

## Human Flourishing in the Philosophical Work of Alasdair MacIntyre

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### Abstract

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In this paper, we circumscribe Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of human flourishing as presented from *After Virtue* onwards. By reformulating the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition in modern terms, MacIntyre introduces such notions as practice, narrative unity of human life, and tradition. Later he supplements these ideas by accounting for human dependency and practical reasoning. The paper articulates these aspects of MacIntyre's understanding of human flourishing and demonstrate how they challenge several (post)modern conceptions regarding the self, morality, and politics. It is argued that MacIntyre's account of human flourishing consists of people becoming independent practical reasoners, able to use their rational powers for the pursuit of a meaningful life.

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**Keywords:** Alasdair MacIntyre, human flourishing, common good, virtues, dependence, practical reasoning

### 1. Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Postmodern thought often leaves the question of a meaningful human life unanswered or reserves it merely for private considerations. Postmodernity with its mistrust of 'grand narratives' rejects all attempts to situate human life within a 'bigger picture', which may in fact provide meaning and purpose. What is meaningful human activity? What is a good life for human persons?

Such questions are proclaimed unanswerable and totalizing according to those who subscribe to postmodern thinking.

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Instead of them, we are told, at least at the political level, we should reformulate such totalizing questions to questions like ‘what preferences should I satisfy in order to make myself happy?’. The individual with its uniqueness, its wants, and desires is at the centre of all such considerations.

From this perspective, Alasdair MacIntyre’s works demand attention. These exact questions, which are rejected by (post)modernity, are reformulated and introduced again by MacIntyre. From the publication of *After Virtue* onwards, MacIntyre worked towards reformulating Aristotelian-Thomist ethical thought into modern terms. At the centre of the Aristotelian tradition of moral enquiry, there is the notion of human persons as essentially political animals and the question of what does it mean for human beings to flourish. MacIntyre raises these questions again – how can we, modern individuals, ask questions about a meaningful human life, questions that would be more than asking a subjectivist question about one’s happiness understood in terms of preference satisfaction. It is to ask what the human good is as well as how and under what conditions humans as political animals can flourish.

The philosophical works of Alasdair MacIntyre are rich in their subject matter and raise important questions with respect to human flourishing under (post)modern condition. In this paper, we will ask how the question of human flourishing is formulated in the works of MacIntyre from *After Virtue* onwards and what the implications might be for modern thinking about the meaningfulness of human life. It should be noted that it would be wrong to treat MacIntyre as simply a philosopher of morality because the issues raised by his works go beyond ethics. Thus, his thought is also deeply political as Kelvin Knight rightly observed (Knight 2011). The social and political implication of his ideas will therefore be discussed as well.

## **2. Teleology, Virtues, and Human Good**

MacIntyre seeks to reformulate the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition on modern terms. In *After Virtue*, he presents a sharp criticism of the moral and political condition of modernity. MacIntyre turns to Aristotle’s ethical and political thinking to search for an alternative standpoint that exposes the problems of modernity and formulates possible alternatives. We should note from the beginning that MacIntyre’s project is not a romantic turn towards the past – gone, forgotten, or even imagined.

In the introduction to the 3rd edition of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre emphatically rejects the criticism that he idealizes the past calling it ‘a careless misreading of the text’ (MacIntyre 2012, xi).

The tradition of virtue ethics was formulated by Aristotle in his ethical writings of which *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) is the basic text. Subsequent readings and interpretations have sustained the tradition of virtue ethics throughout the centuries. Of course, it does not mean that MacIntyre accepts Aristotle’s ethical writings uncritically – that would be quite naïve given Aristotle’s treatment of slaves and women, even some of the virtues in his list demand criticism (e.g., Aristotle’s account of magnanimity). Another problem with Aristotle for MacIntyre – at least at the time of *After Virtue* – is the close association of Aristotle’s ethics to his metaphysics (MacIntyre 2007, 163).<sup>3</sup> We will return to this question in next section.

