

# **Foundational Ethics: A Look at Alasdair MacIntyre's Ethical Views**

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RE: Ethics Paper, Foundational Ethics: A Look at Alasdair MacIntyre's Ethical Views

Greetings Dr. Ibeh,

I am attaching the ethics paper required of me as a participant in the PSU/NSF-REU Summer 2002 Program. In this paper, I have explored the somewhat wavering views that Alasdair MacIntyre has had with respect to foundational ethics. Ironically, MacIntyre initially rejected Aristotle's linking of ethics and biology, but later rethought his position and recanted his earlier remarks.

I hope that you enjoy reading this paper. In preparing to write it, I had the pleasure of reading three of MacIntyre's books and also of discussing MacIntyre's work with both Dr. Gary McGrath and Dr. Don Viney. The time that these men spent with me and the time that you will spend reading this paper is much appreciated.

Perhaps if all members of any given community, whether said community is small or global, rationally discussed ethical issues, there would be a possibility that human animals could one day achieve moral consensus with respect to how they deal with moral questions.

Sincerely,

Kyla D. Scarborough  
PSU/NSF-REU/RET Program 2002

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## Summary:

Alasdair MacIntyre, a widely known moral philosopher, examined foundational ethics in an attempt to discover how and why modern societies had lost their respective moral bearings in his book *After Virtue*.

Among the many ethical lines of thought that presently exist, there is a specific one within which humans are considered as dependent rational animals. Alasdair MacIntyre has explored this issue at depth and has written a book, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, within which he elaborates upon his findings. The second part of this paper will examine MacIntyre's views with respect to issues such as human animality, vulnerability, and flourishing.

## Introduction:

The problem being addressed in this paper is that modern societies do not possess, and perhaps cannot attain, a state of ethical consensus, with respect to how humans deal with moral questions, that is necessary for the flourishing of the human species.

In *After Virtue* Alasdair MacIntyre attempted to give an account of the virtues within social practices, the lives of individuals, and also in the lives of communities, while making that account independent of what he called Aristotle's "metaphysical biology." Key episodes in the development of modern moral thought such as the changing of moral philosophies throughout time were explored. Various virtues were valued in Homeric societies, in Aristotle's Athens, and during and following the Enlightenment.

Almost twenty years after the initial publication of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre admitted that he was in error in supposing that an ethics independent of biology was possible and that:

...no account of the goods, rules, and virtues that are definitive of our moral life can be adequate that does not explain—or at least point us towards an explanation—how that form of life is possible for beings who are biologically constituted as we are, by providing us with an account of our development towards and into that form of life. That development has as its starting point our initial animal condition. (DRA x)

In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre argues that an idea of the good for an agent cannot be formed independently of having a conception of the kind of being that agent is. To conform to the ethics outlined in this book, one has to become an independent practical reasoner. How one does this will be explored as well as social relationships, the common good, and the political and social structures of the common good. The necessity of moral commitment and rational inquiry will be elaborated upon. The good life for human animals is a life with the virtues that allows humans to become independent in their practical reasoning, but also allows them to acknowledge a dependency upon others. A good society is one within which giving and receiving

guidance and assistance to those in physical or mental need such as the very young, the elderly, the ill, and the mentally or physically challenged, is the norm. Such a society has many common elements with those of societies of other intelligent species, such as dolphins, chimpanzees, or dogs. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, Alasdair MacIntyre elaborates on these matters.

### Literature Review:

1. MacIntyre, Alasdair, After Virtue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984

MacIntyre explores societies and events which he believes lead to the present state of degradation of morality evident in modern society.

2. MacIntyre, Alasdair, A Short History of Ethics, University of Notre Dame Press, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 1998

The ethical viewpoints of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and many others were discussed in this book.

3. MacIntyre, Alasdair, Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues, 2<sup>nd</sup> Printing, Open Court Publishing, 1999

This stresses the importance of the human virtues and character. Noted are similarities, and differences, between human animals and other intelligent species.

