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I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration.
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RESUMO

TÍTULO: Who are the “Worst Off” and the “Vulnerable”? Conceptions of the Just and the Good in the Thought of John Rawls and Alasdair MacIntyre

RESUMO: John Rawls e Alasdair MacIntyre, quando considerados em conjunto, são usualmente considerados personagens da controvérsia entre liberais e comunitaristas. Essa divisão é caracterizada em termos de disputa sobre a relação entre o bom e o justo. No entanto, muito se pode ganhar tomando o projeto de Rawls, que defende a justiça como equidade, e o projeto de MacIntyre, desenvolvido na época de seu trabalho marcante *After Virtue*, como investigações morais distintas. As teorias do bem em ambos os projetos dos autores são apresentadas para numa reflexão sobre o perfeccionismo e os fins da vida. A conexão entre liberalismo e niilismo é sugerida ou negada com diferentes argumentos. Mesmo reconhecendo que as visões de Rawls e MacIntyre são, em última análise, incompatíveis, estes compartilham várias características. Ambos rejeitam o utilitarismo e o kantismo (isto é, Rawls rejeita Kant como uma visão abrangente); ambos apelam na psicologia moral a uma ideia ou princípio aristotélico de que a excelência contém, em certo sentido, sua própria recompensa; ambos falam sobre a unidade de uma vida, um em termos de planos racionais (Rawls) ou da unidade narrativa de uma vida (MacIntyre); e ambos tentam incorporar a preocupação com os que estão “em pior situação” ou com os particularmente “vulneráveis”. O presente trabalho explora as aplicações de ideias divergentes do justo e do bom no pensamento destes dois pensadores. Essas aplicações divergentes, defende-se neste trabalho, partilham um limite comum nas conceções de “Pior” e “Vulnerável”.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE**:** justiça, perfeccionismo, virtudes, unidade de vida, vulnerabilidade

ABSTRACT

TITLE: Who are the "Worst Off" and the "Vulnerable"? Conceptions of the Just and the Good in the Thought of John Rawls and Alasdair MacIntyre

ABSTRACT: John Rawls and Alasdair MacIntyre, when considered together, are frequently taken as characters along the liberal-communitarian divide. This divide is often characterized in terms of dispute over the relationship between the good and the just. Yet much is to be gained by taking Rawls's project, which is of justice as fairness, and MacIntyre's project, developed by the time of his landmark work *After Virtue*, as distinct moral inquiries. The theories of the good are presented in both of the authors' projects, so that a reflection on perfectionism and the ends of life emerges. The connection between liberalism and nihilism is suggested or denied with different arguments. Even acknowledging that Rawls's and MacIntyre's views are ultimately incompatible, they share more than a few characteristics. Both reject utilitarianism and Kantianism (that is, Rawls rejects Kant's comprehensive view); both appeal, as a matter of moral psychology, to an Aristotelian idea or principle that excellence is in some sense its own reward; both talk about the unity of a life, one in terms of rational plans (Rawls) and the other in terms of the narrative unity of a life (MacIntyre); and both try to incorporate concern for the "worst off" or for the particularly vulnerable. In fact, while the present work seeks to explore the divergent applications of the just and the good in the thought of these two thinkers, these divergent applications nevertheless reach a common limit in conceptions of the "Worst Off" and the "Vulnerable."

Keywords: justice, perfectionism, the virtues, unity of life, vulnerability

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I. Introduction

The present thesis is an attempt to engage with two different presentations of the relationship between the just and the good in John Rawls and Alasdair MacIntyre. In this engagement, we hope both to contribute to the understanding of these presentations and to provide some useful critical remarks.

It is not usually necessary to justify an inquiry into two major contemporary thinkers like Rawls and MacIntyre. While no one disputes, for example, their relevance to the way that the present-day state of the art has shaped up, nor the fact that both authors have commanded a significant amount of attention, nor that their productivity has put them in the upmost echelon, page-for page, compared to their peers; again, these items safely aside from dispute, the usefulness of adding another short text commenting on these works may seem misplaced, especially considering the length and density of these authors' contributions.[1]

Consider just MacIntyre's case. While all of his books have, so far, been smaller than *A Theory of Justice*, he has, since his magnum opus *After Virtue* in 1981, written four major works – a project referred to by some of his colleagues as *An Interminably Long History of Ethics* – and published several other books, which, according to rumor, are supposed to be joined by a work on the ethics of war in a nuclear age. Besides the matter of length, there is the matter of density; their books are not long "only in pages."[2]

A further justification to revisit Rawls's and MacIntyre's different concepts of the good, and their auxiliary concepts, may be necessary, however. We should consider that the standard narratives about the relationship between these two thinkers are still relatively new, all things considered; we have the task of thinking and rethinking through *A Theory of Justice* and *After Virtue* in a way that, perhaps, we do not have in respect of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Herder's *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*. How, then, may we approach the matter?

We may begin by saying that, on the one hand, Rawls's and MacIntyre's ideas are typically taken to represent two central approaches in contemporary moral and political philosophy, namely, deontology and virtue ethics. Given these differences, their present-day heirs, or inspired others, have thus tended to be apathetic with the other's rival approach. The underlying significance will hopefully become clearer as the present inquiry unfolds, though it may suffice to say that Rawls and MacIntyre cross paths less than the standard narrative may suggest.

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[1] A similar comment was made by Brian Barry, *The Liberal Theory of Justice: a critical examination of the principal doctrines in* A Theory of Justice *by John Rawls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 3.

[2] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), xviii.

Among the general public, there is diminished concern with the "worst off" (Rawls) or "vulnerability" (MacIntyre) when not entirely ignored, and it is apparently being replaced by "identity politics," which, in its current iterations, takes up such concerns only secondarily and incidentally. These discrepancies may be surprising, sitting as we are 50 years after the publication of *A Theory of Justice*, and 40 years since *After Virtue*. Yet what these and other discrepancies have been useful for is to signal ways in which the most common, indeed the orthodox, accounts that attempt to capture the theories both of Rawls and MacIntyre are accounts that need to be put into question.

To address just part of this concern, consider the canonical version of the fate of Rawls's thought and the thought of his opponents, a story which runs more or less along the following lines. Rawls marked, we are told, the return to normative political theory that had been abandoned during the twentieth century by (sometimes) brilliant commentaries on liberal ideals, such as freedom and equality, and the necessary tradeoffs between them. Then, *A Theory of Justice* rejoined the sundered lineages of empirical and theoretical political studies. The union has been described as one between "feasibility" and "desirability."[3]

We may start with the direct criticism of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in Michael Sandel's momentous work, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982).[4] On this account, a certain number of other contemporary critics of liberal political theory have "come to be identified with the 'communitarian' critique of rights-oriented liberalism," and this, according to Sandel, because "contemporary liberalism offers an inadequate account of community."[5] Very different as these critics are, some common features of deontological liberalism fall within the scope of their criticism. In particular, they are taken to together oppose features like the liberal conception of the person, asocial individualism, universalism, objectivism, and neutrality.[6] Rawls's response to these critiques evidently came in *Political Liberalism* (1995), where he introduced a modification as well provided a clarification.[7] Here, he is supposed to have dropped his claim that his theory of justice did not represent a comprehensive philosophical view, and included the view that his own comprehensive philosophical view should be prepared to share common ground with other "reasonable" religious and philosophical comprehensive views. So, political liberalism should include not just a plurality of views of the good, but also a plurality of views

[3] Chandran Kukathas and Philip Pettit, *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and its Critics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 6-11.

[4] Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[5] Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, ix.

[6] Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 9-33. We are following closely here José Colen, *Voto, Governos e Mercados* (Lisboa: Ed. Aster, 2010) 13-15.

[7] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

of justice. It is in this way that Taylor, MacIntyre, and perhaps Walzer, among other communitarians, are supposed to be read as a reaction to Rawls's liberal project.

As my own understanding of some of these thinkers has developed, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with this official narrative. I have taken it as significant that neither Rawls nor MacIntyre, among others implicated in the narrative, seem to have recognized themselves in it. There are a number of indicators which fall in line with these thinkers' distancing of themselves from the standard story. I would like to point out some of these signs.

Dana Villa notes in an attempt to get perspective on the influence of Rawls: "In the 1970s and 1980s, students of political theory invariably encountered the cliché that political theory and philosophy died sometime in the 1950's, only to be revived in 1971 by the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. One can be a great admirer of Rawls's work (...) and still be taken aback by the radical foreshortening of the history of political thought implied by this cliché."[8]

As proof of the livelihood of political theory until the late 1960's, she lists "some of the most interesting – and enduring – works of political theory," such as Eric Voeglin's *Order and History* (1956-57), Isaiah Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty* (1969), Jürgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1963) and *Theory and Practice* (1966), Michael Oakeshott's *Rationalism and Politics* (1962), and Hannah Arendt's most famous works, *The Human Condition* (1958), *On Revolution* (1963), and *Between Past and Future* (1968). We could easily add more to the list if we include the works coming from social choice theorists. So, it seems that, contrary to the current diagnosis, *A Theory of Justice* in fact emerged in a field which already included some "of the most interesting works (...) of the past sixty years or so."[9]

Another sign of instability in the standard story is that even Michael Sandel's criticism – to the effect that Rawls's theory presents a case based on an asocial individualism – seems somewhat wide of the mark. It may fit Nozick's libertarianism, but for Rawls, it needs qualification. For from the very beginning, Rawls presents his project as "describing the role of justice in social cooperation,"[10] although his emphasis on the idea of political community as a system of cooperation surely appreciated a growing emphasis in his later works and essays.

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[8] Dana Villa, "Hannah Arendt: from philosophy to politics," in Catherine H. Zuckert (ed.), *Political Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 108.

[9] Ibid.

[10] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 3.

Nor was Rawls's conception of the person quite as abstract and devoid of historical details and social commitments as some of his critics and even defenders have thought. His view of the person in a community is not devoid of historical-social context. He does not omit the role of the family or that of the school system, and nor does he ignore the heavier concepts of "moral psychology" that one would find in a "perfectionist" theory. (Rather, he reprioritizes them.) Indeed, on this latter part, we have only to remind ourselves that moral psychology takes up the third part of *A Theory of Justice*, and, further, that Rawls declared that the third part is the part of the book that he "always liked best."[11] It may thus be paradoxical that in 1993, in the introduction to *Political Liberalism*, he tries to correct "a serious problem internal to justice as fairness, namely (...) that the account of stability in Part III of *Theory* is not consistent with the view as a whole." This an inconsistency that he tries to remove in the work.[12] What we ought to notice is that Rawls did not fail to take notice of these matters.

As for Rawls's transformation of the theory, he even became less sanguine about the universality of the principles of justice, describing the "central ideas and aims of [the] conception [called] 'justice as fairness' (...) as those of a philosophical conception for a constitutional democracy." That is, these are not to finally be taken as principles for any just society whatever, but of a certain kind.

Yet if the lack of attention to Rawls's theory of the good, whether from opponents or allies, leaves us with an incomplete understanding of Rawls's project, there is a different though related narrowness in addressing other thinkers as they are supposed to relate to Rawls. It seems a confused remark to say that Charles Taylor's monumental works ranging from *The Sources of the Self* (1989) to *A Secular Age* (2007),[13] or the path pursued by Alasdair MacIntyre from *After Virtue* (1981) to *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (2016),[14] are most usefully described, for the purposes of the state of the art, as mere responses to Rawls – and, for that matter, responses to which he supposedly responded.

This is not to mention that Rawls barely refers to the communitarians. Nor is it to mention the fact that most, if not all, of these so-called "communitarians" in fact favor liberal democracy. Both of MacIntyre and Taylor, for instance, are uncomfortable with the "communitarian" epithet, and MacIntyre has repeatedly denounced it ever

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[11] John Rawls, "My Teaching," (1993), unpublished. The quote is presented by Samuel Freeman in *Rawls* (New York: Routledge: 2007), 6.

[12] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), xvi.

[13] Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[14] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981).

Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

since the cyclone of activity following the publication of *After Virtue*.[15] Indeed, Taylor and MacIntyre, although about ten years younger than John Rawls, led long productive lives more rather than less independent of his influence. Their most recent works show that even when they cross paths with Rawls's proposal, which is for little more than a couple pages, they pursue distinct lines of inquiry and aim at different goals.

So, if a cross-examination with Rawls may be useful to better understand MacIntyre's project just as well as Rawls's own, it is precisely to make more explicit their distinctive ideas of, in this case, the primacy of the good, and their cavalier disregard of the modern state (which perhaps explains the frequent criticism that neither present a clear political alternative). Like Rawls, his moral and political views are best described as historical-sociological rather than metaphysical.[16]

Chapters II and III try to understand, respectively, Rawls's project of justice as fairness and MacIntyre's *After Virtue* project, and as distinct moral inquiries. Thus, although we will begin with a brief presentation of our understanding of the thought of these thinkers, we do not aim at making a comprehensive presentation of their thought, which would be impossible anyhow considering that Rawls's and MacIntyre's own bibliography includes almost 100 titles (and counting, since MacIntyre is constantly writing) and the secondary references are well over 1000 titles.

Chapters IV and V try to present the theories of the good in both of the authors' projects, and how they relate to the "political and social structures of the common good," to use MacIntyre's expression. Considering how often MacIntyre is observed under the light of the liberal-communitarian debate it seemed all but impossible not to refer to these arguments. Within the debates, a reflection on perfectionism and the ends of life emerges. In this debate, in an asymmetrical way, the connection between liberalism and nihilism is suggested or denied with different arguments. Our aim is to better understand "the negative and incomplete character of liberalism," as MacIntyre put it.

Chapter VI sketches a brief comparison between the two positions, resorting to their explicit or implicit references, but it is in the final remarks that we may try to address in full their similarities and differences.

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[15] He eventually included these remarks in the prologue to the third edition of *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), xiv-xvi.

[16] For MacIntyre especially, the matter is more complex than a simple claim of this kind, since he takes a Thomistic Aristotelian position, if peculiar one, on the relationship of metaphysics to ethics and politics. While he appeals to teleology, a concept which he ultimately takes to be derived from our biology, he understands these claims about our teleology to be sufficiently clarified within a narrative conception of human life within society. How exactly these claims about teleology achieve metaphysical vindication is, for him, ordinarily a separate matter.

II. Justice as Fairness, as a Project

To understand John Rawls's project, it is useful to situate his inquiry within the analytic tradition.[17] One feature of the analytic tradition is a reticence to engage very much with the deepest and most difficult questions. As Thomas Nagel has observed, even long after the demise of logical positivism, analytic philosophers have tended to proceed with caution and attachment to certain standards, "defining the legitimate questions in terms of the available methods of solution," and so focusing on metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language in a way that elides the deeper questions, that is, those which are concerned "with mortal life: how to understand it and how to live with it."[18] If most of these topics "have not received much attention from analytic philosophers [it is] because it is hard to be clear and precise about them, and hard to separate from a mixture of facts and feelings those questions abstract enough for philosophical treatment."[19]

In fact, one of the major guiding assumptions of Anglophone moral and political thought in the mid-twentieth century was that the ends or goals of life could not be methodically studied in a sufficiently rational and careful way. Anglophone philosophy in this period had, in general, developed an intense focus on the philosophy of logic and then the philosophy of language. During this time, the name "analytic philosophy" began to find application to Anglophone philosophy generally, and which name it has since generally retained. This "linguistic turn" in Anglophone philosophy provided a wealth of resources in the analysis of arguments, as the names suggests. However, this wealth was perhaps not equaled with proportionately convincing approaches to more substantial philosophical topics.

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[17] The most important intellectual biography of John Rawls (1921-2002) is to be found in Thomas Pogge, *John Rawls: His Life and Theory of Justice*, trans. Michelle Kosch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), which devotes the first chapter to his early years, his college attendance at Princeton University, his participation in the Second World War, where he claims that he did not see much combat, but after the war, having lost his Protestant faith, he pursued a rather conventional academic career.

After two years as an instructor at Princeton, he spent one year at Oxford in 1953, where he met Isaiah Berlin and J. L. Austin. He then returned to the United States where he taught at Cornell, MIT, and finally Harvard University, until his retirement. Paul Weithman presents Rawls's task of political philosophy as reflecting the impact of twentieth-century history, as well as the influence of Kant, as a way to demonstrate the possibility of a just and stable society (Paul Weithman, "John Rawls and the task of political philosophy," in Catherine H. Zuckert (ed.), *Political Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Authors and Arguments*, 185-197).

A more recent work attempts a reinterpretation of Rawls's political stance, resorting to his master's thesis and the connection between Rawls's early thought and his disillusionment with Protestant theology: William A. Edmundson, *John Rawls: Reticent Socialist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). We deem some of these considerations best addressed by a therapist.

[18] Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), x.

[19] Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, ix.

This is not necessarily to accept such claims as that "it is generally accepted that the recent rebirth of normative political philosophy began with the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in 1971."[20] These remarks from Will Kymlicka may represent something significant about the history of analytic philosophy, but they may occlude from view those advances which occurred elsewhere. For these were the years where the discipline outside analytic philosophy saw the emergence of the works such as Eric Voeglin's *Order and History* (1956-57), Isaiah Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty* (1969), Jürgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1963), Michael Oakeshott's *Rationalism and Politics* (1962), Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), and F.A. Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960).

How Ought We to Conduct Moral Inquiry?

These pressures within the analytic approach made themselves felt beyond the philosophy of logic and language, namely, in moral and political philosophy. Rawls did not shy away from the reflection on how to conduct moral inquiry. Isaiah Berlin, one of the early influences on Rawls,[21] and one of the luminaries of the pluralistic approaches to liberalism, held that we are unable to develop a robust methodological approach to the ends of life – the consideration of which ends, we may say, would count towards that of the deeper questions. In advancing this view, Berlin spoke for what was the largely prevailing opinion.[22] The state of the art allowed just for a precise, descriptive approach to moral and political philosophy.

This widespread pessimism about a systematic treatment of ends was the backdrop of John Rawls's early work. Among the most important steps for his project, therefore, was to forge a path out of this mindset. Undergoing this development involved rejecting the assumption that the ends of life could not be explored in a sophisticated and methodical way, and we see his effort in this vein expressed, for example, in an early if important way in his "Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics."[23]

Rawls's daunting project did not develop into a mature phase until the passage of twenty industrious years. He had, by that point, developed a systematic approach to moral inquiry that engages with the ends of life. Crucially, it did so in a way sophisticated enough that it was akin to the early-to-mid twentieth century

[20] Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 11.

[21] See Thomas Pogge, *John Rawls*, 16-17.

[22] Probably the best comprehensive study of Isaiah Berlin's ideas is that of George Crowder: *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004). See especially pp. 132-147.

[23] John Rawls, "Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics." (1951)

developments in logic and linguistics. The text in which this systematic approach of his crystallized was his first great work, *A Theory of Justice*.[24] This work would end up being singularly massive in changing the orientation of Anglophone moral and political philosophy.

A Theory of Justice did indeed aim at presenting an approach to moral inquiry. Yet this approach was presented as a component of a political theory. An important feature of Rawls's approach was that it supplied a way to identify basic principles of justice, which principles could be applied in a way that aligned with our intuitions about fairness. Further, it is to specific social and political arrangements that these principles could be applied.

This approach to moral inquiry stood in sharp contrast to the alternative approaches of the time which merely described, however precisely, the presuppositions of some or another application of some or another conception of the ends of life, or justice, etc. The state of the art was not constituted by normative approaches – a deficiency later explored intensely by other authors after Rawls, whether in opposition to him, alongside him, or simply apart from him.[25] A major problem for these thinkers, including Rawls, was how Anglophone philosophy could return to normative ethics and politics after the earlier twentieth-century linguistic turn. For what they inherited were astronomically high standards for merely acceptable systematic work in moral and political philosophy.

A Return to Normative Methodology

One commonality of Rawls and his contemporaries was an awareness that there is a danger to this normative, systematic inquiry into moral and political philosophy. A normative approach could, in principle, avoid the triviality of the earlier descriptively analytical approaches. However, there is the danger that a systematic presentation will tend towards an unacceptable circularity in the way that our intuitions and lines of argument would relate. Namely, it may happen that, in starting from certain strong intuitions, a systematic presentation ends up doing nothing more than rationalizing the existing prejudices that underlie those intuitions. Perhaps it would not be trivial, but it would be dogmatic.

As was explored abundantly especially in the early analytic period of Anglophone philosophy, if any given argument is analyzed, we find out two basic things: (a) whether the conclusion can indeed be validly derived from the starting assumptions, and (b) what those assumptions are. With logical methods developed in the

[24] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999). (§§19-21, 46-53, 578-582)

[25] Example engagements in this vein being Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* and Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.

twentieth century, it is not too difficult to check for a particular argument if the conclusions follow validly from the starting premises (if the terms are well-defined). If this were all that mattered, it would seem that all is needed is either a ready-made stock of irrefutable and useful premises, or a rigorous method for determining what premises we should start with.

