to those conclusions which are their actions, and this is so in consequence of two distinct parts that the virtues play and have played in their lives"[14]. Therefore, we shall discuss firstly MacIntyre's perspective about the virtues.

The significance of the virtues in MacIntyre's theory is hardly surprising because MacIntyre considers himself a philosopher of virtue ethics, following the tradition of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. In discussing the

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[9] A. MacIntyre, *DRA*, 106-107.
[10] A. MacIntyre, *AV*, 148.
[11] A. MacIntyre, *AV*, 148.
[12] K. Knight, *The MacIntyre Reader*, 10.
[13] The views of MacIntyre cited in the paragraph are from his *AV*, 159, 162.
[14] A. MacIntyre, *WJWR*, 136.

virtues, MacIntyre highlights the social, cultural, and historical factors that contribute to understanding the virtues. In order to do this, in *AV* MacIntyre selects five diverse writings of various times and places and shows how these writings formulate lists of virtues that differ not only among themselves but also from a modern list of virtues[15]. MacIntyre goes a step further and shows not only that the above writings have a different list of virtues but also that the meaning of virtue itself differs among them. For Homer, "virtue is a quality the manifestation of which enables someone to do exactly what their well-defined social role requires"[16]. But according to Aristotle, virtue is a means to an end, namely, the *telos* of human beings. The New Testament has a similar understanding, namely, that virtue is a "quality the exercise of which leads to the achievement of the human *telos*"[17]. Now, the relationship of the means to the end is internal for both Aristotle and the New Testament, whereas for Benjamin Franklin the means-end relationship is external, due to which virtue has a utilitarian character. For Franklin virtue "is a quality which has utility in achieving earthly and heavenly success"[18]. Thus, we have different conceptions of virtue, and this difference once again underlines the influence of the historical, cultural, and social factors in the conceptualization of virtue.

Nevertheless, MacIntyre proposes that it is still possible to have a core concept of virtue despite these differences, with the origins of this concept being essentially Aristotelian. One of these essential Aristotelian characteristics shared by MacIntyre is the conviction that virtue has the element of continuity, and thus virtue is about the virtuous person instead of about virtuous acts[19]. The continuity refers to the diachronic identity of the virtuous person that does not change. Some aspects of the person inevitably change with the passage of time but the identity of the person remains the same, these changes notwithstanding. The same virtuous person therefore acts virtuously in multiple, particular situations[20].

MacIntyre develops further this aspect of virtue, as something extended in time, as a habit, through the key concepts of practice, narrative, and tradition. MacIntyre considers these three concepts as stages in the development of a core concept of virtue, with each stage having its own

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[15] For details, see A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 181-183.

[16] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 183-184.

[17] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 184.

[18] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 185.

[19] L. CARUANA, *Science and Virtue: An Essay on the Impact of the Scientific Mentality on Moral Character*, 4.

[20] L. CARUANA, *Science and Virtue: An Essay on the Impact of the Scientific Mentality on Moral Character*, 4.

conceptual background[21]. These stages are closely connected to each other. Each later stage can modify an earlier stage, and each earlier stage is an essential constituent of a later stage. Thus, the stages are neither compartmentalized nor independent within themselves. On the contrary, these stages could be considered as having a common socially constituted context, with the three stages corresponding to three levels of social organization[22]. Thus, MacIntyre's description of this layered social world of practices, the narrative unity of human life, and tradition provide a framework for exercising the virtues[23]. Though each stage contributes to the development of a core concept of virtue, each stage also has an independent connection with the virtues. Therefore, in discussing the stages, I shall also consider the connection of each of these stages with the virtues. Nevertheless, in this section we shall discuss only the first two stages. The third stage, namely, that of tradition, will be discussed in a separate section and more elaborately because, as mentioned before, one of the main themes of this book is to explore practical rationality as a tradition. I will also look at the connection between tradition and the virtues in that particular section. We begin with the first stage, namely, that of practice.

Practices

MacIntyre defines "practice" in the following words: "By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized…"[24]. MacIntyre's perspective of practice is therefore partially different from the conventional sense. Practice could be described as a complex of specific activities, all of which together contribute to the development of that particular practice. Playing football, agriculture, and architecture are examples of practices, and the specific activities within these practices are throwing a football, planting turnips, and bricklaying, respectively[25]. Now both internal and external goods can be achieved by engaging in a practice. What distinguishes internal from external goods is that, while there are alternative ways to achieve external goods, the goods internal to the practice can be achieved only by engaging in that particular

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[21] Unless otherwise specified, the views of MacIntyre cited in the paragraph are from his *AV*, 186-187.

[22] D. SOLOMON, «MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy» in M.C. MURPHY, ed., *Alasdair MacIntyre*, 138.

[23] D. SOLOMON, «MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy», 140.

[24] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 187.

[25] The views of MacIntyre cited in the paragraph are from his *AV*, 188-191.

practice. In other words, internal goods can be defined only in terms of the activity of a practice, while external goods can be defined without reference to the particularities of a practice[26]. For example, in chess the persistent attempts to improve, excel, and contribute creatively to the game are examples of internal goods. On the other hand, by playing chess, one could also achieve wealth, social status, and power, but these are examples of external goods as these can be achieved in alternative ways. The dedication of one's entire life to the development of a practice is also an internal good. Another significant difference between external and internal goods is that the achievement of external goods is only for individual benefit, but the achievement of internal goods benefits the whole community which participates in the practice. Practices also presuppose both the existence of rules and obedience to these rules. They also presuppose obedience to authority. Initiation into a practice requires obedience to these rules and authorities and acceptance of one's incapacity, which acceptance will allow one the openness to learn and to be corrected.

