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Aristotelianism versus Communitarianism

Abstract: Alasdair MacIntyre is an Aristotelian critic of communitarianism, which he understands to be committed to the politics of the capitalist and bureaucratic nation-state. The politics he proposes instead is based in the resistance to managerial institutions of what he calls ‘practices’, because these are schools of virtue. This shares little with the communitarianism of a Taylor or the Aristotelianism of a Gadamer. Although practices require formal institutions. MacIntyre opposes such conservative politics. Conventional accounts of a ‘liberal-communitarian debate’ in political philosophy face the dilemma that Alasdair MacIntyre, often identified as a paradigmatic communitarian, has consistently and emphatically repudiated this characterization. Although neo-Aristotelianism is sometimes seen as a philosophical warrant for communitarian politics, MacIntyre’s Aristotelianism is opposed to communitarianism. This paper explores the rationale of that opposition.

1. Communitarianisms

The term “communitarianism” was used by imaginative polemicists in the 1980s, and has been used by unimaginative textbook writers since then, to signify the criticism by a variety of Anglophone political philosophers of John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* for resting upon overly individualist premisses. Despite the synthesizing efforts of Amitai Etzioni, it does not represent a coherent philosophical position. Nor can it do so unless some one theorist is chosen as its representative. Perhaps the best Anglophone candidate for such a position is Charles Taylor, yet Taylor considers the liberal-communitarian debate to have been conducted at ‘cross-purposes’, with regard both to ‘ontological’ issues of social theory and to moral or ‘advocacy’ issues (Taylor 1989). What others call his communitarianism owes something to his Catholicism, but its philosophical sources are in Germany: Romanticism, Heidegger and, above all, Hegel. His judgement upon the liberal-communitarian debate represents a Hegelian desire to theorize a social and political reconciliation of self-conscious individuals with the greater universality of particular political communities. Taylor therefore locates himself between the positions of liberalism and communitarianism.

We need, then, to look elsewhere for an authentic communitarianism, and Taylor would probably point us first to Romanticism’s celebration of the social constitution of the self and of the self’s expression of itself as so constituted, including its patriotic identification with its particular community in rivalry with other communities. Such Romanticism, and Hegel’s partial reflection of some of its ideas, certainly informs Taylor’s own social theory. It also informs his

most striking expression of political advocacy, his hope that a benign “politics of recognition” (Taylor 1994) between culturally distinct political groups can be conducted according to a transcultural norm.

Whereas Taylor and many others seek a compromise between communitarian particularism and liberalism’s individualist universalism, MacIntyre cites the critiques of each against the other in justifying his rejection of both (MacIntyre 1995a). What he presents as communitarianism’s insistence “that the nation itself through the institutions of the nation-state ought to be constituted to some significant degree as a community” he accuses of generating “totalitarian and other evils” (MacIntyre 1994, 302). “The philosophers of the *Volk* are Herder and Heidegger, not Aristotle.” (MacIntyre 1998a, 241) More starkly than Taylor, MacIntyre identifies the deepest philosophical roots of communitarianism as German.

The greatest recent German philosopher who might be called communitarian is Hans-Georg Gadamer, but Gadamer warranted what he called his practical philosophy by reference as much to Aristotle as to Heidegger, Hegel or Romanticism (Gadamer 1972). On Gadamer’s account, Aristotle incisively distinguished practical philosophy from the concerns of metaphysical and scientific theory and from mundane, necessary and technical concerns with productive processes. Aristotle’s philosophy of practice is concerned with free activity, and therefore with ethics and politics. This understanding of Aristotle Gadamer owes to Heidegger (Heidegger 1997). Following Heidegger’s destruction of the tradition of theoretical reflection upon human affairs, we should rehabilitate an Aristotelian philosophy of practice that does not pretend to the kind of exact and universally valid knowledge of human being claimed by the Enlightenment’s idealist and positivist heirs. A specifically practical philosophy is one that does not start from any such theoretical abstraction as that posited by Rawls but, instead, from the concrete particularity and tradition of some cultural and linguistic community. Such a communal tradition constitutes, for Gadamer, the kind of conceptual scheme and shared understandings which can provide the only real bases for ethical and political agreement.