MacIntyre’s basic claim is that there is a core concept of virtues that could be observed in different variations of virtue theory from antiquity to the Middle Ages and then to modernity. This core theory of virtues is based on the teleological conception of man. It is based on the distinction between ‘man-as-he-happens-to-be’ and ‘man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos*’ (MacIntyre 2007, 52). Virtues then are the characteristics that allow movement towards that *telos*. We find the teleological conception of ethics in the opening sentence of Aristotle’s NE book 1:

Every skill and every inquiry, and similarly every action and rational choice, is thought to aim at some good; and so the good has been aptly described as that at which everything aims (NE 1094a1-3).

Aristotle soon adds that there are many goods that people seek; some of them are goods in themselves while others are means to some other good. Aristotle therefore concludes that there should be a final human good because of which all other goods are sought. He calls this good *eudaimonia* – variously translated as happiness, well-being, flourishing. Aristotle comments that it is a common opinion that *eudaimonia* is the chief human good. But the question soon is raised about the content of *eudaimonia* – we observe different notions of what it consists.

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<sup>3</sup> Although some commentator of Aristotle would argue that this connection is not essential. For such an account see Kraut 2002

Aristotle proposes to solve this problem by considering the *ergon* of human beings: ‘Well, do the carpenter and the tanner have characteristic activities and actions, and a human being none? Has nature left him without a characteristic activity to perform?’ (NE 1097b29-30). Invoking the discussion in *De Anima* about the different functions of the soul, Aristotle provides his theory of moral and intellectual virtues, and the definition of the good life of man as the contemplative life of the philosopher. MacIntyre claims that Aristotelian exposition of virtues presupposes his metaphysical biology (MacIntyre 2007, 163). So the question MacIntyre raises is how can we sustain the teleological structure of ethics without Aristotle’s metaphysics? MacIntyre answers that the teleological structure of virtue theory can be reformulated by introducing three concepts – practice, narrative unity of human life, and tradition.

By practice MacIntyre means any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended (MacIntyre 2007, 187).

This long and complex definition points towards several things. First, practice is a cooperative activity. It is not a thing done in isolation; it is socially established. So, for example, football is a practice; philosophy is a practice. They are complex, cooperative, socially established practices. Usually a practice exists before an individual enters it; it is not his/her individual creation. To become the practitioner of a particular practice, an individual has to learn the standards of that practice. By taking part in the practice, he/she learns the goods that are internal to it. These are the goods internal to practice which are intimately linked to its standards of excellence. This is the first step by which an individual starts to discriminate between his/her particular wants and needs, and what is required to sustain those practices. Virtues here are the dispositions of character that help individuals to pursue the internal goods of practices. We learn to ask the question how our individual goods are related to the goods that are achieved in different practices. It is also by participating in practices that we become acquainted to those necessary virtues. According to Kelvin Knight, ‘practices serve as schools of the virtues’ (Knight 2007, 152).

The second element of the MacIntyrean account of virtues is the narrative unity of human life.

As individuals are engaged in many practices, they unavoidably raise the questions about the importance each particular practice has in their lives as a whole. That is, how should different practices and their goods be ordered so that my life would be intelligible and meaningful as a whole? To answer this question means providing a narrative of one's life, a narrative 'which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end' (MacIntyre 2007, 205). By looking to his or her life as a narrative, the individual learns to discriminate between the particular practices and goods and asks the question what is *the* good of my life? It presupposes a thick conception of selfhood. The individual is not just an aggregate of different and chaotic desires, but a rational being who is able to discriminate between his/her desires, reorient them, and make his/her life intelligible as a whole to him/herself and to others. Coherence and accountability are very important elements of virtues, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Since the narrative of a particular individual is never isolated from the narratives of others, individuals inevitably find themselves in a set of different interconnected social relations and thus a complex of narratives. It is against this background that the question as to how practices and their goods should be ordered in a particular community of which an individual finds herself to be. Raising such a question leads towards the discrimination of goods of this or that person towards the good of human beings as such. Such questioning is what MacIntyre calls a tradition. Tradition is the continuing mode of inquiry that makes such questions about human good possible:

A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations. Hence the individual's search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual's life is a part, and this is true both of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life.