    MacIntyre points out two significant characteristics of practices. Firstly, practices require the exercise of technical skills but should not be identified merely with these skills, because practices do not have a specific goal or goals that are fixed for all time[27]. Rather, the goals themselves keep changing with the passage of time. For example, painting or physics does not have a specific goal or a goal that is unchanging for all time. Despite the multitude of paintings and despite the vast knowledge acquired in physics until the present day, creativity in painting and research in physics continues and will continue precisely because these practices do not have a fixed goal. What also distinguishes a practice from other skills and techniques is that practices are oriented towards the achievement of internal goods and that this achievement is possible only through the practice itself[28]. As various practitioners contribute to the development of a practice with the passage of time, every practice develops its own history due to which the practitioners of the present have a relationship not only among themselves but also with those of the past. The second significant characteristic of practice is that practices should not be confused with institutions. Though institutions are required for practices to sustain themselves in the long run, the objective of institutions could contradict that of practices, because institutions are

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[26] M.C. MURPHY, «MacIntyre's Political Philosophy» in M.C. MURPHY, ed., *Alasdair MacIntyre*, 173.

[27] Unless otherwise stated, the views of MacIntyre cited in the paragraph are from his *AV*, 193-194.

[28] J. PORTER, «Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre» in M.C. MURPHY, ed., *Alasdair MacIntyre*, 40.

essentially concerned with the achievement of external goods such as money, power, and status. This conflict of interests between practices and institutions brings us to the connection between practices and virtues. Nevertheless, before discussing this connection, we shall briefly consider the issues surrounding MacIntyre's concept of practice.

A central problem as regards MacIntyre's concept of practice is the lack of clarity about the understanding of the concept itself. Do we opt for an essentialist or a nominalist perspective on practice? Even if one ignores either of these perspectives and opts for the family-resemblance model, serious difficulties remain[29]. Such an option will invariably lead to the problem of borderline cases, namely, what is the extent of similarity with other practices needed so that something will qualify to be recognized as a practice?[30] Thus, the family-resemblance option could complicate instead of simplify the issues. There are other such difficulties and controversies surrounding the concept of "practice"[31]. Therefore, it is important to bear these difficulties in mind while considering MacIntyre's concept of practice.

The connection between practices and virtues

MacIntyre points out two significant connections between practices and virtues. The first connection, as indicated above, concerns the conflict of interests between practices and institutions. The possession and exercise of the virtues play an important role in preventing the practices from falling prey to the corrupting power of institutions[32]. Thus, virtues play a contrasting role with regard to practices and institutions. The possession of the virtues is necessary to achieve the internal goods of practices, but this possession could hinder the achievement of external goods required for institutions. MacIntyre clarifies that the external goods are genuine goods and are not immoral in themselves. Nevertheless, the desire and pursuit of the external goods could lead to an attrition of the virtues, eventually causing a decline in the standards for achieving the internal goods.

The second connection between practices and virtues is in the context of relationships between the participants in practices. The virtues come into

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[29] L. CARUANA, *Holism and the Understanding of Science: Integrating the Analytical, Historical and Sociological*, 78.
[30] L. CARUANA, *Holism and the Understanding of Science: Integrating the Analytical, Historical and Sociological*, 78.
[31] For details, see L. CARUANA, *Holism and the Understanding of Science: Integrating the Analytical, Historical and Sociological*, 74-90; see also S. TURNER, *The Social Theory of Practices: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge and Presuppositions*.
[32] The views of MacIntyre cited in the paragraph are from his *AV*, 194-196.

play precisely because a person engaged in a practice is inevitably related to other practitioners. Thus, virtues like justice, courage, and truthfulness, among some others, enable the right kind of relationships between the practitioners, thus ensuring the achievement of goods internal to the practice[33]. On the other hand, without the virtues the achievement of goods internal to the practice would be jeopardized. For example, if dishonesty is allowed in football, then the practitioners, namely, the players and coaches, will obviously not attempt to improve and strive for excellence. Consequently, the goods internal to the practice of playing football will not be achieved. MacIntyre gives a similar example in playing chess[34]. Besides ensuring right relationships between the present participants, virtues also help to define the right relationship between the present and past participants in the practices[35]. This relationship experienced by the present participants is especially with those participants of the past whose dedication and excellence contributed to bringing the practice to its present stage of development[36].

Having discussed the connection between practices and virtues, MacIntyre insists that practices are only the first stage in understanding the concept of virtue. An account of the practices in explaining the virtues is only partial, and therefore the significance of any virtue in human life extends beyond the practices[37]. Therefore, practices cannot be identified with the virtues, nor are the qualities that they develop necessarily virtues[38]. By showing the insufficiency of practices for the exercise of the virtues, MacIntyre introduces the second stage of development of the concept of virtue, namely, the narrative unity of human life.

The narrative unity of human life

This stage assumes the "concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end"[39]. MacIntyre is emphatic about considering life in its wholeness, about considering life as a narrative. Specific actions can be intelligible in themselves, but all actions have a historical character.

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[33] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 192.

[34] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 191.

[35] D. SOLOMON, «MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy», 139.

[36] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 194.

[37] A. MACINTYRE, *AV*, 200-201.

[38] J. PORTER, «Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre», 41.

[39] Unless otherwise stated, the views of MacIntyre cited in the paragraph are from his *AV*, 205, 212.