2. Aristotelianisms

From such a hermeneutic perspective, much in *After Virtue*—the book in which MacIntyre criticized Rawls’ individualism (MacIntyre 1985, 246–52) in the name of an ‘Aristotelian tradition’—indeed appears to be more communitarian than its author admits. Although the book is subtitled “A study in moral theory”, it quickly declares that “a moral philosophy ... characteristically presupposes a sociology”, an understanding of how the philosophy’s “concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real social world” (MacIntyre 1985, 23). Nor is the book’s similarity to Gadamer’s work only in its apprehension and evaluation of individual action in terms of social practice. It also resembles Gadamer’s position in apprehending social practice in hermeneutic and historical terms, recognizing that “participants’ understanding of social and economic activity is integral to

and partially constitutive of such activities” and explaining such activities in terms of “rationally defensible explanatory narratives” (MacIntyre 1984, 254). This is an approach that deals in particularities and not the universal. It is therefore an approach which is consistent with the kind of generalizations that Aristotle admitted into the study of “human affairs”, which apply only “for the most part”, rather than with the kind of generalizations made by “the modern social scientist” (MacIntyre 1985, 159). Nor is this all, as there are good reasons to suppose that MacIntyre’s very identification of the argument of *After Virtue* as ‘Aristotelian’ owes much to his rereading of *Wahrheit und Methode* (Knight 2006).

There is, nonetheless, a fundamental difference between the interpretations of Aristotle by Gadamer and by MacIntyre. MacIntyre does not take his understanding of Aristotle from Heidegger. Rather, his interpretation is traditional. The indirect sources of his interpretation are the representations of Aristotle’s philosophy by mediaeval scholastics and by Hegel and his successors. For the mediaevals, Aristotle’s practical philosophy was grounded in his theoretical philosophy. To this, Hegel (following Wolff and Kant) added that central to this theoretical philosophy is the idea of teleology. The most important of MacIntyre’s more proximate sources was G. E. M. Anscombe. MacIntyre took from her the idea that much practical reasoning may be understood in terms the kind of ‘practical syllogism’ that produces not a mere conclusion but a real action (Anscombe 1957). Such practical reasoning is not a matter of deliberation but of character. One acts in a certain way because one is the kind of person one is. One does not calculate what one has to gain or lose by so acting; one acts because one knows that it is the right thing to do. This understanding of Aristotle’s ethics supports another idea that he took from her: that modern, ‘consequentialist’ moral philosophy should be challenged by a conceptually clarified virtue ethics (Anscombe 1957; 1981). In apprehending these ideas, MacIntyre was initiated into a tradition of moral philosophy the canonic figures of which are Aristotle and Aquinas. His appropriation of Aristotle in *After Virtue* differs from Gadamer’s in being a philosophical appropriation of some of Aristotle’s ethical arguments rather than an attempted philological appropriation of Aristotle’s entire conceptual scheme of practical philosophy. This said, Gadamer’s Heideggerian understanding of Aristotle was important to MacIntyre at least in suggesting to him the possibility of calling a moral theory ‘Aristotelian’ whilst repudiating that ‘metaphysical biology’ which was the traditional ‘presupposition’ of Aristotelianism’s ethics and politics. And of course—as another of Heidegger’s students, Hannah Arendt, would have observed—in addressing ‘the social’ at all, Gadamer and MacIntyre alike expose their distance from Aristotle.

After Virtue’s own ‘explanatory narrative’ of the early modern abandonment of Aristotelian practical philosophy blames it upon that practical philosophy’s basis in a discredited, metaphysically naturalistic teleology. The philosophical task that MacIntyre presents himself with in the book is to find some alternative, ‘sociological’ basis for a teleological justification of moral precepts. This is necessary, he explains, because the Enlightenment’s failure to justify moral rules non-teleologically demonstrates the need for some new kind of teleological

justification. Such a justification will postulate some account of ‘man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature’ as the human good and *telos*, justifying moral rules and virtues as means to move from the untutored condition of ‘man-as-he-happens-to-be’ to that desirable end (MacIntyre 1985, 52). That there are great difficulties with this project of reducing teleology to a logic of means and end (Knight 2006) is already apparent from MacIntyre’s retention of an idea of ‘essential-nature’.

