

***Pragmatist Possibilities for Alasdair MacIntyre's Philosophy***

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# Abstract

This thesis argues that Alasdair MacIntyre’s Thomistic turn generates two important difficulties that appear to destabilise his overall position. First, it appears that on the basis of MacIntyre own historical, context-dependent, and developmental account of how traditions develop, Aristotelian-Thomism was in fact sidelined in the course of the various episodes in social-intellectual history, making it hard to see how he can claim that it should be revived, now that it has been surpassed as a tradition. Second, MacIntyre’s commitment to maintaining a close link between moral thinking and the wider social-political context also makes it hard to see how a pre-modern outlook like Aristotelian-Thomism can have a place in the social and political order of the modern world.

On the first difficulty, I consider whether MacIntyre might argue that the marginalisation of Thomism was a mistake, while simultaneously offering good reasons why it should be revived. I nevertheless propose that MacIntyre’s resolution to this problem is ultimately unsuccessful, because it seems that Aristotelian-Thomism, and especially its teleology, were sidelined as part of a complex set of social-historical and intellectual episodes. I then suggest that a pragmatist inspired Deweyan teleology might offer MacIntyre a more promising approach.

Moving on to the second difficulty, I examine whether MacIntyre’s blend of a Marxist inspired social critique of the liberal state and its corresponding politics, together with his communal rendition of an Aristotelian-Thomist politics, might make the latter viable in the modern world. However, I argue that MacIntyre’s political account is still not sufficiently sensitive to our historical situation, and particularly the significance of the modern state. I again suggest that a pragmatist approach, because it remains sensitive to our particular socio-historical context, can better resolve this second difficulty, in a way that still incorporates some of the insights to be found in MacIntyre’s Aristotelian-Thomism.

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The physicists say that the universe exists in the sense that it does in virtue of the cosmological constant; more specifically, the mathematical equations that describe it have to account for a precision or fine tuning to 122 decimal places, otherwise the universe could not support galaxies, stars and ultimately life. Bob is sort of like the human version of the cosmological constant, and this thesis is complete – seemingly on a knife’s edge – precisely because without the force of this constant (Bob) there would be no thesis to speak of. Therefore I owe my greatest gratitude to Bob Stern, my primary supervisor, who has offered me guidance and support in my Master’s degree in philosophy, and has generously coach and mentored me in the completion of this PhD thesis. It is difficult to express my thanks to Bob, for no thought nor sequence of words fashioned into a number of sentences can fully express my deep show of appreciation to, and my respect for, him.

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# Introduction

The breakdown of moral, social, and political discourse in contemporary liberal society presents us with one of the most intractable social problems that western liberal countries have encountered in the post-war period. The fragmentation of present-day social discourse and the apparent interminability of various ethical and political debates, threatens the social cohesiveness, as well as the political integrity, of western liberal societies. Of course the gradual fragmentation and paralysis that plagues our social discourse is multifaceted and highly complex, driven in part by changes in social, political, intellectual, economic, technological, as well as other changes in the general material conditions. Nevertheless, liberalism, the dominant cultural, moral, and political, arrangement, which has defined social life in western societies, appears incapable of dealing with the ensuing conflicts that have emerged as a consequence of this disruption.

Under contemporary conditions in which the breakdown of social and political discourse has gathered an increasingly perilous momentum, it would appear that the work of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, and especially *After Virtue*, holds a certain level of underappreciated clairvoyance. MacIntyre argued in *After Virtue* that modern liberalism emerged from the failure of the Enlightenment Project[[1]](#footnote-1) to formulate an *independent* rational justification of moral claims, although he recognised that the project itself was largely a response to the changes in material conditions as well as intellectual and scientific developments in the seventeenth century which ultimately undermined important Aristotelian metaphysical and ethical concepts. Nevertheless, MacIntyre argues that the loss of important teleological resources in the Aristotelian tradition limited the feasibility of the whole ethical enterprise pursued by various Enlightenment thinkers, which sought to secure an independent ground for the rational justification of morality. In addition, various ethical formulations developed by different Enlightenment thinkers abstracted moral claims from the particular social-historical context which had motivated earlier (Aristotelian) justifications of morality; and the lack of the particular motivating (social) context for the justification of morality ensured the persistence of an apparent irresolvable conflict between the various positions. MacIntyre then argues that the contemporary modern liberal culture and social structure in part emerged out of this cycle of perpetual and recurring conflict between the various ethical positions advanced by Enlightenment philosophers. Therefore, it is entirely natural that the conclusions of modern liberalism are premised on the basic intractability of our moral and political discourse.

Of course, MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*, published in 1981, emerged before the latest round of conflagrations which have very visibly paralysed the social-political discourse of liberal societies, and generated seemingly insurmountable obstacles against advancing possible resolutions for the various social problems that beset liberal society. Yet, considering more recent developments, it is no longer an exaggeration to suggest that on the whole, western liberal societies find themselves at a dangerous precipice where the collective convictions of their citizenry in liberal democratic norms are being undermined.[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, while MacIntyre is widely recognised as one of the most important moral philosophers of the contemporary era, the influence of his work has been to some extent more limited than the outsized figure which his critique appears to cut. The reasons for this are at least three-fold.

First, moral philosophers have found MacIntyre’s conclusion to be too pessimistic or extreme, and the pessimism in MacIntyre’s work, especially with respect to any hope of salvaging the liberal order, is undeniable. Moreover, at the time of the publication of *After Virtue*, the fragmentation of moral discourse which MacIntyre identified in that workremained to some extent an esoteric historical-cum-philosophical exercise that was not enthusiastically embraced nor fully appreciated (and perhaps even dismissed), by mainstream academic (analytic) philosophy.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, fewer people today could reasonably deny that we live in an *extreme* time in which the fundamental democratic and liberal tenets are seemingly under question, not simply as an academic exercise, but rather confirmed by the experience of ordinary people who have become increasingly frustrated with the workings (or ‘failings?’) of their (liberal) social and political institutions. Therefore, this first reason should no longer hold back philosophers from re-engaging with MacIntyre’s work.

Second, MacIntyre’s later work – starting with *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* – generated an additional difficulty for his audience. For example, the philosopher John Haldane has come to conclude that the historicist and contextualist commitments which MacIntyre advances in *After Virtue*,[[4]](#footnote-4) appears to be inconsistent with his later adoption of Aristotelian-Thomism.[[5]](#footnote-5) Now, this fact takes on an added significance when we consider that MacIntyre never really repudiates the historicism in *After Virtue*, and indeed in his post-Thomistic work *Whose Justice*, he firmly places what he identifies as the emerging limitations of Aristotle’s ethics of the polis,[[6]](#footnote-6) in his prior commitments to contextualism and historicism.

Third, while MacIntyre’s social-cum-historical approach to moral philosophy in *After Virtue* has become much more acceptable, partly on account of broader trends in Anglo-American philosophy, his turn to Thomism appears to diverge from similar trends that have strengthened the dominance of, and penchant for, non-metaphysical forms of philosophical arguments.

Nevertheless, given more recent (social-historical) developments, the value of MacIntyre’s account seems undeniable and deserves greater degree of reconsideration, especially when we explore his work from a more holistic standpoint. MacIntyre’s critical account is able to systematically connect earlier historical, social and intellectual developments in ethics and politics to the contemporary set of social, cultural, and intellectual circumstances in which we find ourselves, perhaps better than any of his predecessors. A central claim that I am proposing here is that MacIntyre’s work, because it offers us a rational historical reconstruction of our current socio-political and socio-cultural predicament, remains a compelling intellectual starting point for developing an eventual resolution of at least some of the thorny problems that beleaguer liberal societies.

However, notwithstanding the promise of MacIntyre’s work, in order to advance the discussion in this thesis and achieve its intended outcome, I need to make a faithful attempt at removing or at least reducing the worries generated by the second and third reasons discussed above, which are often cited as limiting factors in MacIntyre’s overall influence. What is perhaps more significant and very much relevant to the direction of this thesis is that the second reason, which in my view limits the influence of MacIntyre’s work, ultimately generates two important difficulties (or tensions); and the resolution of these two difficulties will be the focus of this thesis.

MacIntyre’s Thomistic turn, made some time after 1985, appears to generate at least two important tensions (or difficulties) for his account. And this represents a challenge for those of us who seek to reconcile MacIntyre’s earlier historicism and contextualism, especially evident in *After Virtue*, with the metaphysical commitments that emerge as part of his endorsement of Thomism as the best tradition of moral inquiry. Now, this issue takes on an added significance since MacIntyre never actually abandons the historicism and contextualism put forward in *After Virtue*; instead in *Whose Justice* – a work that reflects his most sophisticated and considered thought after his endorsement of Thomism – MacIntyre looks to continue to build on the historical narrative of moral traditions which he initially advanced in *After Virtue*, and appears to once again reiterate many of the earlier commitments.

Moreover, MacIntyre’s Thomistic turn should be understood as a response to the failure of his social teleology[[7]](#footnote-7) in *After Virtue* – a teleology that was supposed to stand in as a replacement for the loss of Aristotle’s teleological conception in ethics. Now because MacIntyre’s conception of flourishing (or the ‘good’) in *After Virtue* is very much open-ended, it ends up being too thin to be capable of ordering the diverse heterogeneous set of goods that emerges under his account. But in the absence of an effective ordering mechanism which would allow us to assign relative priority to the goods of different social practices, it is not possible to conceptually order social practices in a way that coherently ties MacIntyre’s conception of practice to a unified narrative conception of an individual life that remains directed towards its good; and insofar as the individual is powerless to arrange and structure the various social goods that are generated in his or her social life, he or she cannot definitively adopt or pursue a distinctive way of life, nor embrace a particular conception of flourishing. Thus, MacIntyre’s social teleology doesn’t amount to a successful replacement for the loss of Aristotelian teleology. Therefore, his Thomistic turn should be understood as a response to the inadequacies of MacIntyre’s social teleology in *After Virtue.*

Notwithstanding MacIntyre’s response to the problems that beset his social teleology in *After Virtue*, it is my contention that MacIntyre’s later endorsement of Thomism creates its own unique set of difficulties which remain no less pressing. In my view, MacIntyre’s later Thomistic turn generates at least two complications that are difficult to reconcile with the contextualist-historicist commitments MacIntyre advances in *After Virtue* and elsewhere, and appear to hold a central place in his overall account. Thus, the incompatibility between the later Thomist MacIntyre and the middle MacIntyre in *After Virtue* begins our discussion.

First, MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice* emphasizes the role of traditions in the development of moral and political philosophy. On this view, ethical and political inquiry necessarily takes place in the context of a tradition. Here, moral traditions are viewed as analogous to Kuhnian paradigms in scientific inquiry. Every moral tradition contains its own set of first principles, as well as additional secondary principles that are derived from them; moreover, these basic principles are grounded in a distinct world-view and a particular conception of human nature. Analogously, traditions (or paradigms) in science are grounded in a few fundamental (or core) hypothesis, as well as auxiliary hypotheses that are conjoined to the core of a scientific theory – namely, those fundamental axioms of scientific theory. Likewise, scientific theory presupposes a distinct world-view and cosmology with its own associated metaphysical underpinning.

In *Whose Justice*, MacIntyre then goes on to accept liberalism as the dominant social, cultural, and intellectual tradition in western liberal societies.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, this claim leads to an important difficulty when we try to reconcile it with MacIntyre’s later Thomism. When we take into account MacIntyre’s historical account of traditions – in which later traditions surpass earlier accounts – it seems liberalism appears to have superseded the earlier Aristotelian and Thomistic traditions; and unless he can produce good reasons that effectively challenge this discrepancy, MacIntyre’s disparate commitments undercuts the validity of his overall account. Thus worryingly, MacIntyre’s historicism and contextualism potentially implies that Aristotelian-Thomism was in fact rightly sidelined in the course of the various episodes in the social-intellectual history, which then makes it problematic for him to claim that we should now bring it back.

Second, MacIntyre’s historical-cum-contextualist commitments closely connect moral inquiry to the wider social-political context, arguing that it needs to be embedded in the latter. However, the worry is then: how is it possible to reconcile this outlook with the idea that the Thomistic tradition – as a theoretical expression of social-moral practices belonging to a widely different historical context from our own – can represent our best chance for addressing present-day social and political problems? If MacIntyre is right that a moral theory only makes sense within a particular social context, how can Thomism be made workable when its context is so different from the one which prevails today?

These difficulties emerge in part because MacIntyre explicitly commits to a meaningful version of historicism and contextualism; yet, these same commitments, when taken together with his rejection of large-scale political structures such as the liberal state and support for a small-scale Thomist politics, generates an important tension in MacIntyre’s account, because his rejection of large-scale political structures appears to ignore salient historical-contextual social facts – in this case the modern state and its institutions – facts which fundamentally shape the contemporary liberal order, and form the basis of the socio-political structure in western societies. In addition, MacIntyre’s wholesale rejection of liberal state and its institutions together with his endorsement of a small-scale Thomistic communal politics generates a number of further difficulties.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The above two difficulties (or tensions) generated by MacIntyre’s work, comprise the two puzzles I plan to consider in this thesis. Now before I begin, I should emphasize that it is my intention to frame this thesis in the form of an immanent, as opposed to a more general, critique of MacIntyre’s moral and political philosophy. For this reason, our discussion in this thesis will initially accept the various claims that are contained in MacIntyre’s work. Now, for the sake of advancing a resolution to these two difficulties, I will consider some Pragmatist possibilities that on my view hold great appeal, especially when we consider their close connection with MacIntyre’s overall aims. In this thesis, I will articulate what will turn out to be a mostly[[10]](#footnote-10) Deweyan pragmatist solution to the two difficulties that emerge in MacIntyre’s account.

In addition to the above two difficulties, MacIntyre’s Thomistic turn limits to some extent its wider appeal, in part because of the general trends in the broader discourse that have reinforced and strengthened non-metaphysical attitudes and thinking in philosophy. However, MacIntyre’s later Thomistic turn is accompanied with a more metaphysical, as opposed to a social, approach to managing the problems that emerge from the inability of modern moral and political discourse to converge on jointly conceived solutions. Nevertheless, I will argues that it turns out that the pragmatist option offered in this thesis, as part of a resolution to the above two difficulties, can ultimately generate a more appealing *via media* position – one that avoids a foundational metaphysics, yet also remains non-instrumental and substantive in ways that avoids an important shortcoming of MacIntyre’s original account in *After Virtue*. I will now briefly outline the structure of the thesis.

In Chapter One, I will consider MacIntyre’s account of the contemporary moral landscape. Here, MacIntyre argues that the seemingly interminable conflicts between various ethical views originate from the fact that each position appeals to different basic premises – premises that are underwritten in appeals to different accounts of human nature and social life. And the various attempts at justification for moral claims put forward by different Enlightenment thinkers failed precisely because Aristotelian teleology had become discredited. MacIntyre then goes on to offer a social teleology in *After Virtue*, yet this attempt runs into significant head winds, in large part because his social teleology remains grounded in a broad and open-ended conception of the good.[[11]](#footnote-11) I will then argue that MacIntyre’s response in *Whose Justice* – where MacIntyre expands on the account he offers in *After Virtue* – can be viewed as a way of addressing this problem, precisely because the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition subscribes to a more robust teleology which potentially addresses the chief criticisms advanced against MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue*. Nevertheless, I will argue that MacIntyre’s endorsement of Aristotelian-Thomism as the best moral tradition thus far, alongside his acceptance of liberalism as the dominant contemporary tradition, generates two important difficulties (or tensions) for his account.

In Chapter Two I explore the first of the two difficulties, generated by MacIntyre’s later adoption of Thomism. I argue that MacIntyre implicitly, if not explicitly, recognises that his endorsement of Aristotelian-Thomism gives rise to an important difficulty (which I identified in Chapter One) for his account: namely, it appears that on MacIntyre’s historical account of moral traditions, liberalism as the dominant contemporary tradition in western societies has displaced, or otherwise marginalised, the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. I will then consider what I take to be an attempt by MacIntyre to address this problem. While MacIntyre recognises that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition was in fact sidelined, he goes on to argue that the loss of the Aristotelian moral tradition, and more specifically the teleology at the heart of that project, in part originated in a number of mistakes that were made by Renaissance Aristotelians. Specifically MacIntyre argues that Renaissance Aristotelians had begun to deviate from Aristotle’s ethics in ways that undermined substantive Aristotelian claims with respect to moral education and knowledge. I carefully consider MacIntyre’s hypothesis; yet I nevertheless argue that there is a more plausible explanation for the decline of the Aristotelian-Thomistic teleology. More importantly, I will suggest that MacIntyre’s hypothesis here could just as well apply to Aquinas’ modifications of the standard Aristotelian account. I conclude that MacIntyre’s hypothesis here isn’t ultimately successful in recovering and securing the teleological resources of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition; and the absence of a viable teleology renders MacIntyre’s account vulnerable to a number of objections.

In Chapter Three, I move to consider a Deweyan solution that will attenuate the lack of a viable teleology in MacIntyre’s account. I will argue that Deweyan democracy – namely, democracy as a way of life – can stand as a teleological framework, and therefore possesses the kind of resources capable of addressing this problem, and ultimately is able to offer a resolution of the first tension in MacIntyre’s account. I then move to consider a number of objections against the Deweyan account. First, I consider whether Dewey’s teleology – democracy as a way of life – is sufficiently substantive to generate a distinctive conception of flourishing; I will argue that it can. Second, I explore whether Dewey’s teleology amounts to a kind of teleology that can defend itself against an important objection raised against MacIntyre’s social teleology in *After Virtue*. I try to show that the Deweyan account can deflect those kinds of criticisms. Third, I address the objection that Dewey’s instrumentalist account does not sit well with MacIntyre’s later Thomistic turn.[[12]](#footnote-12) In response, I accept that while Dewey’s account may not convince the later (Thomistic) MacIntyre, it remains a serious contender for supplementing the problems that are generated by MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue*. Finally, I consider a final objection: namely, that Deweyan teleology – democracy as a way of life – rests on the assumption that the pragmatist methodology of inquiry can just as well apply to moral inquiry as it does to other areas of inquiry, and especially scientific forms of inquiry. Here I will utilise the work of the philosopher Hilary Putnam to answer this objection.

Next, in Chapter Four, I move to explore in some detail the second difficulty that emerges for MacIntyre’s political account. First, I unpack some of the consequences that are generated by the second tension in MacIntyre’s work. Second, I consider whether MacIntyre’s engagement with Marx and Hegel immunises his political account against the kind of objections that emanate from the second tension (or difficulty) in MacIntyre’s work. I will suggest that MacIntyre’s engagement with Hegel and Marx isn’t sufficient to address the worries that emerge from his primary focus on communal politics, at the expense of ignoring the problems posed by large-scale political structures – namely, the state and its institutions. Third, I go on to unpack some of the important claims that MacIntyre appears to make, and reflect on the consequences that appear to follow from those claims. Specifically, I consider two particular difficulties that emerge as a result of MacIntyre’s rejection of large-scale politics, and his sole focus on communal politics. I conclude that MacIntyre’s politics is not coherent. If MacIntyre indeed accepts that the shortcomings of large-scale political systems are for the most part permanent, he leaves open the possibility that local political structures are inevitably corrupted on the account of their essential vulnerability to political machinations which on MacIntyre’s view are an inevitable feature of all contemporary large-scale political systems. Therefore, MacIntyre’s communal politics is susceptible to what he identifies as the subversive nature of large-scale political systems; and in the absence of a sufficiently detailed constructive approach to politics – one that could potentially mitigate the subversive effects of large-scale political structures – we are unable to defend local communities, and those communities remain largely at the mercy of the powers exercised by large-scale political arrangements.

In Chapter Five, I consider two possible strategies that MacIntyre can utilise to answer the objections I raised against his political account in Chapter Four. The first strategy requires that we read MacIntyre as an ideal theorist. I first spell out the differences between ideal political theory and its theoretical opposite – real theory; I then move to place MacIntyre’s various political commitments within the larger debate between these two sides. Next, I make a serious attempt to reconcile an ideal reading of MacIntyre’s political philosophy with other internal commitments that comprise his philosophical account. I go on to show that this approach isn’t altogether successful. I then consider a second strategy through which MacIntyre can revive a more traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic politics, without the various historicist commitments that seem to muddy the philosophical waters. It will appear, at least initially, that Thomism does indeed possess the kinds of resources that can be utilised to formulate a positive political account – one that is also capable of defending local communities. Nevertheless, there remains an important problem with this second strategy. MacIntyre argues that the common good defined in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition is not available in the modern social context in which large-scale political systems play a major role. Thus, notwithstanding the initial success of this option, because the Thomistic common good grounds this second strategy, the lack of a viable conception of the common good in the modern social context ultimately undermines this approach. Therefore, both of these strategies ultimately fail in advancing a viable political account that can alleviate the second tension in MacIntyre’s account.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I look to advance an alternative pragmatist form of politics that can potentially address the inconsistencies which are generated as a consequence of MacIntyre’s political account. First, I summarise the particular deficiencies of MacIntyre’s political account; using that as a template, I offer general desiderata for our proposed solution. Second, I move to consider an alternative pragmatist approach which I define as participatory democracy. Third, I consider some examples of just such an alternative (pragmatist) approach highlighted in the political accounts offered by Cheryl Misak, Michael Walzer, and John Dewey. Next, I consider how the alternatives offered in the accounts of Misak, Walzer, and Dewey can potentially answer the problems outlined at the beginning of this chapter. I then look to answer a final possible objection: whether MacIntyre could accept the proposed alternative as a promising approach that is largely allied with his account, yet, one that can also be seen as a *via media* alternative that can act as a bridge between standard liberal accounts, and more normatively inclined approaches to moral/political philosophy for which his account stands as a prime example. Finally, I conclude with some conceptual possibilities as well as some practical examples by which we can defend small-scale political arrangements, since mounting such a defence remains a chief concern of MacIntyre’s political account.