The problem is that there is not a stock of unassailable starting premises to properly work with, and neither is there an unassailable method for determining what premises to use. These premises and methods apparently come from our intuitions. So it may seem, then, that the problem is ultimately one of getting the right intuitions. Yet how exactly we have good or bad intuitions – or any intuitions at all – is so mightily beyond the scope of human knowledge as we have it, that attempting to dissect them from that vantage point is of almost no ultimate avail for us philosophically. As a consequence, it is easy to entertain the pessimistic thought that good philosophical argument cannot be much more than saying nothing more than what one's assumptions allow for and idly recognizing that one carries certain assumptions in hand.[26]

From a different vantage point, our intuitions are not entirely useless to us. This is illustrated in the way that Rawls sought to navigate between the Scylla of honest triviality and the Charybdis of disguised dogmatism in *A Theory of Justice* by a twofold strategy. First, he suggests there that the intuitions that we ought to take as relevant are just those judgments undisturbed by particular and extraneous interests, not dissimilar to the way that judgments in logic are produced. He suggests there that these interests can be sufficiently excluded by employing a heuristic in the social contract tradition. Second, Rawls does claim that there is in fact an acceptable kind of circularity in the process that he calls "reflective equilibrium." As he says in *A Theory of Justice*:

> From the standpoint of moral theory, the best account of a person's sense of justice is not the one which fits his judgments prior to his examining any conception of justice, but rather the one which matches his judgments in reflective equilibrium. As we have seen, this state is one reached after a person has weighed various proposed conceptions and he has either revised his judgments to accord with one of them or held fast to his initial convictions (and the corresponding conception).[27]

Rawls's approach here is not foundationalist, and nor does he expect that a successful alternative to a trivial or otherwise descriptive approach would be foundationalist. Instead of focusing on, for example, what bottom-level

[26] The most impactful resistance in the mid-century was W. V. O. Quine's "The Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 60, no. 1 (1951): 20-43.

[27] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 43.

premises should be admitted and then developed, Rawls suggests that we move back and forth between different considerations, whatever they may be and whatever status or priority they have, so long as they are relevant. This means that no belief is taken as utterly foundational, so as to utterly exclude others – though we may have great confidence in some views which we can then take as provisionally fixed. In this way, what may otherwise end up as a bottom-level principle may be reevaluated because, for example, it is not congruent with any of the plausible interpretations of a particular case or perhaps set of cases. The goal of such a process, of an open evaluation of any and all items of relevance, is to reach a state of reflective equilibrium, which is when all known and relevant considerations are in equilibrium, that is, cohere.[28] In the process of reaching such a goal, there may then be circularity.

In moving somewhat beyond the deadlock between triviality and dogmatism, Rawls moved somewhat beyond the known hazard of unacceptable circularity. A normative ethical and political approach guided by reflective equilibrium brings along with it the requirement that the principles be feasible in application, that is, enforceable in practice. For failures in achieving feasibility may be taken as legitimately upsetting the principles that favor their interpretation in a certain direction. Achieving the relevant kind of feasibility in Rawls's theory would also require for him a crossing of disciplinary boundaries, taking seriously the claims of, for example, economists and sociologists. Perhaps the most rigorous and promising approaches came from the fields of game theory and social choice,[29] which came to play a role in Rawls's presentation of the choices available in the original position, a role that turned out to be as important as it was problematic.

Moral Individualism and Contractualism

The intuitions that Rawls leads his readers to engage with are provided against the backdrop of the liberal tradition. As one writing within this tradition, Rawls's theory of justice has often been characterized as a kind of

[28] Rawls does not take achieving this to be practicable, though he does take the method leading to reflective equilibrium to be greatly useful. Also notable is that acceptable coherence ultimately came to mean for Rawls more than internal consistency, which he described rather as a "narrow equilibrium." This is supposed to be contrasted with wide reflective equilibrium. The latter further requires that beliefs from a much wider range of theoretical concerns – such as from the history of philosophy more broadly – are taken as relevant. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 384n16, and John Rawls, *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 289 ("The Independence of Moral Theory").

As Rawls's work evolved, reflective equilibrium as a form of justification evolved as well. He abandoned the assumption that wide reflective equilibrium is what demonstrates justice as fairness. He instead came to realize that he had to show how wide equilibrium can be reconciled with the idea of an overlapping consensus. This raises the question of the importance of overlapping consensus especially in reinterpreting the third part of *A Theory of Justice*. Cf. Norman Daniels, "Reflective Equilibrium," in *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon*, eds. J. Mandle, D. A. Reidy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 711-716.

[29] See Brian Barry, *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970). In fact, Barry's own PhD dissertation, later published as *Political Argument* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), used widely a methodology that was almost in every respect similar to Rawls's.

"moral individualism."[30] According to Rawls, individuals should be understood as the engines of social life, which means that they should not be subject to engineered social laws that would determine their social engagement from the top down. Even if we consider individuals as capable of entering into social relationships, we also should consider that they remain autonomous and independent of those relationships. Their autonomy and independence are neither derived from social relationships, nor are they abolished by them.

It is partly from this autonomy and independence that Rawls thinks we have a path to considering what a just treatment of individuals in their social and political arrangements would be. Yet this independence and autonomy of individual agents is frequently taken to imply what may be considered an "individualistic metaphysics." Especially communitarians seem to take Rawls to be involved in a metaphysical individualism of some sort. Yet it is plain that Rawls says that any individuals to which his theory of justice may find application are involved in society, recognizing and generally abiding by certain "rules of conduct," which specify a "system of cooperation."[31] Rawls does assert that society is "a cooperative venture for mutual advantage."[32]

One may find fault with Rawls's assumption that individuals are, in a moral sense, independent and autonomous engines of social life. Still, the charge that Rawls conceives of individuals as fundamentally asocial is somewhat wide of the mark. He explicitly declares just the opposite:

> It is a mistake to say that political liberalism is an individualist political conception, since its aim is the protection of the various interests in liberty, both associational and individual. And it is also a grave error to think that the separation of church and state is primarily for the protection of secular culture; of course it does protect that culture, but not more so than it protects all religions.[33]

It is rather that their sociability is in key ways not reducible to the social relationships which they form and, in a different but related sense, are formed by.

On the other hand, it seems clear that Rawls defends what may be called a "moral individualism."[34] For his criteria for judging any socio-political structure are defined in terms of the effects that those structures may

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[30] See Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, 13-18.

[31] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 4. For the development of this idea in Rawls's *Political Liberalism*, see Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, 173-183.

[32] Ibid.

[33] John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in *The Law of the Peoples*, 166.

[34] For the distinction between metaphysical and moral individualism, see Chandran Kukathas and Philip Pettit, *Rawls*, 11-16.

have on individual persons. The justice of just institutions is defined in crucial part by whether and how individuals are treated as morally autonomous and independent, as entering into and partly formed by social engagement rather than controlled by it. As he clarifies, when justifying political decisions:

> (...) we don't view persons as socially situated or otherwise rooted, that is, as being in this or that social class, or in this or that property and income group, or as having this or that comprehensive doctrine. Nor are we appealing to each person's group or each group's interests, though at some point we must take these interests into account. Rather, we think of persons as reasonable and rational, as free and equal citizens, with the two moral powers and having, at any given moment, a determinate conception of the good, which m ay change over time. These features of citizens are implicit in their taking part in a fair system of social cooperation.[35]

Rawls may be said to hold a moral individualism, to the extent that he remains opposed to utilitarian suggestions of determining what a just treatment of persons by institutions is. According to the utilitarian conception, making such a determination requires considering what would be to the greatest welfare of all the relevant individuals. For Rawls, calculating into a sum the benefits across different persons seems to eradicate the significance of those individuals as independent and autonomous.

Additionally, Rawls remains opposed to perfectionists, who maintain that determining what goes into a just treatment of persons by institutions requires some substantial conception of the good life that is then applied to individuals. Unlike utilitarianism, perfectionism does not arrive at the just treatment of individuals through calculating their collectively greatest welfare. However, it does consider indirectly what a just treatment of those individuals would be through considering what is supposed to perfect them.

What is importantly similar about the utilitarian and perfectionist approaches, as they relate to Rawls's proposal, is that they only indirectly determine what it means for individuals to be treated justly in their social and political arrangements. These approaches first examine what is taken to be good for individuals – or at least the relevant ones – and this either what is good for individuals individually, or what is good for them collectively, and then derive the requirements for just treatment of them afterwards.

Neither utilitarian nor perfectionist, Rawls's proposal has been usefully described as "contractualist." Rawls's proposal is developed within the social contract tradition through a heuristic which Rawls calls the "original position." The proposal of the original position is unlike other approaches, including utilitarianism and

[35] John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in *The Law of the Peoples*, 171.

perfectionism, which directly asks about people's ends in order to determine how it is that individuals should be treated if they are to be treated justly.

Instead, Rawls invites us through the original position to ask what socio-political structure we would choose, as independent and autonomous individuals, if we could. It is from this more direct path that Rawls suggests that we should be able to determine what a just treatment of individuals would be. As with other thinkers in the social contract tradition, Rawls's proposal is not real. It is a heuristic which has the function of helping us discover the "principles of justice." However, these principles of justice can help us understand what would be required of institutions in order for them to be just in the treatment of individuals.

The Original Position and the Principles of Justice

What Rawls's approach looks to do is to guide us to the intuitions which lead to the formulation of the principles of justice by excluding from our consideration circumstances irrelevant to determining what those principles require. His idea, more specifically, is that people's consideration of their own interests might be usefully constrained in such a way that all involved parties would, in the end, choose unanimously a specific conception of justice, notwithstanding the differing interests that they may go on to have afterward.

So, in what is called the "original position," we are invited to imagine ourselves behind what Rawls calls the "veil of ignorance." Anyone behind this veil is ignorant of nearly everything that directly pertains to his or her own individual benefit. As Rawls says:

> First of all, no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism.[36]

Rawls includes also ignorance of the "particular circumstances of [one's] own society" or even "to which generation they belong." Yet the reason for excluding all these circumstances is the same: to see what we, as the rational individuals that Rawls supposes us to be, would choose if our consideration of justice was not clouded over by consideration of our personal benefit – that is, more than it is relevant to consider in

[36] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 118 (§24).

considering the principles of justice. Again, these principles are those which would illuminate for us what a just and fair treatment of persons in fact is, so far as public conceptions of justice are concerned.

Suppose then we were to decide upon the basic structures of our society from behind the veil of ignorance. Rawls says that we would choose an equal distribution of goods, all else the same, since we would be aware that we could otherwise end up in the difficult situation of having social and economic structures tilted against us. And by choosing in favor of equal distribution of goods, we would all of us together avoid the chance of falling into the mentioned snare. When the veil of ignorance would be removed, that is, when our real situation is revealed, we would all, so far as the distribution of goods is concerned, have the basic structure of society in our favor.

This intuition provides us with the first principle of justice. A society that is set up for the just and fair treatment of persons is, all else the same, set up for an equal treatment of persons. As Rawls famously put this first principle in his *A Theory of Justice*:

> Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.[37]

While a system of the equal treatment of persons is, all else the same, a just and fair treatment of persons, it is not unqualifiedly a just and fair treatment of persons. Sometimes, persons may be in a worse situation compared to the others to begin with. This is not a problem which can be solved by an equal distribution of goods. In this sense, it is not indisputable that treating those in a worse situation, such as the impoverished, the same as those who are well off, such as the rich, is always just and fair. This kind of distinction is important because, when the veil of ignorance is lifted, we may find that, as a matter of fact, we are in a worse social and economic situation than others. We would not know in advance which exactly of these inequalities will be ours, but we would know from the original position that there is some chance that we could end up in the worst-off sector of society. Since we are rational, we should want to avoid this.

Suppose, though, that we can anticipate this possibility from the original position too, namely, by choosing another principle of justice. A second such principle would tell us, broadly, how to distribute the weight of these matter-of-fact inequalities in a fair and just way when we do find them out. As Rawls says:

[37] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 266 (§46).

> Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the joint savings principles, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.[38]

The problem to us as rational individuals behind the veil of ignorance is that, when we step out of the original position, we could end up being treated equally but unjustly and unfairly. The solution, then, would be that a just and fair treatment of persons allows for some variance from the first principle of justice when it is to the benefit of the worst off.

Relevant Conditions, Goals, and Motivations in the Original Position

It is from considering our status as rational individuals behind the veil of ignorance, then, that we should intuitively understand how the two principles of justice follow from the original position.[39] Yet there remains the need for important clarifications about what it would mean for us to be in the original position, if only imaginatively, and to choose the principles of justice that Rawls thinks we would. Three particularly relevant questions in determining how it is that the principles of justice follow from the original position concern are about who we would be in the original position, what precisely the original position is supposed to help us decide upon, and how we could even be motivated behind the veil of ignorance, just as rational individuals.

First, there is the question of who it is that would do the choosing in the original position. The parties in the social contract are individual persons as opposed to collectives, belonging to the same generation, all of them rational, and all placed in a functionally identical situation. In this way, Rawls excludes the possibility that arbitrary collectives or extraneous circumstances above the individual would (wrongly) be considered among the engines of social life. This is so that when we consider what justice requires, what the principles of justice will be, we do not accidentally justify the subjection of individuals to those collectives or circumstances – much as, through the veil of ignorance, Rawls intention is to help us avoid justifying the subjection of individuals to preexisting interests or prejudices.

Second, there is the question of what exactly the original position is supposed to help people decide upon. It is, of course, the principles of justice. Yet it must be remembered that these principles are useful in the first place in helping us to determine the basic structure of society; Rawls's conception of the original position is

[38] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 266.

[39] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 118-123 (§24, the veil of ignorance).

contractarian. This means, among other things, that these principles should be normative, at least so that they can be ultimate criteria for arbitrating conflicts. The crucial issue is how this can be done without subjecting individuals, who are morally autonomous, to rationalized circumstances, or to individual or collective prejudices.

In order for these principles to apply to societal structures in this way, they need to be generic, universally accepted, and public. If they are not generic, they are wide enough to be applicable to the basic structures of society. If they are not universally accepted, they may be applicable, but the result would not be a social contract; it would be the conquest of a dissenting minority. If the principles were not public, the basic structure of society would be hidden and esoteric, which would unfairly privilege those who know or figure out what they are.

On the other hand, Rawls thinks that the original position has some applicable restrictions. For example, there is assumed to be a moderate scarcity of resources, so that in looking forward to the society that we will be a part of after leaving the original position, we do not expect to end up in a wasteland or a utopia – something that might affect how, for instance, we would think about the second principle of justice. Additionally, while we do not know what it is that our temperaments or rational conceptions of the good will be outside of the original position, Rawls means us to expect that people will in general have a sufficient sense of justice and fairness – so that it is not a moral wasteland or utopia either.

A third matter is how those in the original position could be understood as having some motivation in choosing the principles of justice that they choose. For if individuals in the original position do not know in particular who they are or will be, or what rational plan of the good life that they have or will have, nor of course what principles of justice they will decide upon, we might wonder then what their motivation could be for choosing one set of principles rather than another.

Motivation in the original position is derived from our rationality as the individual persons that Rawls takes us to be. As a result of being rational, we prefer what is good over what is bad, and we are prepared to prioritize what is better over what is good but less so. While unaware of our later, developed rational conceptions of the good, we are aware of what "primary goods" we will need, which Rawls usefully summarizes as those "things which it is supposed a rational man wants whatever else he wants" – and he says in particular that these "primary social goods, to give them broad categories, are rights, liberties, and opportunities, and income and wealth."[40]

[40] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 79 (§15).

From the Principles of Justice to Just Institutions

In the end, the social contract demarcates the conditions for judgment of the relevant kind, rather than providing an operative justification of such judgments. The commitments involved are hypothetical, which means that the contract does not actually justify society. Rather, it is a heuristic for judgment. We engage with Rawls's heuristic of the original position not in order to justify our present situation, but to understand the conditions necessary for us to decide upon a public conception of justice as fairness. Rawls effectively suggests that, if by treating others justly we want to mean treating them fairly in the way that seems to follow intuitively from the original position, we need to accept the conditions necessary for that, and settle the matter of developed life plans later on, except so far as primary goods are concerned.

Recall that we already considered how a normative ethical and political approach guided by reflective equilibrium brings along with it the requirement that the principles be feasible in application, that is, enforceable in practice. The initial phase of Rawls's theory of justice thus must land us further than only the principles of justice themselves, or the other relevant details observed in immediate connection with the original position.

So, the second part of his work *A Theory of Justice* is about the justice of just institutions. In order to avoid an unacceptable circularity, our intuitive conception of the principles of justice needs to be tested and stressed by their application to a "workable political conception," which if successful would be a sign that the principles of justice are "a reasonable approximation to and extension of our considered judgments," that is, of our intuitions within the heuristic framework that Rawls provides.[41] The most pressing reason for which the principles of justice need to be put on trial, then, is to see how we are supposed to stay committed to the principles chosen in the original position when we are placed into our particular social and political arrangements.

Rawls does not take the movement out of the original position to be an all-at-once shift back into our particular social and political arrangements, though.[42] Rather, the next step after deciding on the principles of justice is a "constitutional convention," where "delegates" – a term which Rawls intends to use somewhat imprecisely and lightly – are to decide upon a "system for the constitutional powers of government and the basic rights of citizens."[43] In the original position, we decided on the basic principles of justice, whereas now, in the

[41] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* 171 (Ch. IV).

[42] Consider that this would render the transition irrational; it would be a "paradigm shift" in something like the original sense of the word. The gradual lifting of the veil of ignorance represents a series of steps in rendering the original position intelligible.

[43] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 172.

constitutional convention, the delegates, whoever they are exactly, are to decide upon the application of these principles.

Pointing out to us that this is not an all-at-once shift, Rawls remarks that the "veil of ignorance is partially lifted" at this point, because the delegates know what conception of justice they agree upon from the original position, but not, for example, what their own individual social or political status is. (Thus, the term "delegate" is used lightly.) Nor, of course, do the delegates know what social and political arrangement they will decide upon by the end of the constitutional convention.[44] So, the veil of ignorance is lifted but not completely. What matters in this connection is that the hypothetical character of the scenario, of this social contract, remains the same. This is so that ulterior motives are excluded even after the principles of justice are already decided upon.

Resume of a Rigorous Method of Inquiry in Ethics

In the preface to the revised edition of *A Theory of Justice* (1999), Rawls restates what he had already mentioned in the second and third paragraphs of the preface to the first edition: "I wanted to work out a conception of justice that provides a reasonably systematic alternative to utilitarianism, which in one form or another has long dominated the Anglo-Saxon tradition of political thought. The primary reason for wanting to find such an alternative is the weakness, so I think, of utilitarian doctrine as a basis for the institutions of constitutional democracy."[45]

The index of the book presents a good picture of its concerns.[46] Kant and Sidgwick are the most quoted authors, with sixteen and fifteen lines in the index, respectively, while other liberal thinkers such as John Locke and Isaiah Berlin barely occupy one line.

This may be seen as curious, considering that the main flaw of utilitarianism, according to Rawls, is its failure to give an account of basic rights and liberties, but becomes easier to understand if we pursue the comparison between *A Theory of Justice* and Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics*.

As Brian Barry asserts, both are "comprehensive and systematic statements of a thorough-going liberal position; and both it might be added, appear at a time when liberalism is becoming unfashionable (...) For although Rawls spends a good deal of time trying to show that Sidgwick's utilitarianism should be rejected, this

[44] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 172.

[45] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 11-12.

[46] Brian Barry, *The Liberal Theory of Justice*, 3.

careful attention itself reflects a striking similarity in aims and approaches."[47] Following his footsteps, we may say that (1) both authors share a similar conception of the nature of ethical inquiry, (2) both reject intuitionism and are best described as a kind of constructivism, (3) both pay attention to utilitarianism as a major moral theory (though one rejects it and the other accepts it), (4) both address the question of egoism, although Rawls quickly dismisses it, pointing out that egoism lacks the necessary requirements for being a moral theory.[48]

However, as he later emphasized in a paper titled "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory" (1980), his own method is a variant of a constructivist moral conception akin to Kant's.[49]

[47] Brian Barry, *The Liberal Theory*, 4.

[48] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), 488. See also p. 126-136 and Brian Barry's comments in *The Liberal Theory*, 8-9.

[49] In John Rawls, *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 303-358.