The sociological argument with which MacIntyre wishes to replace Aristotle’s metaphysical biology takes the form of what he describes as “the core concept of virtue”. So described, we might understand it less as a sociological “presupposition” of the “moral theory” of *After Virtue* than as constitutive of that theory. This “core concept” comprises ‘three stages in the logical development of the concept’ of a virtue. These stages are those of “a practice”, of “the narrative order of a single human life”, and of “a tradition”. “Each later stage presupposes the earlier, but not vice versa”, and each is supposed to have a “teleologically” temporal structure in the sense that it is orientated to some concept of a particular, “internal” goal and good. (MacIntyre 1985, 186–7). The virtues are human qualities that are means to these ends.

MacIntyre disregarded Heidegger’s assault upon the tradition. Instead, he chose Nietzsche as his antagonist. Nietzsche’s critique, he proposed, was well directed at the Enlightenment’s abortive project of devising a non-teleological justification of moral rules but left intact the tradition of the virtues that had been discarded in the Enlightenment.

At the time of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre’s appeal to ‘tradition’ appeared similar to that of Gadamer. It had, he insisted, nothing to do with the traditionalism of an Edmund Burke, but about Gadamer he said nothing. Had he done so, he might have allayed misunderstanding. Whereas Gadamer’s conception of tradition resembled Burke’s insofar as it was of something unitary, communal and cultural, MacIntyre’s differs from both in being pluralistic, conflictual and philosophical. As he had already explained, “conflict arises ... between traditions and ... tests the resources of each contending tradition” (MacIntyre 1977, 465).

3. Practices versus Institutions

MacIntyre’s distance from North American communitarianism and German neo-Aristotelianism alike should become immediately apparent when the importance of the idea of ‘conflict’ in MacIntyre’s metatheory of tradition (which is not our primary concern here) and in his practical philosophy is acknowledged, and when its source in Marxism (Knight 2006) is appreciated. *After Virtue* itself arose from MacIntyre’s long-standing attempt to make a moral theory out of Marxism and from his subsequent reflections upon the reasons for the impossibility of that project. His continuing project in moral theory may be understood as a continuation of his earlier attempt to construct an ethics out of Marx’s critique of alienation.

It is the concept of a ‘practice’ that is elemental to the argument of *After*

Virtue. This is the first stage in the logical development of the ‘core concept’ of a virtue and the sociological presupposition of MacIntyre’s rehabilitation of traditional, teleological virtue ethics. Practices are the shared activities within which individuals may find goods apart from and greater than those valued by their untutored desires and passions, and within which they may therefore learn how to advance beyond their ‘untutored human nature’ by disciplining those desires and passions and cultivating virtuous habits of intellect and character. We learn the virtues through pursuit of goods internal to practices. They are the schools of the virtues.

That MacIntyre’s social and moral theory of practices is not communitarian is evident from its postulation of an elemental but ineradicable conflict between practices and what he calls institutions:

“Practices must not be confused with institutions. Chess, physics and medicine are practices; chess clubs, laboratories, universities and hospitals are institutions. Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with ... external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Nor could they do otherwise if they are to sustain not only themselves, but also the practices of which they are the bearers. For no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions. Indeed so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions—and consequently of the goods external to the goods internal to the practices in question—that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for the common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution. In this context the essential function of the virtues is clear. Without them, without justice, courage and truthfulness, practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions.” (MacIntyre 1985, 194)

MacIntyre’s practical philosophy therefore combines a virtue ethics with a politics of resistance to institutionalized power and wealth. His distinction between practices and institutions is nowhere to be found in Aristotle. Aristotle does draw a distinction of the kind upon which that distinction itself depends: between internal and external goods. And money, power and status are external goods for both MacIntyre and Aristotle. However, Aristotle’s distinction is between goods that are internal and external to the human psyche, whereas MacIntyre’s distinction is between goods internal and external to social practices. The difference is between Aristotle’s ‘biologically teleological account’ and MacIntyre’s ‘socially teleological account’ of the virtues (MacIntyre 1985, 197). By ‘internal goods’ MacIntyre denotes the goals cooperatively pursued within particular practices—the various truths of different theoretical disciplines, the various products of different crafts, the overarching good which is the goal of

politics, the upbringing of children within families, and so on—as well as the shared standards of excellence established in pursuit of those goals. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* he renames *internal* goods “goods of excellence” and *external* goods “goods of effectiveness”.