# Chapter 1: MacIntyre’s Historical Tradition-Guided Account of Moral Inquiry

## 1. Introduction

Alasdair MacIntyre’s philosophical project should be best understood as a stark challenge to the terms in which a variety of debates in contemporary moral and political philosophy are structured. Now, MacIntyre’s challenge should not be viewed as affording us another set of arguments that challenge this or that particular view in moral and political philosophy. Instead, he is placing the complete philosophical framework of modern moral discourse under question. This challenge to the prevalent modern modes of moral theorising does not only take place at the level of philosophy, but also sociology, anthropology, politics, and economics. In order to best understand MacIntyre’s challenge, perhaps there is no better way to begin our exploration than with a hypothesis that he presents to his reader at the beginning of *After Virtue*,[[13]](#footnote-13)often considered MacIntyre’s most important work.

MacIntyre presents us with the example of a fictional world where a series of catastrophes are blamed on natural science. In the aftermath of these disasters a political movement against science and scientific understanding takes power. Scientific books are burned, scientists are killed or executed, science labs are destroyed, and the teaching of all science is banned. Much later on, perhaps, after many generations, a revival scientific movement attracts adherents who strive to restore humanity’s scientific culture. However, a problem that presents itself for those seeking this revival is that from the remnants of the science practiced in earlier times, nothing more than partial fragments have survived the uprooting of science and scientific inquiry; and because those aspiring to revive the lost scientific culture are only able to put together disparate charred fragments of this earlier science, the result is that this reconstituted scientific knowledge is itself fragmented and incoherent. So for example: theories are not understood in the context of other core theories that are now lost; partial observational data is divorced and separated from the theoretical context in which it was coherent; scientific instruments and their observational uses that were developed in the context of a complete theoretical framework, are no longer coherent in the wider context of what can be described as a partially resuscitated fragmented science. The upshot of MacIntyre’s example is that in this imaginary world, the language of natural science because it was fashioned anew in an ad hoc fragmentary manner, remains in a state of disorder.[[14]](#footnote-14)

MacIntyre then advances his far-reaching and controversial hypothesis with respect to modern moral philosophy:

“that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I described. What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance is derived. We possess indeed the simulacra of morality.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

He also claims that because the techniques of analytic philosophy are essentially descriptive, this form of philosophy isn’t well suited to detecting the state of the disorder in moral philosophy. Why is that? Just like those inhabitants of our imaginary world where science is lost and then again revived, in describing the conceptual structures of scientific discourse, our imaginary scientists are essentially describing the structure of a fragmented science as it has been revived. Similarly, the description offered by analytic philosophers for the conceptual structures of contemporary moral discourse, are in effect describing concepts and structures that are essentially divorced from the original context that afforded their motivating force. Thus, there is no clear way of connecting the fragmented conceptual structures to the original context which furnished them with their intended meaning.

But MacIntyre says that our current dilemma in diagnosing the fragmented state of moral philosophy, if his hypothesis is in fact true, is not entirely hopeless: “a prerequisite for understanding the present disordered state of the imaginary world was to understand its history, a history that is written in three distinct stages.” In the first stage such a history would inform us of a period where the sciences flourished; followed by a second stage where they suffered from the catastrophe; and finally the third stage where they are restored in a fragmentary and disordered manner.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Thus MacIntyre’s methodology is essentially historical, but also philosophical (or conceptual) – that is, it is an historical analysis of how moral philosophical debates in the intervening historical periods generated and shaped the fragmented nature of contemporary moral discourse.

As part of formulating the problematic that will be the focus of my engagement with MacIntyre’s work in this thesis, I will complete a literature review in this chapter that will examine important parts of MacIntyre’s works in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* It is my contention that these two works hold the key to understanding MacIntyre’s project. Using MacIntyre’s own terminology, I will try to develop a narrative that connects MacIntyre’s works in ways that help clarify the problems that I will explore in this thesis.

However, before I continue with a careful consideration of the important elements in MacIntyre’s work, and hence prior to advancing a clear formulation of the problems that emerge under his account, I will offer some guidance on the nature and shape of my exploration in this chapter. In this review I intend to pay close attention to the historical narrative that MacIntyre guides his reader through in *After Virtue*. This narrative starts with MacIntyre’s controversial hypothesis: that moral philosophy is fragmented in much the same way that science is fragmented in his imaginary possible world.

First, I consider MacIntyre’s analysis of the state of contemporary moral philosophy and its connection to emotivism, since MacIntyre maintains that his thesis should be understood as a confrontation with emotivism.[[17]](#footnote-17) I then illustrate how MacIntyre connects the emergence of emotivism with earlier enlightenment attempts that sought to develop an independent rational justification of morality on the basis of a set of universal standards. Later, I explore the connection between what MacIntyre defines as the *Enlightenment Project of Rationally Justifying Morality*, and the loss of Aristotelian teleology and related concepts which were central to that particular conception of ethical inquiry. I move to survey MacIntyre’s verdict on the Enlightenment Project and try to come to terms with the reasons he offers up to his readers as to why this project was destined to fail. I will suggest that this failure, on MacIntyre’s view, is intimately connected to the loss of the specific conceptual schemes that were available in Aristotle’s teleological conception of ethics.

I then advance the discussion to the second half of *After Virtue* in which MacIntyre considers the aftermath of the failure of the Enlightenment Project. MacIntyre suggests that the failure of the Enlightenment Project leaves us with a choice between an Aristotelian, or a Nietzschean, morality. MacIntyre of course argues that we find ourselves in this perilous position precisely because we have lost Aristotle, and more specifically the teleology that informed Aristotle’s account. MacIntyre then moves to construct a Neo-Aristotelian view – one that tries to resolve this problem by offering a three-fold concept of the virtues that is supposed to stand-in as a kind of social, as opposed to a metaphysical, teleology.

Nonetheless, I will suggest that the resolution of the problem which MacIntyre advances at the end of *After Virtue*, because of some important criticisms advanced against it by Richard Bernstein and Jerome B. Schneewind, doesn’t really resolve the problem. More importantly, I will suggest, that MacIntyre’s failure to successfully rebut these sorts of criticisms in fact led MacIntyre into the project of *Whose Justice*.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Here, I will begin by considering MacIntyre’s project in *Whose Justice* in which he illustrates how traditions can in fact progress historically. In the historical reconstruction that MacIntyre offers, he argues that Thomism synthesizes the Aristotelian and Augustinian tradition into a coherent system that surpasses the limitations of both its rivals and its predecessors. *Whose Justice* is then written in the context of MacIntyre offering his allegiance to the Thomistic tradition and MacIntyre’s attempt at showing how Thomism is the best tradition formulated thus far.

However, towards the end of *Whose Justice,* MacIntyre claims that liberalism is in fact the dominant contemporary tradition. He suggests that the tradition of Aquinas was gradually sidelined in ways which paved the way for what he defines as the Enlightenment Project of Rationally Justifying Morality. This project, as we shall observe in *After Virtue*, sets the stage for emotivist ethics and liberalism as the successor tradition.

After a careful consideration of what are widely held to be MacIntyre’s two most important works in this chapter, I will suggest that in particular two crucially critical questions are generated by his account. First of all, given MacIntyre’s conception of the way in which traditions make rational progress over time, how can he hold onto the Thomistic tradition, when by his own account Thomism has been sidelined by the unfolding of historical events and ultimately displaced by the liberal tradition? The second problem that I plan to discuss is itself generated in part by this first difficulty. This second question can be stated in the following way: if ethics and politics – as MacIntyre argues on his contextualist and historicist account – is for the most part a theoretical expression of the background social structure or edifice, it is not clear how MacIntyre can argue for the relevance and revival of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, which again by his own account was an intellectual expression, as well as a product, of its own time, and as such, is therefore now fundamentally at odds with the social structures of the modern world.

I will now proceed to a more detailed discussion of *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice*, in order to put together the conceptual-historical background against which these two questions appear to emerge.

## 2. The Enlightenment Project

Earlier, I introduced MacIntyre’s disquieting suggestion that our contemporary moral language is in a state of disorder. MacIntyre offers us some examples of the type of arguments advanced by different adherents of the kind of moral philosophy that emerged out of various enlightenment debates.[[19]](#footnote-19) He then goes on to show that these debates are interminable precisely because the distinct arguments advanced by moral philosophers sought to derive a set of rational justifications for moral claims that were grounded on opposing sets of first principles that could not be further argued. So for example, a set of justifications that invoke innocence or justice are set against justifications that invoke success; in another example, premises that are established on rights are at odds with those that are based on universalizability; and in others, claims that invoke the notion of freedom are at odds with those that demand equality.

“Every one of the arguments is logically valid or can be easily expanded so as to be made so; the conclusions do indeed follow from the premises. But the rival premises are such that we possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another. For each premise employs some quite different normative or evaluative concept from the others, so that the claims made upon us are of quite different kinds…It is precisely because there is in our society no established way of deciding between these claims that moral argument appears to be necessarily interminable.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

The upshot here is that the choice between offering our allegiance to one position as opposed to another ultimately involves nothing but an arbitrary non-rational decision.[[21]](#footnote-21) MacIntyre goes on to argue that the interminability of conflicts in contemporary moral discourse rests on the fact that the various appeals which invoke one or another particular set of basic premises, were in fact rooted in a larger set of theories and practices whose functions were supplied by specific historical and social contexts which no longer exist.[[22]](#footnote-22) MacIntyre’s chief claim here is that rival arguments advanced in debates within contemporary moral philosophy – that appeal to one set of basic premises or another – lack the social context which furnished them with their reason giving force. Let us call this claim MacIntyre’s first hypothesis (H1): *that we can only make sense of theoretical claims within the context of some background social structure or context.*[[23]](#footnote-23)

MacIntyre suggests that this interminable character of enlightenment moral discourse ultimately generated the set of conditions from which emotivism emerged. For MacIntyre, emotivism is in essence the (theoretical) expression of the liberal social context. MacIntyre goes on to offer a definition of emotivism as “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preferences, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.”[[24]](#footnote-24) While factual claims can be rationally resolved as true or false, moral judgments, just because they are expressive of feelings or attitudes, cannot be adjudicated as true or false by any set of rational standards. Hence, if emotivism – as a theory of all value judgments – is true, it follows that there is no way of rationally choosing between rival moral claims.

MacIntyre then advances three particular criticisms against emotivism, understood as a theory of all evaluative (or normative) judgments whatsoever. First, he claims that emotivism is vacuous and circular; that is, when we press our inquiry and ask ‘what are the characteristics of the attitude or feeling in moral judgements?’ the answer is ‘attitudes of approval or disapproval.’ If we then ask ‘what kind of approval?,’ the emotivist theorist tells us that moral judgments which express an attitude or feeling, are to be described in terms of *moral* approval or disapproval. Second, emotivism renders equivalent two different types of sentences: it confuses the expression of *personal* preferences or *evaluative* expressions – those whose reason giving (or motivating) force, depends on who utters them to whom – with *impersonal* expressions of a second kind which are not dependent for their reason giving force on the context of utterance.[[25]](#footnote-25) Third, emotivism, while it remains for the most part understood as a theory that describes the meaning of moral sentences, is in fact a theory about the use of particular moral sentences in this or that particular context. Why? Because the expression of attitudes or feelings is not a function of the meaning of this or that particular sentence, but the use of that sentence on one or other occasion.[[26]](#footnote-26)

MacIntyre goes on to contend that emotivism ought to be understood as an historical (or empirical) hypothesis – that is, emotivism is not a theory of all value judgements *as such*, but judgements about a particular type of moral utterance that emerged sometime after 1903 at Cambridge.[[27]](#footnote-27) On this view, emotivism was a response to the failure of G.E. Moore’s intuitionist moral philosophy, in providing an account for the nature of moral claims and the nature of the ‘good.’ So what was it about Moore’s thesis that paved the way for emotivism? Two of Moore’s particular claims stand out. First, the ‘good’ is a non-natural property that is basic; hence, when we take something to be good we are indeed appealing to those intuitions about the ‘good’, characterised as a non-natural property, which must be understood as a given – therefore, the ‘good,’ thus characterised, is closed to further analysis. Second, Moore as a utilitarian evaluates every action with respect to its consequences; hence “no action is ever right or wrong *as such*.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

MacIntyre argues that under Moore’s account, we have a particular conception of ‘good’ or ‘right’ action that is not only deflationary, but also consequentialist and context dependent. On MacIntyre’s view, it was only natural that many of Moore’s students ended up rejecting Moore’s minimal conception of the good, and would go on to advance a new thesis – namely, emotivism.[[29]](#footnote-29) MacIntyre suggests that the type of conditions from which emotivist types of moral theories eventually emerge are similar to those conditions that share the features of Moore’s intuitionist moral theory.[[30]](#footnote-30) For MacIntyre, emotivism is then best understood as the sort of morality that is generated under modern conditions, and that the emotivist understanding of moral language is embodied in contemporary liberal (pluralist) culture.

For MacIntyre, this contemporary liberal culture is characterised by the idea that even if we appeal to any one particular moral view, whether utilitarian, deontological, or some other view, our discussions ultimately presupposes that there is no way of adjudicating between rival premises; and our behaviour in social situations and everyday practice, implicitly accepts that emotivism is in fact true.[[31]](#footnote-31) At this point we can formulate a second hypothesis (H2) implicit in MacIntyre’s account: *emotivist theories tend to emerge under conditions of liberalism and pluralism*. Note that (H2) supports (H1) because it makes it clear how an ethical theory is able to theoretically articulate and express the range of normative practices that are manifest in the wider social context.

How, on MacIntyre’s view, do we then come to understand ourselves consciously or unconsciously as presupposing the truth of emotivism? On Moore’s account, the values that engender the basic moral properties are private, and so exclude those values that are in the public realm such as the values that enable cooperative work and intellectual inquiry. However, if we agree with the emotivist theorist and thus reject Moore’s account, in which there are basic non-natural moral properties, it seems only reasonable to conclude that moral properties are in fact ‘subjective’ attitudes and feelings – namely, that they amount to nothing more than individual private preferences situated within the individual’s mental (or psychological) states.

These private preferences are then recognised as separate and distinct from descriptions of any phenomenal state of affairs,[[32]](#footnote-32) which we could potentially use to objectively identify some or other particular phenomenon in the social context. The emotivist position does not necessarily deny the existence of a relationship between preferences and desires on the one hand, and the contingent social state of affairs on the other. Rather, emotivist views do not accept the priority attached to the social context for forming or motivating desires and preferences in the first place. I should also emphasise that on the emotivist view, preferences and desires are not ‘object-placing,’ namely, that preferences (or desires) do not refer to objects or object-like things in the phenomenal world. Of course, if they did refer to object-like things – let say in a very deflationary sense – we would not ultimately obtain the sort of objects that could be included in or classified under our normal talk about objects.

Thus, the emotivist self is a type of abstract self that stands apart from any (social) contingent state of affairs. It is a self that is separated from any particular socially embodied context. Therefore, moral agency, on this view, is located within the self and not in the social roles or practices that an individual occupies. Given that the ultimate arbiter of normativity on this private view of the self is an abstract notion of the individual – an individual that has no necessary social content or social identity – we end up with a privatized view of morality: namely, moral statements, because they are contestable, amount to expressions of private individual’s attitudes and preferences. Thus the deep-seated conviction that morality, because it acquires its motivational force from subjective preferences, attitudes and feelings, belongs in the private sphere; and this conception of morality is ultimately justified under modern contemporary liberal conditions, and grounded in the (modern) concept of pluralism.[[33]](#footnote-33)

On MacIntyre’s view, the idea of the self that emerges under emotivism, and is embodied in our contemporary culture, is itself a particular social historical phenomenon. We find that in pre-modern societies, this view of morality and the self was quite alien to any sort of realistic understanding of moral phenomena. So for example in the classical Greece of the 4th-5th century BCE:

“it is through his or her membership in a variety of social groups that the individual identifies himself or herself and is identified by others. I am a brother, cousin and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe. These are not characteristics that belong to human beings accidentally…They are part of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

On this view, there is a conception of objectively evaluating a whole human life; a kind of human life which is ordered towards some given end and the ordering of human life is then substantiated in, and by, the particular social context and social identity which one occupies.[[35]](#footnote-35)

At this point we need to ask: what sort of changes precipitated the transformation of moral discourse from the earlier pre-modern form, to the type of discourse which we find in present-day contemporary (liberal) culture? On MacIntyre’s account, the historical transition between the 16th and the 18th century laid the groundwork for this transformation. Broadly speaking, MacIntyre lays the blame on the marginalisation of Aristotelian philosophy and more specifically, on the gradual exclusion of Aristotle’s concept of teleology from serious philosophical inquiry. On this view, social developments in the latter part of the 17th and early part of the 18th century generated a number of distinctions between theological, legal and aesthetic forms of inquiry.[[36]](#footnote-36) Teleology is then only maintained for a time in a much more restricted form as the ordering of the individual’s life towards those ends directed by God. Nonetheless, with the steady secularisation of ethical discourse in the 18th-19th century, the only remaining credible teleological justification available in ethics, namely God, was similarly sidelined from mainstream moral philosophy.

The project of seeking an independent rational justification of morality then emerges from, and is motivated by, the pressure that originates from these kinds of contingent social-historical developments. Now, what MacIntyre coins as the *Enlightenment Project of the Rational Justification of Morality*, strives to establish a foundation for morality based upon principles of human reason and practical rationality. Nevertheless, MacIntyre goes on to argue that this project not only failed in its primary task, but that its failure was inevitable. Why? MacIntyre’s use of Kierkegaard is instructive for us, since Kierkegaard is here viewed as perhaps the first philosopher who understood that the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality on reason (in the case of Kant), or passion (in the case of Hume), could not succeed.[[37]](#footnote-37)

For MacIntyre, Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* shows that the aesthetic and the ethical life are incompatible. To choose between the ethical and the aesthetic

“is not the choice between good and evil, it is the choice to whether or not to choose in terms of good and evil. At the heart of the aesthetic way of life, as Kierkegaard characterizes it, is the attempt to lose the self in the immediacy of present experience. The paradigm of aesthetic expression is the romantic lover who is immersed in his own passions. By contrast the paradigm of the ethical is marriage, a state of commitment and obligation through time.”[[38]](#footnote-38)

Hence, for Kierkegaard, the principles that depict the ethical way of life are to be adopted not based on reason or passion, but on an individual choice that lies beyond reasons or passions.[[39]](#footnote-39) For MacIntyre, Kierkegaard’s view of human nature is such that the choice of adopting the ethical stance resides in the fundamental capacity of the individual human being to make this choice. Just as Kant aimed to justify morality on reason because for him rationality was the fundamental aspect of human nature, Hume sought to justify morality on the passions since he held that passions where the most important characteristic of human nature. Kierkegaard then looks to establish morality on the characteristic ability of individual human beings to choose, and often that choice rests on faith beyond mere reasons and passions.[[40]](#footnote-40)

In this sense, all three views rest on basic premises that are grounded in competing accounts of human nature. In Kant, reason is the fundamental feature of human nature, in Hume it is the passions, and in Kierkegaard what is fundamental is the individual decision-making process. MacIntyre gives the example of these three rival claims advanced by Hume, Kant and Kierkegaard, to show how the rival premises advanced by each of them were embedded in different accounts of human nature; and because each of these positions could not defeat or otherwise overcome its rivals, the moral debates between them were in effect interminable.[[41]](#footnote-41) Thus, in MacIntyre’s view, the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality on rational grounds proves futile.

Nonetheless, MacIntyre contends that the Aristotelian account originally contained the resources that could afford a rational justification for morality and moral claims. So what were those resources in the Aristotelian scheme that differed from the conceptual tools available to Enlightenment thinkers, and were no longer available to those thinkers? Now, in the Aristotelian account we possess a three-fold schematic: (i) the conception of untutored human nature; (ii) the conception of precepts of rational ethics; and (iii) lastly the conception of human nature if it realized its telos.[[42]](#footnote-42) However since Aristotle’s concept of teleology had come to gradually suffer from an increasing degree of marginalisation in the 17th century, there could no longer be a credible conception of a telos of human nature – that is, the concept of human nature if it realized its telos. Why? An important resource in Aristotle’s metaphysics is the concept of ‘essence’ (or nature) and the transition between ‘potentiality’ and ‘actuality.’ The concept of teleology then is defined in terms of the relationship between these three concepts.