III. The *After Virtue* Project

The idea that morality may be presented as a system of rules is akin to having children "learn by heart the surviving portions of the periodic table and recite as incantations some of the theorems of Euclid" after some catastrophe which has leveled the practice of science.[50] At least, this is what Alasdair MacIntyre thinks.[51] He finds that morality conceived as a system of rules is a conception that misunderstands the very aims of morality, much like a desiccated ritualism of the scientific method would misunderstand the very aims of science. Detecting this misunderstanding about the aims of morality, that is, "to detect the disorder of moral thought and practice,"[52] is not a task which MacIntyre thinks contemporary philosophical methods, i.e. analytic, phenomenological, or existential philosophy, can help us in. To understand MacIntyre's project, we need to start with the history behind his most influential work.

Before the After Virtue *Project*

MacIntyre's mature period began in 1981 with the publication of *After Virtue*. This period, however, was shaped by earlier developments. One peculiarity of his early work is that it was deeply reflective of his Marxism. His work has partly turned out to be a critique of the liberalism. He still retains some Marxist views, such as that capitalism is riddled with characteristically alienating tendencies,[53] although he has restated these views in Aristotelian terms.[54]

Providing a narrative of his own intellectual history in the genre which is especially appropriate to MacIntyre is marked by general stages as well as episodes of particular import, both of which are marked by standards of

[50] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1.

[51] Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre (b. 1929) is known especially for his contributions to the revival of interest in what is often called "virtue theory." His most impactful contribution to contemporary moral philosophy, and especially to the study of the virtues, was his 1981 work *After Virtue*. This work also marked the inception of MacIntyre's mature thought by bringing to an apex nearly three decades' worth of prolific, though previously unreconciled, lines of inquiry. Since then, MacIntyre's thought has continued to develop along the lines of what is sometimes called the "*After Virtue* project," so that later changes, while involving important retractions regarding claims made in *After Virtue*, have served in any case to advance and deepen that same line of inquiry.

[52] Ibid, 2-3.

[53] See Mark Murphy (ed.), *Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

[54] See especially MacIntyre's critical commendation of some of the reflections falling under the heading of Kelvin Knight's "*Revolutionary Aristotelianism*": Alasdair MacIntyre, "Politics, philosophy, and the common good." In K. Kelvin (ed.), *The MacIntyre Reader* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 235–252. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 93 et seq.

achievement and failure. (We have some clues from MacIntyre himself about what important stages and episodes there have been in his development.[55])

The beginning of MacIntyre's years as a graduate student at Manchester University in 1949 marked the beginning of the first of three major stages in the narrative of his time in academic philosophy. This was followed by a set of inquiries which he says were "heterogenous, badly organized, sometimes fragmented and often frustrating and messy."[56] Perhaps the key episode at this point was the completion of a project aimed at responding both to the religious background which he inherited, and to the limitations and success of Marxism as he then perceived them. The result was his youthful work *Marxism: An Interpretation*, published just in 1952. But this was also just the beginning of a very long period which would end only in 1971.

The year 1971 marked the publication of *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, a collection of essays and book reviews in which MacIntyre had sought to consider the significance of Christian, psychoanalytic, and Marxist ideological claims, and in particular to argue that none of the claims of those standpoints did the necessary work in the end of ideology thesis as found in Edwards Shils and others. MacIntyre attempted to provide a constructive alternative which filled the void of his critical work there. However, as he later characterized his efforts in 2006, he was made "painfully aware of how relatively little had been accomplished in that book and how much more [he] needed by way of resources, if [he] was to discriminate adequately between what still had to be learned from each of the standpoints that [he] had criticized and what had to be rejected root and branch."[57] He then had a problem that he could pose to himself: "How then was I to proceed philosophically?"[58]

How MacIntyre was to answer that question depended both on what he had already gained and how this could be transformed into a way forward. By 1977, MacIntyre's thought had taken a turn. In particular, he rejected that assumption "characteristic of much analytic philosophy" which was to assume that his "enquiries would and should move forward in a piecemeal way."[59] He published an article that year entitled "Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative, and the philosophy of science," which was the result of needing to rethink the

[55] See Christopher Lutz's biographical remarks about Alasdair MacIntyre in Christopher S. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism, and Philosophy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004). Alasdair MacIntyre was born on January 12, 1929, in Glasgow, Scotland. He was educated into both the older Gaelic oral culture and that of liberalism individualism, as he came to characterize it (Christopher Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 11 et seq.). MacIntyre recounts that, in his youth, he was "fortunate enough (...) to be confronted by the local Communist Party's critique of the local Labour Party. That critique was compelling on concrete terms, not in terms of larger theories. As a result, I became convinced of the truth of some of the larger theories, for those theories appeared to explain and justify the local critique" ("*Kinesis* interview with Professor Alasdair MacIntyre," interview by Thomas d Pearson, *Kinesis* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 44).

[56] "An interview with Alasdair MacIntyre," in *Cogito*, Summer (1991): 68.

[57] Alasdair MacIntyre, *The Tasks of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vii.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., viii.

relationship between these intractable problems with which he was grappling. The change of outlook expressed in that article, he tells us, "was elicited by [his] reading of and encounters with Imre Lakatos and Thomas Kuhn and what was transformed by that reading was [his] conception of what it was to make progress in philosophy or indeed in systematic thought more generally."[60]

The second step was to find a constructive alternative, that is, to do what he was unable to achieve 1971. "I set out to rethink the problems of ethics in a systematic way,"[61] he said in an interview with *Cogito*. It was when he began for the first time to seriously consider if an Aristotelian history of moral theory and practice was perhaps the only adequate one so far. He linked this change of outlook to the maturation of the ideas leading to the writing of *After Virtue*. He responded to the demands of this change when, as he recounts:

> I tore up the manuscript of the book on moral philosophy that I had been writing and asked how the problems of modern moral and political philosophy would have to be reformulated, if they were viewed not from the standpoint of liberal modernity, but instead from the standpoint of what I took to be Aristotelian moral and political practice, and if they were understood as having resulted from a fragmentation of older Aristotelian conceptions of the practical life, a fragmentation produced by the impact of modernity upon traditions that had embodied such conceptions. What I discovered was that the dilemmas of high modernity and their apparently intractable character become adequately explicable only when viewed and understood in this way. This was the highly controversial claim that I first advanced in *After Virtue* and developed in subsequent books.[62]

MacIntyre produced mature works steadily after the publication if *After Virtue* in 1981 – so that, by 2021, he had additionally written *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1981), *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999), and, after an interlude of several briefer books and essay collections, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (2016). All of them are developments in some way or another of his change of orientation in MacIntyre's thinking that emerged by 1981.

The writing of *After Virtue* therefore allowed MacIntyre to diagnose what he took to be the ailing condition of modern moral philosophy from the vantage point of Aristotelian ethics. His conclusion was that modern moral

[60] Ibid., vii.

[61] "An interview with Alasdair MacIntyre," 68.

[62] Alasdair MacIntyre, *The Tasks of Philosophy*, viii.

philosophy had come to a point of insoluble conflict. Put differently, MacIntyre found that modern moral philosophy had come to find certain questions of ethics relevant and in need of answer which, on the other hand, could not be answered in a satisfactorily conclusive way. His diagnosis of modern moral philosophy was therefore one of ailment, riddled with intractable debate about central issues.

The recent history of ethics, MacIntyre says, is a history of the attempts to justify the claims of "morality" without reference either to man's nature (or to what Rawls calls "perfectionist ends"). According to MacIntyre, these attempts not only failed but were doomed to fail. Understanding why it is that such attempts were bound to fail involves examining two of MacIntyre's central reasons for thinking that the idea of a "moral rule" loses force without natural teleological or theological resources. One of these reasons involves the way in which any such moral rule is to be rationally vindicated. A second reason concerns how it is that such injunctions have an effective place in moral practice. Considering these reasons takes us, first into MacIntyre's criticism of the modern moral language and theory, and then into modern moral practice.

The Central Claims of After Virtue

After the publication of *After Virtue*, which because a work of "philosophical history" is far less systematic than it is expansive, MacIntyre decided to present, in a colloquium on the work, the main ideas that he wanted to defend there. *After Virtue*, MacIntyre says, makes seven central claims.[63] A synopsis is worth reproducing here in order to provide some context to MacIntyre's more particular claims about the virtues and the unity of the self.

His first major claim is that one of the most apt ways of describing morality in the present day is that it is characterized by intractable debate. It is not merely that such debates are protracted, but that rival parties in the debates invoke premises in their arguments which are incommensurable with the premises of other rival arguments; there is thus no common measure to determine which premises should be rejected and which accepted. "I do not mean by this just that such debates go on and on – although they do," MacIntyre says, "but also that they apparently can find no terminus," so that there "seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture."[64] If this intuition holds, then if moral agreement is "secured," it would evidently not be by rational means. Morality would have become, in practice, not more than the expression of something non-rational. Just this is what MacIntyre takes to have happened: "If I lack any good reason to invoke against

[63] Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Claims of *After Virtue*," *Analyse & Kritik* 6, S. 3-7 (1984): 3-7.

[64] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 6.

you, it must seem that I lack any good reasons. Hence it seems that underlying my own position there must be some non-rational decision to adopt that position."[65]

This desiccation of morality is supposed to be striking, MacIntyre thinks, because our moral language seems to suggest that morality should be more than a matter of expression of, say, attitudes or feelings. Perhaps moral language is something of a masquerade, then, because it suggests that what is really a non-rational expression of personal preference has taken on the presentation of impersonal, rational explanation.[66] Yet "even if the surface appearance of argument is only a masquerade, the question remains 'Why *this* masquerade?'"[67] This tension seems to signal a failure of some kind, and MacIntyre assigns as the most important cause which brought this about the failure of "the Enlightenment Project":

> [In the period c. 1630-1850], 'morality' became the name for that particular sphere in which rules of conduct which are neither theological nor legal nor aesthetic are allowed a cultural space of their own. It is only in the later seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, when this distinguishing of the moral from the theological, the legal and the aesthetic has become a received doctrine that the project of an independent rational justification of morality becomes not merely the concern of individual thinkers, but central to Northern European culture. A central thesis of this book is that the breakdown of this project provided the historical background against which the predicaments of our own culture can become intelligible.[68]

The thinkers involved in this project sought to develop a morality which could stand separately from its traditional or otherwise institutional justifications. In this way, separated from traditions or institutions, it would be a morality available to all rational persons simply as such. Because this attempt failed, it passed on a set of conflicts about the justification of such morality – yet so that different parties to the debate believed themselves to have achieved rational justification on grounds incompatible with their rivals.

As a result of this failure, moral concepts have taken on a paradoxical character. For they appear rational, although separated from their older justifications they are not rational, so that they have been made into a set of "useful fictions" which serve rival and incompatible purposes. That is, they have become tools of non-rational influence or manipulation, however benignly conceived. As MacIntyre says, "[contemporary] moral experience

[65] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 8.

[66] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 9.

[67] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 9.

[68] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 39.

as a consequence has a paradoxical character. For each of us is taught to see himself or herself as an autonomous moral agent; but each of us also becomes engaged by modes of practice, aesthetic or bureaucratic, which involve us in manipulative relationships with others (...)"[69] What moral concepts presuppose when wielded, by the alleged neutrality of the bureaucrat most notably, are a set of social scientific laws about the effectiveness of such manipulation. Thus we are led to believe that there could be such a general thing as "managerial effectiveness," that "among the central moral fictions of the age we have to place the peculiarly managerial fiction embodied in the claim to possess systematic effectiveness in controlling certain aspects of social reality."[70]

It was Nietzsche who best initially understood this failure and its ramifications, namely, that moral assertion had become a masking of power. "For it was Nietzsche's historic achievement," writes MacIntyre, "to understand more clearly than any other philosopher (...) not only that what purported to be appeal to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will, but also the nature of the problems that this posed for moral philosophy."[71] What Nietzsche, however, failed to understand was the scope of the failure, so that he generalized this failure into a genealogy of morals. What he missed, in particular, was that the failure depended on a rejection of Aristotle's ethics and politics, so that he "illegitimately generalized (...) to the nature of morality as such."[72]

What should be available for presentation, if Nietzsche's generalization is wrong, is a history of the virtues from archaic Greek society to the European middle ages presented as a robust rival position to that of Nietzsche's genealogy of morals. Of particular interest in this history should be a core concept of the virtues. This core concept as MacIntyre defends it has three parts.[73]

First, the virtues are the qualities needed to achieved goods internal to practices, where a "practice" 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."[74]

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[69] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 68.

[70] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 74.

[71] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 113.

[72] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 113.

[73] This complex argument is present in Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 186-225.

[74] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

Secondly, the virtues are the qualities needed to attain those goods which unify individual human lives according to a teleological narrative structure. "The virtues therefore are to be understood," MacIntyre says, "as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the good internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good."[75]

This also embeds them into a social tradition, so that, thirdly, the virtues are to be understood as the qualities needed to maintain the vitality of social traditions, for the "virtues find their point and purpose not only in sustaining those relationships necessary if the variety of goods internal to practices are to be achieved and not only in sustaining the form of an individual life in which that individual may seek out his or her good as the good of his or her whole life, but also in sustaining those traditions which provide both practices and individual lives with their necessary historical character."[76]

This allows MacIntyre to make the more precise claim that the possibility of the Enlightenment project emerged in the late medieval period because of a failure in sustaining the ongoing tradition of the virtues. Now, in the aftermath of the Enlightenment project's failure, we live in a state of moral disorder:

> If you withdraw those background concepts of the narrative unity of human life and of a practice with goods internal to it from those areas in which human life is for the most part lived out, what is there left for the virtues to become? That explicit and thoroughgoing rejection of Aristotelianism was the counterpart at the level of philosophy to those social changes whose outcome was to deprive the virtues of their conceptual background made it impossible by the end of the seventeenth century to supply anything like a traditional account or justification of the virtues.[77]

The outstanding question, then, is whether the withdrawal of such background concepts – by which MacIntyre means the rejection of Aristotelian ethics and politics – has ever been shown to be warranted. He finds this not to be the case, because "the rational case (...) can be made for a tradition in which the Aristotelian moral and political texts are canonical,"[78] which is what would be needed in rebuffing the alternative Nietzschean genealogy. Thus, Aristotle is vindicated against Nietzsche, so that an Aristotelian history of moral philosophy

[75] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 219.

[76] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223.

[77] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 228.

[78] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 257.

(rather than a Nietzschean genealogy) written even up to and encompassing the present is the story which best articulates our situation today as occupying the place "after virtue."

The Unity of a Life, the Unity of the Virtues

The grand drama MacIntyre narrates for us is supposed to give us some insights into the significance of "practices," and how they are supposed to be useful in understanding what the virtues are, and thus what the "good" is. The notion of the "good" is defectively conceived if we have jettisoned the idea of teleology, MacIntyre thinks. And he holds that the realm in which we understand teleology is that of the narrative unity of human life. Yet this we understand through our required grappling with "practices."

One of MacIntyre's key points is that, as humans, we engage in a variety of practices, and that a crucial question we should have is how to prioritize these practices, that is, how to put them together into an intelligible, unified human life. The significance of considering this is that to have learned how to live a unified life in this way is to have learned a good way of prioritizing the different kinds of goods that we may achieve through various practices. It is to have become more or less excellent in determining what excellences or goods could intelligibly have a place in one's life.

An adequate explanation of how to order such practices, such activities, MacIntyre thinks, requires appeal to the virtues. For it is in this broader context, in which activities relate to each other within a life, that the virtues are to be understood in their precise way. While the virtues are in fact qualities that incline us towards achieving the goods we achieved through various activities, they are also, more exactly and relevantly, dispositions for making us excellent in prioritizing and coping with the plurality of practices themselves, and thus the goods that we can pursue. The virtues thus would prevent playing chess in a courtroom session, although being good at chess may in a different way incline the example jury members toward it. It is for this reason that MacIntyre remarks that the virtues are not just those qualities which make us excellent at activities, but are, more specifically, those "which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good."[79] For such chess playing may be good so far as chess playing goes, but it is not good so far as a quest for the good goes.

One thing this does not mean is that a unified life is merely 'a singular pursuit of some good,' since the singular pursuit of any practice could be sufficient to unify a life in that way, or at least sufficient for one to try to do so. Yet as MacIntyre says by way of clarification elsewhere, it "may be best for me and for others that some set of

[79] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 219.

goods – genuine goods – should have a subordinate place or no place at all in my particular life."[80] His example there is that of the artist Gauguin, who abandoned his family and fled to Tahiti for the sake of painting. MacIntyre does not expect us to find Gauguin virtuous but vicious in his actions, for he says that even if fleeing to Tahiti was good for Gauguin the painter, "it does not follow that it was best for Gauguin *qua* human being or best for him *qua* father."[81] The virtues, then, would not for MacIntyre merely produce the unity provided by some singular pursuit of a practice, but the unity provided by something standing beyond particular practices.

One might wonder, then, what a "relevant kind of quest for the good" would be. MacIntyre does say that this quest should enable us "to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations, and distractions which we encounter," and that it should "furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good."[82] Yet identifying these harms and dangers, as well as self-knowledge and knowledge of the good, is not specific to any single practice so far as MacIntyre has defined it.[83] Practices as he has so far described them may, in a general way, teach us what could and apparently should go into a unified life of the kind he points towards. However, in this general way, they cannot by themselves tell us how to do that, for in this respect they are what are unified in a life, not what unify it.

There are thus two important dimensions to the matter at hand. One requires an answer to the question, "What practices am I to engage in?" and the other would answer the subsequent question, "Which qualities, then, are the virtues?" A response to the first question can be made in part by a fuller explanation of what MacIntyre means by the "narrative unity" of what he takes to be a unified life, properly speaking. MacIntyre's idea of a "narrative" in *After Virtue* includes tells us how human actions in a life are supposed to relate intelligibly.[84]

In the third part of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls also addresses the question of the unity of the self,[85] but (in a certain sense) unlike MacIntyre's claims about final ends,[86] he thinks the outcome of his reflections on the

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[80] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 67.

[81] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 67.

[82] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 219.

[83] Of course, The practices of ethics and politics, conceived in an Aristotelian way and successfully carried out, could indeed tell us what it is to overcome the relevant dangers, to gain the relevant kinds of knowledge, and so forth. And, of course, MacIntyre is engaging in a practice as he writes about practices which is supposed to provide recognition of the relevant items. Notice, however, that he has not yet proved that any particular practice, including that which he is engaged in, or that of Aristotelian ethics or politics, could resolve the matter at hand. So, he would beg the question, would appeal to something he is trying to prove, if he appeals to some substantive, filled-out conception of the virtues or of well-ordered human community. And this he does not do.

[84] One of the ways which they relate intelligibly MacIntyre explained in his earlier work on action theory. The standard example is Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," which has been reprinted in Alasdair MacIntyre, *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[85] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 491-496 (§85).

goods of justice is that "there is no one aim by reference to which all of our choices can reasonably be made."[87] He acknowledges that "intuitionist elements enter into determining the good, and in a teleological theory these are bound to affect the right."[88] He takes it that the classical utilitarian theories' attempts to avoid this consequence by resorting to hedonism are doomed to fail. He therefore suggests that the unity of the self needs a "constructive solution," and he faces the question: "if there is no single end that determines the appropriate pattern of aims, how is a rational plan of life actually to be identified?"[89] He asserts that the answer has been given already earlier in the work:[90] the unity of a life is given by a rational plan, one chosen with deliberative rationality "as defined by the full theory of the good."[91] This is the formidable task that he addresses in 1971 in the third part of *A Theory of Justice*, that seems to belong to an earlier strata of the work, but it is necessary to understand the list of the primary goods, whose fair distribution is chosen in the original position.

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[86] This formulation is somewhat risky since MacIntyre does not think that we normally derive our knowledge of the requirements of the virtues from theoretical consideration of their unified teleological structure. This unified structure, he thinks, is often tacitly presupposed, and it is invoked only in special cases. Normally, we deal with concrete cases of success or failure in practice of the virtues, and when we meet with failure, we normally do not have to engage in practical reasoning about the whole of our life. Rather, we have to rethink what it is that the virtues require of us which, previously, we failed to recognize.

[87] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 491.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 358-365 (§63, the definition of good for plans of life).

[91] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 491.

IV. Theories of the Good and the Primary Goods

Brian Barry, in a critical review of *A Theory of Justice*, written down just after the publication of the work, assures the reader that if the ramifying clauses and interrelations between the two principles of justice may seem formidable, they are "simplicity itself compared with what lies behind them," and that if "we want to know how being 'worst off' is defined (worst off in terms of what?) and if we want to know why the rights covered by the first principle should have priority, we must study Rawls's theory of 'primary goods', and to do that we have to take into account the 'thin theory of the good.'"[92]

The comprehensive presentation of Rawls's theory of the good emerges only in the third part of *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls came to consider this third part inconsistent with his theory of justice as fairness. He explains in the introduction to *Political Liberalism* that he aims to correct "a serious problem internal to justice as fairness, namely (...) that the account of stability in Part III of *Theory* is not consistent with the view as a whole."[93] He sought to make some corrections in *Political Liberalism* by removing this inconsistency.