Those goods which MacIntyre calls goods external to practices—money, power and status—are amongst those that Aristotle too counts as external. And the most important difference between internal and external goods, for both MacIntyre and Aristotle, is that internal goods are rightly understood as good in themselves whereas external goods ought always to be valued only instrumentally, as means to the actualization of internal goods. Here MacIntyre draws upon Aristotle’s critique of *pleonexia*, extending that from a moral critique of capital accumulation to one also of acquisitiveness regarding power and status.

MacIntyre has said that external goods are necessary to institutions and that institutions are necessary to practices. The tension between goods internal and external to practices is ineradicable. He nonetheless maintains that, just as an individual should order her activity so that external goods subserve internal goods, so too should participants in a practice ensure that its organizing institution’s goods of effectiveness are deployed to subserve the practice’s goods of personal and practical excellence.

The danger posed by state and corporate institutions is that they will ‘corrupt’ practices by reducing them to the position of means to the end of accumulating power and wealth. Such is the status of practices and practitioners under capitalism. So subordinated, individuals are denied opportunities to cooperatively pursue and sustain goods of excellence, subjected to institutionalized demoralization, and encouraged to believe that social interaction can comprise nothing other than a competitive struggle over zero-sum, external goods.

The institutions to which MacIntyre is primarily opposed are those that correspond to the ideal-typical form of impersonally bureaucratic or managerial organizations. These, as he has long and often objected, involve the social structural ‘compartmentalization’ of different value spheres and moral discourses. Following György Lukács, he observed that liberalism’s “view of the world as divided and compartmentalized” reflects society’s “division and compartmentalization” (MacIntyre 1995b, 132). We may add that this is the same institutional compartmentalization that is celebrated by Michael Walzer (Walzer 1984). A life “split up into rival and competing spheres, each with its own set of norms”, MacIntyre criticizes by contrast with Marx and Lukács’ “notion of a form of human life in which man would” achieve “clarity about means and ends, so creating a human nature in which the ideal and the actual would at last coincide” (MacIntyre 1971a, 66). Such a complete, unalienated life is incompatible with capitalism, which “provides systematic incentives to develop a type of character that has a propensity to injustice” (MacIntyre 1995b, xiv).

A moral agent who operates within such a compartmentalized structure must compartmentalize their own activities and their own norms, believing it appropriate to behave as one kind of person in the office and another at home. They are taught by their society that flexibility is a virtue and integrity a vice. This does not entail that a manager must be a bad person, but it does entail that the

narrative of a manager's life is likely to be compartmentalized and fragmentary. Insofar as a manager is a good person working in accordance with a consistent ethic and a concern with the good internal to the practice she manages, she is likely to be a bad manager in the terms of her institution.

MacIntyre's argument is not against managers qua persons but against managers qua managers. It is, therefore, an argument against the structure of our society. After all, the lives of those whom managers manage are often as compartmentalized as the lives of managers themselves; insofar as a worker's work is dictated by her subjection to bureaucratic command, her only alternative to successful compartmentalization will be outright alienation from her own labour.

After Virtue's famous critique of mechanistic social science gains its point from MacIntyre's critique of "the peculiarly managerial fiction embodied in the claim to possess systematic effectiveness in controlling certain aspects of social reality", whilst its critique of emotivism informs his argument that "the manager represents in his *character* the obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and nonmanipulative social relations" (MacIntyre 1985, 74, 30; MacIntyre's emphasis). Although the 'role' of 'the manager' is that of the 'dominant figure of the contemporary scene', MacIntyre argues that what managers' "claims to effectiveness and hence to authority" constitute is a "culturally powerful 'moral fiction' legitimating their 'manipulation of human beings into compliant patterns of behavior'" (27–8, 74, 86). Their exercise of such effectiveness should not, he is adamant, be considered a social practice. It belongs instead to "the characteristic institutional forms of twentieth-century social life" (87). Their concern is not with goods of excellence internal to any particular practice but "with technique, with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investment into profits" (30).