Once again the narrative phenomenon of embedding is crucial: the history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us; the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions (MacIntyre 2007, 222).

By proposing this structure MacIntyre aims to reformulate the teleological conception of human life in modern terms. It provides a scheme in which, starting with particular desires of individual, through practice, narrative and tradition, it becomes possible to search for an answer to the question ‘what is a good and meaningful life for human persons?’. And only by raising such questions and giving answers can human life and human actions become intelligible. So MacIntyre concludes by formulating his conception of a good human life: ‘the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man’ (MacIntyre 2007, 219). Virtues are then the qualities that allow and sustain this quest for the good life of man.

### **3. Animality and the Virtues of Acknowledged Dependence**

MacIntyre’s next step in the development of his philosophical thought is to acknowledge the animality and dependence of human life. In this way, according to his work *Dependent Rational Animals*, he invokes the ‘metaphysical biology’ he rejected in *After Virtue*. Here MacIntyre argues that the theory of virtues would be incomplete without acknowledging the biological constitution of human vulnerability and animal like nature (MacIntyre 2002, x). This has led him to articulate a set of virtues more in Thomistic rather than in Aristotelian terms. According to MacIntyre, Aristotle’s account of virtues is formulated from the standpoint of the independent man (as it is best illustrated by his account of magnanimous man in NE). Thus MacIntyre supplements his account of virtues by adding what he calls the virtues of acknowledged dependence. This is an attempt to correct the failure of moral philosophy in order to account for human dependency – a failure that is ‘apt to obscure some features of rational agency’ (MacIntyre 2002, 8).

Thus MacIntyre seeks to provide an account of human animality and fundamental dependency in order to give a comprehensive account of human virtues. Aristotle believed that it was the rational activity that separated humans from other animals.

He gave the account of practical wisdom of some animals, but what interested him most was the ability of human animals to engage in contemplative activity, that is, the use of reason in its fullest. Thus the good life of man consisted in an ability to realize fully our powers of rationality. Aristotle separated virtues into moral and intellectual virtues and claimed that the unity of both was needed to achieve *eudaimonia*. MacIntyre argues for a similar idea: the goal of human development is to move from initial dependence towards being, what MacIntyre calls, an independent practical reasoner--an individual who can achieve an independence of mind and reason about her own good and human good in general. Thus the cultivation of *both* moral and intellectual virtues is essential.

What separates the MacIntyrean account from modern accounts of rationality and moral subjectivity is the notion that rational powers do not exist as such. A child, in an important sense, is similar to some of the prelinguistic animals. She has to learn to use her rational powers and the role of others – parents, care takers, teachers as well as the wider social environment – is essential. This is one of the aspects of human dependence that has to be taken into account to formulate an adequate account of human practical rationality. As he puts it:

In most moral philosophy the starting point is one that already presupposes the existence of mature independent practical reasoners whose social relationships are the relationships of the adult world (MacIntyre 2002, 81).

MacIntyre wants to question such a starting point. It is the movement towards being independent practical reasoner that should be understood if we wish to give a more adequate philosophical account of practical reasoning.

Another aspect has to do with the acceptance of bodily dependence. Human being is not just a mind in a body. Body is an essential part of being human, and it also constitutes other aspects of dependency. As a child, or as an elderly person, or ill or disabled, human beings are essentially dependent upon others. How well a person is doing will depend upon what others have contributed and are contributing to that wellbeing. Hence, human flourishing in these situations is essentially dependent on help from others. In this sense, individuals find themselves in social relations based on unequal contribution, that is, in many situations we need more from others than we are able to contribute.

MacIntyre calls such social relations ‘the networks of giving and receiving’ (*ibid.*). Thus individual flourishing is essentially dependent on these networks in which we can receive what we need in order to flourish.

Human development is understood, then, as a movement from the condition of intellectual and bodily dependence towards being an ‘independent practical reasoner’. This development does not happen automatically – ‘it is always one to which others have made essential contributions’ (*ibid.*, 82). To be able to reason practically means to be able to discriminate between different goods and possible ways of actions to choose the one which is best suitable to achieve the good. It is the condition in which an individual is able to stand back and evaluate his desires. It is the movement from ‘initial animal state of *having reasons for acting in this way rather than that*’ towards the ‘specifically human state of *being able to evaluate those reasons, to revise them or to abandon them and replace them with others*’ (MacIntyre 2002, 91, italics in the original).