4. Milch, Robert, and Charles H. Patterson, Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: Notes, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Cliffs Notes Incorporated, 1994

Modern ethics still embraces some aspects of the Aristotelian line of thought. Aristotle's ethics is primarily focused on the Athenian elite and loyalty to the polis (city state).

5. Viney, Donald W., Editor, Questions of Value, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1998

Rereading the sections on *Descartes Principles of Philosophy, Part I* and his correspondence with Princess Elisabeth reaffirmed how much it is, that this student disagrees with Descartes who considered animals as mere machines—denied that animals have thoughts or any kind of mental life.

## **Humankind’s Ethical Crisis—The Lack of Moral Consensus with Respect to How Humans Deal with Moral Questions:**

### **I. Early MacIntyre: *After Virtue*:**

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre examines the historical context of various theories of virtue throughout time in an attempt to better understand how mankind has arrived at its present state of moral disarray and why the language of morality is in serious disorder. He seeks to explain how the intelligibility and understandability of moral language and practice unraveled following the Enlightenment, which resulted in a fragmented situation for ethical discourse.

The problem, according to MacIntyre, is that society has lost its moral language and that moral debate is shrill and rarely leads to consensus. Society seems incapable of coming to enough basic agreement in matters of ethics to enable it to deal with the moral chaos that surrounds it. Arguments about moral issues lead to shrill and sterile debate. Humans are living inside an epistemological inferno—possessing confused notions, empty opinions, and hollow ideas, “That shrillness may have an additional source. For it is not only in arguments with others that we are reduced so quickly to assertion and counter assertion; it is also in the arguments that we have within ourselves (AV 8).”

Basically, what societies had lost was a teleological understanding of human life. Humans have no agreed upon understanding of what it means to flourish as human beings. Too many modern philosophers are quibbling about semantics as opposed to philosophizing about the real world around them. *After Virtue* seems to offer a key with which humans can reassemble the moral fragments and shape them into a coherent moral system.

What is the good for an individual human or for human society in general? Why had humans gradually lost the ability to rationally determine remedies with respect to issues of morality throughout time? Placing an emphasis on Emotivism may have accelerated this deterioration of the language of morality.

MacIntyre states that Emotivism is the key to how moral words became disengaged—and the key as well to why debates are so shrill and he therefore rejects Emotivism. How could they not be, since emotion is always an important component of moral conversation? According to MacIntyre, “The emotivist self has no limits for what he or she may pass judgment upon (AV 32).” He additionally states, “The emotivist self is criterialess and without a teleology (AV 33).” Within Emotivism, judgments of any type are merely expressions of preference, attitude, or emotion and are therefore not rationally made judgments. Emotivism also presupposes a specific sociology.

According to MacIntyre, humans are characters who are role-playing within the communal stage. Characters embody humans’ moral beliefs, doctrines, and theories.

Additionally, characters share the societal roles that define a culture. MacIntyre now defines character:

With what I have called characters it is quite otherwise; and the difference arises from the fact that the requirements of a character are imposed from the outside, from the way in which others regard and use characters to understand and to evaluate themselves. With other types of social roles the role may be adequately specified in terms of the institutions of whose structures it is a part and the relation to those institutions of the individuals who fill the roles. In the case of a character this is not enough. A character is an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them. He furnishes them with a cultural and moral ideal. Hence the demand is that in this type of case role and personality be fused. Social type and psychological type are required to coincide. The character morally legitimates a mode of social existence. (AV 29)

What, then, were the roles that humans played in societies prior to those existing in the modern era? What effects did acting in those types of roles have upon humankind's loss of moral consensus and the language of morality?

In Homeric society, a person had to fulfill the obligations of her or his role in society. A person's identity was based upon what she or he did to earn a living or upon the role that was played within a familial situation. The self in heroic age lacked the ability to detach from any one particular standpoint or point of view—to view a situation as if from the outside. For Homeric persons there were no standards external to those embodied in the structures of the community to which appeals could be made—no rational form of moral discourse.