The Need for a Theory of the Good

Recall that one of the goals of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* was to provide anglophone moral and political philosophers a pathway back into normative moral and political philosophy. Part of this attempt included developing the original position heuristic, and a second part included an application of the ideas from that exposition to an institutional framework. These comprise the first two parts of *A Theory of Justice*. However, Rawls finishes the work with a third part on what he calls "ends," as in "the ends of life." This third part therefore includes treatment of some standard themes such as what goes into a good plan of life, what it is to deliberate rationally about good things, and what kind of filled-out moral psychology this implies.

Unlike the older normative approaches to moral and political philosophy, Rawls does not start his theory of justice with these themes on the ends of life. This difference in strategy stems in important part from his aspiration to develop a systematic normative theory against the backdrop of the changes that anglophone philosophy underwent in the early-to-mid twentieth century.[94] In Rawls's search for a pathway back into

[92] Brian Barry, *The Liberal Theory*, 19.

[93] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), xvi.

[94] Again, one may recall that the near consensus in anglophone philosophy since the early twentieth century was that, on the one hand, we have mathematically rigorous methods for determining the validity of conclusions (if the terms are well-defined), but, on the other hand, nothing of corresponding power for establishing the soundness of premises. These restrictions were widely taken to mean that only descriptive approaches to moral and political philosophy were viable. Whereas "descriptive approach" means one which identifies the arguments in a philosophical presentation, as well as their priority, so that at least among the central

systematic normative work in the field, he suggested that the failure of previous attempts – including the perfectionist and utilitarian approaches which Rawls classes as "teleological" – were failures in understanding how to prioritize these themes about the good. In "teleological" approaches, these mentioned standard themes were placed at the beginning, and then the requirements of justice were derived later. For Rawls, the standard themes on the good are placed at the end, and investigation into justice placed at the beginning through the original position heuristic. Indeed, Rawls's use of the veil of ignorance requires that the good be addressed only after the just.

Recall that the point of the original position heuristic is to show how the principles of justice can be intuitively derived from behind the veil of ignorance. Rather than beginning with the standard themes of the good, Rawls puts the original position heuristic first. This choice gives priority to the principles of justice, and it means that the way in which any theory of the good can emerge in Rawls's theory of justice is determined by their compatibility with and relevance to those principles.

The veil of ignorance, for example, filters out any interests concerning the good which are irrelevant to choosing the principles of justice. On the other hand, the veil of ignorance presupposes at least something about the good, so that the individuals in the original position are motivated to choose the principles of justice. Similarly, when the veil of ignorance is completely lifted, the filled-out conceptions of the good that rational individuals choose should be ones that are compatible with the principles of justice. And further, since the way that the principles of justice are applied to institutions needs to be plausible, certain features of the filled-out conceptions of the good, such as moral psychology, need to align with what a just society would require.

If the filled-out conceptions of the good can fit, are congruous, with the principles of justice, then our beginning intuitions leading to the principles of justice would be adequately justified within the scope of Rawls's project. The filtering of interests by way of the original position, on the one hand, and the development of intuitions that grow into a systematic normative framework, on the other hand, would prevent the theory of justice from sailing into the Scylla of disguised dogmatism, as it meanwhile evades the Charybdis of honest triviality. This would,

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arguments, logical validity is shown to obtain (or not), and the operative fundamental premises are disclosed. However, the approach remains merely descriptive because the soundness of those arguments is never ultimately vindicated according to some set of norms which are characteristically more robust and moreover substantive and useful.

As these changes pertained more directly to anglophone moral and political philosophy, systematic normative approaches had more or less vanished from the state of the art. However, see Dana Villa's remarks about overstating the impact of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, in Catherine Zuckert (ed.), *Political Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 108-110.

therefore, be a systematic normative approach that is sufficiently cognizant of the prior unresolved concerns in analytic philosophy.[95]

Two Theories of the Good

There are two principal ways in which Rawls thinks that conceptions of the good bear relevance to the theory of justice. The first way is a limited theory of the good which emerges with the consideration of individuals in the original position. There, individuals are motivated to choose the principles of justice that they do choose in part because of their rational moral psychology, and in part because of the "primary goods" which they know they will need when they are out of the original position.

So, while the veil of ignorance subtracts extraneous interests concerning the good, it does not subtract all interests concerning the good. Rather, the original position requires a limited theory of the good. The purpose of the original position is to show how individuals will choose a just distribution of goods. Since they are behind the veil of ignorance, they do not have knowledge of all goods. They are only aware of as much as would be required to choose what a just distribution would be for the basic structure of society. As a consequence, they only think in particular about "primary goods," which means, as Rawls says, those goods "it is supposed a rational man wants whatever else he wants."

Rawls calls this limited theory a "thin theory of the good,"[96] which only concerns those goods which are necessary to choose the principles of justice. In particular, acknowledgment of these goods is supposed to help individuals in the original position identify who is the worst-off and least-favored so as to formulate the second

[95] One related question is how to evaluate Rawls's success against the analytic backdrop. The presentation here may suggest that the matter is not more than a Rawlsian triumph in recultivating normative theory after a hyper-attentiveness on language and logic had salted the ground. The matter is surely more complex. There is a sense in which the usual epistemological concerns remain as constraining as they ever have, so that debates about the analytic-synthetic distinction and the correctness of W.V.O. Quine's criticisms, for example, continue to roil. Rawls may have helped to drastically change the landscape of normative moral and political philosophy among anglophones, but he did not equally change the face of epistemology, for example, although he contributed to the more recent developments in moral epistemology.

Rather, Rawls's success was a more complex one because a more precise one. He had some valuable insights about what questions could be suspended, and what questions could in turn be promoted in terms of priority, so as to release from deadlock the right intuitions for the right problems. This is, of course, not an extraordinarily peculiar procedure. It did not require an epistemological revolution. It is rather that Rawls was peculiarly clever in its precise application, and that it produced a peculiar procedure in his theory of justice. Yet the peculiarity of Rawls's procedure in his theory of justice should clearly not be confused with Rawls's cleverness. So, it may not be wide of the mark to say that the challenge, as ever, is with philosophy's resources for inquiry, not with some hauntingly persistent methodological negligence – that many at least since Descartes have hoped to find, if for different reasons. Indeed, hoping to find much more than solutions in the way that Rawls found them, on this interpretation, may represent nothing more than aspirations which have outlived the failed projects in early epistemology that they inspired.

[96] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 79.

principle of justice.[97] Having at this juncture a limited "thin theory" enables the importance of the good to be provisionally thinned down, so that the first priority can be assigned to the principles of justice.

Since the thin theory is about primary goods, the thin theory remains important even after considering the original position heuristic. For primary goods remain part of what rational individuals would want, whatever else they choose to want. However, the thin theory does not provide an account of the goods or ends of life as one would find in a "teleological" presentation. If the thin theory was about what goes into a good plan of life, what it is to deliberate rationally about good things, what kind of filled-out moral psychology this involves, and the like, then the original position heuristic would lose its particular function. For the individuals in the original position would not be behind a veil of ignorance. Thus, they would be unable to decide upon the principles of justice in an unbiased way.

Rawls assumes that individuals out of the original position have more life circumstances and legitimate interests than only about the principles of justice. One thing this means is, of course, that primary goods are not the only goods that rational individuals in a just society would want. Yet this poses a problem, since once individuals are out from behind the veil of ignorance, the principles of justice continue to apply. That is, there are further goods and interests that individuals have, and Rawls needs to give an account of why individuals out of the original position and "back" in their life circumstances will be sufficiently motivated to pursue the idea of justice as fairness that they agreed upon. Without this, justice as fairness as Rawls presents it would not be feasible – and, since the theory of justice is not a foundationalist theory, we would need to rethink how we could work towards reflective equilibrium with both the original position heuristic and motivations beyond the thin theory.

The problem of motivation extends beyond the scope of the thin theory because there is a second principal way in which the conception of the good bears relevance to the theory of justice, namely, with the filled-out conceptions of the good that Rawls supposes individuals will have. He looks to address this in the third and final part of *A Theory of Justice*. There, he tells us that his "central aim is to prepare the way to settle the questions of stability and congruence, and to account for the values of society and the good of justice."[98] His intention is thus to address these mentioned themes on the ends of life just as they bear relevance to the principles of justice and their application.

While the thin theory of the good is elaborated somewhat in the third part, the central aim of the third part extends beyond the thin theory. Rawls tells us that, after recognizing the significance of the thin theory, "we are

[97] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 348.

[98] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 347.

free to use the principles of justice in the further development of what [he calls] the full theory of the good."[99] This is a "full theory" in the sense that it provides us with a theory of all the substantive conceptions of the good that rational individual in a just society would choose. This kind of account thus needs to address the motivation of individuals who are no longer in the original position by considering more fully their moral psychology and the broader range of goods that they may pursue.

Yet Rawls's account addresses these further more substantial goods and questions of moral psychology in connection with the society they inhabit, namely, as what rational individuals in a just society would want. In particular, the rational plans of life should be the kind compatible with the "stability and congruence" of society, as Rawls puts it. For it is this stability and congruence which demonstrates the feasibility of the theory of justice. On the other hand, even the filled-out conceptions of the good still do not determine what justice requires, so that Rawls's theory is not "teleological." Rather, rational plans of life are shown to align with the principles of justice, and ensuring that the relation of such plans to society is one of stability and congruence makes the full theory of the good in fact relevant to Rawls's theory of justice without becoming "teleological."

One pertinent question would be what exactly the final significance of the full theory of the good in Rawls's theory of justice would be. In one sense, this point about significance is simply answered by explaining what goes into a well-ordered society, that is, one with rational individuals and just institutions. With the justice of just institutions already covered, the missing connection to be supplied would be whether such a well-ordered society is feasible given the requirements of moral psychology in securing among individuals in the society what Rawls calls "the sense of justice." In another sense, we might ask how it could be that the presentation of the full theory of the good can, given Rawls's anti-perfectionist restrictions, be anything more than a mere description of who would live a life compatible with Rawls's principles of justice, and not whether rational individuals are in fact those who would choose to live such lives.

However, a preliminary point to considering the question about whether Rawls's theory of the good is descriptive, and what that would mean, is the question of what would even go into the full theory of the good. A suitable answer to this first point would require a more thorough look at what Rawls has to say about plans of life and the deliberative rationality that we employ to be successful in those plans.

[99] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 348.

The Role of Rationality

We have a plan of life when we have a generally consistent itinerary of how we will pursue the ends that we have decided upon. What exactly we will pursue depends in large part upon circumstances, and our choices about them. So, whether one engages in this or that venture, like taking a weekend course in watercolor painting, or the presumably more demanding task of becoming an arcology architect, is not of direct relevance to Rawls's intention here. However, he does intend to address life plans insofar as they are rational, since rational life plans are the life plans of rational individuals in a just society.

The rationality of a life plan is secured, in part, by its coordination with primary goods. Without these primary goods, no rational life plan could succeed. The problem of how to distribute primary goods justly across a society was, of course, a problem that Rawls already treated by way of the principles of justice and their application to institutions. Rawls supposes that, beyond the problem of distributive justice, rational individuals should not have significant problems in incorporating primary goods into their rational plans.

However, there are more goods than just primary goods, and Rawls assumes that rational individuals should want at least some of these. Indeed, it is taken to be of central importance that a rational plan may be structured so that it includes these further goods, that is, when the plan goes well.[100] Rawls refers to our aspirations for these further goods, these "human goods,"[101] as "fundamental desires," which are our desires for satisfying our deeper ambitions in life.[102] By this point in Rawls's theory of justice, we have already chosen a fair way to manage our desires for primary goods through the principles of justice. What may come into conflict with the requirements of justice as fairness, then, are our fundamental desires. Rawls's account of rationality shows how these desires can be managed in a way congruent with the principles of justice and their application to institutions.

Deliberative rationality in particular is the means by which individuals determine what their fundamental desires are, and how to pursue them effectively. So Rawls says that when, using deliberative rationality, one has possession of all the relevant facts, one can determine what it would be to carry out "the course of action that would best realize his more fundamental desires."[103] What counts as the "relevant facts" clearly depends on the

[100] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 360.

[101] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 373.

[102] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 366.

[103] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 366.

course of action that is to be carried out, and the course of action to be carried out depends on what exactly those "more fundamental desires" are.

While Rawls tells us that our fundamental desires are not the same as our desires for primary basic goods, he does not tell us specifically what these fundamental desires are. Part of the reason that Rawls does not identify these fundamental desires is because he finds that they vary from individual to individual. Further, Rawls thinks that there is a crucial sense in which we ourselves choose what these will be. So, by contrast, if he did tell us what our fundamental desires are, he would effectively tell us what courses of actions should be carried out (besides those to do with primary goods), and therefore he would be instructing us on how to engage in deliberative rationality whatsoever.

Grasping the significance of Rawls's silence on this matter can highlight a crucial difference between the way that he speaks about, on the one hand, rationality in determining our fundamental desires and how to fulfill them, and, on the other hand, the way that he speaks about rational individuals choosing the principles of justice. Rawls's presentation on justice tells us what principles of justice we should accept if we want fair ones, but his presentation of rationality does not tell us which plan or plans of life we should adopt if we want a rational one. In particular, he does not tell us what our fundamental desires are, because he does not make appeal to the type of substantial conceptions of the good that we find at the beginning of "teleological" accounts. While individuals engage in deliberative rationality in order to organize their life and the goods they will pursue, Rawls's presentation of deliberative rationality does not itself serve the same purpose.

Now, on the one hand, Rawls's account is not purely descriptive. For we cannot rightly choose to fulfill desires that would go against the requirements of justice. In fact, these desires are not to be characterized as fundamental desires for "human goods." One the other hand, while the account of deliberative rationality shows us how further choices would be structured if they are to be compatible with justice as fairness, it is we who supply our choices regarding our desires for human goods. So, even if the account of deliberative rationality tells us what a rational organization would be of the human goods we choose to pursue, it does not tell us which of these human goods we should indeed pursue.

We may wonder, then, how it is that Rawls's account of rationality more generally is supposed to identify the relevant ways in which human goods are to be organized without relying on an identification of what those human goods are. For that we simply have or choose certain deep desires does not necessarily mean that they are just. Suppose that we are willing to acknowledge that a plausible account of our filled-out motivations is pertinent, since this account would show how our motivations can be coherent with just institutions, and therefore that just institutions can be taken as sufficiently stable. We may still, in particular, wonder what

structure our plans would take on so far as human goods are concerned. Rawls's answer to this query is addressed by what he calls "the Aristotelian Principle."

The Aristotelian Principle

In a key passage regarding the prioritization of ends, Rawls says that "other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities), and the enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity."[104] Rawls's term for this is "the Aristotelian Principle." In his theory of justice, it is a principle which accounts for motivation. As Rawls takes it, "it states a deep psychological fact which, in conjunction with other general facts and the conception of a rational plan, accounts for our considered judgments of value."[105]

One of the important details about Rawls's "Aristotelian Principle" is that it is supposed to state "a deep psychological fact," as he puts it. Perhaps unlike Aristotle, Rawls thinks that a more goal-inclusive exercise of our capacities is different from a more rational exercise of our capacities.[106] Thus, the Aristotelian Principle is used "in conjunction" with "the conception of a rational plan," and is not the same as such a conception. In particular, the Aristotelian Principle is useful in conjunction with the conception of a rational plan in order to show how Rawls's conception of such plans is also a motivating one. If rational life plans were not motivating, then we would have no reason to expect that we would stay committed to the principles of justice after we left our state of focused motivation behind the veil of ignorance in the original position. On the other hand, if the conception of a rational plan is sufficiently motivating, then, to the degree relevant to the theory of justice, goodness can be characterized as rationality. For to acquire the human goods aspired to by a filled-out set of fundamental desires would simply be to have acted rationally.[107]

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[104] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 374.

[105] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 379.

[106] A conventional interpretation of Aristotle is that he derived his conception of justice and of deliberating rationally from a consideration of what he took to be the excellent exercise of our human capacities. Rawls certainly does not derive justice in this way. What is more to the point, neither does he so derive his account of rationality. Partly this difference between Aristotle and Rawls is about how the goodness or badness of ends are to be characterized. Unlike Aristotle, Rawls cannot risk saying that goal-inclusiveness is always rational, although he may want to say that such inclusiveness is imbricated with rational choice. In the first place, Rawls does not suppose that the cosmos is teleologically ordered, and so there is no assurance that our ends (or the ends of Greek gentlemen) will, at least in principle, stack up into a coherent hierarchy. Additionally, some goals may be vicious, as he does not take it for granted that the viciousness of vicious acts is to be relevantly characterized as nothing more than a failure to include an end or ends – in the sense of failing to meet that mark or those marks.

[107] Rawls's identification of goodness as rationality is more subtle than this point only, as it takes a stand on what we should take as relevant to a theory of justice concerning the long-standing debates about how "good" should be predicated. If these matters were arcane before the analytic debates (e.g., in Aristotle and João de São Tomás), they have surely become increasingly complicated since. The limits of Rawls's engagements with these minutiae in their recent iterations can be

Rawls's insistence on the Aristotelian Principle can be helpfully illuminated by his previous suggestions that what he called the "principle of inclusion." The "principle of inclusion" says that "one (short-term) plan is to be preferred to another if its execution would achieve all of the desired aims of the other plan and one or more further aims in addition."[108] The idea is that a plan which can accomplish everything originally intended plus something extra and desirable is better than a plan which can only accomplish what was originally intended without the extra item. This characterizes short-term plans, but Rawls suggests that it can be extended to long-term plans. As he puts it, rationality prefers, "other things equal, the greater means for realizing our aims, and the development of wider and more varied interests assuming that the aspirations can be carried through."[109] In short, the principle of inclusion can be applied to more intricate items such as life plans.

Notice that these are remarks more directly germane to the conception of a rational plan. What the Aristotelian Principle indicates in conjunction with this concept is that the requirements provided from the side of rationality, on the one hand, and the motivations provided from the side of the human goods, on the other hand, align.

Rawls's Aristotelian Principle should not be confused with an Aristotelian theory of the virtues. While it does present a moral psychology – that those who develop excellences find it rewarding, at least partly independently of the outcome – it differs from the Aristotelian view which only takes into account the opinion of the sensible. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle addresses only those who are already engaged in an ethical life.[110] This neglect of the practice of the virtues is what MacIntyre takes to have catastrophically afflicted modern moral philosophy. We may still wonder, in any case, if Rawls's use of the Aristotelian Principle is sufficient for identifying the relevant ways in which human goods are to be organized without relying on an identification of

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discerned in the descriptive limitations he puts on the predication of "good." He says that all sides agree that "good" and "bad" are used, for example, in advice and praise, and that the criteria for rightly predicating "good" or "bad" vary depending on the thing in question, since what, as he says, "is wanted in dwellings is not what is wanted in clothes" (John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 355). His descriptive theory proposal is that "the term 'good' has a constant sense" in predication, notwithstanding different criteria for different objects. Thus, thought we want different things from dwellings and clothes, there is still an underlying or "constant" sense when we call both of them "good." Rawls argues that the only other relevant piece of information for a descriptive theory is "an account of speech acts," which is of course even more general than claims about a constant sense of "good" (John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 356). For the account of speech acts, he refers us to J. L. Austin. Consider then that in considering "goodness as rationality," which is just a specific descriptive theory, all that remains for Rawls to do is to show how predicating "good" fits with rationality by saying that "something's being good is its having the properties that it is rational to want in things of its kind" (ibid.). Therefore, when Rawls says that there is "no necessity to assign 'good' a special kind of meaning which is not already explained by its constant descriptive sense and the general theory of speech acts" he means there is no extra, rogue sense of "good" which he has also somehow to relate to rationality in his descriptive theory (ibid.). Goodness is simply the goal of rational pursuit.

[108] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 362.

[109] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 363.

[110] See *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.3.

what those human goods are. Could a more negative approach work – which, rather than enumerating authentic human desires, excludes those which are not?

Wants and Ideals

Understanding Rawls's two principles of justice requires grasping his underlying account of primary goods and, additionally, the thin theory of the good. What information we would need in order to define, for example, the "worst off," depends on what they are the "worst off" in terms of. This account is the central feature of the "thin theory of the good." Since in the original position, individuals do not know what they will go on to want after the veil of ignorance is lifted, they do not know what they have in common by way of interests. What they do have in common, however, is that they are looking to satisfy their wants, whatever those turn out to be. Primary basic goods are those goods which enable them to do this. Thus, it is by this commonality that they are able to determine what the principles of justice would be about.