From what has been said so far, it is clear that such an account of rationality has little in common with an instrumental rationality of calculation – of finding the best way to satisfy desires as preferences whatever they may be. It requires discriminating between different goods as well as having a conception of what the good that should be pursued in a particular situation. It is the Aristotelian practical syllogism which requires identifying ‘the goods that are at stake in some particular situation and the harms and dangers that threaten their achievement’ (*ibid.*, 92). An individual, finding himself in a particular situation deliberates upon the best action to secure the goods that this situation allows to achieve or protect. The practical syllogism is concluded with an action. But being able to deliberate this way ‘is to exhibit the kind of responsiveness that characterizes the virtues’ (*ibid.*).

So what we learn from acknowledging our dependence is that being a moral agent requires character formation, the development of virtues that allow individuals to be effective and sound practical reasoners. But to become an independent practical reasoner demands work from others – family, teachers, and friends. As Aristotle wrote in NE that: ‘On important issues, we do not trust our own ability to decide and call in others to help us deliberate’ (NE 1112b10-11). So MacIntyre challenges the premises of modern moral philosophy by directing our attention towards becoming an independent practical reasoner that requires the cultivation of moral and intellectual virtues, a cultivation that is essentially social and political.

The development from the state of dependency towards the human state of independent reasoning can fail at many levels – family, school, social environment, etc. – and this failure can seriously compromise the future wellbeing of an individual. A virtuous moral agent is not the one who follows rules blindly, but a person who has become an independent practical reasoner, able to judge rightly a situation in order to take appropriate action. As MacIntyre puts it, ‘knowing how to act virtuously always involves more than a rule following’ (MacIntyre 2002, 93).

#### **4. Personal Unity and Accountability – Against Geneology and Irony**

An independent practical reasoner stands as someone who is able to speak in his own voice. MacIntyre claims that this involves the question of accountability, that is, to be called to account for ourselves and our actions by others. It involves not just making yourself intelligible to others, but also to ‘make ourselves intelligible to ourselves’ (*ibid.*, 148). It is self-scrutiny that always requires a particular set of social relations – relations of giving and receiving, the relations of participatory political community. It is in this sense that we can say that a man is *zoon politikon*, a political being, when even a retrospective attempt to understand and give account of oneself is fully possible due to others and the existing structures of communal life.

This brings us back to MacIntyre’s earlier claim, namely that independence of mind involves accepting and understanding our dependence and vulnerability, the movement from the original dependence to independence achieved by taking part in particular social practices. It is through practice that we understand what our goods are and learn to discriminate between important and less important goods. This kind of reasoning stands in sharp contrast with the Kantian conception of reason which sees reason as something already given, an *a priori* reason existing in every one of us. It is also very different from a minimalist or ‘thin’ conception of practical rationality, which takes the wants and desires of individuals for granted and treats reasoning as a mere calculation in the process of our preference-satisfaction. Only by seriously taking into account the initial human dependency can we become really independent. The failure to reshape our initial desires and become independent practical reasoners makes us susceptible of conformity or prone to relentless disagreement: ‘[i]n both such cases I am not a voice, but an echo’ (MacIntyre 2002, 148).

As we have seen, a MacIntyrean account of virtuous human action presupposes accountability. It is already presupposed in the narrative unity of human life. Being accountable involves being able to give an account of our actions and our beliefs. This in turn requires critical scrutiny of our lives, the ability to identify the good one is pursuing. It presupposes a particular type of social relations in which humans are not seen as private individuals entering social relations based on interest-calculation but as essentially political animals whose independence and rationality are dependent on the wellbeing of the social relations in which they find themselves.

MacIntyre's notion of accountability stands in clear contrast to some of the postmodern theories of subjectivity. Two are worth mentioning – genealogist, as presented by post-Nietzschean philosophy of unmasking, and, more specifically, but in connection with the first, the liberal ironist, as formulated by Richard Rorty.