However, on the view of Enlightenment thinkers and their heirs, reason alone could not comprehend essences or natures, nor could it perceive the transition from potentiality to actuality – all of which were crucially important resources available in the Aristotelian tradition. Nevertheless, these essential concepts in Aristotle’s metaphysics were long discredited and therefore the various Enlightenment thinkers for the most part rejected a teleological conception of human being in which individual human beings not only possess a distinct essence (or nature), but that this nature defines the individual’s telos (or final end), moving from potentiality to actuality. Yet, on the Aristotelian view, the whole point of ethics – both theoretical and practical – is to enable human beings to pass from an untutored state, to their complete end as fully actualised human beings. By jettisoning the concept of an essential human nature closely connected to the idea of a human telos, Aristotle’s three-fold conception of morality now only has two remaining legs to stand on – that of the untutored human nature, and ethical principles. The loss of teleology thus removes an important concept from the mix, and the relationship of the earlier tripartite framework in ethics becomes incoherent since the connection between the two remaining concepts without the (third) concept of human telos, is left unclear.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Thus, on MacIntyre’s view, while Kant, Hume and Kierkegaard all attempted to define morality on different accounts of human nature, they all simultaneously ended up advancing (in different ways) the idea that “no valid argument can move from entirely factual premises to any moral or evaluative conclusions.”[[44]](#footnote-44) In contrast, within the Aristotelian framework the concept of teleology acts as a functional concept, and hence this distinction does not always hold. There are examples where we do indeed obtain ‘ought’ conclusions from ‘is’ premises. So for example we move from ‘is’ premises to ‘ought’ conclusions with respect to what it means to be a good watch, or what it means for a dog to do well, or a person to do well.[[45]](#footnote-45) The upshot of MacIntyre’s claim is that moral arguments within the Greek classical tradition, which Aristotle was a part of, have a functional concept at their heart – the concept of an essential human nature, connected to the concept of the human telos – namely, human nature when fully realised. MacIntyre goes on to say that the functional concept of human telos is not initially rooted in Aristotle’s metaphysical biology, rather

“it is rooted in the forms of social life to which the theorists of the classical tradition give expression. For according to that tradition to be a man is to fulfil a set of roles each of which has its own point and purpose: member of a family, soldier, philosopher, servant of God. It is only when man is thought of as an individual prior to and apart from all roles that ‘man’ ceases to be a functional concept.”[[46]](#footnote-46)

On MacIntyre’s view, Aristotle refines the already existing concepts of the human telos that was found in the classical tradition. On the Aristotelian account, to identify X as a good X is to make a factual statement with respect to X. Nonetheless, this sort of functional concept is no longer possible for those who inhabit the contemporary social context, partly because the concept of individual flourishing is separated from excellence in any particular role, and in part because, after Darwin, the concept of an ultimate human nature or function no longer seems credible.[[47]](#footnote-47)

MacIntyre then argues that in the work of Henry Sidgwick, the failure of teleological framework is fully accepted.

“the moral injunctions of utilitarianism could not be derived from any psychological foundations and that the precepts which enjoin us to pursue the general happiness are logically independent of and cannot be derived from any precepts enjoining the pursuit of our own happiness… [They] do not form any kind of unity, they are irreducibly heterogeneous; and their acceptance is and must be unargued.” [[48]](#footnote-48)

The upshot of this view is that our individual good and those precepts that tend to maximise our individual happiness, are defined independently of the larger common or social good, which are supposed to maximise general happiness. (This conclusion is of course incompatible with MacIntyre’s later adoption of Aristotelian-Thomism since that account not only closely connects the individual’s good to common goods, but in fact argues that at least to an important extent, an individual’s good can only be advanced through the realisation of the common good. (I won’t discuss this any further at this point since it will figure in a number of important discussions in Chapters Four, Five and Six).

The main point we should remember from the summary of our analysis above is that the loss of Aristotle’s functional concept – that of human being directed towards its telos – generates the intellectual background that produced the conditions for the emergence of the *Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality*. What is essential for advancing the argumentative narrative of MacIntyre’s project is that the failure of the Enlightenment Project leaves us to ponder an important disjunction that MacIntyre presents – that of choosing between Nietzsche or Aristotle. If we accept MacIntyre’s hypothesis in which the participants in the Enlightenment Project, and its various heirs, failed and indeed had to fail in their efforts to justify morality on independent grounds, simply because they no longer credibly possessed the Aristotelian resources to make sense of ethical inquiry, then it would appear that Nietzsche was certainly right to reject the whole enterprise that comprised this project. However, if we no longer have access to Aristotelian resources then it seems that this disjunction ultimately tilts towards Nietzsche; that is, unless and until MacIntyre could find a way to revive an Aristotelian account that would challenge our Nietzschean conclusion.

## 3. MacIntyre’s Social Teleology as a Resolution of Present-day Moral Conflicts

In the preceding section, I stated that MacIntyre presents us with a disjunction between Aristotle and Nietzsche. I should emphasize that for MacIntyre, Nietzsche’s and Aristotle’s moral philosophy stand against each other in an important sense by virtue of the historical roles they play. They stand opposed to each other because, while Nietzsche claims that there can be no rational justification of morality, Aristotle’s account explicitly rejects such an outcome.[[49]](#footnote-49) Now, one might say that Nietzsche’s conclusion is potentially correct, but only as a contingent fact. Aristotle’s functional concept of human being directed towards its telos can no longer play its role, once the mechanics of Aristotle’s metaphysics that made his teleology possible is rejected. I take it that it is in this sense that we owe the failure of the Enlightenment Project of rationally justifying morality, to the rejection of the Aristotelian tradition.

This also means that Aristotle’s ethical account potentially offered an ethics with a unified concept of human nature on which a robust account of the good could be established. However, notwithstanding this initial optimism concerning the Aristotelian option, we also know from the historical accounts of classical Greek society, through the work of its tragedians, sophist and philosophers that rival and highly contestable accounts of the good were indeed advanced. For example in *Gorgias*, Socrates and Callicles are at odds in regards to both first order and second order issues, i.e., whether pleasure is a ‘good’ and what counts as a good argument in consideration of whether pleasure *is*, or *is not*, a ‘good.’[[50]](#footnote-50) However, MacIntyre recognises this fact and suggests as much himself; hence, he accepts that there were a number of radical disagreements between rival views in 4th-5th century BCE Athens.[[51]](#footnote-51) Nevertheless, he goes on to contend that Aristotle, expanding and correcting the work of Plato, was able to advance the then hitherto, best argued rational justification of morality (for the classical context of the Greek polis). So how did Aristotle try to resolve the various moral debates between rival views in classical society?

MacIntyre suggests that the incoherence between competing views in classical society was due to a number of social transformations which emerged in the transition from the Greece depicted in the Homeric Epics, to the Greece we find in the 4th-5th century BCE. Now, in order for us to understand the conflicts between rival views in the classical period we have to first identify how these rival views emerged in the intervening period. Thus a sufficient knowledge of heroic society is indispensable for an appropriate comprehension of Athenian society of the 4th-5th century BCE. I should emphasize that on MacIntyre’s view, the relevance of this historical review is not dependent on the accuracy of the Homeric Epics in their representation of bronze age (pre-archaic) Greece – it is rather because classical (Athenian) society of 4th-5th century BCE defined itself in terms of its relationship to that real (or mythic) past.[[52]](#footnote-52) So what is the structure of morality in heroic society rendered in Homer’s Epics? MacIntyre states that

“any adequate account of the virtues in heroic society would be impossible which divorced them from their context in its social structure, just as no adequate account of the social structure of heroic society would be possible which did not include an account of the heroic virtues. But to put it in this way is to understate the crucial point: morality and social structure are in fact one and the same in heroic society. There is only one set of social bonds. Morality as something distinct does not yet exist. Evaluative questions are questions of social facts.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

A person in heroic society owes, and is in turn owed, certain obligations in virtue of her place in the hierarchical social structure. Morality thus conceived is a question of social fact. Nonetheless, the transition from bronze-age Greece represented in Homeric epics, to the Athenian society of the 5th century BCE, upended this relationship because the heroic social structure – which was grounded in the bonds of kinship – ceased to exist. Thus, during the transition from heroic society to Athens of the 4th-5th century BCE, the bonds of kinship were transformed; moreover, the newly emerging social bonds were no longer the same as those in the social order depicted by Homer, and the social structure of Athenian democracy itself more and more came to promote a new set of social bonds – namely, the idea of citizenship.[[54]](#footnote-54) Second, what followed from these events is that the conception of the virtues established by the place of an individual in the social hierarchy had become detached from any social role.[[55]](#footnote-55)

At this point, we can identify the third hypothesis (H3) that MacIntyre is positing: *the change in the Hellenic social structure from the earlier Heroic period, to that of 4th-5th century BCE Athens, was precipitated by the historical transition which gradually dissolved and transformed the social bonds and practices of the earlier period*.

For MacIntyre, the tragedies depicted by Sophocles gave expression to the conflicts that emerged from the loosening of Homeric social bonds of kinship, and the loss of the strict hierarchal social structure of heroic society. On MacIntyre’s account, Sophocles in his play Philoctetes, utilises the characters of Odysseus and Neoptolemus to confront us with rival standards of behaviour. On the one hand, Neoptolemus is keenly aware of the injustice that Philoctetes will suffer, as a consequence of the cunning ruse contrived by his friend Odysseus which on the view of Neoptolemus is an intentional dishonourable action of his friend. On the other hand, the character of Odysseus displays for us those standards of virtue (and success) which are present in Homer’s Odyssey – that of benefiting one’s friend or kin, and harming one’s enemy.[[56]](#footnote-56) Therefore, by the late 5th century BCE it is possible to ask if it is *good*, or *not good*, to act as *dikē (*δίκη),[[57]](#footnote-57) the established cosmic order, requires; and it is also possible to radically disagree about what it means to act in accordance with that order.[[58]](#footnote-58) MacIntyre therefore suggests that Sophocles “systematically explores rival allegiances to incompatible goods, especially in the Antigone and Philoctetes, in a way that raise a key and complex set of questions about the virtues.”[[59]](#footnote-59)

Now, I should once again reemphasize the extent of the close relationship that MacIntyre draws between social structure and morality. On the account of the transformation of the Homeric social structure and its eventual relegation, the ethics of Homer appear to no longer offer a mostly uncontestable ethics for the Athenian social context – namely, the polis of the 4th-5th century BCE; and so debates emerged that gave expression to rival and incompatible views on choosing a particular moral outlook. What were the rival competing views which led to radical disagreement in Sophoclean tragedies? Perhaps the best representative of the first view is Thucydides. On this view, the pursuit of heterogeneous human goods “cannot be reconciled into any single moral order”. On the second view, first systematically developed by Plato, “there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious hierarchy.”[[60]](#footnote-60) The former view accepts a form of relativism while the latter view is firmly realist.

So how, on MacIntyre’s view, did Aristotle come to resolve the radical disagreement presented in Sophoclean tragedy between rival and incompatible views? Aristotle, on MacIntyre’s account, “holds that the city-state is the unique political form in which alone the virtues of human life can be genuinely and fully exhibited.” Additionally, Aristotle’s metaphysical biology and more broadly, his metaphysics, afforded the resources to develop such an account. More importantly, within the context of the polis, Aristotle offers an account which we can then utilise to understand the human good as a locally realised good within the bounds of a particular polis (or city-state) while at the same time *this* good is embedded within the framework of a larger cosmic reality.[[61]](#footnote-61) In this way Aristotle can maintain a view that accepts that goods may be context relative, but that those goods should be understood as arranged within the framework of a wider cosmic order.

Having said that, MacIntyre also claims that Aristotle’s account exaggerates the unity of the virtues and that Aristotle’s own analysis of the complex relationship between the virtues does not bear out his strong conclusion concerning their unity; therefore, an Aristotelian view that accepts the strong thesis is rather defective.[[62]](#footnote-62) Another problem that MacIntyre points to here is that the social context does quite a lot of the philosophical work; therefore, it certainly appears that without the social context and social relations that are characteristic of the Greek polis, any revival of Aristotelian ethics is seemingly out of reach. Thus, the main challenge for MacIntyre is to find a way of reconciling the heterogeneous nature of the goods and their seemingly incompatible demands, within a Neo-Aristotelian framework.

Now, an implicit question that in my view MacIntyre is entertaining here is that if we reject Aristotle’s metaphysical biology, is there a way to preserve, or better yet, formulate a new conception of teleology? Here, MacIntyre moves to systematically introduce his three part concept of the virtues – namely, that of (i) practice; (ii) human life understood as a narrative unity conceived as a whole life; and (iii) the concept of tradition[[63]](#footnote-63) in moral inquiry. At this point in my argumentative narrative, I would like to introduce an important suggestion: namely, that from here on, MacIntyre’s project in *After Virtue*, and more specifically, his three-fold concept of the virtues, ought to be viewed as an attempt to articulate a kind of social teleology[[64]](#footnote-64) – one which can replace the Aristotelian teleology that is no longer available to us. How does MacIntyre go about his task?

First, MacIntyre defines the concept of social practices as

“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 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.”[[65]](#footnote-65)

Practices then have both internal and external goods. External goods of practice are those tangible goods such as wealth or power. Conversely, the internal goods of practices are those standards of excellence and the virtues, by which excellence in that practice is defined. In achieving the internal goods of practices, we exercise those standards of excellence that are in part constituted in the exercise of the virtues; and for MacIntyre, 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.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

Nevertheless, MacIntyre also tells us that the adequate realisation of the internal goods of a heterogeneous set of practices, could only be understood within a second concept – that of *the (narrative) unity of a whole life*. Thus MacIntyre says that what we need is an “overriding conception of telos of a whole human life, conceived as a unity.” This conception of the unity of a whole life then allows us to rank and order the goods of social practices, and the ‘good,’ conceived as a whole.[[67]](#footnote-67) Moreover, this unity of a whole life has a narrative character that should be best understood in terms of the *narrative history of the self*. It is only through this narrative history that the self orders its life towards the realisation of the goods of the virtue, and the good as a whole. In directing our life towards these goods we understand short-term intentions in terms of long-term intentions. This sort of narrative history, MacIntyre argues, is an essential way by which we render human actions intelligible.[[68]](#footnote-68) We can thus observe that the narrative history of the self has a teleological character, albeit a more social version of teleology than the metaphysical account we find in Aristotle. This narrative unity of a human life as whole is defined in terms of a narrative quest, and this quest is the quest for the *good* that should be understood in terms of a quest for the human telos.

MacIntyre then offers us a somewhat wide ranging definition of the good life: “*the good life for man is life spent in seeking good life for man, and the virtues necessary for seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is* [emphasis mine];”[[69]](#footnote-69) and MacIntyre also accepts that under his wide-ranging account of the good life, the good life “for a 5th century Athenian general will not be the same was what it was for a medieval nun or 17th century farmer.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Thus, his account is in an important sense socio-historical and context dependent.

MacIntyre then introduces the third concept with which he articulates the notion of virtue – that of tradition. Now, we are in need of this third concept simply for the reason that it is only possible to come to an adequate understanding of the narrative character of a unified individual human life directed towards its good, if that life remains intimately connected to the various (social) practices (in the context of society viewed as a whole), and those social practices are always embodied and articulated within some tradition. Thus, not only is it the case that practices are conveyed and transmitted through traditions, but rather all reasoning about *the* good takes place within some tradition. MacIntyre then offers an expansive definition of tradition as: “an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.”[[71]](#footnote-71) The narrative history of a self, which remains directed towards its quest for *the* good, is always defined in terms of an expanded (historical) narrative defined in terms of a number of arguments advanced within some tradition.[[72]](#footnote-72)

For the purposes of our inquiry in this thesis, MacIntyre’s discussion of the concept of tradition in *After Virtue* is an appropriate place to bring our examination of this workto a natural conclusion. However, there are two important criticisms that we should consider before moving on, for they will highlight a crucially important weakness of this work; and this limitation in my view, shapes the later developments in MacIntyre’s thought.

Here, Jerome B. Schneewind advances the first criticism. He argues that MacIntyre’s social teleology developed in his tripartite concept of the virtues reinforces the emotivist thesis.[[73]](#footnote-73) Why? Because MacIntyre’s account of *the* ‘good,’ and his conception of *the* ‘good life,’ remains very much open-ended and will more than likely produce a heterogeneous set of goods that are not easily nor necessarily reconcilable. Thus, contrary to MacIntyre’s ultimate objective, his account in *After Virtue* has the unintended effect of reinforcing a (highly) particularist conception of the good life, and leaves us with a number of difficulties in reconciling the goods of different practices. Therefore, owing to MacIntyre’s definition of the ‘good,’ there is no easy way of reconciling the various heterogeneous goods of (social) practices, within a narrative unity of a human life directed towards its telos – namely, the good.

The second criticism is advanced by Richard Bernstein, where he criticises first concept in MacIntyre’s account of the virtues – namely, practice – and puzzles over the relationship between the first concept and MacIntyre’s second concept – that of the unity of a whole life understood as a narrative quest towards the good. [[74]](#footnote-74) Bernstein argues that MacIntyre’s account of practice is much too wide-ranging since it seems that not all practices are directed towards the good; and because MacIntyre rejects Aristotle’s metaphysical biology, it is not clear how he can sort out good practices from bad practices. Moreover, if we can’t make a clear distinction between good and bad practices, it is not entirely clear how we can connect the first concept of the virtues to MacIntyre’s second concept.

Now, this criticism is essentially an implication or upshot of the first criticism advanced by Schneewind, which is that the evaluation and ordering of various social practices remains problematic under MacIntyre’s deflationary account of the good life. Thus, for Bernstein and Schneewind, MacIntyre’s project in *After Virtue* appears to inadvertently reinforce, as opposed to undermine, the emotivist, or even the Nietzschean account, which he so forcefully sets out to oppose in this work.

It seems reasonable to then argue that MacIntyre’s tripartite concept of the virtues – namely, his Neo-Aristotelian social teleology – doesn’t appear to offer us an account that can adequately evaluate and rank what are seemingly diverse set of incompatible goods available in the modern social context.[[75]](#footnote-75) However, my intention here is to qualify this conclusion. In my view, the problem with MacIntyre’s three-fold social account (or teleology) doesn’t necessarily originate in the mechanics of the three concepts; rather this problem emerges because MacIntyre offers a rather thin conception of the ‘good’ and the ‘good life.’ Therefore, I am not suggesting here, nor is it my intention to suggest at a later stage, that we ought to altogether jettison MacIntyre’s three-fold concept of the virtues. Moreover, as a last remark, I would like to draw attention to a hypothesis that I alluded to earlier: namely, that the criticisms advanced by Schneewind and Bernstein, are the sort of paradigmatic cases (of criticisms) which to a significant extent motivates MacIntyre’s project in *Whose Justice*.

## 4. Is Tradition a Theoretical Articulation of Socially Embodied Norms?

In the conclusion of the previous section, I recounted the arguments advanced by Schneewind and Bernstein which criticised MacIntyre’s historical reconstruction in *After Virtue*. They do not simply argue that *After Virtue* shows us how and why the morality that we encounter in modern liberal society – namely, emotivism – is essentially a theoretical articulation of the social practices in that society, which is of course a thesis that is at home in MacIntyre’s account. Rather, they argue that MacIntyre’s definition of the ‘good,’ connected to his three-fold account of the virtues, generates a heterogeneous set of human goods that remain in potential conflict, and the tension between these goods – especially, the ways which we ought to order them – strengthens the case for emotivism, at least in contemporary liberal society.

Therefore, if MacIntyre wants to undermine the efficacy of their claim that his account in *After Virtue* confirms the emotivist thesis – namely, that emotivism is a more or less *adequate* theoretical formulation of what ethics *is* under modern liberal social conditions – it seems then he has little choice but to articulate an account that can reconcile the apparently incompatible heterogeneous goods generated by such a society. Now, as a first approximation, it seems that such an account will require a more substantive account of the ‘Good’ than the account offered in *After Virtue*. The hope here is that a more substantive account is capable of ordering the heterogeneous set of goods generated under contemporary material conditions, which are only apparently (or superficially) incompatible. Thus, it is instructive that at some point between writing *After Virtue* and before *Whose Justice*, MacIntyre reveals his support for the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition,[[76]](#footnote-76) which indeed possesses a more robust account of the good of just this sort, which could potentially order these rival, and at least ostensibly, incompatible goods, within a unified conception of a human life directed towards its good – and thus see off the threat of a return to emotivism.

Nevertheless, it seems that what follows from MacIntyre’s historical account of traditions is that in order for his endorsement of Thomism to succeed, he has to show exactly why the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition is in fact *the* best tradition thus far. For on the account he presents in *After Virtue* and which he continues to hold in *Whose Justice*, the validation of a tradition is only through a history of the resolution of conflicts within that tradition; and so he has to demonstrate how at each stage earlier traditions encountered problems, and in what fashion they were ultimately superseded or otherwise surpassed by later traditions in ways that resolved those earlier problems. Thus, he has to first show in what way Aristotle resolves the problems that emerged in the context of 4th-5th century BCE Greek polis, and similarly go on to specify the standards under which Thomism surpasses its predecessor Aristotelian tradition.[[77]](#footnote-77) This is the main task that MacIntyre sets out to achieve in *Whose Justice*, and which I shall consider in the following discussion.

MacIntyre begins by exploring the standards of rational justification within a tradition, and how we can identify whether a traditions has realised a meaningful degree of progress. This is important, as MacIntyre is aiming to justify the standards under which we can distinguish the successful progression of a tradition at each stage of its development. Here, MacIntyre goes on to spell out how the tradition depicted in Homer’s epics was superseded by the Aristotelian tradition, and still later, outline the way in which Thomism surpasses the limitations of the Aristotelian tradition.