MacIntyre's critique of management may well appear to turn Aristotle on his head. Aristotle attempts to characterize the managerial activity of the *architekton* as akin to *praxis* and his architectonic rationality as a kind of *phronesis*, whilst reducing the technical activity of the managed to a productive *poiesis* which he characterizes as a mere process effected within the product. In contrast, it is managerial effectiveness that MacIntyre opposes to the teleological rationality of practices, opposing its morally fictitious claims of expertise to the moral and technical excellence of true practices.

In *After Virtue*, and in many essays since, MacIntyre presents Aristotelianism as the philosophical representative of practitioners' resistance to state and capital. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, especially, he presents David Hume and liberalism, as well as Nietzsche, as representatives of one or more rival traditions that promote the causes of Aristotelianism's institutional rivals.

4. Against the State

MacIntyre's antipathy to the state may appear unAristotelian. It is, after all, now a commonplace in the history of political thought that the mediaeval reception of Aristotle's *Politics* served to legitimate the *res publica* of the early

modern state as the virtuous site of political community, and this commonplace is now often cited in Anglophone political philosophy in support of a revival of republicanism that owes something to Arendt, as well as to Quentin Skinner, and that, at least with reference to Michael Sandel, is often called communitarian. Against them, MacIntyre argues that the state must not be identified with what Aristotle called a political community.

MacIntyre's critique of the state owes much to his early Marxism. He conceptualizes "the contemporary state and the contemporary national economy as a huge, single, complex, heterogeneous, immensely powerful something or other" (MacIntyre 1999a, 140). The state is itself a "hierarchy of bureaucratic managers" (MacIntyre 1985, 85), an institution without any veritable practice to facilitate.

We have already noted MacIntyre's critique of communitarianism for patriotically legitimating the state, and at the height of the liberal-communitarian debate he often focussed upon the issue of the state's legitimacy. In several papers of the time he argued that actual states simultaneously require legitimation in terms of rights, utility and patriotism, and that they therefore lack any coherent philosophical justification. However, he has since acknowledged "how very little the exposure of incoherence generally achieves" (MacIntyre 1998b, 227), and this certainly includes the exposure of "oligarchies disguised as liberal democracies" (MacIntyre 1998a, 237).

MacIntyre is sometimes said to criticize the state for its instrumentalism. Insofar as this implies that he regards the state 'as the guarantor of individuals' self-chosen goals' the characterization is only highly incomplete, and when coupled with a republican or communitarian conception of the state as a 'political community' of citizens this incompleteness inspires appeals for him to put "more emphasis upon it as the site of their shared purposes" (Beiner 2002, 473). However, the characterization is more seriously misleading when it implies that he understands the state as an instrument freely available for deployment in pursuit of any end that may be proposed. This is not at all his position. As he has recently put it, the state is "united in an indissoluble partnership with the national and international market". Besides having their own institutionalized interests in money and status and power over their subordinates within and outside of the state, its managers share a "common need" with those of private corporations "for capital formation, for economic growth and for an adequately trained but disposable labour force, whose members are also compliant consumers and law-abiding citizens" (MacIntyre 1999a, 138–40).

What is missed by those who regard the state as either a communal or neutral instrument is its power to 'coopt', to incorporate practice-based institutions into its overarching apparatus of social management. "All power tends to coopt and absolute power coopts absolutely." (MacIntyre 1985, 109) MacIntyre's understanding of and opposition to the state's power to coopt may be traced back to his Leninist critique of reformism and corporatism. He followed Lenin in warning "the working-class movement" against "abandonment of revolutionary aims" and "adjustment to trade union goals" (MacIntyre 1961, 21). As he has verified since the defeat of social democracy, Marxist predictions have "turned

out to be true ... that, if trade unions made it their only goal to work for betterment within the confines imposed by capitalism and parliamentary democracy, the outcome would be a movement towards first the domestication and then the destruction of effective trade union power” (MacIntyre 1995b, xxi). However, it is not only trade unions and reformists who have been coopted by the state; so too were Leninists themselves. “As Marxists organize and move toward power they always do and have become Weberians in substance, even if they remain Marxists in rhetoric; for in our culture we know of no organized movement towards power which is not bureaucratic and managerial in mode.” (MacIntyre 1985, 109) Without a moral theory of goods of excellence and a social theory of practices as the site of such goods, Marxism was simply but self-defeatingly prepared to expropriate state power in order to manipulate ordinary people. This is why MacIntyre abandoned Marxism and looked elsewhere for such theory.