At this point, it is useful to consider the distinction between "want-regarding" and "ideal-regarding" stances.[111] A want-regarding stance would evaluate, say, the moral acceptability of a situation, in terms of want-satisfaction. Wants may be of various kinds, including a want for food or for attending a live symphony. Notice that this is not straightaway utilitarianism, since perhaps not all wants in fact contribute to the pleasure of any individual. Further, a want-regarding stance does not strictly mean that we should be interested in net welfare, since other distributions may be preferred. What the want-regarding stance should illuminate for us is what is distinctive about an "ideal-regarding" stance. An ideal-regarding stance discriminates, from the beginning, which wants may be worthy of consideration (or of less consideration). Put conversely, it determines that some wants are valueless (or of less value). This distinction may be useful for assessing the eventual ramifications of the general facts of moral psychology at play the original position.

Recall that Rawls's account of the full theory of the good is supposed to demonstrate as plausible the stability of just society, once the heuristic safety net of the veil of ignorance has been removed. This would mean that attention to some want-satisfaction must be excluded from consideration. Rawls cannot endorse a want-regarding view (and nor does he).[112] The difficulty is whether sufficiently excluding some range of wants is a maneuver that can be extracted from the principles of justice without begging the question.

[111] Cf. Brian Barry, *A Liberal Theory*, 20-21.

[112] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), 326-327.

As a result of the requirements of the later full theory of the good, one of the functions of moral psychology in the original position seems to be to allow individuals to ignore certain wants. As Rawls says elsewhere in connection with the full theory, "a certain ideal is embedded in the principles of justice, and the fulfillment of desires incompatible with these principles has no value at all."[113]

There is indeed an ideal is "embedded in the principles of justice." But it seems that "[i]f you put nothing but wants in at the beginning you cannot get anything but wants out at the end."[114] If we end up with something other than wants, namely, ideals about which wants count, then it would also seem that what gets put in at the beginning are ideals. A further question then is how the individuals in the original position have decided – rationally decided – on principles which can render valueless some range of want-satisfaction. For the individuals in the original position, if rational, do not get to be innocent of what is "embedded" in the principles of justice. If they did, Rawls would be affirming the antecedent in his argument.

At this juncture, Rawls is caught in something of an odd dilemma. On the one hand, the particular content of wants is to be avoided in the original position. It is supposed to be a sterile environment, except for the general facts of moral psychology which the individuals are allowed to know, so that the heuristic is not perfectionist. On the other hand, certain specific wants (perhaps a want for injustice) are to be sufficiently excluded from just society so that it is stable, and this must be done through the rational choice of individual agents according to a plausible moral psychology. The individuals must not choose, that is, according to Rawls's presented ideals. For the original position would not be a sterile environment if the individuals there already had this sensitivity to Rawls's just society. Thus, as Barry points out, adding in a moral psychology sufficient for rationally identifying what later turns out to be that just society is a perfectionist move, or it otherwise presupposes the full theory of the good.[115] Since Rawls rejects perfectionism, it seems he is presupposing the full theory of the good, which is precisely what he cannot do at that stage.

A Comprehensive Theory of the Good

Although in later works Rawls came to be more pessimistic about the possibility of an agreement on any comprehensive view of justice, including his own, and suggested instead an overlapping consensus between

[113] Ibid. See also §47.

[114] Brian Barry, *A Liberal Theory*, 22.

[115] An alternative would be if the individuals could make an irrational choice in favor of what turns out to be, for Rawls, rational from the beginning. But, of course, this would miss Rawls's intention even more than a suggested perfectionism or affirming the consequent about the full theory of the good; there is no need of a heuristic to facilitate witless luck.

reasonable theories of the good, he did not refrain from presenting what it would be like if there were such a comprehensive view of the good in the third part of *A Theory of Justice*. Feasible or not, he kept it with some modifications in the revised edition of *A Theory of Justice* in 1999.

His view is presented in broad strokes in Chapter 8, "The Sense of Justice." This title as applied to his comprehensive view of the good may look odd, because the common use of the words "good" and "just," and even that of most ethical theories, gives "good" a clear moral meaning, so that "just" is only a particular case of "good," or a particular virtue of the good person, or something of the kind. For Rawls, on the contrary, the theory of the good as presented in the third part is supposed to be a morally neutral theory of rational decision, in which he resorts to game theory on decision making: the good is just any life plan that someone decides to pursue, resorting to deliberative rationality. It is not a metaphysical theory of the good *qua* good, but of the good *qua* just. Even the Aristotelian Principle picks out merely a psychological feature of those who are consistent in their pursuit of their rational plan.[116]

By contrast, there is the developing and widespread sharing of a sense of justice. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls defines "a sense of justice" as a moral sentiment, which disposes citizens to act in accordance with justice. Since Rawls takes moral sentiments to be necessary for the stability of a well-ordered society, what they represent is how the principles of justice are feasible in application, rather than being merely theoretical contrivances. This requirement follows from Rawls's central placement of the method of reflective equilibrium, the process leading to reflective equilibrium, in his theory of justice.[117] Whether or not there is a moral sentiment which allows individuals to be motivated properly in a way congruent with the stability of just society is a relevant feature of understanding what such a society would be.

The "sense of justice" disposes citizens towards such a congruity, and this further allows individuals in a just society to act from the point of view of justice.[118] As Rawls put it, the sense of justice is "an effective desire to apply and to act from the principles of justice and so from the point of view of justice."[119] The principles of justice are, again, those principles which are decided upon from the original position, from behind the veil of

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[116] See the contrast between the right and the good in *A Theory of Justice*, §68, pp. 392-396.

[117] Whether or not society ends up being stable and well-ordered is something which is relevant to considering whether those principles of justice really represent a point of reflective equilibrium in the first place. Since Rawls does not take the principles of justice to be foundational and unrevisable, the method of reflective equilibrium does not take those theoretical components as foundational and unrevisable, but rather seeks an end status in which there is equilibrium between the theoretical components and any other relevant components, including the stability of just society.

[118] These remarks on the sense of justice draw from the way that Jon Mandle's presentation is organized in "Sense of Justice," in *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon*, eds. Jon Mandle, David A. Reidy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 768-772.

[119] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 497.

ignorance, and what agents behind the veil of ignorance decide upon is how primary goods should be distributed in a fair way – which is to say in a just way.[120]

As Rawls says in *A Theory of Justice*, applying and acting from the principles of justice in a well-ordered society means that there is "an effective desire to comply with the existing rules and to give one another that to which they are entitled."[121] This is a disposition, then, to correspond both with the rules and to the entitlements of others. It requires, he says, that we "do our part in maintaining these arrangements" and that we will "[work] for (or at least not to oppose) the setting up of just institutions, and for the reform of existing ones when justice requires it (...)"[122]

Crucially, Rawls says that this disposition is not limited to "those particular schemes that have affirmed our good."[123] This claim is to be understood in connection with his description of the citizens of a just society as having two moral powers.[124]

> As I have said, moral personality is characterized by two capacities: one for a conception of the good, the other for a sense of justice. When realized, the first is expressed by a rational plan of life, the second by a regulative desire to act upon certain principle of right. Thus a moral person is a subject with ends he has chosen, and his fundamental preference is for condition that enable him to frame a mode of life that expresses his nature as a free and equal rational being as fully as circumstances permit.[125]

Rawls maintains that the human person has important two moral powers. The first moral power is "to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good" and the second "is to propose and honor fair terms of social cooperation."[126] So, the first moral power is about the individual pursuit of a determinate, if revisable conception, of the good. The second power is about proposing and honoring fair terms of social cooperation, which is not strictly about the individual, but about the way that the individual engages with others. Put

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[120] Again, what they decide upon is that primary goods should be distributed, all else equal, in an equal way. The "difference principle" indicates, however, that there can be deviance from the first principle of justice when it is to the advantage of the worst off.

[121] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 497.

[122] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 415.

[123] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 415.

[124] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 19.

[125] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 491.

[126] This is David A. Reidy's formulation in "Unity of Self" in *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon*, 853.

differently, the first of such powers is a capacity for a sense of justice, and the other is a capacity for a conception of the good.

The capacity for a conception of the good is related especially to the formulation, revision, and pursuit of the good as particular individuals. The capacity for a sense of justice is related especially towards cooperation with others; it has an especially social dimension, but it does not necessarily produce particular affirmation of our conception of the good which we develop and pursue.

Rawls talks about being "reasonable" in connection with the first moral power and being "rational" in connection with the second.[127] This may seem to mirror the relationship between what we may roughly call instrumental and substantive value. However, this is only partly true for Rawls, because being reasonable, which is with a view to the sense of justice is not merely instrumental, as it does aim at a thin conception of the good. If it were merely instrumental, then the sense of justice would, perhaps, be limited indeed to those particular schemes that affirm our particular conception of the good. Being rational clearly aims at individuals' substantive conception of the good, but this is not the whole value of the public conception. There is a public conception of at least this thin theory of the good which can be advanced by fair cooperation.

Thus, when Rawls says that "merely reasonable agents would have no ends of their own they wanted to advance by fair cooperation," what he means is that fair cooperation would not be further instrumental to further substantive goods of the agents themselves.[128] He says, by contrast, that "merely rational agents lack a sense of justice and fail to recognize the independent validity of the claims of others."[129] What they fail to recognize is that there are goods which are public and which are not merely expressions of their own particular substantive views of the good. Rather they need, as Rawls says, to "recognize the independent validity of the claims of others." This does not of course mean adopting the substantive views of other citizens. What it does mean is acknowledging that the public expression of justice, the public resources provided in a just scheme, are directed towards the substantive views of others just as well as their own, by the same standards of justice.

Rawls also says that "there is no thought of deriving the reasonable from the rational."[130] What Rawls means to point out here is that the public conception of justice does not have latent within it the rational schemes which

[127] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 48-54.

[128] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 52.

[129] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 52.

[130] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 51.

individuals will go on to adopt later. In fact, this is not what justifies the public conception, as Mandle points out.[131] Rather, what is valued about what the sense of justice disposes citizens towards valuing is that very framework which is, in some sense, indeterminate to many different substantive conceptions of the good.

As Rawls says, they "desire for its own sake a social world in which they as free and equal can cooperate with others on terms all can accept. They insist that reciprocity should hold within that world so that each benefits along with others."[132] The sense of justice is a moral sentiment which is aimed not strictly at any substantive conception of the good, although it will be congruent with just conceptions. Instead, the sense of justice disposes citizens towards applying and acting from the principles of justice. They are not disposed towards and acting from the justice of individuals, but the justice of just society. This is the case even though the sense of justice is a moral sentiment which individual citizens have.

There is, however, an intersection between the reasonable and the rational in the sense that there must, as Mandle says, be a congruence between the sense of justice and one's own conception of the good.[133] Put differently, while the sense of justice is not itself derived from one's conception of the good, that is, as Rawls says, "there is no thought of deriving the reasonable from the rational," it still remains that the reasonable and rational must be congruent.

Rawls provides an account of the development of the sense of justice in individuals because he thinks that it is part of the stability of just society that individuals have this generally and for the most part, or, as Rawls says more precisely, "at least a substantial majority of its politically active citizens."[134] More specifically, what is required is that citizens develop the two moral powers which correspond to the sense of justice, and to one's own development, pursuit, and conception of the good.

In any case, there is involved the further requirement, once individuals develop this sense of justice, that it is congruent with their pursuit of the good. Otherwise, one's pursuit of the good could override that sense of justice – or the sense of justice could suffocate individuals' pursuit of the good. Rawls says, in this vein, that

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This should remind us a bit of Hume's formulation of his claim that there is no thought of deriving "ought" from "is." For in some sense, the public resources provided in a just scheme, on the one hand, to which more substantive conceptions of the good are added on, on the other hand, are related on an appreciably contingent basis. The alternative would be perfectionism.

[131] Jon Mandle, "Sense of Justice," in *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon*, 769.

[132] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 50.

[133] Jon Mandle, "Sense of Justice," in *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon*, 769.

[134] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 38.

acting from the sense of justice could be a matter of neurotic compulsion.[135] In the end, Rawls's main concern for the theory of the good is still to uphold the stability of a just society.

The Unity of the Self

However, the stability of a just society and its compatibility with the rational plans that people choose is in fact a version of the old problem of how to relate moral psychology and the just regime – perhaps the canonical version of this being found in Plato's *Republic*. Rawls addresses this as the congruence of justice (as fairness) with goodness (consisting in pursuing a rational plan).

Moreover, keeping the person motivated to keep the principles of justice devised in the original position under the veil of ignorance may seem more problematic once the veil is lifted and real persons in fact know which interests and comprehensive views of the good they are interested in. They could simply abandon their previous commitments once they know "what is good for them," out of interest or envy, and abandon their moral concerns with fairness.

Contrary to the teleological theories that Rawls surveyed before advancing his view of the moral person, he finds that there is no real conflict because it is resolved in the unity of the self, which has the two moral powers previously indicated. These two moral powers are coupled with a determinate, if revisable, conception of one's own good. Rawls says that we may think of each person as a particular human life lived according to a rational and reasonable plan. We may think of such a plan as rational and reasonable because it pursues ends and purposes. And, indeed, the fact that it pursues certain ends and purposes rather than others provides a kind of unity to the self. For this seems to be what would make it into one particular life rather than another. Thus, it is not merely according to a rational and reasonable plan but, moreover, this or that rational and reasonable plan.[136]

Rawls wants to say that justice as fairness gives a particular account of how particular persons or selves are thus unified, that is, how they may be unified by their ends and purposes. One of his main ways of explaining this is by contrasting it with the unity of the self which he interprets as implicit within "average utilitarianism."[137] Average utilitarianism is the view that what matters is not ultimately the aggregate utility of a society, but the average "per capita" of individuals. So, average utilitarianism would look to maximize this "per capita" utility.

[135] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* 451.

[136] Compare this presentation with David A. Reidy, "Unity of Self," in *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon*, 853-857.

[137] He walks us through the contrast in §§83-85 of *A Theory of Justice.*

Rawls takes this version of utilitarianism to be the most plausible teleological rival candidate conception of justice to justice as fairness.

He begins by saying that average utilitarianism does not present us with an account of the self which is "descriptively accurate" – so it does not accurately describe, as a matter of fact, how people how individuals act whenever they are rational – nor "normatively attractive" – which means that, even if the description were correct as a matter of fact, it is because something has gone wrong.

He then critiques average utilitarianism on its own basis for presenting something that is descriptively inaccurate and normatively unattractive. He also says that justice as fairness has its own conception of the self which is importantly different from that of average utilitarianism. He argues that the unity of the self that is presupposed in justice as fairness is both descriptively more plausible and normatively more attractive. Thus, Rawls claims that this account of the unity of the self is both a better description of the matter of fact, and it is a more attractive account of what should go on anyway. This two part comparative conclusion is supposed to captures two general lines of objections that Rawls advances specifically against average utilitarianism.

Rawls moves into the first objection against average utilitarianism by asking us to consider how utilitarianism of that kind could even be significant to someone in the original position. It is useful recall some features of individuals' status in the original position, and the purpose of thinking of them in that way. They are, again, behind the veil of ignorance, so that all of their particular interests are occluded from them. In this way, they are supposed to be considering only those things that are relevant to justice and, in particular, they are looking to understand what the justice of a just society would be. This implies taking a stand on what distribution of goods is just, and this they decide upon by deciding upon the principles of justice.

Why could average utilitarianism be attractive in this position, at least in principle? It would be attractive to the degree that preference maximization is what finally matters – calculated in a per capita fashion, as average utilitarianism says we should like to do. Rawls says it is true that we should care about utility in this way only if the individuals involved do not have "a determinant character or will, if they don't have a system of final ends with which they identify." In other words, what they would be selecting for in the original position if they chose average utilitarianism are those would-be principles of justice that maximize preference maximization, which maximization is abstracted from any particular rational plan. Thus, if the agents in the original position go on to identify with a specific rational plan, and this rational plan is not something which can admit of very much preference satisfaction, this is not something that the justice that they had originally decided upon would favor. It would rather help those positions which maximize preference and utility.

The problem that Rawls has with this is that it requires not treating individuals as full persons. It fails in the sense that it does not treat them as a human person with two moral powers – the first one to form to revise and pursue a conception of the good, and the other one to propose an honor fair terms of social cooperation with, by way of annex, a determinate, if revisable, conception of the good. This requires honoring the particular rational plan that individuals may choose, as opposed to being mere "vessels for utility" or "sites of preference satisfaction."[138] Rational agents in this thin sense would, instead, be "ready to take on any conception of the good or system of final ends" under the condition that it satisfies preference maximization.

What individuals in the original position would find attractive in principle about average utilitarianism is that it presents the maximal average utility or preference satisfaction among life plans, or perhaps rather among whatever life plans can produce the most utility. In this way, however, focusing on average utility abstracts from the particular details of one's life plan, and it also abstracts from choosing one's own life plan.

Reidy pithily describes the Rawlsian response to this when he says that "I would not want to be someone else with their conception of the good end or system of final ends just because they enjoyed a higher level of utility or preference satisfaction."[139] He continues on a bit later, "but my agent should know that I have and should advance my interests as a person with an identity given by a determinate conception of the good or system of final ends." It is illicit from a Rawlsian perspective to abstract preference maximization or utility away from identity, and this is since it is coupled with a determinate conception of the good or system of final ends, that is, from the plan with which one identifies.

We should wonder then how Rawls thinks we should avoid treating individuals as mere vessels for utility or sites of preference satisfaction. It is clear by now that he thinks that individuals in the original position have to be understood as having a determinate system of final ends with which they identify. Yet this does not mean that agents should know the details in advance. It means instead that, in the original position, agents need to know about the general kind of "structure" or general kind of "content," if they are going to decide rationally upon the principles of justice.

Rawls suggests that there are two ways of understanding how this could happen. A first way, which Rawls does not invite us to accept, assumes that, while all the parties will go on to have diverse final ends of their choice, they still in any case have a common overarching final end which, as such, organizes whatever other final ends that the parties may have. Thus agents in the original position, by knowing what all the final ends are organized by, can try and choose principles of justice which take this into account.

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[138] As Reidy puts it when he is summarizing *A Theory of Justice,* 150-152. See David A. Reidy, "Unity of Self," in *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon*, 854.

[139] Ibid.

Rawls suggests another possibility. Instead of trying to determine the requirements of justice from the side that asks what overarching final end there is and how it organizes all other relevant final ends, he indicates that agents in the original position should take interest in primary goods, which are generalized means to whatever final ends of a rational plan that individuals go on to pursue. In a different way, then, it captures the relevance of the final ends that individuals go on to have in their distinct individual life plans, not by focusing on what more significant final end could organize them "finally," so to say, but rather on what antecedent means would be organized by the different final ends that individuals go on to have.

There is an additional aspect to this alternative to average utilitarianism (and perfectionism) which Rawls is keen to point out, which is that individuals count as important the development and exercise of those two moral powers as part of the final ends which they will go on to develop. They can thus go on to choose the principles of justice in accordance, not with what maximizes preference or utility, but with what maximizes that which can be organized by individual rational life plans, and that which produces commitment to the organization of those primary goods in a way that coheres with the two moral powers of the individual.

Rawls is not insensitive to the social background in which the moral person develops, but his resort to analytical philosophy and the logic of choice makes his presentation very abstract, even when he tries to incorporate a kind of Kantian constructivism and a Humean philosophy of moral sentiments with an Aristotelian principle. MacIntyre's view is that, on the contrary, not all these things are compatible.

V. Goods within a Virtue Framework

Intractable Disputes about the Good

MacIntyre's diagnosis of modern moral philosophy as one of ailment has, as one of its central symptoms, the presence of intractable debate about central issues. Modern moral philosophy seems ill-equipped to fulfill its own (perhaps ill-conceived) goals. So, questions on a number of often enough politically charged issues – such as about what the conditions are which determine that a war is a just war instead of international thuggery – have become points, not quite of reflection and consideration, but of expected disagreement and strife. They have become generally accepted markers for distinguishing one group or faction from their rivals. MacIntyre does not dismiss the fact that rival parties to central and ongoing debates are in some sense a perennial feature of moral philosophy, modern or not. However, he does propose to us that modern moral philosophy suffers from this kind of rivalry and strife to such a degree that we ought to consider it catastrophic.