Now, MacIntyre argues that the standards of rational justification tend to explicitly emerge within some tradition; and that those standards only emerge in the context of a history in which they are proved adequate in correcting the defect of their predecessors, and thus surpassing them in the history of that tradition.[[78]](#footnote-78) Therefore, the question as to ‘how can traditions be counted as affording progress, and are thus justified as traditions which are reasonably viewed as rationally progressive within their history?,’ seems imperative.

Here, MacIntyre suggests that what justifies the first principles, and the theoretical structure of theories advanced within a tradition, is the rational superiority of its particular structure to all prior attempts (within that tradition) to formulate a theory.[[79]](#footnote-79) Thus MacIntyre says that “from the standpoint of tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive enquiry, what a particular doctrine claims is always a matter of how precisely it was in fact advanced.”[[80]](#footnote-80) Here, the history of traditions, just like the history of social transformations, remains in an important sense a history of conflicts; and traditions on this view are to a large extent defined in terms of continuities of conflicts and progress. Thus, the resolution of conflict is paramount in understanding progress within traditions.[[81]](#footnote-81)

MacIntyre, through the use of some examples, renders concrete the process of historical progress within traditions. In order to do this, he goes back to drawing on some of his favourite examples – those in Greek antiquity. Earlier in our discussion of *After Virtue*, we saw that MacIntyre argued that the loosening of social (kinship) bonds, and the concomitant emergence of Periclean democracy in Athens, generated a number of radical disagreements between rival views as to which definition of the ‘good’ amounted to a correct account of human flourishing. In a way, MacIntyre in *After Virtue* presents us with a sociological-cum-historical explanation of these events. However, in *Whose Justice*, while that sort of explanation plays an important role, MacIntyre appears to frame the problem in more conceptual terms.

MacIntyre begins by showing how Greek life was defined in terms of the concept of the *a*gōn (ἀγών).[[82]](#footnote-82) On this Greek view, life is in large part understood as a contest; here Greek life is primarily defined in terms *winning*, and *excellence*, in the *a*gōn. Nevertheless, these two concepts – namely, winning and excellence – progressively came apart in the intervening period.[[83]](#footnote-83) More importantly, because winning and excellence came to be viewed as separate or distinct, it generated a new set of problems, chief among them was a serious reconciliation of Homeric morality within the newly emerging classical social structure. So how did this problematic unfold?

In the Homeric accounts, the use of the word *dikē* (δίκη)[[84]](#footnote-84) is presupposed by the existence of a fundamental cosmic order, one that shaped both nature and society. A *dikaios* (δίκαιος)[[85]](#footnote-85) – translated as righteous (or just) – is then someone whose activities are aligned with this order.[[86]](#footnote-86) *Agathós* (ἀγαθὸς)[[87]](#footnote-87) (or *arête* ἀρετή)[[88]](#footnote-88) – namely, excellence – should be understood as realising (or achieving) what is required of you in your social role, and to do it well using the correct skills that are necessary to successfully fulfill the commitments assigned to you as a person occupying a certain role within a specified social structure.[[89]](#footnote-89) MacIntyre then argues that the concept of achievement – *arête* (ἀρετή) – in Homer possesses two distinct aspects: to achieve is to excel, but to achieve is also to win.[[90]](#footnote-90) Nevertheless, in Heroic society, the incompatibility between those qualities required for the pursuit of winning (external goods), and those required for the pursuit of excellence (internal goods), remain mostly unacknowledged.[[91]](#footnote-91) If we accept this view, during the heroic period which covers the Homeric epics, the concept of *agathós* (ἀγαθὸς) and *arête* (ἀρετή) remain more or less indistinguishable.

MacIntyre at this point articulates a fourth hypothesis (H4): *that social change in the intervening period from Heroic Society to 4th-5th century BCE Athens generated the sort of conditions where the incompatibility between the goods of excellence and goods of winning more and more become acknowledged in conceptual terms.* Thus, it appears that a series of historical events and social transformations, which are conceptually captured by this hypothesis, then generates a number of debates between various parties including Thucydides, Sophists, Socrates and other Socratic interlocutors.[[92]](#footnote-92) MacIntyre’s secondary thesis is that as the conflict between goods of excellence and effectiveness became more and more explicit in 4th-5th century BCE, it gave rise to a number of radical disagreements; and that this conflict should be understood as a radical disagreement as to which set of goods – those of excellence or those of effectiveness (or efficiency) – are relevant to organising and structuring life in the polis.[[93]](#footnote-93)

On the Periclean view, the concepts of winning and excellence are treated as compatible and closely linked. On this view, the diverse set of goods that Athenians can potentially pursue, can be pursued by them in a kind of harmony. Moreover, on this view, the individual, pursuing *his* or *her* good, is simultaneously pursuing *the* good of the Athenian polis. Here, the rules of justice, like those in the Homeric epics, are rules only for those within the group – in this case Athenians – and not those who reside outside of it.[[94]](#footnote-94) MacIntyre then reconstructs the various episodes in the history of the Athenian polis in which Athens is seen to be treating other city-states badly.[[95]](#footnote-95) Therefore, if Athens is seen as treating other Greek city-states unjustly, Periclean rhetoric could not simply rely on a set of rational arguments, and instead rhetorical manipulation had to play some role. MacIntyre also suggests that the work of Sophocles raises the question as to what justice is within a political community and what justice might be to those outside the community, and their relationship as to what can be counted as effective, or expedient.[[96]](#footnote-96)

Thucydides then in reconstructing the history of Peloponnesian war offers a formulation of a type of Periclean morality prevalent at the time. MacIntyre articulates the Thucydidean view in the following three claims: (i) he distinguishes between *arête* (ἀρετή)[[97]](#footnote-97) and intelligence; (ii) the only type of justice is the justice that is upheld by the strong and maintains their interest; and (iii) the rhetorical mode of deliberation is the best way for human beings for answering practical questions. On the Thucydidean view, the goods of effectiveness possess a priority in their importance over the goods of excellence.[[98]](#footnote-98)

For Plato and Socrates, however, the Thucydidean view not only fails in describing justice in terms of the goods of excellence, it also fails as an account of the goods of effectiveness. Why? Because the Thucydidean (or Periclean) view cannot adequately explain justice in terms of the goods of effectiveness, nor can it explain it in terms of the goods of excellence, without resorting to manipulative forms of argument.[[99]](#footnote-99) Thus MacIntyre frames the conflict between rival views that emerges in the 4th-5th century BCE Athens, as a radical disagreement between Socrates and Plato on the one hand, and those views advanced by Thucydides and the Sophists.[[100]](#footnote-100) Needless to say that on MacIntyre’s view, Plato offers the first systematic account in defence of the goods of excellence.[[101]](#footnote-101)

MacIntyre claims that Plato’s *Republic* gives clear philosophical formulation to the conflict between *goods of excellence* and *goods of effectiveness*. Therefore, Plato’s account essentially presents us with a dilemma: *Either it is the case that the life of a human being possesses an ethical archē (ἀρχή),*[[102]](#footnote-102) *or it turns out that the social thesis advanced by Thucydides and the various Sophists is, however unfortunate, more or less confirmed*.[[103]](#footnote-103) But if that turns out to be the case, then there could be no independent standard of justice or truth to which appeals can be made, nor could any such appeal be invoked against a particular standard that may (wrongly) be held as correct by some group.[[104]](#footnote-104) For MacIntyre, the problem in Plato’s account is that the nature of the relationship between justice, and how inquiry could proceed if justice is the telos of human beings, is never clearly stated.[[105]](#footnote-105)

Part of the problem here is that Plato’s explication in his theory of Forms, defines justice and *arête* (ἀρετή)[[106]](#footnote-106) as independent from, and prior to, the good that is realisable by individuals in their social context. At this point in the story Aristotle enters the picture. Aristotle’s ethical inquiry, on MacIntyre’s view, tasks itself with articulating the kind of human life within which a diverse set of goods can be integrated; moreover, the concrete social framework that integrates various goods within the life of an individual is the institution of the polis. Thus, Aristotle’s account of the good and the best *is* an account of the good and the best life for human beings, realizable in the context of the polis.[[107]](#footnote-107) Now, virtues and their ordering in the Aristotelian context necessitate a concrete institutionalized polis since norms of justice are dependent on the social practices available within a particular polis. The major implication of MacIntyre’s argument is that the Greek polis provides Aristotle with the social context in which the ordering of the goods generated in the course of the life of an individual, who resides in a polis, is made possible.[[108]](#footnote-108)

Still, for MacIntyre’s, this view doesn’t collapse into a type of relativism where the norms of justice are what they are because they are found in some particular polis or other. First, the polis is aiming at the best possible life for its citizens, and the best realisable life is defined in terms of an account of human nature and its specific telos; therefore, the best life is defined in functional terms. Second, the inhabitants of the polis possess the rational resources to evaluate their particular polis, and consider whether their polis is or isn’t contributing to or otherwise advancing this objective.[[109]](#footnote-109) In this sense the Aristotelian account, by building on Plato’s account and correcting its deficiencies, surpasses its predecessor’s earlier formulation.

On the historical reconstruction that MacIntyre suggests, therefore, Aristotle’s *Ethics* offered the first coherent framework where the limitations and achievements of earlier accounts – those of Thucydides and the Sophists – could be identified and evaluated, thereby transcending those earlier accounts.[[110]](#footnote-110) The Aristotelian challenge to Thucydides is that we can’t be properly rational if we need to resort to manipulative and rhetorical modes of deliberation; and, to possess the right sort of rationality one has to be virtuous.[[111]](#footnote-111) Why? Manipulative modes of deliberation, because they fail to aim at the truth, fail to advance our knowledge of the good. Thus, on the Aristotelian (and the Platonic) view, if we don’t pursue the good (excellence), it is because we are ignorant about the nature of the good, perhaps on the account of an unsatisfactory (or otherwise defective) moral education.

Nevertheless, before moving on, I would like to point out that this problem isn’t entirely resolved, because it seems possible that highly intelligent educated people have different conception of what the good is, and what it requires. More importantly, because of a series of social-historical transformations that began in the latter part of the 4th century BCE and gained further momentum soon thereafter – namely, the emergence of empires – the institution of the polis is ultimately eclipsed; therefore, the primacy of the polis as an organising institution in which the various goods are ordered, is placed under further question and this problem is rendered more acute.

It is at this point in the narrative history of traditions directed towards the goods of excellence that Augustine enters the story in *Whose Justice*. The aim of the Augustinian account in MacIntyre’s narrative is then to offer the type of resources that would still later, under Aquinas, offer a resolution to this particular problem.

## 5. Aquinas’ Synthesis of Aristotle and Augustine

MacIntyre, in *Whose Justice*, shows how the loss of the polis and the emergence of empire – first the Macedonian Empire under Alexander, and later the Roman Empire – poses a problem for the Aristotelian account. Now, the social transformations that begins with the emergence of empires presents a problem for that account since the relationship between justice and virtues that engender the flourishing of human beings within the context of the polis is rendered unclear. Without the institutional form of the polis playing its part as the principal organising force, it is no longer clear how we ought to go about integrating the various goods under a single unified hierarchy. Put differently, we are no longer just concerned with the nature of the good life in the context of the polis; rather we must consider the good life in the much larger context of the empire which can potentially encompass the relationship between all human beings as such.

MacIntyre goes on to argue that the Stoic philosophers were the first thinkers to become aware of this problem, and it is they who come to see the scope of justice as universal to humanity as such, in which all of humanity are viewed as members of the same community, and are subject to the same law.[[112]](#footnote-112) Nonetheless, MacIntyre argues that the Stoics lacked the resources to evaluate such an account of justice, for what the Stoics thought of justice for human beings as such, was only the justice afforded by Roman law. MacIntyre then suggests that the resources necessary for this task actually resides in another tradition – the tradition that originates in Judaic law and the Hebrew bible. So what kind of resources does the bible offer us? Here, MacIntyre cites the exceptionless precepts of the Ten Commandments, forbidding and enjoining certain actions regardless of context, as an example of universal laws. The Tanakh (תנ״ך)[[113]](#footnote-113) – or the Old Testament – then, on this view, offers the kinds of resources to evaluate an account of justice that is extended to humanity as such.[[114]](#footnote-114)

Nevertheless, the exceptionless character of the Ten Commandments does not directly answer a question that we broached earlier: How do highly intelligent and educated people come to hold rival and incompatible views? It would appear implausible that they are just simply ignorant about the nature of the good, or that they lack the requisite education. At this point, MacIntyre suggests that Augustinian psychology provides specific resources to address this problem.

Augustine is in an important sense concerned with the psychology of the individual. That is, how do individuals come to act in ways that undermine the good even though they have knowledge of the good? Augustine formulates the Christian concept of the will – ‘*voluntas*’ – from the biblical account in the Genesis story where the bible depicts the fall of humankind, and the role that sin plays in that story; moreover, this new concept of the will emerges from Augustine’s moral experience.[[115]](#footnote-115) Augustine’s concept of the will is necessary for directing and ordering human desires. The state of human desires, in whatever condition they happen to be, then depends on whether we succeed or fail in directing the will in the appropriate ways; thus, human desires are understood to be, in an important sense, voluntary.[[116]](#footnote-116)

The contrast between Plato and Aristotle on the one hand, and Augustine on the other, is quite stark. In the tradition in which Aristotle’s *Ethics* stands as its most systematic contributor, the failure of the individual to direct her actions towards the good, is on the account of an imperfection in the person’s knowledge of what is the good, or some imperfections in educating the passions. On the other hand for Augustine: “it is possible for someone to know unqualifiedly what it is best to do in a particular situation and for there to be no defect in the passions as such, except that they are misdirected by the will.”[[117]](#footnote-117) On the Aristotelian view reasons can motivate us independently, yet for Augustine, reason alone remains inadequate and the proper direction of the will rests on its alignment with those exceptionless precepts of God’s law – thus, the will remains a prerequisite for the proper motivation of reason (or intellect).[[118]](#footnote-118)

Augustine’s psychology offers a new account as to the nature of justice and the origin of human action.[[119]](#footnote-119) The problem of the Stoics, who didn’t possess the resources to make sense of justice and the good for all human beings as such, is resolved owing to the divine law that is afforded to us by Moses. It is here that “equality before and under divine law belongs to human beings qua human beings, an equality which derives from membership in the universal, divinely ordained community.”[[120]](#footnote-120) Thus God is the most central requirement for Augustine to properly generate the telos of human beings; nevertheless, under Aristotle there is no human telos beyond what can be attained by human beings before death.

However, at this stage in the narrative history of traditions, the tradition of Aristotle and that of Augustine remain in conflict and cannot be reconciled at this stage in their development. It is here that Aquinas enters the story, and on MacIntyre’s view, Aquinas is tasked with synthesizing the Aristotelian insights within the Augustinian tradition. MacIntyre here utilises Aquinas’ account – viewed as a synthesis of the Augustinian and Aristotelian positions – to formulate different conceptual stages in the conflict between these two traditions.[[121]](#footnote-121) MacIntyre suggests that the stages in this conflict and eventual synthesis between these two traditions required a gift of empathy, and that Aquinas had just such a gift. Thus, he was able to imaginatively view himself as straddling both traditions, and thus sympathetically combine the best elements of both traditions.[[122]](#footnote-122) So what was it exactly that Aquinas achieved?

MacIntyre tells us then that Aquinas “was engaged in a long series of constructive debates through whose arguments and conclusions he constructed or reconstructed a representation of the hierarchical order of the universe,”[[123]](#footnote-123) and in these long running debates with Aristotelian and Augustinian rivals he was able to correctly formulate their inadequacies, while preserving everything from these conversations that remained unrefuted. Moreover, by utilising the concepts of *cōnscientia* and *synderesis*, Aquinas is able to resolve moral dilemmas that were expressed in human tragedies, and to which tragedians such as Sophocles afforded expression.[[124]](#footnote-124) MacIntyre suggests that in the Thomist account we possess

“a theological framework within which is presented a fundamentally Aristotelian account of the genesis of action, into which are integrated both an Augustinian conception of the will and such later concepts such intention and *synderesis* and *conscientia*.”[[125]](#footnote-125)

MacIntyre argues that Aquinas is able to demonstrate why Aristotle’s teleology was defective – it was defective because of the inadequacies of the social order, that of the polis, to which Aristotle belonged. On the other hand, the details offered in the Aristotelian account, correct the broad generalisations which was a weakness of Augustine’s account.[[126]](#footnote-126) It is in this sense that Aquinas’ account, not only surpasses and transcends the limitations of those offered by his rivals, but it also transcends the limitations of the accounts offered by his predecessors – namely, the limitations of Augustine and Aristotle.

Before moving on, I should emphasise that MacIntyre utilises the above history not only to argue for standards of rational progress, and therefore show how traditions can be seen as progressive, but also to argue that the Thomistic tradition hasn’t been really defeated by those same standards of rational progress. Still, there remains another important lesson in MacIntyre’s account (covered in this section) and it is a lesson that we broached earlier in (H3) and (H4) – that the change of social structure can also lead to the defeat, or at least marginalisation, of a tradition. This is important, since it seems that on MacIntyre’s view, Thomism as a tradition has certainly been sidelined in this sense.

## 6. Liberalism: The Dominant Contemporary Tradition

In the latter parts of *Whose Justice*, MacIntyre suggests that the Thomistic tradition was gradually sidelined in ways which paved the way for the set of conditions from which the Enlightenment Project of Rationally Justifying Morality ultimately emerged. Later, the failure of this project, described in *After Virtue*, sets the stage for emotivist ethics, and modern liberalism is the successor tradition which best encapsulates the salient characteristics of emotivism. While in *After Virtue* MacIntyre hasn’t yet ascribed to liberalism the status of a fully fledged tradition, in chapter seventeen of *Whose Justice* MacIntyre argues that liberalism, which on his view is the social and political philosophy that best expresses the culture of contemporary Western society, is in fact the dominant tradition of the modern era. Likewise, the emotivist culture and the emotivist self, taken together, are the theoretical formulations of the set of social practices and norms that define the liberal tradition. MacIntyre then claims that the liberal tradition, itself “born of antagonism to all tradition, has transformed itself gradually into…one more tradition.”[[127]](#footnote-127)

MacIntyre suggests that the liberal point of view originated as a tradition-free standpoint – that is, liberalism was supposed to offer practical rationality for tradition-free individuals.[[128]](#footnote-128)

“Initially the liberal claim was to provide a political legal and economic framework in which assent to one and the same set of rationally justifiable principles would enable those who espouse widely different and incompatible conceptions of the good life for human beings to live together peaceably within the same society, enjoying the same political status and engaging the same economic relationships.”[[129]](#footnote-129)

Nevertheless, in the context of the social and historical transition that spanned the period between the late 18th century and mid- 20th century, the market grew to be the most powerful institution in the liberal economy, and by extension, the liberal state. On this view, what is expressed in the market is the expression of economic preferences, and later in the 20th century, what is expressed in the political arena is the expression of political preferences. The market’s mechanism thus acts as a way of ordering and valuing the preferences of individual agents in the wider social context; and, it is through these expressions of preferences out of which the heterogeneity of needs, desires, and goods, are afforded their particular place and value.

Here, the relationship between individual preferences and the market plays an important role in ordering human goods.[[130]](#footnote-130) Liberal institutions and more specifically the market not only satisfy individual preferences, but influence and shape those preferences to a great degree. The liberal tradition then, on MacIntyre’s view, perfectly expresses contemporary emotivist culture, because under the emotivist account, principles of justice are governed by rules that are defined in terms of the aggregate preferences of individuals in society.[[131]](#footnote-131) The upshot here is that on the liberal view, appeals to rationality as such must fail, since the manner in which the range of social and intellectual debates in society are structured, are defined in terms of maximizing the aggregate of individual preferences.[[132]](#footnote-132)

MacIntyre goes on to argue that while the liberal tradition is in fact the dominant tradition embodied in our social practices and wider culture, intellectually or rationally, it remains nonetheless a failed tradition, precisely because it accepts an indefinite version of value pluralism governed by open competition between all sorts of values and preferences; furthermore, values and preferences on this view for the most part possess only instrumental value. MacIntyre offers a conception of rational progress in the development of traditions, which in its most detailed form is explained in *Whose Justice*. On this view, which for our purposes I will identify as MacIntyre’s fifth hypothesis (H5): *traditions of moral inquiry must be evaluated dialectically, where later traditions transcend the limitations present in earlier ones, and that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition hasn’t really been surpassed or defeated in this sense*. Hence, for MacIntyre, the Thomistic tradition is the best tradition thus far, in part because he claims that it hasn’t been refuted dialectically.

At this point we would do well to recall the concept of tradition that MacIntyre offers in *After Virtue*, and contrast it with the account he offers in *Whose Justice*. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre tells us that the concept of a human being directed towards its telos, is a functional concept that is implicitly embedded in the social practices and norms of Greek society.[[133]](#footnote-133) MacIntyre goes further and claims that Aristotle’s moral theory ought to be viewed as a theoretical formulation of an already existing set of social norms and practices among the educated Athenians.[[134]](#footnote-134) On this sort of view, moral theory is always defined in terms of the background social context. Now, recall that both (H1) and (H2) support this conclusion.