Aristotle's Athens was a place where virtue was tightly tied to the concept of community. An Athenian person's understanding of the virtues did not provide the person with standards by which that person could question the life of the community and enquire with respect to whether or not practices or policies were just. Citizens of Athens who were laborers, slaves, or women were not considered with respect to matters virtuous, as such persons were deemed somewhat subhuman by the male Athenian aristocracy.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment tried to reclaim some of traditional morality by refounding it upon human will or choice. All of the Enlightenment approaches included either the principle that moral rules were the work of reason or the work of the passions. Morality had become isolated from the true condition of humanity and was defined as an expression of human feeling; universal moral law governed social behavior, individual choice, and a means for deciding which actions would benefit the most people. Why are the developments of the Enlightenment project today considered an ethical failure?

The Enlightenment project of justifying morality failed and left behind it a morally fragmented culture. In secularizing morality, teleology and authority had been lost. It

had been improper for these moral philosophers to think that ideas could have an independent life. MacIntyre explains:

I take it that both the utilitarianism of the middle and late nineteenth century and the analytical moral philosophy of the middle and late twentieth century are alike unsuccessful attempts to rescue the autonomous moral agent from the predicament in which the failure of the Enlightenment project of providing him with a secular, rational justification for his moral allegiances had left him. I have already characterized that predicament as one in which the price paid for liberation from what appeared to be the external authority of traditional morality was the loss of any authoritative content from the would-be moral utterances of the newly autonomous agent. (AV 68)

For MacIntyre, the virtues cannot be understood or attained any by means other than by a person's actively participating in a practice that contains its own internal goods and standards of excellence. His concept of a virtue is explained in terms of such practices. Within practices, in order to obtain the goods that are internal to that practice, a person must develop certain excellences of character—the virtues:

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 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 excellences, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (AV 187)

Individual practices embody various virtues that are necessary for the continuation or flourishing of said practice. Those virtues are the standards of the practice and they are also common cultural resources by which actions and commitments are justified. Practices, accordingly, are coherent and complex forms of social cooperative human activity that enhance the abilities of humans to achieve.

Participation in any practice involves adhering to certain standards of excellence and obedience to the rules of the practice as well as the achieving of goods. Upon entering into a practice, one accepts the authority of such standards and the inadequacy of one's individual development as judged by these standards. Excellence in a practice is gradually developed by assorted apprenticeships. There are always those in a practice who are accomplished in the practice and other persons who are at various stages of development within the practice. The standards of virtue within practices provide a basis within which a vision of the common good can eventually be established.

By participating in a practice, one can produce two types of goods, internal goods and external goods. Internal goods, which are internal to a practice, can only be obtained by one's participation in the practice. Internal goods are the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice. Internal goods are goods describable only in

terms of the practice. However, it is characteristic of external goods that when obtained they are always one person's property and possession. External goods are of the type that the more one person has of them; the less there are remaining for other persons. Therefore, external goods are characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners. Desire for external goods can be a source of corruption in practices within which grants, fame, and prizes are awarded. Persons may lie or cheat in order to obtain such goods. Therefore ethics is necessary to maintain practices' integrity and to them protect them from such corruption.

One of humankind's current moral crises is that humans need to simultaneously be predictable and unpredictable when participating within practices. MacIntyre now addresses this dilemma:

We need to remain to some degree opaque and unpredictable, particularly when threatened by the predictive practices of others. The satisfaction of this need to at least some degree supplies another necessary condition for human life being meaningful in the ways that is and can be. It is necessary, if life is to be meaningful, for us to be able to engage in long-term projects, and this requires predictability; it is necessary, if life is to be meaningful, for us to be in the possession of ourselves and not merely to be the creations of other people's projects, intentions and desires, and this requires unpredictability. We are thus simultaneously trying to render the rest of society predictable and ourselves unpredictable, to devise generalizations which will capture the behavior of others and to cast our own behavior into forms which will elude the generalizations which others frame. If these are general features of social life, what will be the characteristics of the best possible available stock of generalizations about social life? (AV 104)