MacIntyre's engagement with genealogy has a number of aspects. We cannot discuss all of them here, but one of them is important to our discussion. *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (1990), among other things, raises the issue of personal unity and accountability. Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's genealogical projects theorize the disintegrated self in the way that it served as the starting point for their projects (MacIntyre 1990, 210). For MacIntyre, this is problematic because by denying any unity of the self the possibility to be accountable is precluded: 'So we might conclude that there is no way of posing questions about accountability or, correspondingly, about the identity, unity and continuity of the self within a genealogical framework (*ibid.*, 208). Thus MacIntyre's claim is that identity, unity, continuity are essential in the quest for the truth in human life. If the unity of the self is denied, this quest becomes meaningless. MacIntyre's engagement with genealogy is based precisely on his rejection of the genealogical premise. His philosophical thesis is that the disintegration of the self – the death of the author, as Foucault put it – is not the truth revealed about the nature of human subjectivity, but the consequence of the failure of the Enlightenment project. That is, the failure to provide rational justification of morality whose long term consequences have been morality becoming nothing else but a mere mask for power (an argument presented in *After Virtue*), and the compartmentalization of society into separate spheres – private, family, economic, political etc. As these spheres become disintegrated and independent, governed by their own set of different social rules so do individuals and their lives as they take part in these different social spheres.

The more individuals try to integrate into these independent spheres the more their lives become disintegrated. Compartmentalised social relations create compartmentalised personality. Yet a Foucaultian genealogy is not able to address this simply because it does not see compartmentalization as a problem.

MacIntyre asks ‘can the genealogist legitimately include the self out of which he speaks in explaining himself within his or her genealogical narrative?’; is he not ‘exempting his or her utterances from the treatment to which everyone else’s is subjected?’ (*ibid.*, 210). The genealogist is engaged in constantly rejecting the past, the past that made one to be as he is, and this is seen as the emancipatory power of genealogy. This is the project of rejecting the burden of the past in order to liberate yourself from what you were and constantly recreate yourself. However, MacIntyre’s point is that for such disavowal to be possible enough unity, identity, and continuity must be presupposed. Being unable to find an unironic relationship to the past, the genealogist makes himself exempt from this scrutiny:

To be unable to find the words, or rather to be able only to find words incompatible with the genealogical project, in which to express an ironic relationship to a past which one is engaged in disowning, is to be unable to find a place for oneself as genealogist either inside or outside the genealogical narrative and thereby to exempt oneself from scrutiny, to make of oneself the great exception, to be self-indulgent towards, it turns out, something one knows not what (*ibid.*, 214).

Rorty’s ironist stands as a person who took seriously the Nietzschean perspectivism to its logical conclusion. He is the one who realizes that ‘anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed’ (Rorty 1993, 73). The ironist is the postmodern figure who accepts diverse ‘vocabularies’ as incommensurable, radically different and without any possibility of rational mediation between them. Irony means one’s alienation from any of these vocabularies, even (and mostly importantly) her own. In this sense, vocabularies are private without any justification outside individual preferences, wants, and desires.

Such a standpoint comes as an insult to MacIntyre’s project. As MacIntyre notices, accountability presupposes a vocabulary that is never merely private. It is always common, our vocabulary, and only in it can an independent practical reasoner become intelligible and accountable.

By taking an ironist position, one stands on the brink of being evasive, unable to justify one's action, and thus be accountable to others. In a sense ironist stands as an emotivist figure because it also embodies the emotivist inability to distinguish between manipulative and nonmanipulative social relations (see MacIntyre 2007, 25-35). If vocabularies are merely private, any standard to distinguish between manipulative and non-manipulative discourse disappears:

Ironic detachment involves a withdrawal from our common language and our shared judgments and thereby from the social relationships which presuppose the use of that language in making those judgments (MacIntyre 2002, 152).

So MacIntyre is criticizing these standpoints as ones unable to create relationships based on identity, unity, and continuity of the self, relationships that create the possibility for accountability. Without this, according to MacIntyre, the quest for the meaning of life is not possible.