In *Whose Justice*, he expands his account of tradition in *After Virtue* by suggesting that while moral theory is informed by social context, and represents a theoretical formulation of that which is implicit in the common sense morality of a particular society (i.e. classical Athens), moral theory within traditions should only be rationally accepted or defeated dialectically within a historical series – namely, one set of theories demonstrating itself to be better than its predecessor.[[135]](#footnote-135) This claim can be understood as more or less a restatement of (H5).

The unacknowledged conclusion we can draw from this claim is that while MacIntyre accepts that the Thomistic traditions has been superseded by later traditions which ultimately culminated in the liberal tradition, this was a contingent accident of history, and that it was premature.[[136]](#footnote-136) Nonetheless, this could only be the case if we accept an implicit premise (or presupposition) – namely, that the intellectual and social history of the western world in fact took a wrong turn. The highly controversial upshot of this claim is then to say that to the extent in which the collective intellectual (and social) history of the West committed this mistake, emotivist moral theory must be understood as the theoretical expression of the modern social context that emerged as a consequence of that error.

However, I would like to suggest that such a wide-ranging claim is not only controversial, but that (H5) – which is the basis of this claim – could potentially come into conflict with (H3) and (H4). Why? Let us briefly recall MacIntyre’s historical narrative and reconsider the claims made by (H3) and (H4). In MacIntyre’s historical narrative of the transition between Homeric Epics and 4th-5th century BCE Athens, social bonds of Homeric society had unravelled in ways that gave expression to rival and incompatible views on the nature of the good. On this view, the ethical account available in the earlier Homeric tradition generated irreconcilable difficulties owing to the historical changes out of which a new social structure seems to emerge; and we also observed that the social structure (or arrangement) of classical Athens was in important ways different from the structure that is characteristic of the earlier Homeric (Bronze Age) order. Thus the theoretical problematic which concerns Thucydides, Sophocles, amongst others, are generated precisely because the Homeric tradition that was informed by the social and cultural practices of an earlier, and significantly different, social-cum-political arrangement was no longer adequately informed by, nor adapted to, the realities of the then emerging social structure which is characteristic of the classical period.

Now, it appears that ethical theory and social structure are not only interdependent in an important sense, but that changes in the social structure not only appear to limit, but also render older theories inadequate in important ways. However, this conclusion seems to be at odds with (H5); namely, that theories are only defeated rationally through dialectical means within a tradition. For it appears the examination of some of MacIntyre’s own examples demonstrates that social change can render a tradition inadequate even when it has not been defeated dialectically in a rigorous sense. Therefore, transformations in the social structure can potentially undermine the coherence and the viability of moral traditions, in virtue of the fact that social transformations can place the existing premises within some tradition – premises which are tied to a particular social configuration, and which in turn set the standards of behaviour in the social sphere of the same – under pressure, well before the development of appropriate intellectual resources that are necessary to supplanting or surpassing an existing tradition.

Let us briefly consider another example which MacIntyre presents in *Whose Justice*. MacIntyre suggests that an important reason why Aristotelian ethics later proved inadequate originated in the gradual emergence of the Macedonian and later Roman empires which marginalised the particular (institutional) role that the Greek polis played in organising the various goods that informed ethical life in antiquity. Thus, what is implicit here is that the social structures of the earlier classical period (4th-5th century BCE Athens) were displaced, and so Aristotle’s ethics which was on MacIntyre’s view the best formulation of ethics for the particular social context of the Greek polis, was no longer informed by the then newly emerging background social structure present during the Roman empire and early Christianity. Here, it seems that MacIntyre is implicitly reiterating the claims present in (H1), (H3), and (H4), and all of them indeed appear to be mutually supportive of, and compatible with, each other. Thus, MacIntyre appears to closely connect social context to theory, and sanctions the thought that change in the background social context could make an older theory inadequate.

Similarly, by drawing on the resources in MacIntyre’s historical narrative we could advance a hypothesis similar to (H3) – let us call it (H3a) – which I believe can explain the gradual marginalisation of Thomistic ethics. On the view I am proposing, the social bonds in medieval feudal society to which Aquinas belonged, were gradually dissolved through the marginalisation of the feudal social order which in turn was a consequence of certain material conditionals that accompanied the historical transition experienced by European society, in the period spanning the 14th-16th century. Just as important is the fact that the preceding changes in the social order ushered in a period of intellectual and scientific advances that generated a rather extensive set of fundamental problems that undermined important Aristotelian metaphysical concepts. Therefore, to the extent that Aquinas made use of Aristotelian resources in his ethics, these problems also plagued Thomism; and to the extent in which Thomism survives this transition, it was the revised formulations of Thomistic natural law theory, as opposed to Aquinas’ Aristotelian inspired teleological ethics. Here once again we have a situation where moral theory is rendered inadequate owing to sweeping upheaval in the social order, and transformation of societal edifice.

A firm conclusion that emerges from MacIntyre’s historical narrative is therefore that any plausible account of morality must not only, in a meaningful sense, remain informed by the background social structure, it ought also to be able to adequately answer the various intellectual problematics that are generated in the process of reconciling already existing ethical formulations – passed on from earlier traditions and potentially tied to earlier historical contexts and social arrangements – with the conditions present in the then contemporary social context; and by accomplishing this task, a properly formulated moral inquiry (in the context of a tradition) advances an account that supersedes earlier traditions.[[137]](#footnote-137) Hence, in an important sense, moral theory is necessarily informed by, and cannot remain divorced from, the background social structure.

Thus we have a scenario where on the one hand the hypothesis we have identified (H1), (H2), (H3), and (H4) seem to reinforce one another.

*(H1):* Theoretical claims are only intelligible in the context of a background social structure.

*(H2):* Emotivist theories tend to emerge under conditions of liberalism and pluralism.

*(H3):* The historical transition from the earlier Heroic period, to that of 4th-5th century BCE Athens, precipitated a change in the Hellenic social structure that undermined, dissolved, and ultimately transformed, the social bonds and practices of the earlier period.

*(H4):* Social change in the intervening period from Heroic Society to 4th-5th century BCE Athens had generated the sort of conditions where the incompatibility between the goods of excellence and goods of winning more and more become acknowledged in conceptual terms.

Nonetheless, it also appears that the first four hypotheses remain in potential conflict with (H5).

*(H5):* traditions of moral inquiry must be evaluated dialectically, where later traditions transcend the limitations present in earlier ones, and that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition hasn’t really been surpassed or defeated in this sense.

It is at this point in our discussion that we can explicitly identify an important problem generated under MacIntyre’s account. On the one hand, when MacIntyre talks about the development of traditions, he views this in terms of one position overcoming the problems that plagues earlier account, but H3 and H4 appear to suggest that a new set of problems can potentially arise through the emergence of new social-historical material conditions in ways that can render an earlier tradition problematic even *before* there is any serious methodical systematic intellectual overcoming of the earlier position – here I can further cite H3a as an example in which one could propose that the Thomist account comes to be viewed as problematic after the steady marginalisation and problematisation of Aquinas’ feudal society.[[138]](#footnote-138) I should emphasize that social context is paramount since even Aristotle, on MacIntyre’s account, was able to offer a resolution of the radical disagreements present in 4th-5th century BCE Athenian society, by framing his ethics as offering solutions to the disagreements that were generated in the context of the Athenian polis.

On the other hand, MacIntyre tries to defend the contemporary significance and value of Thomism, a position whose historical context is in the distant past, and which has been supplanted in the contemporary western context by the liberal tradition. Thus, there appears to be an important tension between these two views. If MacIntyre is right, that traditions progress through the ways in which they afford satisfactory answers to the range of social problematics which their predecessors encounter owing to newly emerging social realities, then it seems he should be committed to seeing liberalism as an advance over Thomism. And equally, if MacIntyre is right that traditions relate closely to their social context in order to be meaningful, then it seems he should question whether Thomism can really be revived for us today.

Therefore, it seems that it is difficult for MacIntyre to hold onto both of these views. This generates the *first problematic* of my thesis: that MacIntyre needs to explain why under his own account – in which traditions are presented as part of a historical series where earlier traditions are surpassed by later ones – the tradition to which he allies himself is Thomism, for it appears that Thomism itself has been supplanted by later accounts, and ultimately, the liberal tradition. This claim of course takes on an added emphasis since MacIntyre argues in *Whose Justice* that liberalism is in fact the dominant tradition of modern liberal society.

Now, as part of his criticism of the liberal tradition, MacIntyre seems to reject not only liberalism, but also any engagement with liberal political systems, and in its stead offers a small-scale communal politics that can be characterised in equal parts by its support for small-scale social-political associations as well as its strong and unmitigated opposition to the liberal political order. Our *second problematic* then emerges, and can be characterised, as an implication (or upshot), of the first difficulty, when taken together with the exact type of claim in which MacIntyre unequivocally expresses his steadfast opposition to the liberal political order.

Therefore, notwithstanding MacIntyre’s opprobrium towards the liberal order, it would appear that under the historical-contextualist account developed by MacIntyre in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice*, we can come to reasonably hold the view that Aristotelian-Thomism was in fact marginalised, in part owing to the transformation of the social edifice in Europe during the high middle ages, and partly owing to MacIntyre’s contextualism-historicism under which moral and political theory in the context of traditions cannot be understood apart from the background social structure precisely because moral/political inquiry conceptually formulates essentially those social norms implicit in ordinary social practice embedded within particular social-historical contexts. Now, the liberal tradition, on MacIntyre’s view, is the social and cultural embodiment of those norms that are implicit in present-day social practices, and emotivism, again on his view, is the ethical articulation of liberal social life. It then seems that MacIntyre ought to afford us good reasons as to why liberalism, and especially liberal politics, not only fails in some meaningful sense as a moral-political tradition, but what’s more is that the correction of the flaws and limitations in the liberal order is an impossible task so much so that it remains all but hopeless.

Now, this second tension poses an especially crucial problem for MacIntyre, for the reason that on his account, ethics and politics are inter-connected and mutually supporting. MacIntyre argued earlier that Aristotle’s ethics is a theoretical expression of social and political practices particular to the Athenian polis. Yet, if the social structures that were particular to the polis no longer exist, wouldn’t this at least to some extent undermine the possibility of a MacIntyrean revival of an Aristotelian-Thomistic politics in the contemporary era of nation states? It seems to be then quite a leap of faith to suggest that Thomism, which on MacIntyre’s historical-contextualist account (see hypothesis H3 and H3a above) ought to be viewed as a theoretical formulation of the best possible set of social norms and practices in the context of the social structure that characterises European high middle ages, is also a tradition that can best formulate moral and political inquiry appropriate to the modern social context, for it is readily apparent that the modern social structure is very different from the historical social context to which Aquinas belonged.[[139]](#footnote-139)

In order to sum up the two challenges that will concern us in the balance of this thesis, the first problem is: how can MacIntyre claim that the historical narrative of traditions proceeds progressively on the one hand, while championing the Aristotelian-Thomistic moral tradition on the other hand, when this tradition has been marginalized in the modern world? The second problem is generated in virtue of the fact that on MacIntyre’s historical contextualist account, the ethics and politics available in the Thomist traditions seems more appropriate to the medieval social structure, for it remains in an important sense a theoretical expression of social practices formulated based on that earlier socio-historical context – which then makes it a mystery how MacIntyre could, in altogether rejecting any possibility of ameliorating the problems present in liberal politics, seriously propose Thomism as a solution to the problems that we face today.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I began by characterising MacIntyre’s hypothesis concerning the seemingly interminable nature of moral conflict in liberal society. I then outlined MacIntyre’s argument where he suggests that the perpetual nature of moral conflict between rival views emerged from the failure of various attempts by Enlightenment thinkers to formulate an independent and definitive rational justification for moral claims. Here, MacIntyre argued that the failure of the Enlightenment Project was inevitable precisely because Enlightenment thinkers could no longer reputably utilise important teleological resources in their arguments, which were previously available to earlier Aristotelian thinkers.

MacIntyre then advances a rather disconcerting disjunction of what he takes to be the remaining alternatives. Here, he argues that the modern individual is essentially left with two different options: either Aristotle or Nietzsche. But because Aristotle is no longer feasible to us moderns, it turns out that modern morality is ultimately a version of Nietzschean morality, and that emotivism is its most cogent articulation. Nevertheless, because MacIntyre rejected emotivism as an option, he tries to advance a new moral framework in his three-fold account of the virtues – what we can best be understood as a form of social teleology.[[140]](#footnote-140) However, despite MacIntyre’s bold attempt at articulating a new teleological account suitable to the present-day social text, his account runs into two important related objections raised by Bernstein and Schneewind, namely, that MacIntyre’s three-fold account appears to reinforce, rather than undermine, the case for emotivism. I then argued that MacIntyre’s project in *Whose Justice* is best understood as a way of replying to objections of this type, precisely because the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition possesses a more robust teleology capable to resolving this difficulty.

Next, I proposed that notwithstanding the teleological resources available in the Thomistic tradition, MacIntyre has to provide us with good reasons as to why the Thomistic tradition is the best tradition thus far, especially because MacIntyre’s historical account of moral traditions adopts a number of historicist-cum-contextualist commitments. Nevertheless, it appears that the reason that MacIntyre offers in the defence of the Thomistic tradition – characterised by the hypothesis H5, namely that it is dialectically undefeated – seems to be in conflict with his first four hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, and H4) generated by a number of claims he makes in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice*, namely that traditions change through history when they are surpassed. In addition, MacIntyre’s endorsement of Aristotelian-Thomism, alongside his claim that liberalism is the dominant contemporary tradition, produces two important difficulties.

First, how do we square MacIntyre’s later adoption of Thomism, with the fact that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition was displaced in the run up to modernity? And second, if moral-political traditions are in fact a more abstract formalistic expression of (more or less) accepted social practices embedded in a particular social-cultural context, how can Thomism – a moral-political tradition originating in the medieval period and expressing the social and cultural practices peculiar to that period – deliver to us a germane ethical framework for moral life in the contemporary social context?

Commencing in the next chapter, I turn my attention to this first difficulty, while in Chapter Four, I begin to explore in more detail the second tension in MacIntyre’s account.

# Chapter 2: Thomism and Historical Progress in MacIntyre’s Tradition-Guided Inquiry

## 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I considered the broad outlines of MacIntyre’s account presented in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice*. I considered MacIntyre’s historical narrative which posits a rather complex and far-reaching argument – that the seemingly rival and intractable debates in contemporary moral philosophy are generated precisely because different moral arguments advanced by proponents of this or that view appeal to fundamentally different sets of basic premises; premises that could only be fully understood in relation to the particular social context that motivated them. Now, MacIntyre also argues that amidst all the intellectual fragmentation and disorder, a new moral theory – emotivism – nevertheless emerges. For MacIntyre, emotivism is seemingly at home with the social practices and the cultural context of contemporary liberal order, and is indeed, a theoretical expression of deeply embedded liberal social norms and customs. Nevertheless, MacIntyre rejects emotivism, for emotivism accepts the implicit premise that when it comes to moral claims, there is no rational way of adjudicating one claim against another. Recall that in Chapter One, we saw how MacIntyre positioned his thesis in direct opposition to emotivism, and MacIntyre’s positive account hinges on showing how ethical claims can in fact be justified rationally within a tradition; and that in the context of the history of moral traditions, traditions achieve rational progress by overcoming the limitations of earlier traditions.

I then looked to draw attention to MacIntyre’s profound historical and contextualist claims that are deeply-rooted in the complex argument advanced in his historical narrative. We observed that MacIntyre’s narrative: (i) closely ties ethics and morality to the wider social-cum-historical context; (ii) demonstrates how seemingly intractable conflicts between rival accounts in moral philosophy emerge from disruption and transformation of the social structure; (iii) and reveals how the resolution of conflicts between rival views, and ultimately progress in moral philosophy, takes place within traditions of moral inquiry. I should emphasize that the idea of justifying moral claims, and more broadly, the idea of moral progress within traditions of moral inquiry, is fundamentally at the heart of his project.

Now in the previous chapter, we observed that MacIntyre in *Whose Justice* identifies liberalism as the dominant contemporary tradition. Nevertheless, MacIntyre has emphatically rejected the liberal tradition, and vigorously defends his overall thesis in terms of its opposition to liberalism, where he identifies with, and endorses, Aristotelian-Thomism. However, at the end of the Chapter One, I suggested that two important problems emerge for MacIntyre’s historical account of tradition-bound moral inquiry. My focus in this chapter will be directed to the first problem. We can articulate this first problem in the following way: On the one hand, it seems that on MacIntyre’s contextualist-historical account of tradition-guided moral inquiry, traditions succeed each other in an historically progressive series; on the other hand, the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition to which MacIntyre subscribes to, has been in some sense surpassed or marginalized in the same historical process; this then makes it hard to see how he can also claim that it should be revived.

To resolve this tension, it would seem that MacIntyre needs to give an account of *why* Thomism, his own preferred tradition, has been surpassed as a tradition, or is at least in long-term decline. Moreover, he needs to accomplish this task in a way that shows it is also possible for us to return to it in some form, and that we would be right to do so. For unless this can be achieved, it would suggest that on MacIntyre’s own account – where traditions of moral inquiry progress historically and succeed each other – Thomistic ethics is no longer a viable theoretical framework for us.

In the next section, I try to highlight a distinction between different aspects of progress, and utilise this distinction – within the framework of MacIntyre’s historical account of tradition-guided inquiry – to speculate on the standards under which we could come to hold (the view) that Aristotelian-Thomism perhaps suffered from a spurious discountenance. In section 3 I present the historical context for the first tension (or difficulty) and briefly consider the background for the marginalization of Thomistic tradition. Here, I will nevertheless offer a more plausible account for the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism, and utilize MacIntyre’s hypotheses (H3) and (H4), outlined in the previous chapter, to strengthen my argument. In section 4 I will consider MacIntyre’s ‘Rival Aristotles: Aristotle Against Some Renaissance Aristotelians,’ which I take to be a kind of genealogy that MacIntyre is offering for the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism. However, before we can ascertain whether MacIntyre’s genealogical account for the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism is convincing, I will consider MacIntyre’s account in ‘Natural Law as Subversive: The Case for Aquinas,’ in section 5. In this section, I will draw some conceptual analogies between the criticism MacIntyre directs against Renaissance Aristotelians, considered in section 4, and the account I examine here, in support of Aquinas.

I will suggest that while MacIntyre presents us with a descriptive narrative of particular events that sets the stage for the decline of Aristotelian views – especially Aristotle’s functional (or teleological) account in ethics – the argument he presents in ‘Rival Aristotles: Aristotle Against Some Renaissance Aristotelians’ is inadequate for the purpose of resolving this first tension (or difficulty). And in the absence of a resolution to this first tension, MacIntyre should reconsider whether Thomism can really be revived for our contemporary social context, otherwise he might have to re-evaluate whether the contextualist historical narrative of tradition-guided moral inquiry – where ethical inquiry is always connected to the wider societal context – is in fact accurate.

## 2. Aspects of Progress

Now, the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition could be construed as deficient in two ways. First, it may be that Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition was, in fact limited, and therefore, rightfully surpassed precisely because it rested on problematic grounds which were effectively exposed through the subsequent historical, intellectual, and social transformations, out of which more novel and improved ways of thinking emerged.[[141]](#footnote-141) Or secondly, it could be the case that the socio-historical transformation experienced by Western European society generated a set of social/moral problems that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition wasn’t adept in resolving;[[142]](#footnote-142) and as a consequence of this, that tradition was amended and gradually surpassed precisely because Aristotelian-Thomism could no longer offer satisfactory answers to newly emerging normative problems. I should emphasize that in either case we could sensibly speculate on, and perhaps point to, a range of social, historical, and intellectual reasons for the eclipse of Thomistic ethics. It would then appear that either MacIntyre’s account of historical development of traditions as progressive is in error, or his claims about the value of reviving Thomism; it is hard to see how he can hang onto both. This then is the crux of this first tension (or difficulty) that emerges for MacIntyre’s historical account of tradition-guided moral inquiry.

Nonetheless, MacIntyre seems to have an easy way out of this dilemma, namely by insisting that he isn’t espousing a view that the traditions of moral inquiry are *always* progressive. He will certainly reply that traditions of morality can be marginalized for the wrong reasons.[[143]](#footnote-143) Still there is a nagging worry in the background since it appears that MacIntyre’s hypotheses H3 and H4, identified in Chapter One,[[144]](#footnote-144) show that as a consequence of the transformation of social structures, moral traditions could potentially suffer from diminution, or at least, are unable to address important social-moral issues. This means that at least sometimes, traditions are not defeated through extended dialectical inquiry, but merely due to contingent historical changes that undermine or transform the societal edifice. It also seems that Aristotelian-Thomism is a tradition that has been surpassed in the way described in hypotheses H3 and H4 (this is an example in which MacIntyre’s H3 and H4 could potentially conflict with H5).

MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue* precisely tries to show that our modern moral predicament is due to the fact that the Aristotelian tradition was sidelined in the transition to the modern era; and that we discarded important teleological resources that were available in the Aristotelian tradition. Nevertheless, in *After Virtue*, his account more or less accepts that, given the historical transformation of the contemporary social structure, we cannot go back to the Aristotelian tradition. MacIntyre then tries to formulate a new social teleology under his three-fold conception of (i) practice; (ii) narrative unity of a human life; and (iii) tradition. What emerges from MacIntyre’s social teleology is a highly heterogeneous multiplicity of goods that are not always reconcilable.[[145]](#footnote-145) Both Schneewind and Bernstein then argue that MacIntyre’s social teleology, taken together with his historical account of traditions, reinforces the view that emotivism is a morality that coherently describes moral life in the modern liberal social context.[[146]](#footnote-146) On their view, MacIntyre’s three-fold account – owing to its ambiguous definition of the goods – appears to strengthen, rather than diminish, the strength of the emotivist thesis.[[147]](#footnote-147)

Now, on my view, much of MacIntyre’s later work, especially in *Whose Justice*, is motivated in large part as a response to these kinds of criticism. Thus, the MacIntyre in *Whose Justice* is less concerned with the further development of his social teleology and three-fold account of the virtues, and more concerned with identifying and defending a tradition – Aristotelian-Thomism – that has the necessary teleological resources to answer critics like Bernstein and Schneewind. And because he wants to undermine, rather than reinforce, the emotivist thesis, MacIntyre wishes to recoup a more robust substantive account of the good, available in the Thomist tradition. Recall now that MacIntyre’s three-fold social teleology in *After Virtue* doesn’t engender a strong account of human good and human nature. On the other hand, the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition – which he endorses in *Whose Justice* – is an option that offers him a more substantive account of the good and a stronger teleology that potentially resolves these sorts of challenges. What I am suggesting here is that MacIntyre’s adoption of Aristotelian-Thomism generates a stronger teleology that allows MacIntyre to defend himself against the kinds of criticisms advanced by Bernstein and Schneewind.

However, in order for MacIntyre to recover the teleological resources available in Aristotelian Thomism he needs to explain how a tradition such as Aristotelian-Thomism can be sidelined for the wrong reasons, and show how those (teleological) resources can be revived and appropriated for use in contemporary debates. Now before I consider the methodology through which MacIntyre engages in the revival of the teleological resources in Aristotelian-Thomism, we need to further disentangle the two ways in which traditions in moral inquiry progress or succeed each other.[[148]](#footnote-148) I should emphasize the importance of this point for advancing our discussion since it is only through disentangling these two aspects of progress that MacIntyre is able to offer a rational account of moral progress.

Earlier, we observed that MacIntyre’s historical narrative draws our attention to the ways in which significant conflict emerges in moral traditions, usually due to significant changes that affect the social context. We also considered the standards that specify whether a tradition achieves progress, for example when a tradition offers a resolution of those conflicts.[[149]](#footnote-149) So for example when an earlier tradition is surpassed by a new emerging tradition, the new tradition is able to solve the problems which the earlier tradition could not resolve.[[150]](#footnote-150) It is in this sense that the Aristotelian tradition made intellectual progress by offering an ethics best equipped to resolving normative problems in the context of the polis, by affording a resolution to the conflicts – conflicts which for MacIntyre were best expressed (or first problematized) in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*. It is in this sense that we can argue in favor of a new tradition – viewed as ‘progressive’ – defined in terms of its ability to advance resolutions to a range of social conflicts. Let us call this the ‘*intellectual aspect of progress.*’[[151]](#footnote-151)

At this point the use of an example from philosophy of science can inform our discussion.[[152]](#footnote-152) Here, I utilise the example offered by Kuhn in the philosophy of science.[[153]](#footnote-153) On the Kuhnian model of scientific traditions,[[154]](#footnote-154) scientific advance depends both on what Kuhn identifies as normal science – where scientists achieve advances in science by solving what are more or less standard puzzles – as well as revolutionary science – when the sheer number of anomalies and ad hoc procedures in a scientific tradition force scientists to fundamentally alter their approach to scientific problems. For Kuhn, during periods of revolutionary science, the basic premises underpinning the prevailing cosmology and metaphysics fail to adequately explain phenomena, and therefore, they fail to advance a resolution of the apparent conflict between theory and observation. Nonetheless, on rare occasions, new scientific traditions emerge from basic premises that specify the framework for a new world view – a new cosmology and metaphysics. What is relevant for the purpose of advancing my argument is that for MacIntyre, the analogy from science can apply to moral inquiry.[[155]](#footnote-155) On this view, a new tradition emerges when it is better able to overcome limitations of some older tradition – namely, when it is better able to explain some feature of social or normative phenomena, and/or resolve a set of normative questions in ways that transcends the limitations of an earlier tradition. It is then, in a kind of intellectual or rational sense that moral inquiry is supposed to be historically progressive, and it is in this manner that the analogy between traditions in science and morality holds.

Nonetheless, I emphasized earlier that for MacIntyre, this intellectual aspect of progress isn’t inevitable.[[156]](#footnote-156) In fact, MacIntyre’s account not only hinges on showing how moral inquiry can get derailed, and hence, fail to realize progress, but in also demonstrating how a tradition like Thomism, that on MacIntyre’s view possesses important intellectual resources, can be marginalized prematurely by later traditions – traditions which do not possess important resources, precisely because they were discarded in the process. However, there is another aspect of ‘progress’ that we need to identify – namely, the ‘*material aspect of progress*’.[[157]](#footnote-157) We could think of this aspect of progress in non-Marxist neutral terms – namely, changes to the relevant sorts of material conditions.[[158]](#footnote-158) On the neutral view, the material aspect of progress can be defined in terms of an increase (or even a loss) of complexity in the social structure, or even more generally, in terms of simply the historical progression and transformation of social structures. So for example, we could say that classical Greek society was one stage of material progress, while Homer’s archaic Greece is placed at an earlier stage; or that early modern Europe was another stage of material progress that succeeded the middle ages; or that the gains contemporary liberal society has made over that of early modern Europe, represent yet another stage. All of these examples described an increase in the complexity of the social order; but we could similarly argue that while the early Middle Ages represented a later (chronological) stage of progress than the Roman Empire, it represented an historical juncture which epitomized a loss of complexity in the social structure, relative to late (Roman) antiquity.

While the material definition of progress is not necessarily inevitable – for example, human beings could potentially make the planet uninhabitable or a major natural disaster could wipe out humanity so that there is no longer any social structure to refer to – the conditions that satisfy this definition of progress is much less prohibitive than for example the conditions that would satisfy the definition for the intellectual aspect of progress. What should be emphasized is that for MacIntyre, it is possible to realize the material aspect of progress, without its intellectual aspect, and so we must draw a distinction between these two aspects.[[159]](#footnote-159)

Here, I would like to suggest that MacIntyre’s criticism of contemporary ethics, the liberal tradition, and modern society, rests on how effectively he can maintain this distinction within the confines of his historical-contextualist account – and this account is ultimately a product of the close connection and mutual interdependence MacIntyre draws between ethics and the social structure. Given that MacIntyre agrees with the fact of material progress and he knows that there is no way of going back to the social-cum-historical context of the Thomistic tradition, the success of his project rests on whether he is able to grant the material aspect of progress, while continuing to maintain this distinction by offering a reasonable justification that – that traditions which superseded Aristotelian-Thomism, failed in realising the intellectual aspect of progress. If this attempt is then successful, MacIntyre can potentially capture important teleological insights from the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and appropriate them for use in contemporary moral inquiry, without violating his earlier (historicist-cum-contextualist) commitments.

In the next section I turn to tracing the historical background to the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism, in order to, at least as a first approximation, contend that MacIntyre will have a difficult task maintaining this distinction,[[160]](#footnote-160) precisely because there is an alternative story – *the story of science* – that could afford us a reasonable explanation for the decline of Thomism.[[161]](#footnote-161) Still, I should qualify this, since I do not mean to say there are no other stories that could form a more general narrative explanation for the decline of Thomism, or perhaps act as a component in a larger historical explanation for the intellectual and scientific progress made by Western European societies in the early modern period.[[162]](#footnote-162)

## 3. The Background to the Decline of Thomism

Earlier, I indicated that the process of historical development in some sense has marginalized Aristotelian-Thomism as a mode of inquiry. Hence, MacIntyre has to offer an explanation for this marginalization because under his contextualist-historical account of the development of moral inquiry, traditions succeed each other. Just as important is the fact that not only does MacIntyre stress the developmental as well as the historical-contextual nature of tradition-guided moral inquiry, but also his account connects moral inquiry – and morality more generally – to the background social structure. So why was the Thomistic tradition displaced through historical developments in the history of morality, if it in fact was a superior tradition as MacIntyre claims? While we do not find an answer to this specific question in *After Virtue*,[[163]](#footnote-163) nor in *Whose Justice*,[[164]](#footnote-164) MacIntyre broadly blames the marginalization of Aristotelian philosophy, and more specifically, Aristotle’s metaphysics and teleology, for the decline and eventual dismissal of Aristotelian ethics.

We find that an account not so dissimilar to the one presented by MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, was offered by Anscombe in her seminal paper ‘Modern Moral Philosophy.’[[165]](#footnote-165) In this paper, Anscombe suggests that the words we use in everyday moral language such as ‘ought,’ ‘duty,’ ‘obligation,’ ‘right,’ and ‘wrong,’ lack the conceptual background that made them intelligible; and that in fact, they are vestiges of a Christian divine-command ethics, which became prevalent after Aristotelian ethics and its corresponding world-view, lost their prominence. Nevertheless, the influence of Christian ethics came under pressure during a slow and steady decline which became critical from the late 18th century onwards. For Anscombe, the rational force of a divine command view of ethics began this decline owing to the onset of a range of historical events beginning with the Protestant Reformation. Hence, by the 18th century, philosophers, beginning with Hume, questioned whether one can derive moral oughts from non-moral premises. Anscombe concludes that without a divine command ethics and a theistic world-view of a divine law-giver, our ordinary moral language of ‘duty’, ‘obligation’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, cannot be sustained; thus, our contemporary moral language suffers from a sort of dissonance. In the previous chapter we observed that MacIntyre identifies this dissonance as a kind of fragmentation of modern morality precisely because various moral claims posited in our contemporary moral discourse appear to be cut off from the particular historical context that made sense of them, and in which they were at home.

However, before we can accept the claim that Aristotelian-Thomism and its corresponding teleology was displaced for the wrong reasons, without inviting further controversy, we need to very briefly acknowledge a series of social-cum-historical events that lies in the background of the type of historical argument which MacIntyre appears to stipulate. I will briefly offer an historical account of the events and processes through which Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and its respective social structure came under pressure. This history is in part a social history, and in part an intellectual history. Let us refer to this combined account as *the story of science*.

The period which forms the bridge that connects the 13th century social context of Aquinas to the early modern period spans four very eventful centuries (14th-17th) in European history. During this period, a number of social upheavals fundamentally transformed the social structure of much of Western Europe. Massive population decline primarily due to the spread of the bubonic plague generated large-scale demographic changes in Europe. These events were followed by a series of long-running European wars that entangled France and England, systemic famine owing to colder temperatures, i.e., the little ice-age, as well as a drastic decline in the number of peasants working the field on account of the substantial decline in Europe’s population. The famine and population decline generated a number of peasant revolts in the late 14th century and placed the entire feudal social structure under strain. The invention of printing technology made available printed books and pamphlets to a much larger population which had previously been the domain of clergy and the aristocratic elite.[[166]](#footnote-166) This, together with the slow decline of the Byzantine Empire under increasing pressure initially from the Seljuk Empire, and later, their ultimate defeat at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, precipitated a mass exodus of people and intellectual ideas – especially Platonic ideas – to Western Europe. While the major works of Aristotle had been introduced to Europe much earlier, starting in the middle of the 12th century, the introduction of Platonic texts in the 15th century, together with the gradual social and economic recovery Europe experienced from the various social upheavals that plagued much of the continent in the late 14th and early 15th century, generated a new post-medieval intellectual curiosity for Greek antiquity – especially Plato – that reached its climax in the Renaissance.

By the early 16th century, feudalism – the prevailing social-cum-political structure that defined European societies in much of Western Europe from the 8th to as late as the 15th century – was in steady retreat in favor of a new set of social, political, and economic relationships. The surge in intellectual interest in Platonic ideas – especially Plato’s emphasis on mathematics and its potential for the study of the natural world – would ultimately gain favor over Aristotelian ideas prevalent in the medieval period. Concurrent with the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and the resulting schism eventually ushered in great religious and political upheavals that ultimately were a major factor in precipitating a new bloody and lengthy European war spanning the late 16th century and the first half of the 17th century.

These events, taken together, gradually marginalized the power of the church and marshaled the beginnings of what in hindsight turned out to be a systematic move to a more secular world-view. In addition, they hastened the growth of more abstract and mathematical modes of inquiry – owing to some early successes in the late 16th and early 17th century – and precipitated the gradual decline of Scholastic and Aristotelian concepts, specifically Aristotle’s metaphysics and teleology.

MacIntyre’s historical narrative in *After Virtue* primarily focuses on the Enlightenment period, and the intellectual background immediately preceding the gradual decline of Aristotelian teleology in the latter part of the 17th century. I would like to suggest that MacIntyre perhaps overlooks the important social, political, and intellectual background that spanned the 14th to the 17th century, and in so doing neglects an important implication of the historical narrative he outlines in both *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice* – an implication I explicitly outlined in hypothesis (H3) and (H4): namely, that massive disruption of the social context can precipitate the decline of moral traditions.[[167]](#footnote-167)

Thus, the lesson that I would like to add to MacIntyre’s historical narrative in *After Virtue* is that the set of social transformations that extended from the High Middle Ages to the Renaissance paved the way for new forms of rational inquiry that ultimately leaves behind Aristotle’s metaphysics.[[168]](#footnote-168) This claim is in effect the upshot or implication of the hypothesis (H3a) I outlined in the previous chapter.

Now, given the early successes of inquiry into the natural world, it seems conceivable then that different thinkers, pursuing diverse forms of inquiry, came to believe that the application of abstract concepts *sans* *teleology*, could fashion new and interesting ways of advancing inquiry in other areas. And granting the early successes of formulating theories that corroborated observation of the natural world, the new abstract approach then engenders a revised conception of reasoning that appears to be not only promising, but also more profitable than scholastic philosophy (with its focus on teleologically-laden ratiocination and dialectical arguments). In this context, it seems only reasonable that the pursuit of a form of rational inquiry – or more precisely, an abstract non-teleological mechanistic methodology – was naturally extended to other areas, including social and moral inquiry.

Therefore, the changes in the methodology of science and intellectual inquiry, as well as other historical social-cum-political events, hastens a general shift in social attitudes in regards to what was accepted as the pursuit of the good. Under Aquinas, the conception of ‘the Good’ and the highest good or *summum bonum*, is held to be union with God. However, the changes that accompanied the historical transition identified in the above, transformed the earlier Thomistic notions of what precisely the pursuit of ‘the Good’ entails. Consequently, save for Aquinas’ account of Natural Law which emerged from the Christian tradition and not Aristotle’s account, Aristotle’s metaphysics and its concomitant teleology are no longer held to be viable, in part because they seemed to stifle the development of inquiry in other areas, notably in science. So for example Bacon,[[169]](#footnote-169) Descartes,[[170]](#footnote-170) and Spinoza[[171]](#footnote-171) all come to reject Aristotle’s teleology (final cause) as a form of explanation appropriate to the natural world.[[172]](#footnote-172) However, it is plausible to hold that because the distinction between philosophical inquiry and scientific inquiry had not taken a distinct form at that juncture, Aristotle’s teleology gradually comes to be viewed as altogether archaic for all forms of inquiry.[[173]](#footnote-173)

What is both significant and relevant to our discussion here is that as far as I can tell, MacIntyre’s work, famous for its emphasis on narrative social history, nonetheless mentions little concerning the effects of the above succession of events on the Western European social order, and the particular intellectual history that dislodged Aristotelian philosophy. Nevertheless, I should emphasize that the above historical reconstruction offers us precisely the same sort of historical argument that MacIntyre offers in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice*. Recall that MacIntyre’s H3 identifies the social transformations which rendered Homer’s ethics problematic and later in H4, a different set of transformations rendered Aristotle’s ethics deficient in important respects. We should then ask: why doesn’t the displacement of Aristotelian-Thomism by socio-historical forces – which precipitated the developments in our scientific understanding of the world and simultaneously problematized the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition – disqualify it as a tradition of moral inquiry appropriate for the modern world? My central claim here is that the transition from Aquinas’ scholasticism into modernity involved a transformation of ideas, society, and culture in Western Europe – a transformation that dislodges the contingent socio-historical features pertinent to a Thomistic mode of inquiry. Now, in virtue of acknowledging MacIntyre’s commitments, should we not then view Aquinas’ work as a response to a particular set of social-moral-intellectual circumstances that emerged in his world?

I would like to maintain that if we accept MacIntyre’s claim that social norms are not constituted outside contingent social practices of particular historical communities,[[174]](#footnote-174) it is not clear we can revive the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. For it appears that the Thomistic tradition was constituted not only in relation to the particular social practices of the historical community to which Aquinas belonged, but it was formulated to deal with a set of social and moral problems born out of the particular set of circumstances that surrounded the medieval feudal community of Aquinas. Recall that MacIntyre argues in *Whose Justice* that the marginalization of the polis rendered the Aristotelian tradition problematic precisely because Aristotle’s account did not possess the resources to make sense of life outside the polis. On this view, the age of empire – the Roman Empire being the paradigmatic case – marginalized the polis. Consequently, new problems emerged when the Stoics and others tried to make sense of questions such as: how human flourishing can be advanced and various goods organised through a stable cohesive social institution, i.e., the polis, when there is no longer a polis to speak of (in the sense that that institution continues to play a principal role in organizing the range of societal goods)? Here, the Aristotelian tradition wasn’t necessarily defeated through extended dialectical inquiry, but simply because a number of historical transformations in material conditions ushered in the empire – or more precisely, the social structure and institutional arrangements associated with it – which ultimately undermined the importance of the polis as the institutional context that could continue to order human goods.

It appears that by granting the above, it may be safe to assume that the range of social problems that are generated in our contemporary context, are then very different from the problems which Aquinas faced while developing an ethics suitable for, and capable of, resolving the problems that emerged in his feudal society. Therefore, if we accept the above claims – claims which are implied by MacIntyre’s hypothesis (H3) and (H4) discussed in Chapter One – our contemporary social context renders Thomism, at least in an important sense, incommensurable with our modern social form and its associated structures.

However, the reader might wonder whether I could have considered MacIntyre’s account more charitably, and that he will most likely have a reply to what I referred to as ‘the story of science.’ I will grant that this is most likely the case. Here MacIntyre could accept the broad outlines of the story of science, but still counter that my rehashing of that history is somewhat crude and lacks some important details. MacIntyre will likely accept that a number of socio-historical contingencies prompted the intellectual, social, and historical, transformations which I have outlined; and that taken together they rendered different aspects of the Aristotelian tradition problematic. Yet, MacIntyre could reasonably argue that our intellectual predecessors, rather hastily and perhaps prematurely, excluded important and credible components of the Aristotelian-Thomistic account, at least with respect to their plausibility and efficacy in moral inquiry. MacIntyre could then argue for reviving some version of teleology. We can view MacIntyre’s efforts in *After Virtue* as aiming at a weaker conception of teleology, but later in *Whose Justice*, MacIntyre hankers after a stronger version of teleology.[[175]](#footnote-175)

In addition, MacIntyre could also suggest that while I have offered a plausible general story – ‘the story of science’ – for the decline of the Aristotelian position, there is a more detailed story which can show that at least when it comes to ethics, the teleological resources in Aristotelian Thomism were contingently discarded due to a number of intellectual mistakes; and that in the absence of these mistakes, our intellectual history could have unfolded differently, and in ways which could have perhaps left those (important) teleological resources intact. He could suggest that were it not for these intellectual mistakes, our predecessors could have safeguarded elements of Aristotelian teleology for use in ethics; and that by bracketing some of the excesses of Aristotle’s metaphysics as it relates to science, some of those teleological resources could have been preserved for use in ethics.

MacIntyre considers the emergence of the ‘fact/value’ distinction as a pivotal development by Enlightenment thinkers – a development that not only further accelerated the erosion of the functional (or teleological) view of human nature, but undermined the significance of value considerations in philosophical inquiry.[[176]](#footnote-176) For MacIntyre, once a realist account of values ceased to be credible, philosophers ultimately accepted a conception of values in which values no longer possess the requisite substantive force in practical deliberations. Nonetheless, in the previous chapter, we observed that on Aristotle’s functional account of human nature, Hume’s distinction between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ does not necessarily hold. This is because for Aristotle we can derive ‘ought’ conclusion from ‘is’ premises since it is not obvious that we can always separate the question ‘what is it for a person to flourish and realize her potential as a human being?’ from the question ‘what action ought she consider to advance that potential?’

Therefore, MacIntyre is cognizant of the fact that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition has been displaced in the run up to the modern era, and accepts that the functional (teleological) account of human nature and the place of values in practical rationality were marginalized in the process. Yet, it is still possible for him to argue that once the mistakes of our intellectual predecessors are brought to light, we can recover important insights contained in these Aristotelian-Thomistic concepts. Thus, MacIntyre can try to develop a *via media* where some form of teleology could be preserved. On this view, he can broadly accept ‘the story of science,’ but argue that in the domain of ethics it was possible to safeguard some essential teleological insights of that tradition.