5. Politics and the Common Good

An Aristotelian politics is often thought of as one concerned with actualizing ‘the common good’. MacIntyre agrees with this, even whilst differentiating between Aristotelian and rival conceptions of such a good (MacIntyre 1998a, 239–43). Communitarian politics is also often articulated in terms of actualizing a common good, and what MacIntyre regards as an Aristotelian conception of the common good is similar to communitarian accounts of the common good as something that cannot be exhaustively reduced to the good of separate individuals. Recent communitarian accounts usually also share much with earlier accounts that were expressed in Hegelian terms.

For Hegel, rationality and actuality progress hand in hand, and so too do morality and productivity, freedom as an internal good and freedom in terms of material goods. A Hegelian society is one that is both ethical and efficient. Such an absolute ideal gained increasing currency in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The ideas of this ‘philosophical idealism’ and New Liberalism informed both sociology and political socialism. An example is R. H. Tawney, ‘the patron saint of the Labour Party’. The title of his book *The Acquisitive Society* expressed his moral critique of capitalism, to which he juxtaposed the ‘functional society’ of socialism in which all would dutifully perform their particular social functions with a consciously common purpose. Tawney has been commended by British communitarians (e.g. Boswell 1990) but criticized by MacIntyre for his “banal earnestness”. For MacIntyre, Tawney’s moral ideals legitimated the interests “not of workers, but of managers and technocrats” and his Labour Party was therefore “the party of the other half of our ruling class” (MacIntyre 1971b, 39, 41). The British social democracy and corporatism once represented by Tawney and Labour have anyway now been defeated, and the communal institutions of Hegelian political morality have been demonstrated to be less economically efficient and productive than those of individual and corporate enterprise.

What is true here of social democracy is true also of communitarianism.

Indeed, communitarianism may well be regarded as a pale imitation of socialism. The rhetoric of communitarianism has been skilfully used by Tony Blair and New Labour as a substitute for old Labour's language of socialism, but capitalist critics understand "community" to denote the state just as surely as it was once denoted by "society". They, too, know their Hegel.

MacIntyre knows Hegel and rejects his architectonic politics along with his architectonic philosophy. It does not follow that MacIntyre rejects any architectonic politics, such as that articulated at the beginning of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, but only that he looks elsewhere for its institutionalization. He looks, of course, to practices.

MacIntyre's social theory resembles that of Hegel in regarding the actual as rational, but not in proposing that there are rival rationalities and that actual practices conflict with actual institutions. The goods of excellence internal to practices are common goods of their participants, serving their edification and in turn rightly subserved by institutions. This is a minimal kind of architectonic ordering of goods. To this MacIntyre adds that what he calls 'projects' combine the rationalities of different practices in deciding upon some more architectonic good and ordering (Knight 2006) and that some "communal practices" can help constitute "relatively self-sufficient and independent form[s] of participatory and practice-based community ... that ... need to protect themselves from the corrosive effects of capitalism and the depredations of state power" (MacIntyre 1995b, xxvii, xxvi). "Between the one politics and the other there can only be continuing conflict." (MacIntyre 1998a, 252) He cites as practice-based communities those "of the hand-loom weavers of Lancashire and Yorkshire" who resisted the industrial revolution, as did the insurrectionary "Silesian weavers of the Eulengebirge in 1844" who inspired Marx's politically revolutionary hopes (MacIntyre 1998b, 231–2). A more recent example is that of "Welsh mining communities and of a way of life informed by the ethics of work at the coal face, by a passion for the goods of choral singing and of rugby football and by the virtues of trade union struggle against first [mine]-owners and then the state" (MacIntyre 1999b, 143). These are, of course, very different kinds of communities from those which communitarians conceive of nation states as being or becoming. They are also communities that failed in their resistance to state and capital.