## 5. 'The Political and Social Structures of the Common Good'

By this point, it is clear that the discussion of virtues is not just a discussion of moral philosophy seen as an independent sphere of inquiry. Rather, it leads to questions of social relations, that is, to the questioning of society and its existing social structures. According to MacIntyre, there are two sources of wrongs – one arising from individual moral failure and the other that arises from social systems. Both are interconnected in the way that '[d]efective systems of social relationships are apt to produce defective character' (*ibid.*, 102).

Of course we should not here make a naïve move and pretend that good social relationships will automatically produce good characters. MacIntyre warns against this by arguing that 'even the best sets of social relationships cannot ensure that no one develops badly' (*ibid.*). Thus we should always be aware of the two sources and avoid the conflation of the first into the second (personal to social) but also account for the degree by which social relationships are connected with particular characters. MacIntyre makes this point when he critiques modernity by presenting how some particular flaws of modernity are internalized into particular social characters – rich aesthete, manager, therapist – all are examples of how social relationships and institutions are connected with social characters (MacIntyre 2007).

Thus the criticism of social relationships and social structures should be given their due place and should be understood as a next step when accounting for a good and meaningful life. Institutions, relations of power, systematic injustice will frustrate the achievement of human flourishing.

It was Aristotle who understood ethics and politics as two aspects of the same inquiry. At the very beginning of NE, he wrote that this work was ‘a kind of political science’ (NE 1094b11). NE finishes with the urge to start discussion about the political constitution of human communities. Only with the discussion of politics can the inquiry into human good be completed. Thus for MacIntyre ethical discussion begs for the criticism of social relationships. It is not the intention of this paper to discuss MacIntyre’s political theory but to outline the link between our inquiry into the human good and the criticism of social practices. Without understanding this link the discussion of human flourishing is incomplete.

We should begin with identifying two types of goods related to practices – internal goods and external goods. External goods are money, status, and prestige. They are ‘externally and contingently attached’ to a particular practice ‘by the accidents of social circumstance’ (MacIntyre 2007, 188). What distinguished them from other forms of goods is that ‘there is always alternative ways for achieving such goods’, that is, they can be achieved by alternative means. They are not essentially a part of a particular practice. Internal goods, however, are the goods of excellence, internal to a particular practice and cannot be pursued independently from it. The internal goods of excellence achieved by playing piano cannot be achieved by playing football.

The relation between the two types of goods is complicated. On the one hand, the sustaining of practices requires external goods. Without them, the practice would not survive over time. Thus institutions – whose goal is the provision of external goods – are required. But, on the other hand, institutions tend to undermine the good of excellence achieved by practice: ‘the ideal and creativity of practice are always vulnerable to the competitiveness of institution’ (*ibid.*, 194). Thus we need to account for the uneasy tension between the two. There are many convincing stories of what happens when the ideals and creativity of practice are subjugated to the influence of money or power.

Here again the importance of virtues is evident: ‘Without them, without justice, courage and truthfulness, practices could not resist the corruptive power of institutions’ (*ibid.*).

This discussion points, then, towards a discussion of political community. The flourishing political community requires more than external recourses. As Aristotle wrote in *Politics*:

Similarly, if there were some who lived separately, yet not so separately as to share nothing in common, and had laws against wronging one another in their business transactions (for example, if one were a carpenter, another a farmer, another a cobbler, another something else of that sort, and their number were ten thousand), yet they shared nothing else in common besides such things as exchange and alliance—not even in this case would there be a city-state (Aristotle 1998, 1280b17-23).

Thus the flourishing political community is something other than the one abundant with material resources. It involves cultivating particular types of social relations, relations that allow the pursuit of human good. Individual good and the good of political community are closely connected: ‘For we cannot have a practically adequate understanding of our own good, of our own flourishing, apart from and independently of the flourishing of that whole set of social relationships in which we have found our place’ (MacIntyre 2002, 108). This, of course, does not mean that individual good has to be subordinated to the good of the community – it means that to understand the good of individual requires the understanding of the goods of community. This conclusion comes from the understanding how individual flourishing and movement towards being independent practical reasoner is dependent on the quality of social relations.