So does MacIntyre take this challenge seriously for the sake of advancing a justification for a revival of Aristotelian-Thomistic teleology? I would like to argue that he does in fact view this as a problem. MacIntyre in *After Virtue* states that the loss of Aristotle’s teleology is the reason for our current predicament, where ethical debates under liberal conditions are viewed, at least in principle, as interminable. However, in *After Virtue*, he doesn’t think we can recover Aristotle’s metaphysical biology which underpins Aristotle’s teleology; and so he offers a more modern three-fold social teleology. Thus it seems plausible to suggest that this effort in *After Virtue* is for the sake of capturing some form of teleology. I also argued earlier that owing to the kinds of paradigmatic challenges posed by Bernstein and Schneewind to his account in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre’s later work can be fruitfully read as him having taken up this challenge: namely, as an attempt to defend and revive the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and especially its teleology, and hence deflect the kinds of paradigmatic criticisms, raised against his account by Bernstein and Schneewind. Thus, MacIntyre’s later efforts can be read as an attempt by him at reviving a more substantive account of the good, teleology, and human nature available in the tradition of Aristotelian-Thomism. So does MacIntyre himself engage in this recovery?

I would like to suggest that he does, and I argued in the previous chapter that he begins this work in *Whose Justice*, but later, he expands on it in his Aquinas Lecture. Recall that in *Whose Justice*, MacIntyre expands on the historical account of traditions, where traditions are seen to be succeeding each other; each succeeding tradition must defend its various claims dialectically against earlier traditions. During the course of this book MacIntyre then defends Aristotelian-Thomism and argues that it is the best tradition thus far. MacIntyre argued that not only was Aquinas able to imaginatively capture important insights from both the Aristotelian and the Christian tradition (in the form of Augustine), and thereby advance an ethics that was an improvement over both earlier traditions, but he also suggests that the Thomistic tradition hasn’t been refuted dialectically by any of those later traditions; and this is the correct model for evaluating the claims of later traditions, against earlier iterations.

Therefore, at first blush, we might suppose that we ought to defend Thomistic ethics by employing dialectical reasoning. We might then be puzzled when MacIntyre in his Aquinas Lecture MacIntyre states that

“We are debarred, that is to say, from following Aristotle and Aquinas in employing any of those dialectical strategies which rely upon some appeal to what all the contending parties in a dispute have not yet put in question. How then are we to proceed? It is at this point that we have to resort to unThomistic means, in order to achieve Thomistic ends. What means are these?”[[177]](#footnote-177)

MacIntyre goes on to say:

“The provision of such a theory requires the construction of something akin to what Nietzsche called genealogy. The genealogical narrative has the function of not arguing with, but of disclosing something about the beliefs, presuppositions and activities of some class of persons. Characteristically it explains how they have come to be in some impasse and why they cannot recognize or diagnose adequately out of their own conceptual and argumentative resources the nature of their predicament. It provides a subversive history.”[[178]](#footnote-178)

But, given MacIntyre’s fondness for historically informed forms of arguments, we shouldn’t express too much surprise when MacIntyre offers up Nietzschean genealogy as a method to defend Aristotelian-Thomism, and reveal how Aristotelian-Thomism, and specifically the functional account of human nature and the teleological conception of human ends, were displaced by the forces of social and intellectual history.

“What I am going to suggest is that the predicaments of contemporary philosophy, whether analytic or deconstructive, are best understood as arising as a long-term consequence of the *rejection of Aristotelian and Thomistic teleology at the threshold of the modern world* [emphasis mine].”[[179]](#footnote-179) And “that certain strands in the history of philosophy are best to be understood as consequences of the rejection of any Aristotelian and Thomistic conceptions of enquiry.”[[180]](#footnote-180)

It then seems plausible that MacIntyre wants to demonstrate that the fragmentation in moral philosophy – which on MacIntyre’s view, is something that ethical debates suffer from in our contemporary context – owes its genesis to the rejection of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition in the early modern period.[[181]](#footnote-181) Thus MacIntyre’s main line of argument in the last section of his Aquinas Lecture can be broadly construed as defending a version of the Aristotelian-Thomist metaphysics, but he also wants to make the case that the teleological insights of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition are very much essential to advancing a coherent ethics that can get us out of the quagmire of interminability and fragmentation in moral debates.[[182]](#footnote-182)

Perhaps then there is a way that we can defend the value of Thomism as the best tradition by elucidating the ways in which *that tradition* was marginalized, and demonstrating that the source of its misguided rejection originates in a series of avoidable mistakes on the part of our intellectual predecessors. In accomplishing this task, MacIntyre can then revive the important teleological insights contained in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, and appropriate them for use in our moral discourse, with an eye towards advancing a more coherent structure for moral debates.

I am suggesting here that MacIntyre is set on utilising genealogy (or historical reconstruction) as a methodology that can unearth the historical decline of Thomism as involving a series of errors; and that, by conceiving those errors in the proper light we can perhaps set the stage for retrieving important insights from the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. In this sense, by uncovering presuppositions hitherto granted, genealogy can problematize important (and hidden) aspects of this decline that have thus far been accepted without serious questioning. Thus, if we are to engage in an immanent critical appraisal of MacIntyre’s account we need to see whether his genealogy (or historical form of argument) can aid us in showing the historical mistakes precipitated the marginalization of Aristotelian-Thomist ethics, and in doing this, help recover the teleological (or functional) insights in that tradition. Thus, the decline of teleology and the rise of the ‘fact/value’ distinction are central elements to the historical narrative MacIntyre develops in *After Virtue*. But while in *After Virtue* MacIntyre is seemingly rejecting Aristotle’s metaphysical biology[[183]](#footnote-183) and more or less believes that we cannot recover the underpinnings of that teleology, in his later work starting with *Whose Justice*, he wants to recover the teleological insights of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. Now, if MacIntyre can recapture the (teleological) insights contained in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, it might afford him the resources he needs to resolve the tension that is the focus of this chapter, by showing how the displacement of the Aristotelian tradition by modern ethics was in fact a false step; and in doing so he can help realize a revival of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition.

In the next section, I will therefore assess what I take to be MacIntyre's attempt at offering a genealogy that lays bare the historical mechanism through which the historical stage was set for the dislodging of Aristotelian-Thomist ethics and its corresponding teleology, which originates in a number of mistakes by Renaissance adherents of that tradition. But before we begin considering this genealogy, I will briefly outline how I plan to advance the argument in the remainder of this chapter.

I will start by considering what I take to be an historical (or genealogical) account that MacIntyre offers in ‘Rival Aristotles: Aristotle Against Some Renaissance Aristotelians,’ where he discusses the transition from Aristotelian ethics proper, to the Renaissance Aristotelian reconsideration of the same ethics.[[184]](#footnote-184) In this paper MacIntyre outlines the following view: Renaissance Aristotelians had already diverged considerably from Aristotle’s conception of ethics, in ways that undermined the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, and made the transition to the modern point of view all but inevitable. On the account that MacIntyre presents, moral education for Renaissance Aristotelians focuses primarily on theory; yet for Aristotle, an adequate education in ethics primarily emphasizes correct moral habituation through the practice of the virtues, learned by emulating those who already possess the requisite knowledge of the virtues. The implication of the argument that MacIntyre is advancing here is that the departure of Renaissance Aristotelians from Aristotle’s own approach paved the way for the eventual demise of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition.

However, I will nonetheless suggest that it remains unlikely that MacIntyre can trace all the mistakes that contributed to the marginalization of the Aristotelian tradition back to Renaissance Aristotelians. I will argue that MacIntyre’s genealogy isn’t entirely convincing, for it appears that in other places in his work,[[185]](#footnote-185) MacIntyre presents a set of claims that potentially undermines the arguments he raises against Renaissance Aristotelians in support of his genealogy. What are these different claims? In the paper ‘Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas, MacIntyre’s describes Aquinas’ Natural Law account as a consequence of Aquinas’ synthesis of insights gathered from Aristotle and Augustine. Yet Aquinas’ explanation of natural law and natural reason, so it seems, gravitates towards a more modern conception of reason and law – one that is in an important sense un-Aristotelian. I will then suggest that in addition to those Renaissance Aristotelians, who on MacIntyre’s account share the blame for ultimately undermining Aristotelian ethics, *Aquinas himself had likewise pulled away from important constitutive aspects of Aristotle’s ethics*. Consequently, it is difficult to see why the former should be held responsible for misdirecting the Aristotelian tradition, unless we also accept that Aquinas is similarly blame-worthy for deviating from Aristotle. However, if this is acknowledged, the results of MacIntyre’s genealogy are at best mixed, and on my view, this account doesn’t ultimately advance the goals it sets out to accomplish.

I will therefore suggest that while MacIntyre’s genealogy sets out to offer an account of why the Thomistic tradition was marginalized, it isn’t terribly convincing. For example, if the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition was in good order perhaps it wouldn’t have been corrupted by later Aristotelians; or perhaps because it was not able to deal with practical problems that emerged in the Renaissance, various attempts were made to modify the tradition, so that on the one hand it could be preserved, while on the other, it could be improved so as to become capable of addressing the new set of problems raised by the transition to the Renaissance. Another problem for MacIntyre is ‘the story of science’ which I outlined earlier, in virtue of the fact that it accentuates the difficulties of preserving the metaphysics in the Thomistic tradition, since its entire framework came to be viewed as problematic. And because the framework of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition in ethics rested on important concepts that originated in Aristotle’s metaphysics and teleology, it is plausible to assume that the Aristotelian-Thomist ethics as a whole became philosophically problematic, primarily for this reason rather than those identified by MacIntyre.

Therefore, I will suggest that the MacIntyre’s genealogy for the decline of Thomism is inadequate, because it is not able to resolve the first tension or difficulty which I alluded to earlier: namely, MacIntyre has to explain *why Thomism has been displaced in the historical narrative account of tradition-guided moral inquiry*? Finally, I will argue that the genealogical account MacIntyre provides in ‘Rival Aristotle’s: Aristotle Against Some Renaissance Aristotelians,’ while it advances a possible answer as to why the Aristotelian-Thomistic account and especially its teleology was marginalized, nonetheless suffers from the fact that in other places,[[186]](#footnote-186) MacIntyre’s account appears to offer potential counter-examples that undermine the sort of arguments he offers in his genealogy, for it appears that Aquinas himself had conceptually distanced his account from an orthodox Aristotelian conception of ethics.

I will then argue that the conceptual positions that are taken up by Renaissance Aristotelians are not dramatically different in form from those taken up earlier by Aquinas; and that they can be viewed as a natural progression from the account offered by Aquinas. The upshot of this claim is that it potentially undermines the purpose of MacIntyre’s genealogy. While it is still the case that MacIntyre’s genealogy offers us a possible descriptive account for the marginalization of Aristotelian-Thomism, and especially, the functional/teleological view of human nature, it fails to provide us with the sort of explanation that could potentially challenge the Humean premises from which the distinction between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, and ‘fact’ and ‘value’, emerged.[[187]](#footnote-187) And since MacIntyre’s goal is the revival of teleological (or functional) forms of explanation with respect to human nature and the human good, the failure of his genealogy to effectively challenge Hume’s premises which underwrite the ‘fact/value’ and the ‘science/ethics’ distinctions, limits the possibilities that his account can successfully defend that sort of view.[[188]](#footnote-188)

I now turn to the consideration of MacIntyre’s account in ‘Rival Aristotle’s: Aristotle Against Some Renaissance Aristotelians,’ a paper which I take to be a brief historical (or genealogical) account for the decline of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. Here, I will consider MacIntyre’s argument to see whether MacIntyre succeeds in offering a compelling argument for the mistaken (or wrongful) marginalisation of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. A persuasive explanation by MacIntyre could potentially present us with a resolution of the first difficulty (or tension) generated under his account.

## 4. Aristotle and Renaissance Aristotelian

In an important paper “Rival Aristotles,” MacIntyre elaborates Aristotle’s views on the practice of the virtues by stating that

“Aristotle argues that arguments by themselves are insufficient to make human beings good….so practical habituation in the exercise of the virtues has to precede education in moral theory. But it is not just that such habituation is required for those who are able to understand and be responsive to argument. It is also that only those who have undergone such habituation will be in a position to theorize well about issues of practice.”[[189]](#footnote-189)

Here, MacIntyre is drawing attention to a chief aspect of Aristotle’s account which emphasizes the role of practice and habituation as a prerequisite for a satisfactory moral education. On this view, we learn proper habits and familiarize ourselves with the virtues through actively practicing and exercising relevant actions that count as virtuous. This will initially involve emulating and learning from those who are already well-versed in the virtues and who more or less possess the requisite knowledge to act virtuously. Hence, for Aristotle, practicing virtuous actions, forming correct habits, and thus becoming accustomed to correctly exercising the virtues, precedes theorizing in moral philosophy.

The implication of the above argument – that effective theorizing can only occur after we have adequately learned the proper habits that allow us act virtuously – can be described using the contrast between ‘knowledge how’ and ‘knowledge that.’ By utilising this distinction, we can state that in order for an individual to develop into a virtuous person, she must first come to grasp ‘knowledge how.’ Only after emulating educated teachers and practicing the actions that count as virtuous, can we begin to inquire theoretically into the virtues, and hence acquire ‘knowledge that.’ Thus, we need to first possess an adequate understanding of ‘knowledge how’ before we can make correct theoretical judgments and arguments with respect to ‘knowledge that.’

MacIntyre then engages with Francesco Piccolomini, whom I believe MacIntyre is presenting as a paradigmatic example of a Renaissance Aristotelian. On MacIntyre’s view, Piccolomini and other Renaissance Aristotelians assign higher value to theorizing in ethics and teaching of moral philosophy, than to the practice of the virtues. They therefore depart from Aristotle in seeing moral theory and philosophy as more important than practice and habituation into the virtues. For example, Piccolomini views moral philosophy taught in the university – what he identifies as education in civil science – as an important part of cultivating the virtues and states that “The virtues are to be understood by and inculcated through the teaching of the exponent of civil science.”[[190]](#footnote-190) Piccolomini makes the case to the Venetian senate for teaching moral philosophy to the young in his discussion on the nature of *paideia* comprised of both theoretical and practical instructions in moral philosophy to the young.[[191]](#footnote-191) And such an understanding of the place of moral philosophy isn’t necessarily unique to Piccolomini, as Giovita Ravizza, a contemporary of Piccolomini, similarly held that moral improvement of young pupils was the primary aim of a moral education, and that teaching moral philosophy to young adolescence should be encouraged.[[192]](#footnote-192) Piccolomini characterizes *phronēsis* ([φρόνησῐς](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CF%86%CF%81%CF%8C%CE%BD%CE%B7%CF%83%CE%B9%CF%82" \o "wikt:φρόνησις))[[193]](#footnote-193) as the prime virtue and emphasizes its important role in educating the young in moral theorizing. And in his address to the Venetian senate, Piccolomini argues that in order to secure the success of the republic – in this case Venice – educating the young into the virtue of prudence is essential to ensure that the republic has rulers who are virtuous.[[194]](#footnote-194)

MacIntyre then asks: what definition of prudence does Piccolomini argue for? MacIntyre explains that for Piccolomini, *phronēsis* allows for the correct application of theoretical knowledge in relation to exercising the right action in a variety of situations. However, recall that Aristotle account of *phronēsis* differs given that it does not necessarily involve the application of theoretical knowledge. On Aristotle’s account, to be a virtuous individual one requires the type of training that involves the practice of correct habits and actions in particular situations, in order that one may cultivate the virtues. So a moral teacher by the example of her actions in this or that particular circumstance provides the standard of virtuous action to her students:

“We learn how to act virtuously, while engaging in and learning how to act well in the activities of everyday social life. So we learn how to act courageously, for example, as part of learning how to live the military life – although not only military life – and we learn how to act generously as part of learning how to manage or to share in managing the income and expenditures of the household.”[[195]](#footnote-195)

MacIntyre considers the above accounts in order to draw our attention to the contrast between Aristotle and Piccolomini. MacIntyre argues that Piccolomini’s Aristotelian ethics was a radical departure from Aristotle. Why? Because Aristotle believed that it would be a mistake to educate the young in moral philosophy and moral theorizing, for the young have not had the chance to adequately practice virtuous actions and therefore they lack the necessary degree of habituation. As I noted earlier, Aristotle believes that one cannot be habituated into the virtues by an education in moral philosophy; rather sufficient practice of the virtues is a prerequisite for learning and theorizing in moral philosophy. So in this sense both Piccolomini and Ravizza were closer to the modern point of view, than they were to Aristotle’s; and to this extent they had moved away from the sort of view held by Aristotle. This is MacIntyre’s central claim.

MacIntyre then draws our attention to a second related argument: while for Aristotle, philosophy’s task is to understand the relationship between actions and the practical reasons of the individual in particular circumstances, Piccolomini sees philosophy itself as performing the type of education which permits the formation of the virtues.[[196]](#footnote-196) On Aristotle’s account, the task of philosophy is to understand how appropriate instruction and legislation can promote the cultivation of the virtues, whilst for Piccolomini, moral philosophy directly educates us into the virtues by allowing individuals to apply theoretical reasoning to adjudicate between right and wrong actions in different practical situations.[[197]](#footnote-197) Here we should emphasize a point that I made earlier: that on Aristotle’s view, only persons who already possess the necessary virtues can engage in moral reasoning and philosophy; and the only way to acquire the virtues is through emulating the practices and habits of educated elders.

Thus, in the account offered by Piccolomini, theoretical education in moral philosophy helps foster virtuous persons; while for Aristotle, virtues are instilled through a kind of practical moral education that primarily focuses on emulation of correct practices, and habits, as opposed to reasoning about right and wrong actions. It is in this sense that under Piccolomini’s account, moral education develops into a *theoretical* endeavour, whereas in Aristotle’s account education into the virtues remains a much more *practical* activity. MacIntyre then points to other Renaissance Aristotelians to show that the views held by Piccolomini were not in any way unique to him;[[198]](#footnote-198) and subsequently, MacIntyre suggests that something similar to Piccolomini’s view is present in other Renaissance Aristotelians like Leonardo Bruni, and John Case.[[199]](#footnote-199)

A third argument that MacIntyre presents in this paper stresses the important role of the virtue of *phronēsis* in Aristotle’s account of the virtues. MacIntyre here argues that for Aristotle, *phronēsis* as a virtue is the ability to make correct judgments in acting virtuously in a variety of different social context. That is, *phronēsis* can be viewed as a second-order virtue that enables the person to know how to apply a variety of first-order virtues to particular situations. What is also significant for MacIntyre’s argument is that Aristotle’s *phronēsis*, often translated to English as ‘prudence,’ should not be confused with the modern definition of prudence as prudent action or behavior. MacIntyre goes on to argue that the virtue of *phronēsis* for many Renaissance Aristotelians, such as Piccolomini in places like Venice, was likely to be very different from Aristotle’s conception of *phronēsis*.

In order to support this argument, MacIntyre states that while Piccolomini placed together course syllabuses for lectures delivered to students at the University of Padua, he himself never delivered any such lectures.[[200]](#footnote-200) Rather he dedicates his lectures to the Venetian senate. More importantly, with respect to the discussion of prudence (*phronēsis*) he uses as his example current and past member of the Senate.[[201]](#footnote-201) Therefore, MacIntyre appears to be suggesting that for Piccolomini, prudence – the virtue of *phronēsis* – in the context of Venetian life was more likely to be understood as discretion, pragmatism and expedience – concepts that are closely allied with the modern concept of self-interest, expediency, and effectiveness. Nevertheless this definition of *phronēsis* – as prudence – was very much at odds with Aristotle’s conception of *phronēsis*.

The fourth and last point that MacIntyre makes is that Aristotelians like Piccolomini unintentionally helped discredit Aristotle’s ethics, by framing the Italian city-states in terms that view those cities as analogous to, and continuous with, the Aristotelian *polis*. Piccolomini’s writings treat the senators of Venice as models of virtue, and especially the virtue of prudence. Nonetheless, the senators of Venice did not necessarily possess the type of philosophical education that Piccolomini supports. In fact, Venetian senators and magistrates were more likely to be part of the powerful families of the city, who vied for power and influence in the city, and were thus likely educated by their distinctive upbringing as members of the Venetian elite. On MacIntyre’s view, it is because Venice was a commercial oligarchy, and thus very different from the Aristotelian *polis*, that Piccolomini’s attempt to connect the Aristotelian polis to the Venetian city-state in fact fails. Thus, Piccolomini’s Venice was inherently incompatible with the sort of ethics that Aristotle formulates as part of his account of the *polis*.

Moreover, in Venice, acquisitiveness and the clever application of prudence, seen as cool self-interest, were highly valued in particular. Hence the discrepancy between Aristotle’s concept of *phronēsis* and the type of prudence seen in Venice is rather obvious, in part because the Venetian definition of prudence is much more modern in its character. Piccolomini’s account incorrectly translates Aristotle’s *phronēsis* into a term that is entirely different – namely, self-interest. On MacIntyre’s view, the disconnect between the Aristotelian polis and the Venetian city-state, and *phronēsis* as defined by Aristotle and prudence as it was understood by Renaissance Venetians like Piccolomini, created further conditions for the eventual failure of Aristotelian ethics. An important conclusion that MacIntyre draws from the above is that it wasn’t so much Aristotle’s ethics and teleology which experienced defeat; rather it was an inadequate facsimile of Aristotle’s ethics – developed by Piccolomini and other Renaissance Aristotelians – that suffered this defeat.