How then can a person be simultaneously predictable, unpredictable, and virtuous within a practice in order to obtain the goods affiliated with that practice? Which virtues are required to achieve such goods? According to MacIntyre:

Now the virtues are those goods by reference to which, whether we like it or not, we define our relationships to those other people with whom we share the kinds of purposes and standards which inform practices. (AV 190)

Some virtues are universal and necessary for any human participating in a practice to flourish. MacIntyre defines a virtue as an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable humans to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents them from achieving any such goods (AV 191). Oftentimes, the institution that provides for a practice prevents its practitioners from achieving the goods internal to that practice.

The institutional frameworks, that fund and surround most practices, oftentimes rob practices of virtue as opposed to validating various virtues. Institutions are needed to sustain practices, but they are primarily concerned with obtaining external goods such as money, power, and prestige. Institutions are also necessary for obtaining the internal

goods affiliated with a specific practice. A problem is that the external goods that an institution strives to obtain and the internal goods of a practice must remain equally balanced. If society places too much emphasis on the external goods obtained by institutions, then the internal goods obtainable within a practice will diminish.

MacIntyre thinks that modern political regimes also rob their constituents of the acquisition of goods, and are, in general, lacking in virtue:

Modern systematic politics, whether liberal, conservative, radical, or socialist, simply has to be rejected from a standpoint that owes genuine allegiance to the tradition of the virtues; for modern politics itself expresses in its institutional forms a systematic rejection of the tradition. (AV 255)

Practice and possession of the virtues is not a concept that should be applied only within the confines of specific practices, or political practices, but one should be virtuous with respect to all aspects of one's life.

The persistence of practices is dependent upon the cultivation and application of virtues. But virtues must not be exercised only in practices, but also in family life and in politics in order to sustain the institutions and not fall prey to the competitiveness of institutions. The practices that involve private interests are of the form of application that they concern the areas of life about which individuals feel most passionate, such as protection of one's personal rights and also the protection to pursue one's economic interests.

In choosing the specific practices within which one desires to participate, one must find a manner of intelligibly choosing among the assorted goods that may be sought through such practices. MacIntyre deems that humans determine what is good for them, or what the good—telos towards which they direct their lives, by appealing to a kind of narrative or story about their lives. Narratives that humans live out have both an unpredictable and also a teleological character. If the narrative of one's individual and societal lives is to continue intelligibly, then there exist constraints on how the narrative can continue and within those constraints there are indefinitely many ways of its continuation.

MacIntyre's central thesis begins to emerge—a human is in action and practice essentially a story-telling animal. Humans become, through their respective histories, tellers of stories that aspire to truth. One's sense of self is connected to one's roles in narratives. Narrative, therefore, is a living tradition. The histories that help sustain practices and make them intelligible are traditions within which there exist particular systems of beliefs and arguments about the common good and how to appropriately seek such. MacIntyre describes a living tradition in this manner:

A living tradition then is a 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. 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 that tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us; the history of each of our own lives generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions. (AV 222)

A key part of humans' cultural inheritance lies within the tradition of the virtues. Unfortunately the controversies within specific cultures seem to be as unshakable, or shrill, as the present political and moral debates are. MacIntyre succinctly states, "It follows that our society cannot hope to achieve moral consensus (AV 252)." So what is it that humans should do in response to this lacking of shared societal moral principals? Humans must continue to be humans with good will, in pursuit of the virtues.