Since the failures of modern moral philosophy are not, MacIntyre thinks, a perennial feature of moral philosophy, he suggests that we can trace these failures back to their origins. These failures are related in crucial part to one of the characteristic features of early modern moral philosophy, that is, during the Enlightenment. During this time, there was a general attempt to jettison the pre-modern resources for justifying and sustaining moral practice and theory. Two key resources from that pre-modern era were that of Christian theology and that of natural teleology. The way that the Enlightenment thinkers engaged with these two key resources was to prove critical, MacIntyre claims, to the way that their efforts would turn out.

Christian theology proposed that the world in general and people in particular were created and fitted by God according to the purposes of God's supernatural goodness. Natural teleology, a notion inherited by Latin Europe from the recovery especially of Aristotle, proposed that natural things have an intelligibility and purposefulness in themselves – which is an intelligibility that can be observed apart from divine intelligence itself in way that, for instance, the function of a watch cannot in fact be discerned apart from the intention of the watchmaker. A great deal of knowledge about the meaning of the world in general and people in particular does not require knowledge of divine intelligence. Christian Latin theologians generally took theology and natural teleology to be compatible, but what in any case was similar to both Christian theology and natural teleology was that they claimed a purposefulness to the world in general and people in particular.

Also at the origin of modern moral philosophy was the attempt to justify many of the claims of these earlier theological and teleological traditions. This included injunctions such as "Do not kill" and "Do not steal." Yet a

decisive feature of the new project of moral philosophy in the modern period was to appeal to secular justifications of injunctions like those just mentioned. This new mode of justification was expected to occur in such a way that neither the claims of Christian theology, nor the claims of a natural teleology, would need to be invoked. For Christian theology had itself become not a point of agreement but of disagreement, so that neither Protestants nor, of course, secularists would find traditional theological authorities sufficiently robust. Natural teleology, too, was taken to be a vacuous concept that, in any case, was incompatible with the anti-teleological, mechanistic turn that the natural sciences had taken. These traditional resources for justifying the purposefulness of the world and human life seemed to be collapsing.

Notwithstanding these sweeping changes in the intellectual and cultural fabric of Europe, while a great many of the philosophers of the highest rank in the Enlightenment period did in fact largely abandon these traditional resources for justifying such injunctions or rules as "Do not kill" and "Do not steal," they did not abandon the traditional moral injunctions or rules themselves. Nor, importantly, did they abandon the notion of a moral rule in general. On the other hand, the history of these thinkers may be interpreted, MacIntyre thinks, as a series of attempts by these thinkers to justify the claims of "morality" according to post-theological and post-teleological resources.

The history of these attempts to justify the claims of "morality" not only failed, MacIntyre tells us – as though the project was not taken far enough. Rather, it had to fail. Part of the reason that these attempts had to fail was that these thinkers sought to justify particular moral rules that were originally justified, and could only be justified, by theological or teleological resources. However, the deeper reason for the failure was that these thinkers attempted to justify any such thing as a "moral rule" in the first place without such resources.

Understanding why it is that such attempts were bound to fail involves examining two of MacIntyre's central reasons for thinking that the idea of a "moral rule" loses force. One of these reasons involves the way in which any such moral rule is to be rationally vindicated. A second reason concerns how it is that such injunctions have an effective place in moral practice. Considering these takes us, first into MacIntyre's criticism of the modern moral language and theory, and then into modern moral practice.

Aristotelian Teleology Reconsidered

MacIntyre understands moral rules to be prescriptions or prohibitions of certain kinds of behavior. Contemporary moral language, he had suggested early on in *After Virtue*, is laden with what appears to be appeals to such rules. Suppose that someone says, "Do so-and-so," and someone else replies "Why am I to do

so-and-so?" after which the other person responds, "Because it is your duty."[140] What appears to have occurred is an appeal to a moral rule: "Do so-and-so because it is your duty." The language suggests that we are supposed to find notions like "duty" to be both impersonal and rational so that, whoever utters it, we ought to find it compelling if we are in our right mind and if the item in question is in fact our duty.

However, consider what would happen if such language were not as impersonal and rational as it presents itself. Suppose that we, in fact, have no good reason to believe in "duties" as convincing in the way that the example person suggests it should be. In such a case, what would be spoken is "Do so-and-so because it is your duty," yet in fact what would be meant is "Do so-and-so because I wish it." The language of a "duty" would simply be concealing an expression of personal preference.[141]

The language of moral rules gone wrong is, for MacIntyre, the language of concealed manipulation. As he narrates in one passage, the development of modern moral philosophy into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries developed in an increasingly clear way that "[e]ach moral agent now spoke unconstrained by the externalities of divine law, natural teleology or hierarchical authority; but why should anyone else now listen to him?"[142] We modern moral agents are no longer taken to be under the paternalism of theology or natural teleology. Yet it is not clear to MacIntyre how, in that case, our own autonomy and self-styled principles could turn out to be anything except ultimately assertive when it involves relating to others.

MacIntyre thus interprets modern moral philosophy to have degenerated into a manipulative mode of relating with others that is masked by pretensions to being rational and moral. It is a failure to provide rational vindication of those moral rules, meanwhile seeking variously to assert them. And it is further a recognition that there is yet to be any sufficient replacement in accounting for who or what we are, separated as it has become from the hold of theology or natural teleology. So, his diagnosis here implies a further failure between these two features of modern moral discourse, namely, that something has broken down regarding the relationship between who or what we are and what we ought to do.[143]

We might, then, wonder if there could be such a thing as moral rules which is not just concealed manipulation. One answer, a Nietzschean one, would be to answer in the negative: "For it was Nietzsche's historic

[140] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 8-10.

[141] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 9.

[142] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 68.

[143] "On the one hand, the individual moral agent, freed from hierarchy and teleology, conceives of himself and is conceived of by moral philosophers as sovereign in his moral authority. On the other hand the inherited, if partially transformed rules of morality have to be found some new status, deprived as they have been of their older teleological character and their even more ancient categorical character as expressions of an ultimately divine law. If such rules cannot be found a new status which will make appeal to them rational, appeal to them will indeed appear as a mere instrument of individual desire and will" (Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 63).

achievement to understand more clearly than any other philosopher (...) not only that what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of objective will, but also the nature of the problems that this posed for moral philosophy."[144] MacIntyre takes Nietzsche to have recognized that modern moral philosophers before him lacked the resources to conduct moral inquiry in a way as to secure the existence of a set of impersonal, rational moral rules.

The upshot of this failure in modern morality was equally a failure in the practice of modern morality, something MacIntyre takes Nietzsche to have recognized additionally. The failure of modern moral philosophy, coupled with its shrill and continuing assertions of its would-be conclusions could only, in the end, not only mean that such theorizing results in a set of more or less concealed manipulations; it is also representative of the way in which any "confidence of the everyday moral agent in post-Enlightenment culture that his moral practice and utterance are in good order" is a misplaced confidence.[145] It is not merely that modern moral language is in a state of disorder, so that modern moral theory can only end up being deployed in a manipulative mode. It is that such language and theory signal an incompetency in putting such language and theory into practice, too. Modern moral agents are, as such, apparently bereft of the resources they need to follow the rules of modern morality in quite the way prescribed.

MacIntyre, like Nietzsche, does not take action and theory to be relatively unconnected realities. "There ought not to be two histories," MacIntyre says, "one of political and moral action and one of political and moral theorizing, because there were not two pasts, one populated only by actions, the other only by theories."[146] Yet a crucial part of what separates MacIntyre and Nietzsche is a disagreement about the scope of the failure to justify moral rules. In response to the question, "Can moral language and theory be anything other than manipulative?" Nietzsche would, on this interpretation, answer in the negative. MacIntyre's answer is a qualified "Yes." We might ask, then, what MacIntyre thinks that it would take for there to be such an affirmative response.

If the language of moral rules is to be something other than manipulative, then, MacIntyre thinks, it appeals to something else that is naturally purposeful, which is something that cannot be a mere contrivance of arbitrary will. This is, at the very least, a resource much like that of the natural teleology and theology which the Enlightenment thinkers largely abandoned. If we have such a natural purposefulness, this would mean that there is some better and best version of who we are that we ought to aspire to simply because it is better and

[144] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 113.

[145] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 113.

[146] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 61.

best, that is, because it is our *telos*. If someone has enjoined us to aspire towards our *telos*, and if we have such a thing, then the person who has enjoined us cannot have (for that reason) manipulated us.

As MacIntyre characterizes the Aristotelian natural "teleological scheme," there is "a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature."[147] There is a contrast, that is, between humans as we presently are, and as we ought to be if we are to achieve our good as humans.

If natural purposes are once again considered relevant to moral rules, then the significance of moral rules changes, and not just because they are wrested from an otherwise ultimately manipulative moral scheme. Moral rules come to make the demands that they make because they enjoin the things that we humans must do or avoid if we are to develop into the better and best versions of ourselves, that is, in order to reach our *telos*. As MacIntyre summarizes in a critical passage from *After Virtue*:

> Each of the three elements of the scheme – the conception of untutored human nature, the conception of the precepts of rational ethics and the conception of human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos* – requires reference to the other two if its status and function are to be intelligible.[148]

Part of the significance of this passage is that, if moral rules are severed from the scheme involving us as we presently are and us as we ought to become, then they lose their function and intelligibility. As a result, they cannot but ultimately become manipulative language disguising ulterior motives and reasons. The restoration of natural purposefulness also involves an older, inherently purposeful comprehension of ourselves according to something very much like this older Aristotelian account of human nature.

As it stands, moral rules have been thus separated from any theological or natural teleological context. Part of the fallout of this is that the language of modern morality is in a state of disorder. It cannot achieve what it apparently intends to achieve; for disconnected as it is from a substantial account of our natural purposefulness, modern moral language cannot justify such claims as "Do not kill" or "Do not steal." It can repeatedly denounce them, but if the moral language or theory involved cannot bear out rationally the conclusions, then the only mode ultimately available to it is an assertive one, however right the moral injunctions themselves may be.

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[147] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 52.

[148] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 53.

MacIntyre's interpretation of what would get us out of the present state of disorder would require revisiting something like the older natural teleological framework that ethics was conceived in terms of. He ultimately has come to argue that a certain narrative conception of human life is sufficient to provide this teleological context. Yet this consideration has emerged against the background of his engagement with the Aristotelian concepts of "good" and "flourishing."

Aristotelian Concepts of "Good" and "Flourishing"

MacIntyre's approach to moral and political philosophy is normative in the sense that it addresses themes such as what goes into a good human life, what it is to deliberate rationally about good things, and what kind of moral psychology this implies.[149] MacIntyre has a somewhat distinctive way in which he addresses these themes on the good.

MacIntyre takes it that the use of language like "good" or "bad" makes sense just by its relation to some further goal. When we say, then, of a medicine that it is "good," we mean something further such as that it is "good for curing infections," or of a "good hammer" that it is "good for driving in nails." We should also notice immediately that when we speak of good medicines or good hammers in this way, we begin referring to some further activity which is characterized by some goal or goals. While strictly it is some goal or goals which makes relevant the use of language like "good" or "bad," these goals are often part of some or another activity.

Yet consider that things can be good for more than just the goals of further activities. Activities of a different kind are those activities characteristic of living things. Oak trees or humans have their own characteristic activities with their own proper goals. As a result, they may properly benefit from things that are good for them. We may say, for example, that water is "good for oak trees" or that exercise is "good for humans." In these instances, we continue ascribing "good" in relation to goals, but we ascribe it in relation to the proper goals of the characteristic activities of living things. This is often called a "teleological" account.

What this account additionally allows us to understand is the significance of the term "flourishing," and its importance for MacIntyre. Living things like oak trees and humans flourish when they achieve the proper goals of their characteristic activities, that is, when they achieve their *telos*. Since all ascriptions of "good" or "bad" are made with reference to some goal or goals, and the relevant goals for living things are those of their

[149] MacIntyre may be classed as a "Neo-Aristotelian" in his approach to moral and political philosophy. He says, though, that this is a "cumbersome" piece of terminology. His more precise description can be found in Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 31.

teleology, all ascriptions of "good" or "bad" with respect to living things can be attached to whether or not, and in what way, the term "flourishing" can be rightly ascribed.

MacIntyre understands this "teleological" account of flourishing to be often unarticulated foundation for addressing questions about the good. This is because all the senses of "good" relevant to human flourishing are thus related to whether they help us or hinders us in achieving our *telos*. Thus, all the senses of "good" (or "bad") that have use in moral and political philosophy can be related back to some teleological account of our flourishing.

However, a further question which needs answering is how exactly we are to know what our teleology involves, so that we can know what is good for our flourishing.[150] MacIntyre does not define and explain the virtues as perhaps Aristotle does, although he does in fact come to identify the virtues as those excellent qualities which enable us to flourish. Even so, by the time of *After Virtue*, he rejected the standard Aristotelian account in which the virtues are tied up with what he there called Aristotle's "metaphysical biology." By this, he meant to reject that traditional way of accounting for the virtues by first determining some set of psychological capacities, and then defining the virtues as perfections of those capacities.

This older way of accounting for the virtues is notably found, according to a conventional interpretation, in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* just before he moves into discussing the virtues specifically. According to this interpretation, Aristotle presents the three powers of the soul more or less as he presents them in the *Treatise on the Soul*. However, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle emphasizes that the virtues are either perfections of the rational power itself, which is most precisely human, or otherwise they are a perfection of the sensory power, which can be perfected so as to participate in the precisely human rational power.

Thus, Aristotle divides up the kinds of human virtue into those perfective of the rational power itself – which are intellectual virtues – and those perfective of the sensory power – which are moral virtues. Yet Aristotle's list of the virtues does not seem deducible from the theoretical framework that he begins with.[151] For after this rather

[150] How a good Neo-Aristotelian should answer this question is a contested point. The traditional approach has been to explain this teleological account by a further account of moral psychology. This approach would justify claims about what our human capacities are, what their different kinds are, and – at least in rough sketch – what importance and level of priority we ought to assign to the different kinds of capacities we have if we are to flourish as humans.

[151] Perhaps this is because Aristotle is not looking to discover the virtues deductively but to prove their naturalness when he has found them, insofar as they may be considered "intellectual virtues" or "moral virtues." Thus, the virtues supplied by Greek ethical experience may be sorted generally in either natural type while their faulty conceptions may be further sorted out as vices. Yet this seems to prove, at most, that a given virtue would be either an intellectual or moral virtue and thus natural – not that a candidate virtue is more than just a candidate. This is something regarding which Aristotle seems to treat Greek ethical experience as sufficiently justificatory. Why, though, should ethical experience become justificatory only after the general division of the virtues into "moral" and "intellectual"? Is their distinction perhaps just a pedagogical point (considering, for instance, that his remarks just afterwards are about a student's preparation for the present study) and not one of

theoretical investigation into both the psychological capacities and the general kinds of virtue, Aristotle seems to determine what virtues he will investigate by appealing to the Greeks' experience in practicing them.

This point of inquiry about how exactly we are to know what our teleology involves is one where MacIntyre's approach becomes particularly distinctive. MacIntyre's method skips the initial stage of dividing up the powers of the soul, however it is to be interpreted in Aristotle. Although he thinks that an account of goods and the good must be structured teleologically, his account of our human capacities, their kinds, and their priorities does not begin with such direct engagement with moral psychology. Rather, he begins in the way that most ordinary, non-academic persons develop some account of goods or the good. This is through our discovery of the variety of desires that we have, of the goods that we desire, and of the reasons we recognize that we have for pursuing some desire, not pursuing it, or pursuing it differently.

Desires, Goods, and Reasons

MacIntyre makes the perhaps reasonable assumption that we often do not begin our practical reasoning with a catalogue of our characteristically human capacities, and then select which of them we think we should fulfill, and in what order. Rather, we realize that we would like to achieve various things such as playing guitar, becoming the CEO of a start-up, or writing a book. When we recognize that we have desires for such things, we at least tacitly realize that we have come to desire certain goods. We may also notice that these goods that we desire provide us with "reasons for action," as MacIntyre says. If someone, Hannah, takes up guitar lessons, and someone else asks her what she takes herself to be doing, she may explain herself by citing the good she is after: "I wanted to play guitar." It is not only that we desire goods; it is also that we find them to give us reasons for action.

Of course, not all reasons for action are good enough. To the aspiring guitarist, someone may further ask, "But are you well aware that this will leave you with too little time to take lessons in piano, cello, clarinet, trumpet, and xylophone as well – like you had planned?" What the aspiring musician needs to decide upon is how she should prioritize the goods that she desires. A failure in prioritizing well such desires could result in the more important ones, or even all of them, being frustrated. This would be true of prioritizing desires for playing musical instruments, but it would also be true more generally of prioritizing any other desires that may conflict.

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ethical justification, as in conventional presentations? Perhaps this difficulty can be tempered by his remark in 1.3 that he is after a scientific precision, but not a mathematical one. In any case, it does not settle straightforwardly the relationship between practice and theory in his ethics.

Whereas not all reasons for action are good enough, not all desires are good in the first place. John's desire to burn down his neighbor's gardening shed in a fit of rage and Susan's desire to be manipulative at the Parent-Teacher Association meeting are misdirected desires in a way unlike Hannah's desire to play guitar. For in the cases of John and Susan, it is not that they are failing to desire good enough goods. It is that they are failing to desire goods at all.[152]

MacIntyre says that, in order to avert such kinds of error, we will have to engage in practical reasoning about the desires that we have, the goods that we pursue, and the reasons that we have so far considered for pursuing those desired goods. Successful practical reasoning enables us to make good judgments about our desires, goods, and reasons. Yet we may wonder what it could be to make a good rather than a bad judgment about such things.

Notice first that MacIntyre does not think we should take these kinds of judgments to be either expressions or judgments about, say, our attitudes and feelings.[153] To recognize that I desire to play chess, or that I think playing chess is good, or that I think playing chess is a reasonable thing for me to do right now, is to make a judgment which is true independently of my attitudes or feelings about it. It is to make a judgment which either does or does not correspond to the facts. These kinds of factual judgments are, of course, about desires, goods, and reasons. Yet they are ultimately factual judgments about my own or others' flourishing.

To see, first, how such judgments could be factual, consider first an example in which a friend asks me to play chess and, as it happens, I am distracted by the thought of some work I need to do only later in the week, so that I decline the offer. In such a situation, I may fail to recognize that I do in fact desire to play chess – a desire which I might have recognized had I not been preoccupied. In that situation, I would experience a mismatch between my "felt distresses" or "felt wants" and my desires. Further, when I recognize this mismatch, what becomes clear to me is that the worries about work that I feel are, as a matter of fact, different than what my desires are. Thus, I am presented with the opportunity to make a better judgment, and this is because I can make a different judgment that is true to the facts.

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[152] Presenting a defensible version of this claim within a Neo-Aristotelian framework requires a notoriously large amount of clarification. A ruefully short version of a Thomistic Aristotelian response could come in roughly two parts. (See Aquinas's interesting responses to two very strong Neo-Platonist and Scholastic Aristotelian objections in his *Summa Theologica*, q. 18, art. 1, ad. 1-2). On the one hand, some specific kinds of actions are vicious and ought never as such to be done, e.g., arson. In this sense, their actuality ought never to be desired, as there is nothing desirable in their specific kind. On the other hand, individual vicious actions are composed of otherwise potentially desirable component activities. Thus, the pleasure that John takes in burning down the gardening shed is of itself potentially not bad. However, it is severely out of place because burning down the shed is not really an act of, e.g., restorative justice – the truth of which John has chosen to ignore.

[153] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 23.

It is not enough to make factually true judgments about our desires in order to make good judgments about our flourishing. That is, it is not enough simply to clarify what one's desires are, to rid oneself of any self-deception about them, and perhaps then to act in accordance with them. The reason this is not enough is because, as we have seen in the cases of John and Susan, our desires may be misdirected to begin with. What Hannah, by contrast, has discovered in her musical aspirations are her desires for a number of genuinely good activities. The goodness of Hannah's preferred activities, and the badness of John and Susan's preferred activities, are good or bad independently of anyone's attitudes or feelings about them. Thus, judgments about them will be factual judgments, and good judgments about them will be factually true judgments.

Neither, though, is it sufficient to make factually true judgments about both our desires and the genuine goodness of the goods we are after. Consider MacIntyre's distinction between two ascriptions of "good" that we may make. One ascription is rightly applied to the many activities which have genuine goods of their own, such as music or painting.[154] Consider again the case of the famous French painter Paul Gaugin who, in order to pursue painting more devotedly, abandoned his family and moved to Tahiti.[155] Gaugin, we may suppose, being the great artist that he was, made good ascriptions of this initial kind about the goods of painting. However, he made a mistake of a different kind in judging the genuinely good activity of painting that he pursued. Namely, he failed to acknowledge that he did not have good enough reasons for pursuing painting to the undue exclusion of his family, and whomever else. Painting is good, but it is not as good as Gaugin pretended that it was.