MacIntyre does go beyond calling for resistance. For example, he advocates providing all children with an excellent education, proposing that this would be "dangerous" to the dominant order. "A society in which fishing crews and farmers and auto mechanics and construction workers were able to think about their lives critically and constructively", on the basis of such an education, "would be a society on the verge of revolution". However, he recognizes that to achieve an excellent education for all "we would first need a revolution to bring about the massive shift in the allocation of resources", a revolution against that partnership of state and capital which benefits from schools' production of compliant consumers. If, therefore, "the prospect of revolution is Utopian, then [his educational] proposals are Utopian" (MacIntyre 2002a, 15).

6. Communal Functionalism

Since *After Virtue* MacIntyre has increasingly accepted the traditional rationale of a Thomistic Aristotelianism. It has become correspondingly obvious how and why his position differs from that of communitarianism. His social theory of practices remains, but is now itself based in a moderate form of that metaphysical biology which he once followed Gadamer in separating from a nominally Aristotelian practical philosophy. “An Aristotelian ethics presupposes an Aristotelian metaphysics”, he now tells Gadamer (MacIntyre 2002b, 169), adding that he was “in error in supposing an ethics independent of biology to be possible” (MacIntyre 1999b, x). In progressively rejecting the scepticism of linguistic philosophy and instead accepting a thoroughgoing realism, his Aristotelianism exemplifies what he has called the rationality of participation in a tradition. He now presents himself not at all as a chastened neo-Aristotelian but as an Aristotelian of a fully traditional kind. He has made final ends into first principles and followed the argument of Aquinas about our embodied being into an account of human beings as dependent rational animals. We need the virtues, he argues, because of the kinds of biological being that we are. The idea of the virtues may be historically Aristotelian but his account of their content is Christian and Thomistic. Truthfulness is a virtue; magnanimity is not. Whereas Aristotle proposed that what constitutes the human good is self-sufficient activity, and that those who are dependent upon others are incapable of excellence, Christianity preaches that it is good to serve others and that all human beings are equally incapable of self-sufficiency. This position is evident even in *After Virtue*, which is why it is structured as a critique of Nietzsche and not of Rawls.

This stress upon our mutual dependence might seem to point us back toward something like Tawney’s idea of a functional society, even though MacIntyre here maintains his politics of conflict and resistance and even though he has inherited from Hegel and Marx a prohibition against writing blueprints for any utopian future. After all, an Aristotelian politics must involve “the making and sustaining of forms of human community—and therefore of institutions” (1985a, 194). Such a politics must differ from that of the state in being participatory and in ordering goods architectonically for the sake of a comprehensive common good but, as he has consistently maintained, it must also differ from Aristotle’s account of political community in being socially inclusive, building upon the reasoning of all those engaged in productive and other practices.

That mediaeval Aristotelianism included a politics that met most of these criteria has been argued by America’s foremost historian of mediaeval political thought, Cary Nederman. He distinguishes his own from MacIntyre’s “more philosophical understanding of Aristotelianism” (Nederman 1996, 567). Aristotelianism he defines in terms of its distinction “between ‘contemplative’ inquiry ... and ‘active’ or ‘practical’ disciplines” (574), so that an Aristotelian politics does not presuppose Aristotle’s metaphysics or biology. He makes no reference to Heidegger in this definition, but he does refer to the considerable authority of Heidegger’s student Paul Oskar Kristeller and of the German neo-Aristotelian practical philosopher Joachim Ritter (565, 573). And he takes as the paradigm

matic figure of such an Aristotelianism not Aquinas, the significance of whom he argues is overrated, but John of Salisbury, who in turn is belittled by MacIntyre. Accordingly, Nederman's Aristotelianism is concerned more "with the physical than the moral or spiritual well-being of citizens" (568), unlike MacIntyre's now metaphysically teleological and ethically perfectionist Aristotelianism.