Alasdair MacIntyre closes *After Virtue* with a somber note—this passage:

What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without ground for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. (AV 263)

## II. Recent MacIntyre: *Dependent Rational Animals*:

MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, was published almost twenty years following *After Virtue*; its preface provides the reader with a much-needed transition at this point in time:

In *After Virtue* I had attempted to give an account of the place of the virtues, understood as Aristotle had understood them, within social practices, the lives of individuals and the lives of communities, while making that account independent of what I called Aristotle's "metaphysical biology." Although there is indeed good reason to repudiate important elements in Aristotle's biology, I now judge that I was in error in supposing an ethics independent of biology to be possible... (DRA x)

The general argument presented in this book is that human beings must be initially understood as animals, albeit, as a special sort of animal. There are some aspects of human nature that are similar to aspects of other intelligent species such as dolphins.

It is suitable to attribute to animals, such as dolphins, intentions and reasons for action. They are not so far removed from humans as humans often think. Especially in the early years of life as humans develop their aptitudes as rational agents, the condition of human beings is not unlike that of some other animals. The human identity is in a fundamental way the identity of an animal. Human bodies are animal bodies—much of

what is intelligent animal in humans is not specifically human. Both human and nonhuman animals manipulate means to achieve their respective ends—they do one thing in order to bring about another. After carefully considering several examples of nonhuman animals, MacIntyre argues that these animals do in fact have beliefs. Other animals often better their beliefs by obtaining a new perception with respect to a specific situation. Human beliefs are also often similarly indeterminate.

In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre claims that societies' acknowledging humans' dependency on others, and also their vulnerability, can assist mankind in better understanding human morality. Human animals endure many periods during their lives during which they are dependent or become dependent upon fellow humans. Some instances of these times are throughout childhood, during periods of mental or physical illness or distress, and in old age. A prominent property, of human animal nature that has not received the due philosophic deliberation that it deserves, is these times of disability and vulnerability. Other animals that experience extended childhood dependency, such as dolphins and gorillas, also exhibit the elementary moral characteristics of cooperation, mutual protection and care for the disabled. In needy animals, including human animals, independence and dependence are not mutually exclusive. In fact, dependence is the presupposition for the possibility of independence. Independence is never without its dependencies. Practical reason is an extension and reworking of prelinguistic and prerational affective needs and motivations—needs and motivations that humans share with other animals.

The significance of what it is that humans share with other species of intelligent animals is obscured when immoderate importance is attributed to human possession of language. Dolphins engage not only in actions, but also in sophisticated and collaborative social practices that constitute what can be understood as particular forms of life, similar to the manner in which humans understand other human cultures. The dolphin ratio of brain mass to body mass is similar to that exhibited in humans, additionally, the dolphin cortex is highly developed. Dolphins also live together in groups and herds within well-defined social structures. Dolphins conceptualize, desire, exhibit reasons for acting, can distinguish truth from falsity, and can also correct their beliefs. These abilities constitute an aptitude to flourish, which is natural to them as the kind of being that they are, although various harms might disable them from flourishing. All of this is also true of human animals.

Human infants possess similar prelinguistic abilities to those that dolphins possess and without said abilities would be unable to acquire language. What language adds are the abilities for humans to distance themselves from and reflect upon their desires, beliefs, and practices; to reflect upon their past and upon future possibilities; and to be persuaded that they should aim at better goods than those that had previously given them reason to act. Although other species engage in practical reasoning, language enables human reasoning about a practice to be of a higher order. It is through engaging in such reflective practical reasoning that humans become independent practical reasoners. The use of a language is always embedded in forms of social practice. Ironically, dolphins

have been taught new human-created languages and can easily detect variances in word meaning due to alterations in sentence structure and variances in context. MacIntyre summarizes with respect to these matters:

We have on this view, a first animal nature and *in addition* a second distinctively human nature. The force of the ‘and’ is to suggest that this second nature can, at least in the most important respects, only be accounted for in its own terms. Its relation to our given biological nature is thought of as external and contingent in a way and to a degree that permits a single sharp line to be drawn between human beings and members of all nonhuman species. And that line is the line between those who possess language and those who do not. It is of course right to insist upon the significance of the differences between language-possessing and non-language-possessing animals. And some of these will be of crucial importance for my inquiry. But what exclusive, or almost exclusive, attention to these differences may and commonly does obscure is the significance of the continuity and resemblances between some aspects of the intelligent activities of nonhuman animals and the language-informed practical rationality of human beings. (DRA 50)

Humans begin life as dependent rational animals. To develop human moral capacity as moral agents means that humans need to obtain some measure of independence, though this should not come at the cost of admitting one’s constant and continued dependence. Humans need to become independent practical reasoners, but how do they go about doing so?

To become independent reasoners, humans need an assortment of aptitudes, among which is the ability to detach themselves from the immediacy of their desires, and the ability to imagine alternative realistic futures. Those who possess specific virtues that cannot be procured without prolonged help from others cannot achieve except in capacities such as these.

MacIntyre states that to become an independent reasoner one needs to accomplish three things. First, one has to move forward from simply having reasons for acting to evaluating one’s reasons for acting. Secondly, others have to take note of one’s particular condition—I can only truly know who I am if others truly know who I am. One has to become accountable for one’s actions and moral views and also become able to imagine other alternate futures—other possibilities. According to MacIntyre, “One cannot then be an independent practical reasoner without being able to give to others an intelligible account of one’s reasoning (DRA 105).”

An important part of one’s evolution towards independent practical reasoning is for one to acquire the virtues and to move towards what is the good for the self while at the same time considering, and caring about, what the common good consists of. Common goods are goods that can only be one’s insofar as they are also those of others.

There are three ways that humans should attribute goodness. One must be able to evaluate something as a means. Being able to do this will enable one to be, or do, or have some further good that is in itself good. The second attribution is that one must be excellent in attaining the goods of a specific practice. The third attribute is that one must be able to determine whether or not it is good for them to have the goods of a particular practice in their life. One must also take into consideration whether it is good for a specific society that the goods of a particular practice should be in the society's common life. It should not be said that the individual's good is inferior to that of the community or that the community exists simply to sanction the good of individuals. An individual cannot conceive of or pursue one's own good apart from that of the community. Therefore the common good is not summed up or sculpted of specific individual's goods.

Why do persons need to acquire the human virtues? Humans cannot flourish without them. Which virtues are desired? Humans need the virtues that permit them to become independent in their practical reasoning and simultaneously allow them to admit their dependence upon others. The abilities needed to flourish as dependent rational animals—to grow from and within one's vulnerable state toward the ability to reason independently, are familiar virtues such as courage, justice, temperateness, and an amiable will. But one needs much more than that. Humans virtues such not only that they may grow toward independence, but that humans need them also because without them, no one could appropriately attend to and educate children so that they also may flourish.

The virtue of just generosity requires humans to act from and with a certain kind of affectionate regard. The span of just generosity extends beyond the confines of community. MacIntyre states that, "Just generosity requires humans to be uncalculating in the sense that they can rely on no strict proportionality of giving and receiving (DRA 126)."

Every individual, from the onset, lives in debt—that this is so is simply embedded in the vulnerability and fragility of human life. Humans need the virtues of acknowledged dependence. They, therefore, must learn to practice gratitude, courtesy, and forbearance. Any specific human can flourish only insofar as others make that human's good their own and help that human through periods of debility and disability so that she or he can obtain the virtues that found flourishing. To the degree that this human acquires them, the human becomes apt and inclined to honor the good of others as her or his own. To participate in this complex of kinships of giving and receiving as the virtues require, MacIntyre says that:

I have to understand that what I am called upon to give may be quite disproportionate to what I have received and that those to whom I am called upon to give may well be those from whom I shall receive nothing. And I also have to understand that the care that I give to others has to be in an important way unconditional. Since the measure of what is required of me is determined in key part, even if not only, by their needs. (DRA 108)

Without the virtues, humans cannot adequately care for or educate others. Neither can they protect themselves or others from neglect or malice.