A second kind of ascription, then – the kind regarding which Gaugin was mistaken – is one about human flourishing. Consider that if, by contrast to Gaugin, someone was to make factually correct judgments about their desires, and about the goods that they are after, and about the reasons they have for pursuing those goods, then they have made a factually correct and thus good judgment about human flourishing. She or he would have identified, that is, at least part of what would be required in order for them or others to flourish, for they would have identified goods that are, as a matter of fact, good enough for them or others.

[154] MacIntyre links this account of activities to his account of practices. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 66. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (2007), 187ff.

[155] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 66-67.

Practices and their Goods

What this account of desires, goods, and reasons presupposes is some account of the activities that we engage in. This MacIntyre develops most notably in his concept of a "practice." As MacIntyre explains in an oft-quoted passage:

> By 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 excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and good involved, are systematically extended. Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess.[156]

To begin with, MacIntyre understands a "practice" to be a social activity of some kind which has goods intrinsic to it. A practice, such as chess, therefore has 'goods of the game' which are not of themselves necessarily instrumental to something outside of the game. In this way, achieving a checkmate in a game of chess may be coherently understood in a way separate from some prize to be gained through that achievement. This conception of a practice thus illustrates human activity as integrally non-instrumental in some ways. Further, the fact that these activities truly have internal 'goods of the game' enables the person who becomes excellent at such an activity to develop qualities that are truly connected to success within the given practice. This is partly because a game without goods or goals is a game without any possibility of success in it. However, there is a more salient reason that practices are the activities that enable us humans to succeed in excellence.

By "practices," MacIntyre means just those activities that are sufficiently complex to give us an increasingly better idea both of what ends we can pursue, and how to do so. Practices must be able to extend, in a "systematic" way, our powers for pursuing goods. This history would, therefore not merely be one of increasing excellence. It would be a history even of increasingly excellent standards of excellence. This means that practices are complex so that the ways in which the internal goods that may be achieved are themselves capable of undergoing development. For example, becoming excellent at chess is something sufficiently complex that it can undergo a history of increasing degrees and escalating norms of excellence. As a consequence, practices are those activities which develop our human powers for success in excellence when we practice it. We learn both how to become excellent according to some particular norms, as well as how to

[156] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

recognize better norms to be good at. By contrast, playing tic-tac-toe cannot, by itself, embody such a history, and so cannot extend our human powers in this way.

It is necessary to clarify that these extensions of our human powers, these qualities that we develop through practices, are not strictly speaking what MacIntyre means by "the virtues." MacIntyre does in fact, in a preliminary way, tell us the connection between the virtues and practices:

> A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.[157]

However, this is not and cannot be the only relevant feature of virtues for MacIntyre. In order to understand why, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact of the plurality of practices.

There are many practices, and 'now' is not always the time to engage in any given one. Practices perfect and extend our human powers in a systematic way, since they enable us both to achieve success in human activities and to achieve better standards of success. Yet among all the possible ways in which our human powers can be perfected by practices, not all of them are always called for. For example, jury members playing chess in a courtroom session, however well they are doing so, are perhaps not acting virtuously.

This point can be restated more exactly. Achievement in practices does require certain human qualities in us. Moreover, at least some exercise of these qualities MacIntyre identifies as virtuous. Indeed, virtues are to be identified as in the class of those qualities which enable success in practices. However, it is not always virtuous to exercise these qualities, as apparently with chess in the courtroom. What more is needed for MacIntyre's definition of a virtue is, therefore, something which can distinguish it from the mere exercise of those qualities which enable and incline us towards achievement in practices. The way for him to make this distinction is to clarify when some or another practice should be practiced, and when not, so that the exercise of the relevant human qualities is virtuous.

So, the fact that practices are perfective of human powers, but not always appropriate, raises the question of how they ought to be prioritized, that is, of when in fact they are appropriate. Such questions as "When ought I to engage in oceanography?" are not in the relevant way answerable by the qualities that, for example, successful oceanography confers. An answer to this question about organizing our priorities about practices, and thus the qualities that they confer, requires from MacIntyre a deeper account both of what he considers an intelligible, unified life, and also of the virtues.

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[157] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

Flourishing, Teleology, and Narratives

When as ordinary persons we make good judgments about our own or others' flourishing by making factually correct judgments about our desires, the goods we are after, and the reasons we have for pursuing those goods, then we achieve for ourselves in particular cases what is achieved in a more schematic way through a teleological account of human flourishing. We may ask what we are to think of MacIntyre's approach to knowing what our teleology involves, then. For on the one hand he is invested in a teleological account of this kind, though now it is clear that, on the other hand, he attempts to relate desires, goods, and reasons in such a way that appeal to some moral psychology would be unnecessary to make judgments about human flourishing.

One way of illuminating what is at stake is to take note of two central questions about our reasons concerning goods and desires which MacIntyre's presentation so far leaves unanswered, namely, "How am I to know whether a desire is a good desire in the first place?" and "How am I to know which goods are better than others?" Failure in being able to answer the first question well would characteristically result in the failure of a John or a Susan, whereas a failure in answering the second question well would characteristically result in something like Gaugin's failure or Hannah's less severe failure. Success in answering both questions, by comparison, is precisely what would produce good judgments about human flourishing, for we would know whether a desire for a good could be a good desire, and further whether there is a good reason for acting on this particular desire rather than a desire for some other good.[158]

One of MacIntyre's points of insistence is that this general schematic about human flourishing is indeed different from particular judgments that we make about human flourishing. What any such schematic omits are the particular histories or narratives that we should be able to tell about our desires, the goods we pursue, and the reasons we develop for acting as we do. The narrative of how things have gone for us so far often includes commitments to others, our accountabilities, the gratitude that we owe towards particular others, and more generally our decisions in which we have legitimately privileged certain desires, goods, and reasons in our practical reasoning. A good narrative would exhibit such things in a way compatible with our teleology as

[158] A conventional Neo-Aristotelian view of moral psychology would look to assist in answering the two questions above by providing, first, a stock of natural desires that we have which follow upon our natural capacities and, second, a hierarchical prioritization of our natural capacities so that we know which of them are more important and which of them less so. Thus, in answer to the first question, we would know that certain desires that we have are good desires because they are in line with our natural capacities, rather than frustrations of them. Next, we would know whether one good is better or worse than another according as it fulfills a more important or less important natural capacity. Both answers turn directly on how our natural capacities are either fulfilled or frustrated, or less rather than more fulfilled, and so together they would provide an account of our teleology. Thus, we would be provided a general schematic of human flourishing.

humans. Indeed, it would be expressive of such teleology. Yet a general teleological schematic could not tell us these particulars in advance, nor often what decisions we should make about them.

Suppose that Michelangelo, in the midcourse of painting the Sistine Chapel, let his brush fall to the ground, and sent word to the Pope's secretary that he was abandoning painting in order to pursue a higher calling as a Carthusian monk. While the life of a Carthusian monk would, at least by the Pope's standards, in fact be a higher calling than that of even a prodigious painter, it would also remain true that Michelangelo would be quitting his prior commitments and decisions, and that it would be reasonable of the Pope to be frustrated, not just with the unfinished work, but with Michelangelo too. Such commitments and decisions are not captured by a general teleological schematic since not everyone has, for instance, the same reasons to be grateful or to be accountable. Rather, it is the narratives of particular individuals' lives which would tell us what I or you would need to know in order to be grateful or accountable. And so it is possible that while our imagined Michelangelo would perhaps not have made an error in thinking about the general schematic of our teleology, he would perhaps have made an error in his particular judgments about how the history of his and others' flourishing is to be narrated (and painted).

The Narrative Unity of a Life and the Virtues

MacIntyre claims that, when we work out good judgments about human flourishing, we often leave any general schematic of our teleology unarticulated.[159] Most of our actions do tacitly presuppose a general schematic of this kind, but to constantly articulate what goes into such a schematic would paralyze us in our practical reasoning. One pertinent question therefore is when it would need to be articulated, if at all. MacIntyre thinks that we do on certain occasions need to articulate something of this general schematic. The way of making an answer requires understanding MacIntyre's conception of a unified life, and one way of grasping the significance of that conception is through his notion of "compartmentalization."[160]

To compartmentalize my life is to separate off some segments of it from others as though I lead several different lives rather than one. Politicians and bureaucrats who sever good conduct from administrative effectiveness, and the chronically indecisive who have different priorities every month, both present us with

[159] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 112-113.

[160] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 228. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 204-225. Note Christopher Lutz's remarks in *Reading Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 123. In that connection, see Alasdair MacIntyre, "Social structures and their threats to moral agency," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays, Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 200-202.

stock examples of compartmentalization. Their failures signify some or another kind of disunity of life: politicians and bureaucrats with disparate behavior, and the chronically indecisive with disconnected intentions.

Such failures may be addressed by appealing to the qualities of character that the individuals in question are missing. The failure of the politician or bureaucrat is, we may say, a failure in honesty of speech and conduct. Meanwhile, the failure of the chronically indecisive may be classified as a failure in fortitude. The importance of qualities of character is not just that they are incompatible with dishonesty or irresoluteness, but that they are also incompatible with the compartmentalization or disunity of life that such defects of character bring about. The honest politician or bureaucrat does not have such disparate behavior, and the person of resilience and fortitude does not have such disconnected intentions.

These qualities of character, or the "virtues," as MacIntyre calls them, enable us to be good at genuine activities, and they also make us good at being good at the right genuine activities. It is in this sense that the virtues apply across the whole range of genuine human activities, so that we should expect honesty, fortitude, and the like, in our fencers, watchmakers, pediatricians, engineers, and so on. As a result, the virtues lend a greater unity to our lives. It is also in this way that they enable us to make good judgments about human flourishing, since we find in such judgments a recognition both of the genuine goodness of some good as well as whether we have a sufficient reason for it. Recognizing more precisely why this is true, however, requires considering more closely the unity which the virtues produce in us.

Notice that part of the importance of such qualities of character is that they are not merely skills attached to some particular, even genuine, activity. They are of a different kind than the learned dexterity of a watchmaker or the medical knowledge of a pediatrician. Skills can make us good at genuine activities, but they do not ensure that it is good that we should be good at such activities, or at least not here and now.[161] Again, two jury members playing a brilliant match of chess in a court session would be acting skillfully, but we may assume that they would be failing in the mentioned qualities of character.

Responding to the problem of compartmentalization by appealing to the virtues is, by itself, an insufficient response. Since even if we may agree that the virtues would have the effects suggested, we may go on to disagree as to which qualities are to be counted as virtues in the first place. It is thus that we may disagree about whether a desire is in fact badly directed, or a genuine good insufficient, so that we disagree over

[161] The component parts of skills, such as dexterity or visual acuity, are in some sense applicable across the range of human activities too. However, unlike virtues, they do not make us good at being good at the right activities.

whether someone is a Susan or a Gauguin.[162] It is in part because of this deficiency that MacIntyre does not treat the virtues in isolation, but rather insists that they be understood within the context of a tradition. Thus, the virtues would find their place not just within a unified life, but in a unified life among others, that is, within the tradition or traditions of which we are a part.

[162] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 229. It is at this point, MacIntyre says, that we stop to articulate our human teleology, and this we do by thinking about whether our lives are intelligible as a unified narrative.

VI. Different Functions of "the Good": Stability and Revolution

MacIntyre takes modern moral and political philosophy to be in a state of severe disorder, and he thinks that what is true of modern moral and political philosophy more generally is true also in particular of the normative approaches that we find in, for instance, the work of John Rawls. It is true that MacIntyre refers to Rawls by name a few times throughout *After Virtue*. However, these references barely occupy three pages within an almost 300 page book.[163] This fact may be more easily understood by the fact that MacIntyre does not take Rawls to be particularly special in the history he is telling. Rather, he understands Rawls to be only one of the latest proponents of the liberal tradition.

In the first substantive mention, MacIntyre suggests that Rawls articulates a distinctively modern liberal idea about the triple relationship between "the ends of life," the virtues, and rules.[164] Modern liberalism, says MacIntyre, breaks up this triad, because it expels "Aristotelian teleology from the moral world."[165] The way that modern liberalism does this is, first, to instruct us to treat questions about the ends of life as unanswerable from the public standpoint. Part of the reason that this is significant is because rules used to be derived from answering these kinds of questions in a public way. Now, however, rules are not derived from any definite conception of the ends of life. Instead, they have come to stand alone, so that "[r]ules become the primary concept of the moral life."[166] In the third place, the virtues used to be understood as those "qualities of character" which were helpful in achieving the good life for man. Now, virtues – or perhaps better "qualities of character" – are useful just insofar as they help us to follow the right set of rules. In this modern liberal conception, rules and virtues thus seem to have lost their connection with the ends of life.

MacIntyre indicates to us that Rawls upholds this modern liberal idea of the relationship between the virtues and rules. He quotes a passage from Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* which says that the "virtues are sentiments, that is, related families of dispositions and propensities regulated by a higher-order desire, in this case a desire to act form the corresponding moral principles."[167] He thus interprets Rawls to mean that the virtues are just those qualities of character which motivate us to act in conformity with the right rules. Perhaps we may

[163] The first mention, which is cursory, treats John Rawls as among other analytic philosophers unable to get us beyond the state of disorder that our moral language is in, as it has affected academic engagement in moral philosophy. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 21.

[164] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 119.

[165] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 119.

[166] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 119.

[167] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 192.

understand MacIntyre as saying that Rawls's conception of the moral sentiments, insofar as they relate to the requirements of justice, is a conception which is presented as independent of any substantive account of the good. Within the scope of MacIntyre's argument in *After Virtue*, the most relevant failure of Rawls's theory of justice is that it fails to get us out of the disordered state of modern moral theory and practice. For, perhaps we may understand MacIntyre saying, precisely the solution we need is one which involves a substantive conception of the good.

Moreover, MacIntyre does not seem to have Rawls in mind except as an instance of a larger approach which he takes to be applicable also to Robert Nozick. Both belong to the ailing moral culture whose main failure is obscured: it is "because human beings as rational animals have the specific end that they have that questions about how they should act have determinate answers, answers that are true or false." In other words, there is a fact of the matter as to, for example, whether it is good or bad for rational animals to possess large amounts of surplus wealth or to slaughter the innocent. "Withdraw the concept of an end," he continues, "and those moral judgments that formerly presupposed it will continue to mimic judgments that are true or false, but will in fact only function as expressions of attitude."[168] That is, if the reasons for those judgments that either do or do not contradict the fact of the matter about how rational animals should act are withdrawn, then the judgments will of course be without reason, and thus if they are advanced they are not more than an expression of something non-rational, namely, expressions of attitude.

However, Rawls and Nozick are just instances of a feature of our present moral culture. Both use "*impersonal* rational arguments and as such are usually presented in a mode appropriate to that impersonality."[169] But they do not merely provide the backing for the moral injunctions to someone else in the mode of "Do so-and-so," asserting merely "Because I wish it." They obscure an ultimate arbitrariness with apparently universally applicable utterances as "Because it would give pleasure to a number of people" or "Because it is your duty."[170] They do this by appealing to the existence of some kind of "*impersonal* criteria (...) independent of the preferences or attitudes of speaker and hearer, of standards of justice or generosity or duty," that, paradoxically, whose existence we doubt. So, all duties are imposed "because I wish it," in such a way that it continues to mask the assertive, bureaucratic mode of modern moral theory and practice.

A corollary of MacIntyre's claim about the incoherence of modern moral theory and practice is that attempts to legitimate the present social order by unacceptably reducing its legitimacy to claims about efficacy. If

[168] Alasdair MacIntyre, "What More Needs to Be Said? A Beginning, Although Only a Beginning, at Saying It," *Analyse & Kritik 30* (2008): 262.

[169] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 8.

[170] Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 9.

MacIntyre's diagnosis is correct, this would be true even of Rawls's theory of justice. MacIntyre does not say that it is legitimate to accept the de facto stability created by the liberal social order as legitimizing state-and-market. He does say that we must accept the present influence of the state in order to derive some benefits from it,[171] but he does not think that its power makes it legitimate. He thinks it makes its institutions and agents Weberian, and its presuppositions Nietzschean.

If the modern state is out of the question, we are left with a question of what the alternative is. We do not receive an elaborated response from MacIntyre. He does state that it is dangerous to foreclose on "Utopian" standards, in aiming for something which he presumably means is not yet invented. But the significance that he gives to this kind of claim relates to two distinctions – one between local community and the "established power" of bureaucratic government, and one between "Utopianism of the present" and "Utopianism of the future." As MacIntyre writes in a somewhat telling example:

> From time to time it becomes possible in some local community either to bring into being a new school or to remake some existing school, so that it can provide an education for the children of that community. When such an opportunity arises, it is sometimes possible for parents, teachers, and other interested members of the community, to become involved and to participate in discussion and decision making. (...) [Yet] once you begin to map out what is involved in the project of bringing this kind of school into being, you will have to raise at the level of everyday practice a much wider range of political and moral questions about human goods. When you do so – and we can observe this happening in many places in the world – and when you try to secure the resources that you need in order to educate children, you find almost immediately that you encounter the systemic resistance of the representatives of the larger social and economic structures. (...) What you will be told by those who represent established power is that the kind of institutions that you are trying to create and sustain are simply not possible, that you are unrealistic, a Utopian. And it is important to respond by saying 'Yes, that is exactly what we are'.[172]

This much explains how he thinks the discussion and decision making of ordinary persons leads to a conception of the goods required for, say, a functioning school, and that deliberations like this at the level of local community are bound to upset preexisting social and economic structures. Again, MacIntyre takes such

[171] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 131-133

[172] Alasdair MacIntyre, "How Aristotelianism can become Revolutionary," in *Philosophy of Management* 7, no. 1 (2008): 4-5.

overarching structures to be incapable of embodying this kind of practical reasoning. However, he also distinguishes between two kinds of Utopianism:

> This Utopianism of those who force Aristotelian questions upon the social order is a Utopianism of the present, not a Utopianism of the future. Utopianisms of the future have been and are misleading and corrupting, because they are always apt and almost invariably do result in a sacrifice of the present to some imaginary glorious future, one to be brought about by the sacrifice of the present. But the present is what we are and have and a refusal to sacrifice it has to be accompanied by an insistence that the range of present possibilities is always far greater than the established order is able to allow for. We need therefore to acquire a transformative political imagination, one that opens up opportunities for people to do kinds of things that they hitherto had no believed that they were capable of doing. (...) It is in these contexts of everyday conflict that the accusation of Utopianism becomes important, since it is in such contexts that the achievement of human goods often takes new and unpredicted forms, for which the existing social order hitherto afforded no space.[173]

The kind of Utopianism which MacIntyre advocates is that which we observe in the clash between practical reasoning about human goods, conceived in Aristotelian terms,[174] and preexisting social and economic structures. It is in this way that we may adequately "acquire a transformative political imagination," one that does not abandon the achievement of human goods in the face of established power. The presents a conception of human goods, and indeed of the common good "found in that activity of communal learning through which we together become able to order goods, both in our individual lives and in the political society." (In this conception, MacIntyre distinguishes common goods from what he calls "public goods" like drinking water, which are indeed fitted for talking about just distribution.) And this conception is to be contrasted with the claim "that political authority is justified insofar as it provides a secure social order within which individuals may pursue their own particular ends, whatever they are."[175] What this illustrates is a tension between stability and revolution that arises out of MacIntyre's critical consideration of the ethics and politics of the present.

MacIntyre presents the latter perspective, of a stable social order allowing the pursuit of individuals' own particular ends, as in fact a rival perspective about the common good in which "the common good is arrived at

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[173] Alasdair MacIntyre, "How Aristotelianism can become Revolutionary," 5.

[174] We should bear in mind here that "conceived in Aristotelian terms" is, he would think, finally a redundant addition.

[175] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good," in *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight, 241.

by summing individual goods."[176] Rawls would strongly object to this characterization, of course. He would reject precisely that thesis that "summing individual goods" is related to the basis for political legitimacy. This is a secondary problem with characterizing the relationship between individual and common goods (and public goods). The primary problem is that Rawls does not take political legitimacy to be based on a society's common good in the first place, meant in anything like what MacIntyre would mean. It is based, rather, on justice, the principles of which, as the original position heuristic is supposed to show, are not derived from prior consideration of the good. In Rawls, consideration of the good does not provide for us an account of legitimacy. It provides for us an account of stability, or ideally so.

The most important aspect of this disagreement may seem like one about the priority of the good and the just. For Rawls would say that we may talk about the requirements of justice without invoking substantive conceptions of the good, and MacIntyre seems to say that we must indeed invoke such substantive conceptions in characterizing political legitimacy. Otherwise, political legitimacy would seem to mean nothing more than a so-far effective set of more or less concealed manipulations of a more or less benign nature. What may escape us, however, is that Rawls and not just MacIntyre has a utopian bent.