These qualifications made, we may note Nederman's claim that the Aristotelian tradition has already theorized an inclusive political order that affords a place to different practices and allows their different rationalities to be combined in pursuit of their common good. He calls it "communal functionalism". His mediaeval Aristotelians employed an "organic metaphor" as "an institutionalized expression of political rule based on *cooperation* between diverse elements of society in order to realize ... a collective end which is greater than any of its members and which is equivalent to the good of the whole society" (Nederman 1987, 215; Nederman's emphasis). This "paradigm, within which much creative theoretical discussion occurred during the Middle Ages", conceptualizes the body politic as composed "of functional groupings", so that "any person from any segment of society that contributes in any way to the welfare of the communal unit is thereby accorded an equal capacity to gage the needs of the community and to perform [their] function accordingly" (Nederman 1992, 978). Within it, "citizenship is rooted in what individuals *do*, rather than what they are", the community "is not a simple unity but is, instead, a multiplicity ordered toward a single end", and there will be some "mechanism ... for sharing perspectives and appreciating the totality" (Nederman 1992, 983; Nederman's emphasis). He also differentiates a communal functionalist "Christian republicanism" from the incipient statism of later, secular republicanism (Nederman 1998).

The mediaeval world may have had its own ideas of freedom, toleration and, indeed, politics, but those ideas were radically different from those of our modernity. Nederman commended reflection upon communal functionalism "to current communitarian theorists. Such a reading may bear surprising fruit" (Nederman 1992, 985). If it ever does, perhaps this will take the form of a more substantial and innovative kind of communitarian theory than has been generated by criticism of Rawls or by recourse to Hegel or to 'philosophers of the Volk'.

But, as MacIntyre observes, theory can never be enough. The social problems he perceives cannot be solved "from within the practice of theorists" but "only by a particular kind of practice, practice informed by a particular kind of theory rooted in that same practice" (MacIntyre 1998b, 230, 225).

7. Against Communitarianism

MacIntyre is no communitarian. He regards it as

“a mistake, the communitarian mistake, to attempt to infuse the politics of the state with the values and modes of participation in local community. It is a further mistake to suppose that there is anything good about local community as such ... [because, without] the virtues of just generosity and of shared deliberation, local communities are always open to corruption by narrowness, by complacency, by prejudice against outsiders and by a whole range of other deformities, including those that arise from a cult of local community.” (MacIntyre 1999b, 142)

Three final points may be in distinguishing MacIntyre’s position from that of communitarianism, at least the first of which can be unreservedly called Aristotelian. This first point is epistemological. MacIntyre is a realist and universalist, although one who takes the necessary particularity and historicity of any given standpoint extremely seriously. That universally valid truth is the final end of enquiry he takes to be a first principle. Conversely, a consistent philosophical communitarian is presumably a committed relativist.

The second point is ethical. MacIntyre is a moral rationalist and perfectionist. This is the point of his virtue ethics. What distinguishes his promotion of excellence is his anti-elitism, and here he parts company with Aristotle. In most cultures and most of history, human excellence has been equated with wealth and power. This is true of the origin of the idea of *arete*—‘virtue’ or ‘excellence’—in pre-classical Greece, and it is true of the idea of ‘aristocracy’ that developed after the mediaeval reception of Aristotle’s *Ethics*. These past ideas are not philosophical but ideological. A Thomist and Christian ethics must be one that is practically inclusive and theoretically universalist. Communitarians are not moral perfectionists. For them, morality is a matter of adherence to cultural convention. It is, as both Nederman and Gadamer emphasize, a matter of *ethos* or, as that great semi-communitarian Hegel would have it, of *Sittlichkeit*.

Finally, MacIntyre is, although a political realist, also a *political* perfectionist. Communitarians may be supporters of the British Labour Party (Miller 1990) or Canadian New Democratic Party (Beiner 1992; Taylor 1993) but, even so, communitarianism cannot but be politically conservative. Communitarians want to conserve communities. As we have seen, MacIntyre also wants to defend and conserve certain kinds of local community. However, we have also seen that he does not value ‘community as such’, whereas communitarians presumably do. He wishes to defend certain communities because he considers them to be ‘practice-based’ and, therefore, to instantiate and institutionalize virtues of ‘justice, courage and truthfulness’ and of ‘just generosity and of shared deliberation’, virtues that are threatened by ‘the corrupting power of institutions’ alien to the community. These actual communities he considers to be improvable; other communities are either parts of the dominant order or, likely, worse.

Conserving the institutions and functions of such communities could only be oppressive and demoralizing and, therefore, a mistake.

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