MacIntyre now addresses politics and what specific type of political society would benefit the independent practical reasoner:

What I am trying to envisage then is a form of political society in which it is taken for granted that disability and dependence on others are something that all of us experience at certain times in our lives and this to unpredictable degrees, and are adequately voiced and met is not a special interest, the interest of one particular group rather than of others, but rather the interest of the whole political society, an interest that is integral to their conception of their common good. What kind of society might possess the structures necessary to achieve a common good thus conceived? (DRA 130)

Fortunately, humans share many nonpolitical common goods—in families, groups, and practices within which they choose to participate. Sadly, political communities exist to promote cooperative reasoning about goals that enable humans to continue existing and to help them to find ways to obtain the goods that they pursue. The political community should exist to produce a community within which joint deliberation can occur within a framework of reciprocal indebtedness and just generosity. The modern nation state provides certain needed public goods, but it also conceals its manipulation of human lives with insincere talk of common good. Political life within this type of state is not properly organized as a practice and can never overcome the fragmentation of modern society. Communities smaller than those political are the only possible arenas within in which the common good can be debated and nourished. What humans need politically is a form of local community within which a common good is truly pursued and also in which the virtues of acknowledged dependence are accepted.

It is only through reflecting upon the educative reasoning of others and through making ourselves intelligible to them, and so also to ourselves, that humans acquire a capacity for independent judgment. Humans need political structures within which those who have lost their ability to independently practically reason to have a voice in such communal deliberation. There must be humans willing to stand proxy for individuals such as these. MacIntyre explains:

To engage in this dialogue of question and answer, so that we make ourselves accountable to others and treat ourselves as accountable to them, we have to become able to assume the other's point of view, so that the concerns to which we respond in giving our account are the ones that are in fact genuinely theirs. If we are successful in so doing, we become able to speak with the other's voice and, if the conversation between us is sufficiently extended through time and is wide-ranging enough in its subject matter, we will become able to speak with the voice of the other systematically, that is, to assert, to question and to prescribe in the light of the other's conception of our common good. (DRA 150)

Alasdair MacIntyre concludes *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* as follows:

...reminding us of how much is involved in allegiance to a conception of the common good that requires both the virtues of the independent practical reasoner and the virtues of acknowledged dependence. For this is a good common to the very young and to the very old, as well as to the athlete and to those engaged in intellectual inquiry, a nature, as well as our specifically human condition expose us. It is because and insofar as rational enquiry serves and partly constitutes that common good that it is itself the good that it is. (DRA 166)

### **Discussion of Results:**

If a human possesses both the virtues of independence and the virtues of acknowledged dependence, this human will be committed to act in certain ways—even unconditionally so to act. Humans should help those in need simply because of the needing and no further justification should be given. Helping others in need will help one to realize one's own good. Only those who can help strangers without further reflection will flourish as human beings. By acting in accord with virtue, humans will each achieve their individual good as well.

### **Conclusions:**

Born as dependent animals into a species characterized by rationality, no one can individually become an independent reasoner. Humans cannot move from dependence to relative independence without the exercise of certain virtues—they must become virtuous. Others in one's community must also possess the virtues that enable one to acknowledge one's continued dependence. Humans must see themselves as always vulnerable and more or less disabled. It is essential to consider seriously humans' animality, continual dependence and vulnerability, and also the human capacity to become an independent reasoner.

Although MacIntyre states that human beings need a community within which common good is pursued and acknowledged dependence is acknowledged, he omits the instructions with respect to how humans can find or create such a community. Additionally, MacIntyre fails to mention how communities can obtain the sense of shared vision or culture that is needed to have relatively coherent practices of giving and receiving. MacIntyre makes many valid points, and addresses several important issues, but is such a society's, within which the participants are independent rational animals with the virtues, existence, and or future flourishing possible?

Ethics independent of biology is not possible.

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