Most interpreters read Rawls's choice to approach the philosophical question of justice through ideal theory. In fact, Rawls argued that "an important role of political philosophy is to identify the ideal standards of justice at which we should aim."[177] A recent book reminds us that "[o]ther philosophers challenge this approach, arguing that Rawls's ideal principles are useless as a guide for action in the real, nonideal world or, worse, that they are an impediment to addressing injustice in the world where racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination intersect to create complex forms of domination and subordination."[178]

Rawls's reference to utopian standards are often downplayed because he is concerned with dismissing the negative meaning of the word as unrealizable, as desirable but impossible, using the qualified expression "realistic utopia" in his later work to contrast his view with conceptions, which are "utopian in the pejorative sense" or "unrealistic,"[179] which he applies to his own comprehensive view, or "unrealistic" view, "idea of a well-ordered society by justice as fairness" given the facts of reasonable pluralism of democratic cultures,[180] as

[176] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good," in *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight, 242.

[177] Jon Mandle and Sarah Roberts-Cady (eds.), *John Rawls*, 8.

[178] Jon Mandle and Sarah Roberts-Cady (eds.), *John Rawls*, 8.

[179] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 188.

[180] " John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xix.

well, perhaps, as we mentioned, the account of stability in the third part of *A Theory of Justice*, that he aimed to revise.[181]

[181] For Rawls's use of the expression, see Catherine Audard, "Realistic utopia," in Jon Mandle and David A. Reidy, (eds.) *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 688-691.

Conclusion

It might be well to enter into the concluding remarks by first noting that, in Rawls's and MacIntyre's theories, there is a formidable complexity to the relationship between the just and the good. It is practically necessary, as a result, to map out again the results so far of comparing their projects. But it is additionally helpful to recall what those results were supposed to mean.

Although the thesis began with presentations of the thought of these two philosophers, these were never meant to be comprehensive presentations. The objective was just to draw enough connections in order to focus on some points of closer detail. One such point was that of the relationship between the sense of justice and a conception of the good of the citizens. The other was how those two items relate to other aspects of Rawls's and MacIntyre's thought.

The body of the thesis began, in Chapter II, with John Rawls's project of justice as fairness. The aim was a presentation which would allow us to focus on the role of the good. This chapter began with the question, "how ought we to conduct moral inquiry?", which was a question asked in various ways by figures in the analytic tradition in the early-to-mid twentieth century. The state of the art of moral and political philosophy was in many ways constricted. The next section, "A Return to Normative Methodology," outlined some of the main problems of such constriction which Rawls was able to rework. Here we see especially the importance of the method leading to reflective equilibrium and its connection to the requirement of feasibility.

That much provides the general context for Rawls's project. A couple concrete characterizations of his project – made here just with a view to considering the role of the good – are as one of moral individualism and contractualism. The moral individualism of his project distinguishes it from the metaphysical individualism that it is sometimes interpreted as, and this allows us to better understand the basis of his contractualist approach. He is not trying to be metaphysical about individuals or "the good" and he is interested in talking about the good but only as it bears relevance to justice.

We then gave a presentation of the original position and how this should lead intuitively to the principles of justice. We provided some general remarks about the "Relevant Conditions, Goals, and Motivations in the Original Position," which answer some more general queries about how the heuristic is supposed to work. The heuristic moves Rawls's project forward in part because of the feasibility requirement, since the flexibility afforded by such an antifoundationalist approach requires an in-principle openness to any relevant data. This means that the principles of justice have to apply to just institutions, as in the second part of *A Theory of*

Justice. We touched on this briefly, but the point was to present enough of Rawls's project that the significance of the third part of *A Theory of Justice* could emerge. We could thereby give a separate presentation on this later. This chapter ended with some overall remarks on the project.

Chapter III introduced the work of Alasdair MacIntyre through his own major work, *After Virtue*. We began by giving some of the history behind *After Virtue*, which is useful to considering how MacIntyre could come to find that an Aristotelian interpretation of modern moral and political philosophy was missing. We then moved into the central claims of *After Virtue*, which presentation was purposed to make clear what MacIntyre thinks is disjointed about contemporary moral culture, how this disjointedness is to be traced back to the "Enlightenment Project," how this disjointedness was partly recognized by Nietzsche, and the distinctiveness of the rival tradition of the virtues which Nietzsche failed to recognize. The last chapters of *After Virtue* are significant in their attempt to present a "core conception" of the virtues, consisting of practices, the narrative unity of a life, and the tradition of the virtues. This relationship of the virtues to the narrative unity of a life gets us to one of the closer contact points between MacIntyre and Rawls, bringing the chapter to a close.

Chapter IV was a more in-depth examination of Rawls's theory of the good, as presented in part three of *A Theory of Justice*. We first opened the question of why a theory of the good would be needful for Rawls's project, given the limitations on what such considerations we may take as relevant in the original position. The major sections of *A Theory of Justice* are organized in the order they are organized into because of the prioritization produced by the veil of ignorance. The role of the good in Rawls's theory of justice therefore begins with a discussion of the primary goods and the moral psychology which the original position agents have knowledge of. What remains necessary is to see whether there could be a congruence between the substantive conceptions of the good which individuals go on to have and the principles of justice which are chosen in the original position. Deliberative rationality inclines us to organize effectively our pursuit in fulfilling our fundamental desires, and what Rawls calls the "Aristotelian Principle" indicates a deep psychological fact that, in so doing, we often tend towards greater rather than less complexity in our pursuits.

One concern that emerges out of this analysis is that Rawls's objectives in this part of his theory demand more than what the resources at play can provide. Thus, Barry points out that, even back as far as the original position, it is difficult to account for having one set of primary goods rather than another – which implies saying any such set of goods at all – without some kind of (perhaps hidden) perfectionism. While noting this, and while noting that Rawls noted this to a degree in *Political Liberalism* and beyond, we moved on to consider two especially relevant features of Rawls's presentation, namely, the sense of justice and the unity of the self.

The sense of justice is that moral sentiment which disposes us towards what justice requires in a just society, apart from those motivations we get from our substantive conception of the good. The significance of this sentiment is that it disposes us towards these requirements and not merely because they are part of our own conception of the good. One question this raises is what it means for Rawls that the self is unified. We may call to mind the two moral powers which Rawls proposes that individuals have – one directed towards developing the sense of justice, and the other towards formulating, revising, and pursuing our conception of the good. These are coupled with the conception of the good which we go on to have. That is, contrary to the claims of some versions of perfectionism, we do not have a capacity merely for a specific life plan. And unlike the claims of utilitarianism, we are not mere vessels of utility – in which case we could hardly be called unified selves. Rather, we may choose one conception of the good rather than another.

Chapter V examines more systematically MacIntyre's presentation on goods, leading up to the narrative unity of a life. It begins by restating the significance of the claims of *After Virtue*, namely, that the Enlightenment abandonment of the theological and natural teleological background lead to the present-day intractable character of moral and political disputes. One remedy to the situation would be to reconsider the significance of Aristotelian teleology. For natural purposefulness is what would allow for any kind of relating to others, that is, any kind of ethics or politics, to be something other than mere assertions of individual will.

In later works like *Dependent Rational Animals* and especially *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, MacIntyre looks to reconsider the significance of Aristotelian teleology through a narrative conception of human life, but he does this by means of considering our practical reasoning about "flourishing." Thus it involves practical reasoning about our desires, goods, and reasons for action, so that we may go on to identify genuine goods. But practical reasoning leading to an identification of genuine goods is insufficient, since some goods are better than others, and our circumstances shape what goods we should seek here and now. Good practical reasoning about goods involves our making factually true judgments about human flourishing, and we learn how to achieve this in participating in practices and developing the virtues which sustain them. Ultimately we learn how to do this through participation in a tradition of the virtues, but we develop into individuals with narrative unity of life in developing the virtues needed to act, think, feel, etc., consistently and intelligibly across the range of our practices and pursuit of genuine goods.

Chapter VI looks at some points of intersections between Rawls's and MacIntyre's very different presentations of the good. Rawls's presentation is aimed at identifying what would be necessary in order for just society to be stable. MacIntyre's presentation, which only becomes political at certain points, attempts to articulate what it means to reason practically about goods, and to do so well. When MacIntyre does become political, he talks

about the social and political structures of common goods. These are not captured within a state framework because he interprets the modern state to be Weberian – that is, characterized by bureaucratic manipulation. A different way of stating this is that the modern state does not operate against either a natural teleological or theological background, and so it must be a more or less benign system of manipulation. MacIntyre, therefore, has different criteria from Rawls about what even constitutes the legitimacy of social and political structures. In addition to the scarcity of primary literature connecting the two thinkers, there is then the further obstacle that Rawls speaks about the good in the third part of *A Theory of Justice* just under that aspect – of the stability of a politically legitimate society – in which MacIntyre thinks it unintelligible to talk about it. Still, both have presentations, if with different operative criteria, on utopian aspirations. This area merits more direct investigation.

Another suggestive area of potential investigation is that both thinkers attempt to address, if for different reasons, the status of the disadvantaged. MacIntyre does this somewhat extensively in *Dependent Rational Animals*, and we have only to call to mind Rawls's characterization of those who would be at a de facto disadvantage, that is, the worst-off. MacIntyre characterizes vulnerability in a more general way, namely, as the possibility that we may, in virtue of having an animal biology, fail to achieve those goods which we need in order to flourish. Yet there are a number of hurdles to doing this properly. We should recall that, despite Rawls's own preference for the section on moral psychology, he evidently intended to correct it in *Political Liberalism*. What this correction did not seem to amount to, curiously, was some needed clarification about how it is that we should identify the "worst off." Incredibly very little is said by Rawls about what exactly makes someone "worst off," and this scarceness extends to *Political Liberalism* as well as to the later writings, including importantly his restatement in *Justice as Fairness*.

It is clear at least that being among the worst off is a relative situation rather than a question to be addressed from a sufficientarian vantage point – as presented, for example, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[182] In any case, it is a position of relative deprivation of the primary goods, and so of opportunities, of income, and the like. Being as they are "all-purpose" goods (that is, to all just purposes), they are supposed to be useful for all kinds of rational plans. Thus, being among the worst off is a particular position of deprivation in respect of achieving such plans.

[182] Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), esp. 212-215. See also J. A. Colen, Anthony Vecchio. "Samuel Moyn. *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2018. 277 pp." *Ethical Perspectives*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2019): 546-550.

Notwithstanding the lack of clarification, Rawls suggests that we would have a clear idea of the institutions that ought to result from the chosen principles of justice, and indeed at every stage. This represents a strategic point of contrast between our thinkers, though; for, meanwhile, MacIntyre shows a cavalier disregard of the modern state whatsoever, retaining in different ways a set of Marxist suspicions that it is little more than the coercive arm of capitalism. We may also suppose that this disregard plays a part in explaining why he does not present a clear political alternative to what he takes to be the corrosive and decaying structures of the present day; he only denies that the modern state can provide anything like the framework for human flourishing, even if at some junctures it must be carefully bargained with.

However, somewhat parallel to Rawls, neither does MacIntyre seem very interested in giving us clear political alternatives aimed at relieving the most vulnerable, and this although the concept of human vulnerability is central to his conception of the virtues. Interpretive charity would require bearing in mind that MacIntyre takes human vulnerability to be a matter of scale and not of kind ("us," not "us and them"), and that affliction should not result in political exclusion (a point which, if taken to its term, leads to the interesting requirement of political proxies). Yet consider that MacIntyre's conception of the virtues does in some sense pick out the most vulnerable.

The virtues are supposed to enable us to "participate in relationships of giving and receiving,"[183] but they do so in such a way that the "virtues of acknowledged dependence"[184] – that is, the qualities which allow us to recognize the extent to which we are dependent upon others, such as collegiality and gratitude – seem primarily directed to those "in dire need both within and outside a community [so that it] generally include[s] individuals whose extreme disablement is such that they can never be more than passive members of the community."[185] MacIntyre's "worst off" (put somewhat crudely) are those who cannot be active members of a society, "not recognizing, not speaking or not speaking intelligibly, suffering, but not acting."[186] Also notable is that vulnerability is not strictly a social situation to begin with if it is a part of the human condition by which we are all of us more or less disabled, more or less afflicted.

It is necessary to take a step back from these details to draw a comparison with Rawls. We may broadly characterize MacIntyre's own inquiry as one engaging with the history of modern moral and political philosophy although, even in its minimally historical moments, it ends with an attempt to revive something about the

[183] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (La Salle and Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 122.

[184] See especially Ch. 10 of Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

[185] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 127.

[186] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 127-128.

virtues that is supposed to be lost or ignored by our present situation. This runs on a different and often uncrossing path with that of Rawls's inquiry, which we could broadly characterize as an inquiry into the ideal society as "a cooperative venture for mutual advantage,"[187] yet driven by "rules of conduct" and principles required by a sense of fairness. There are less fireworks here than the conventional narrative. However, as suggested in the Introduction, this approach is more accurate and faithful to both authors. Again, it is signal that these and other parties supposedly involved in the liberal-communitarian debate maintain an appreciably consistent lack of enthusiasm for it.

Whatever the case, the comparison of both authors' conceptions of the good is a useful one in clarifying, at the least, that what these thinkers present us with are two different ethical proposals which are ultimately incompatible for reasons other than matters of detail. It may be additionally helpful to rehash some of these overall differences in attitude and ethical-political analysis. Let us enumerate just a few of these differences.

Rawls claims that unanimity of past ages was possible only through downward pressure, whereas "a basic feature of democracy is the fact of reasonable pluralism – the fact that a plurality of conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious, philosophical, and moral, is the normal result of culture of free institutions."[188] MacIntyre, on the contrary, is consistently nonplussed with what he takes to be the "the most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance," which is "that so much of it is used to express disagreements," a feature coupled with "the most striking feature of the debates in which these disagreements are expressed," namely "their interminable character."[189] We are further supposed to take these features as signs that the liberal "tradition" has fallen into decay and that, in general, we moderns are caught in a state of moral chaos. Rawls has much the opposite estimation, maintaining that "religious, philosophical, or moral unity is neither possible nor necessary for social unity."[190]

Another point, to repeat, is that Rawls's theory is supposed to apply just within a state framework, whereas MacIntyre, on the contrary, takes the (nation-)state framework to be morally irrelevant – except insofar as it may and at times must be negotiated with. It is morally irrelevant because a characteristically unintelligible leviathan dealing in noble lies like utility, rights, contracts, and so on. But while Rawls asserts that the "members of a community are united in pursuing certain shared values and ends (other than economic) that lead them to support the association and in part bind them to it," it remains that, in his view of justice as fairness, "a

[187] Ibid.

[188] John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in *The Law of Peoples*, 131.

[189] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 6-8. He goes on to give three examples of well-known rival arguments: just war, abortion, and healthcare.

[190] John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 16.

democratic political society has no such shared values and ands apart from those falling under or connected with the political conception of justice itself."[191]

Now, on the one hand, it is this thinness of shared values and ends which Rawls takes not merely to make the state intelligible, but just and legitimate. Yet, on the other hand, he says that it is "a serious error not to distinguish between the idea of a democratic political society and the idea of community."[192] This is a statement with which MacIntyre would agree, and this is another important point of contrast with the standard narrative. For MacIntyre takes it to be a severe mistake, in fact "the communitarian mistake," to give political society at the state level a communal character, or, as he says, "to infuse the politics of the state with the values and modes of participation in local community."[193]

Thus, even acknowledging that Rawls's and MacIntyre's views are ultimately incompatible, they share more than a few characteristics. Both reject utilitarianism and Kantianism (that is, Rawls accepts a modified version of Kantian Constructivism rather than a strict Kantian outlook as a comprehensive view); both appeal, as a matter of moral psychology, to an Aristotelian idea or principle that excellence or complexity is in some sense a deep-seated aim of human action; both talk about the unity of a life, one in terms of rational plans (Rawls) and the other in terms of the narrative unity of a life (MacIntyre); and both try to incorporate concern for the "worst off" or for the particularly vulnerable.

Interestingly, both are shy of brandishing metaphysical commitments. Rawls's proposal of justice as fairness is one that is "political and not metaphysical,"[194] a feature sometimes taken to be an answer to Michael Sandel's criticism of Rawls's conception of the self as "abstract" and "unencumbered," that is, subject to "a sort of metaphysical myopia."[195] MacIntyre is often accused as well of basing his ethical views on historical and sociological analysis rather than on metaphysical claims.[196]

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[191] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 20.

[192] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 21.

[193] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 142.

[194] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," *Collected Papers*, 388-414.

[195] Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, 55.

[196] In 2008, MacIntyre came to clarify, however, in response to Timothy Chappell (and Stephen Mulhall), that "at the time that I wrote *After Virtue,* [I sought to] to minimize my metaphysical commitments. What I should have argued was that this paradoxical character is to be understood as due to the loss of the concept of an *end,* a final cause, a concept central to the practical discourse and thought of some of our Western predecessor cultures, but one characteristically abandoned at the threshold of modernity. (I did indeed speak of the concept of a *telos,* but spelled it out inadequately, because nonmetaphysically.) Something is directed towards its end, the end that is its in virtue of its specific nature, when it develops as it needs to, if it is to be completed and perfected. Plants and animals, including human beings, and a range of types of human activity have ends in this sense" (Alasdair MacIntyre, "What More Needs to be Said," 261-262).

Something that perhaps runs deeper than any of the above items is a divide between our authors which could be described, using Thomas Nagel's words, as part of "the fragmentation of value."[197] Rawls and MacIntyre prioritize differently the features commonly attached to moral claims. MacIntyre's interest extends beyond the trend of reviving interest in the virtues, since he finds that the virtues are key to making moral theory and practice intelligible in the first place. This prioritizes the virtues in such a way that he is, using Rawls's terminology, a "perfectionist." He takes human flourishing as articulated by a "thick" moral language that requires historical-sociological context. When Rawls, by contrast, talks about the virtue of justice, he is not talking about a perfection of human nature. He is talking rather about a feature of a society's basic institutions, so that it is in this connection that he speaks about a thin theory of the good. Our authors present, therefore, rival moral theories.

Although this order is surely not entirely arbitrary, given the "relative stringency" of these types of values, it is surely absurd to attempt to turn such an order into a universal maxim of action. Some cases make any decision a difficult one, but these are exceeded by those that are "the strongest cases of conflict," namely, "genuine dilemmas" or moral dilemmas.[198]

Despite the fact that Rawls's deontology and MacIntyre's theory of the virtues are ultimately incompatible, both provide us with important insights into what a moral or political account of how people make decisions should be. If we assert that in some cases the abstract rigor of philosophy is unable to fully grasp difficult questions, and to separate interests, feelings, and facts, devising principles for private life or the public sphere, the lesson from their disagreements may be one of patience and the importance of perspective.

There is, however, a practical difference that despite being a nuanced one, may have become very important in our public culture. Although Rawls does not ignore the role of what he calls "the background culture,"[199] and even emphasized that, those who propose the terms of cooperation within a society need to think they are reasonable terms for others to accept – as a requirement of just reciprocity. They may have different conceptions but "they should be able to agree that all are reasonable, even if barely so."[200] But in a democracy, this background culture is usually not guided by any single, central idea or principle, including Rawls's own.

Let us note, however, his remark that we humans, "as rational animals have the specific end that they have that questions about how they should act have determinate answers, answers that are true or false" (Ibid, 262). Rawls, also trying to minimize his metaphysical commitments, never stopped talking of man as rational and reasonable.

[197] Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 128-146.

[198] Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 128.

[199] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Lecture 1, sec. 2.3., 14.

[200] John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 14.

Our perception, however, is that, in the current situation of liberal democracies in the western world, MacIntyre's contention that Nietzsche's criticism of liberalism was successful and that it will lead liberalism in the direction of "emotivism" or "expressivism" seems to be plain. Perhaps there is no final solution, but our contention throughout this thesis has been that Rawls's suggestion, in refraining from using comprehensive views of the good as justifications in the public realm, may end up weakening instead of strengthening the "goods "or "virtues" needed for the maintenance of liberalism in the public sphere.

Critics of MacIntyre might say that he presents a diagnostic but no clear political solution. Although MacIntyre's pessimism about a certain kind of liberalism even today do not seem to provide him with an image of a well-ordered society, his latest books do provide him (and us) with a critical tool for evaluating the justice of communities – a tool that took him over forty years to develop and is still very much in development. Our provisional contention is that it is worth continuing to debate the merits of MacIntyre's own political proposal, however vague.

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