Thus individual flourishing requires particular types of social relations. MacIntyre calls them ‘the political and social structures of the common good’ (*ibid.*, chapter 11). Such structures involve ‘institutionalized forms of deliberation’ in which independent practical reasoners can deliberate on matters important to the community. Secondly, such a community would count just generosity among its central virtues. It is required to sustain networks of giving and receiving, which are fundamental to human development and flourishing.

And thirdly, the structures of deliberation would have to account for those whose power or reasoning is limited or nonexistent (because of illness, disability or other reasons). The norms of justice would require that every member of community would be heard in deliberation. And those with limited or nonexistent power can be heard through the role of proxy (*ibid.*, 129-130).

The central issue here is that the possibility of human flourishing requires the possibility to deliberate upon the activities and goods that political community is pursuing. What is needed is the creation of the structures where the community and individuals could be accountable to each other about the goods they are pursuing. Such accountability makes questions about the human good possible. By scrutinizing itself, the community and individuals contribute in shaping their desires and acquiring virtues that are essential for becoming independent practical reasoners and for sustaining the networks of giving and receiving: ‘And the best rational defence of our present judgments, standards, relationships, and institutions is that, after undergoing such critical scrutiny, they have proved able to withstand the strongest objections that have so far been advanced against them’ (*ibid.*, 157). Such collective reasoning is what makes the communities of self-scrutiny political: ‘to reason together about the common good is to reason politically’ (*ibid.*, 140).

Thus human flourishing requires creating and sustaining social structures and institutions in which the concept of the common good can be meaningfully formulated by the members of the political community. Such social structures can exist at the level which is in-between family and the state. It is clearly something else than civil society, which, in the Hegelian scheme, is the intermediate between family and the state. Civil society is a place where individuals meet to pursue their private interests. MacIntyre tries to describe the structures where the common good may be articulated, where the questions of the human good, of what makes humans flourish are asked and answered.

Such an account of human goods challenges some of the main institutions of liberal modernity, such as the state and markets. While both essentially are institutions concerned with the provision of external goods, they are also the institutions whose power corrupts communal relations and the networks of giving and receiving.

Thus creating and sustaining the political and social structures of the common good will eventually challenge the state and market relations. This is why Kelvin Knight has called MacIntyrean project 'Revolutionary Aristotelianism' (Knight 2007, 2011).

## 6. Conclusion

MacIntyrean Neo-Aristotelianism gives an account of human life in which questions of meaningful life are not something accidental but are central and fundamental to human flourishing. By giving the central role to the internal goods of diverse human practices, MacIntyre draws our attention toward a meaningful human life that can be understood only in terms of those social relations sustained by the virtues and goods provided by these relations for individual flourishing. Losing sense of such goods provides ground for substituting them with external ones, when flourishing of individuals becomes accidental, or where internal goods are degenerated only to serve the interest of power and capital.

From the writings of MacIntyre emerges a theory of human agency and rationality in which an individual is not just a bundle of competing preferences and whose rationality serves those preferences as the ability to calculate the best way to satisfy preferences whatever they are. MacIntyre stresses the importance of the social relations that allow us to develop our rational powers and become independent practical reasoners. To reason practically means first of all to reason about the goods individuals are pursuing, to educate our desires, and to ask the question what is the good for all human persons. MacIntyre describes how, through practices and the networks of giving and receiving, we are able to move from the initial state of dependency towards independency. The flourishing of the human individual depends on the flourishing of social relationships.

The MacIntyrean scheme makes it clear, then, that forming and sustaining structures that allow the questioning of the goods individuals and their community pursue are fundamental in order to resist the corrupting practices of capital and the state. Virtues are essential to the sustainability of these kinds of structures. The possibility to look for the answer to the question about what is the good for human beings makes human life meaningful and intelligible. Human life is then understood as a pursuit for truth in human life. This pursuit is not possible without virtues and particular types of social relations that allow for the flourishing of individuals.

Hence, an important and essential element to this flourishing consists of us becoming independent practical reasoners, people able to use our rational powers for the pursuit of a meaningful life.

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