“Renaissance Aristotelianism in morals and politics was defeated by its own pretensions rather than by the arguments of its rivals or by an inhospitable cultural climate…[and] those characteristics of Renaissance Aristotelianism in moral and politics that ensures this defeat were precisely those in which it differed from and had misinterpreted Aristotle. It was not after all Aristotle who was rejected in the moral and political debates of the Renaissance, but rather a simulacrum of Aristotle.”[[202]](#footnote-202)

Before we move on, I will give a brief summary of what we have so far covered in this section. First, MacIntyre highlights that ethical practice – namely, learning how to act virtuously through emulating teachers who are well-versed in the virtues and subsequently practicing those actions, is an activity that precedes theorizing about ethics; thus, ‘knowledge how’ is prior to ‘knowledge that.’

Second, Piccolomini’s identification of the task of moral philosophy, and the theorizing involved therein, in educating the students of philosophy in the virtues, stands in contrast to Aristotle’s ethics. Recall that Aristotle’s ethics emphasizes habituation, and the practice of the virtues through emulation is the means by which persons become virtuous. On the other hand, Piccolomini and other Renaissance thinkers seem to have more in common with a modern conception of the role philosophy plays in moral education.

Third, the concept of *phronēsis* in Piccolomini’s Venice was very different from the way in which Aristotle understood this term. For MacIntyre, the disconnect between *phronēsis* as understood by Aristotle and the Renaissance understanding of that term, at least in part, helped secure the eventual defeat of (Renaissance) Aristotelian moral philosophy. Thus, the incommensurability in meaning between *phronēsis* and *prudence* as understood in the Renaissance was a further point of separation between Aristotle and Renaissance Aristotelians.

The fourth and final point is that Renaissance Aristotelianism was defeated by its own inadequacies; and the same characteristic inadequacies attributed to Renaissance Aristotelianism, of which Piccolomini’s work stands as a paradigmatic example, were generated precisely because Piccolomini diverges from Aristotle’s account of moral education.[[203]](#footnote-203) Thus, on MacIntyre’s historical argument, Piccolomini and other Renaissance Aristotelians, in revising elements of Aristotle’s ethics, inadvertently facilitated the eventual marginalization of Aristotle’s teleological/functional views in ethics that remained concerned with the ordering of practical ends. Nevertheless, MacIntyre is at the same time arguing that what was ultimately defeated was not Aristotle himself, but flawed revisionist accounts of Aristotle’s ethics developed by Renaissance Aristotelians (such as Piccolomini).

The above is what I take to be an attempt by MacIntyre at a genealogy of the sort he called for in his 1990 Aquinas Lecture, ‘First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues.’ However, before we can safely accept MacIntyre’s thesis – that Piccolomini and other Renaissance Aristotelians had already moved away from Aristotle in a way that undermined Aristotle’s ethics, or at least, a vulgar form of that ethics – it is worth contrasting it with an account of Aquinas that MacIntyre provides in “Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas.” This will be the primary task of the next section.

## 5. Aquinas’ Natural Law and Renaissance Aristotelians

At this point I will turn to considering MacIntyre’s discussion of Aquinas’ natural law.[[204]](#footnote-204) There are at least two good reasons for considering the arguments that MacIntyre presents here.

First, MacIntyre claims that the Thomistic tradition, and specifically Aquinas’ natural law, was born out of Aquinas’ successful synthesis of two older traditions[[205]](#footnote-205) – Aristotle’s ethics and Augustine’s divine command theory. For MacIntyre, this claim serves a secondary purpose, as it illustrates the way in which a new tradition is able to synthesize the insights available in earlier traditions, and owing to this advance, they are then able to answer social and moral problems that have emerged under new material conditions. However, by considering Aquinas’ natural law in the context of the sort of Aristotelian ethics and moral education which MacIntyre approves of, I intend to argue that a crucial point of contrast emerges between Aristotle and Aquinas. I will then argue that there are some important difficulties in reconciling Aquinas’ natural law with that of Aristotle’s ethics; and these complications owe their genesis to a number of fundamental and hard to reconcile differences between Christian morality[[206]](#footnote-206) and Aristotelian ethics. The upshot of this conclusion is that it is inconsistent with a central thesis in MacIntyre’s account in *Whose Justice*, in which he claims that Aquinas successfully synthesized the insights of the Aristotelian and Augustinian morality.

Second, I will try to highlight some of the claims revealed in our consideration of MacIntyre’s account of Aquinas’ natural law with respect to moral knowledge and education. I will then reveal some interesting parallels between Aquinas and Renaissance Aristotelians such as Piccolomini. I will argue that it is reasonable to conclude that Aquinas’ natural law may have, inadvertently, set the stage for a more theoretical form of moral education – the sort of moral education which MacIntyre condemns in his discussion of Piccolomini. And while the particular way in which Aquinas’ natural law ethics diverges from Aristotle’s ethics – and hence becomes less recognizably Aristotelian – is certainly different from Piccolomini’s reinterpretation of Aristotle’s ethics, there are important parallels between the two views. I will suggest that Aquinas’ account of natural law and its conception of moral education, especially the means by which we acquire moral education and grasp the knowledge of primary moral precepts, pulls away from Aristotle in important respects. Consequently, it is not clear why we should condemn Piccolomini for the eventual demise of Aristotelian ethics, yet hold Aquinas blameless.

But before we can fruitfully engage with these questions I will briefly state some of the important claims MacIntyre offers in ‘Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas.’ MacIntyre suggests that for Aquinas, human law is constituted and governed by the exercise of natural reason; nonetheless, human law can only be correctly described as just, insofar as it does not find itself in conflict with the claims posited by natural law. Hence, “Every law laid down by a human being has the nature of law only insofar as it is derived from the law of nature.”[[207]](#footnote-207) Furthermore, MacIntyre restates some of the most important claims in Thomism – namely that with respect to the fundamental (or common) principles of natural law every rational being, and not only those who possess sufficient moral education possess that knowledge.[[208]](#footnote-208) MacIntyre thus summarizes Aquinas in the following way:

“The exceptionless precepts of the natural law are those which, insofar as we are rational, we recognize as indispensable in every society and in every situation for the achievement of our goods and of our final good…Those human beings who do happen to become rulers therefore have no special capacity, which differentiates them from plain persons, whose capacity for prudence and whose knowledge of natural law is theirs in virtue of their human nature.”[[209]](#footnote-209)

We may now ask: who can know what natural law is? The answer is

“The knowledge that enables us to do this is possessed by any person capable of adequate reasoning and, so far as the common principles of natural law are concerned, by every rational being.”[[210]](#footnote-210)

The above account is relevant because it states the major claim that forms the basis of Aquinas’ natural law. Yet, this account, perhaps unintentionally, uncovers some important discrepancies between Aquinas and Aristotle, for it appears to take a step in universalizing moral law, and makes fundamental moral reasoning available to any human being whatsoever. Hence, simply, in virtue of being human we are rational, and as such, possess the knowledge of the primary principles of natural law which enable us to realize our good as human beings.

In the rest of this section, I will consider the two problems which are raised when we consider Aquinas’ account of natural law in the broader context of MacIntyre’s discussion of Piccolomini. These questions are important because I believe they ultimately undermine MacIntyre’s historical argument (discussed in the previous section) for the eventual decline of Aristotelian ethics.

I will now point out some interesting differences between on the one hand, Aquinas’ natural law ethics, and on the other Aristotle’s, in order to ultimately challenge MacIntyre’s criticism of Piccolomini in his genealogical argument which he posits for the decline of Aristotelian ethics and politics. I suggested earlier that Thomistic natural law universalizes moral knowledge, whereby human beings simply in virtue of their nature are not only rational but also possess the knowledge of the fundamental principles of natural law. On this point Aquinas’ account deviates substantially from Aristotle’s ethics; and while the way in which Aquinas and Piccolomini depart from Aristotle are certainly different, they share crucial similarities and are connected in important ways. On Aquinas’ account of natural reason and natural law, human beings in virtue of their nature possess moral knowledge; however, recall that when MacIntyre presents Aristotle in the context of moral knowledge and education, he emphasizes the role of practice and habituation in Aristotle’s ethics. What I would like to suggest in the following is that Aquinas’ conception of natural reason and natural law appears to foreshadow the move away from Aristotelian account where proper learning and exercise are essential to becoming virtuous. I will expand on this second problem before going back and considering the first.

So did Aquinas’ conceptual (or theoretical) moves in fact set the stage for a more theoretical approach to moral philosophy? And is MacIntyre correct to condemn Piccolomini divergence from Aristotle, yet at the same time continuing to support the views of Aquinas?

Let us start with the claims that comprise the basis of Aquinas’ natural law account, by which we grant that all human beings in virtue of their nature possess knowledge with respect to the good. If this is the case however, isn’t it then plausible to argue that ethics should place less emphasis on emulating the practices and habits of those educated persons – who on Aristotle’s view possess the right sort of moral education? For it appears that on Aquinas’ natural law account every person possesses moral knowledge in virtue of being human.

Consequently, if we accept this claim it makes sense to reason that moral inquiry, having placed less emphasis on practical education and the exercise of right actions and habits – for we already possess, owing to our nature, those fundamental moral precepts – should then place more emphasis on the minutiae of theoretical details. I would like to emphasize that on the above view, it may be natural to maintain that – with respect to the good – we possess ‘knowledge that’ in virtue of our nature; and insofar as we err in applying ‘knowledge that’ to particular contexts, we lack a suitable account of ‘knowledge how.’ Yet, recall that on MacIntyre’s reading of Aristotle, we first need to practice the right actions and form good habits – and thus acquire ‘knowledge how’ – before we can reason about the good, i.e., ‘knowledge that.’ Thus in ethics, ‘knowledge how’ is prior to ‘knowledge that.’

This difference is striking because Aquinas’ elaboration of natural law and natural reason presents a universal claim – that all rational beings possess knowledge of the fundamental principles of natural law, simply owing to their nature. Yet, on the Aristotelian account, individuals become virtuous through learning from, and emulating, those citizens who possess the appropriate moral education. Thus, Aquinas’ natural law account moves away from Aristotle’s ethics which emphasizes the point that human beings are naturally ignorant about the good, and practicing the right actions and proper habituation into the virtues are required before we can engage in ethical reasoning.

We can clearly observe that the characteristic feature of Aquinas’ natural law ethics – its universalizability with respect to moral knowledge – differs markedly from Aristotle’s account in which the appropriate education and habituation in the virtues is the prerequisite for successful practical reasoning. On the Aristotelian account, we are educated in the virtues through emulating the actions of moral teachers – teachers who already possess the appropriate moral knowledge. However, in the Thomistic account, we discover that Aquinas has in a meaningful sense, democratized (or universalized) the human capacity for ethical knowledge where every rational person in virtue of their nature, possess the knowledge of the fundamental principles of natural law.

Now at this point, MacIntyre will most likely counter my criticism and argue that on Aquinas’ primary natural law claim, all rational beings merely have the *potential* to comprehend and understand the fundamental principles of natural law, and that the fulfillment of this *potential* requires adequate habituation into the virtues. Consequently, it is only through of the right kind of habituation that we can fulfill the potential in coming to know the fundamental principles/precepts of natural law. However, this sort of answer won’t work for the following reason. Reading Aquinas’ natural law in this way represents a radical departure from Aquinas, the Thomistic tradition, and more generally, the Christian account explicated by Augustine. Furthermore, MacIntyre argues that on Aquinas’ view, the nobility (or the ruling class), who presumably have greater opportunity to receive moral education, nonetheless do not have any special moral knowledge of natural law principles.[[211]](#footnote-211) Yet, on the Aristotelian view, human beings are naturally ignorant, and moral education necessitates diligence in practice and exercise, as well as the emulation of those who already possess the right sort of education and hence the virtues. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the knowledge of those essential moral principles would involve a degree of moral education.

Still, MacIntyre could offer a different sort of reply. He could argue that while practice and habituation is a prerequisite for achieving a more in-depth knowledge of the principles of natural law, by virtue of being embedded in, and participating in, social life; nevertheless the fundamental principles of natural law are easily knowable by all rational beings. Still I am not sure this sort of answer is sufficient. First, MacIntyre stresses the importance of practice and habituation in Aristotle’s account of moral education and moral knowledge, and he criticises Piccolomini for deviating from Aristotle precisely on this point. Therefore, it certainly appears that Aristotle’s account of moral education requires more than a minimal account of possessing ethical knowledge; thus it doesn’t appear that we could possess a properly Aristotelian moral education on a minimal account, framed in terms of mere participation in social life. Second, the primary precepts of natural law not only include the prohibition against lying, theft, as well as taking an innocent life – which one might be tempted to say are straight forward, and hence available to all persons – but include detailed claims that could only emerge out of at least some level of critical reflection.[[212]](#footnote-212)

A contrast with Aquinas’ conception of moral knowledge is perhaps useful at this point. On the view presented by Aquinas, all human beings possess an infallible habitual moral knowledge ‘*synderesis*’, while ‘*consciendi*’ “is the consideration of a specific case in light of one's moral knowledge.”[[213]](#footnote-213) A crucial point here is that human beings inherently possess general moral knowledge and that whatever mistake they might make as moral persons rests on applying their infallible moral knowledge to particular social contexts and circumstances. And so it certainly appears that Aquinas’ natural law ethics universalizes (or democratizes) our capacity for moral knowledge; and this is certainly a major departure from Aristotle’s account of moral education and the way in which on that account we acquire moral knowledge.

We now have a good understanding of the contrast between Aristotle and Aquinas; therefore, we can turn to the difficulty raised by the first question I considered at the outset of this section: it seems that there is a meaningful and substantive degree of opposition between Aristotle’s ethics and Christian morality which can be framed in the way the two views approach moral knowledge. Nevertheless, this rivalry is fundamentally grounded in the way these two positions view the world – namely, that the difficulty ultimately rests at the feet of their respective cosmology and metaphysics.

I should emphasize that other scholars have drawn attention to the difficulty of reconciling Aristotelian ethics and Christian morality. J. B. Schneewind has offered an argument that draws attention to another aspect of the difference between the way which Aristotle’s account treats moral education and the manner in which we become ethical persons and Aquinas’ Christian account of natural law in which all human beings in virtue of their nature, possess moral knowledge. [[214]](#footnote-214)

“The Aristotelian theory may have been suited to a society in which there was a recognized class of superior citizens, whose judgment on moral issues would be accepted without question…since virtue theory must treat disagreement with the virtuous agent as showing a flaw of character, it discourages parties to a moral dispute from according even prima facie respect to differing points of view…and it gives no distinctive guidance about how to analyze a dispute so as to find the common ground from which agreement can be peacefully reached.” [[215]](#footnote-215)

Schneewind argues that Aristotle’s virtue ethics is perhaps more peculiar to a hierarchical society with a recognizable class of aristocrats and plebes. For Schneewind, the Aristotelian polis more or less accepts that the educated elite are in a better position to offer the standards for moral excellence to the rest of the community. Schneewind goes on to claim that Aquinas’ natural law sees this as a problem and tries to address it, precisely because it views this as a deficiency in Aristotle’s ethics. Recall that in the previous chapter, I argued that Aristotle’s account overlooks the fact that two people who possess adequate moral education could in fact disagree. It is Augustine’s concept of the will, in the context of the Christian account of a fallen human nature, which allows Aquinas to articulate his account. Hence, even though MacIntyre has argued in various places that Aquinas successfully synthesizes Aristotle’s ethics with Augustine’s theology, Schneewind is emphasizing the points of conflict between the Aristotelian and the Christian traditions. The upshot here is that Aquinas’ synthesis of Augustinian morality and Aristotelian ethics isn’t nearly as successful as MacIntyre maintains.

More fundamentally, the differences between the respective metaphysics and cosmology of Aristotle and Augustine can be expressed in the following terms. Augustine’s Christian morality is committed to a fallen view of human nature grounded in biblical eschatology – the story of the fall and original sin.[[216]](#footnote-216) The Christian conception of original sin is essentially embedded in a particular view of human nature. On this view, human beings are ultimately wretched – and thus beyond all hope – except and insofar as they are afforded God’s grace. Consequently, it is through a relationship with a transcendent God beyond worldly existence that human beings have any potential as moral persons and inquirers about the good. Thus, in the end, human good or telos cannot be defined in terms of the natural world. The source of this good is ultimately God. On the other hand, Aristotle’s ethical framework for the pursuit of moral excellence emphasizes the developmental nature of human potential. For Aristotle, without the proper moral education we fail to emerge as virtuous persons. On this view, human beings remain only provisionally, and not inherently, ignorant of the virtues and the good. Moreover, each individual’s potential knowledge of the good can for the most part be fulfilled on the account of their own desire and commitment; yet, this position stands in stark contrast to the Augustinian view in which human fulfillment and flourishing not only resides in a transcendent source but is ultimately afforded by its sole wishes, irrespective of the individual’s particular actions. The contrast with Aristotle here is quite stark since on the Aristotelian account, human ethical potential is fulfilled within a naturalistic framework – a framework where human potential is reached within this life – without the need to ground morality and human flourishing in a transcendent being or an other-worldly existence.

Thus, there seems to be important fundamental differences that separate Aristotle’s ethics and Augustinian morality since the two accounts maintain widely different views on some foundational issues. Of course this potentially means that *pace* MacIntyre, Aquinas’ synthesis of Augustinian morality and Aristotelian ethics isn’t nearly as successful as MacIntyre claims, in part because there are fundamental differences in the underlying metaphysics of these two views.

The upshot of the above analysis is three-fold. First, it seems difficult to reconcile, on the one hand, MacIntyre’s historical arguments that condemn Renaissance Aristotelian like Piccolomini for deviating from Aristotelian ethics with respect to moral knowledge, and on the other, MacIntyre arguments in support of Aquinas’ natural law theory which appear to be decidedly un-Aristotelian in similar respects. Second, when we consider MacIntyre’s account advanced in these two papers, we find that the results are somewhat ambiguous. Therefore, MacIntyre’s account here doesn’t propose a convincing case for the marginalization of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and the functional/teleological view of human nature, in part because his account appears to also suggest that the theological/theoretical innovations by Aquinas could be reasonably read as indirectly setting the stage for the work of later Aristotelians, and the eventual decline of Aristotelian ethics. The third and final point that emerges is that if in fact there are important difficulties in resolving differences between the way in which moral education and moral knowledge are defined in Christian morality, and conversely, in Aristotle’s ethics, it then seems that MacIntyre’s reading of Aristotelian ethics and moral education tends to accentuate and reinforce, rather than ameliorate, those differences.

Now, before we present a final verdict on MacIntyre’s genealogy let us briefly recall its substantive conclusions. With respect to moral education, MacIntyre suggested that by focusing on theory as opposed to practice and habituation, Renaissance Aristotelians deviated from Aristotle’s ethics; and in doing so they undermined key Aristotelian tenets. But as we have seen, this is problematic for at least three reasons.

First, it would appear that Aquinas’ formulation of natural law and natural reason similarly countenances a step away from Aristotelian virtue ethics, and this in a way, foreshadows the later developments in which Renaissance Aristotelian similarly deviate from Aristotle. Aristotle’s account of moral education and moral knowledge focuses on practice and habituation, yet Aquinas’ natural law in a sense undermines the Aristotelian view, because for Aquinas, human beings in virtue of their nature infallibly possess fundamental moral knowledge (the knowledge of important natural law precepts). Second, we observed that Aquinas’ natural law and its claims with respect to moral knowledge, sits uneasily with Aristotle’s account of moral education and moral knowledge. Third, we saw that Christian ethics appears to be in conflict with Aristotelian ethics. Schneewind and others have argued that Aristotelian ethics and his account of moral education and knowledge is much more suited to a hierarchical society; yet, historical-social forces had largely undermined the hierarchical social structure. In fact, Christian morality can be fruitfully read as a rejection of hierarchy. Perhaps more emphatically, we could argue, as indeed was suggested by MacIntyre in *Whose Justice*, that Christian ethics has the resources to offer a resolution to the sort of problems which can emerge from the loss of the kind of social context in which there are explicitly defined hierarchical social roles such as those found in the polis. Recall that earlier, we considered a series of social-cum-historical events that point to changes in the social structure – transformations that in light of hypotheses (H3) and (H4) (discussed in the previous chapter) – affords us a reasonable account for the decline of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. Hence, it seems more plausible to argue that a range of historical processes precipitated the gradual collapse of the social-cum-political relationships which sustained feudal society. The older feudal relationships were then replaced with new set of social-cum-political relationships that came to define the later social structure. Thus, the change in the social edifice played a crucial role in undermining the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition and its corresponding teleological/functional view of human nature.

Now, it is important to recall that on MacIntyre’s account of traditions – seen as diachronic arguments extended in history that are sensitive to new social problems, which emerge as a consequence of the variations in the material conditions that are constitutive of the social edifice – occur in an historical series where earlier traditions are surpassed by later ones. Nevertheless, it would appear that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition was in fact surpassed in the historical march of moral traditions. Now, because MacIntyre identifies as an Aristotelian-Thomist, it seems that he takes it upon himself to show why the tradition he ultimately endorses, seems to be in conflict with his historical account of tradition-guided moral inquiry. Of course I already stated that MacIntyre isn’t beholden to any kind of absolute view of moral progress, or traditions as historically progressive where later traditions are always superior to earlier ones. Still, he needs to offer us compelling reasons as to why we should accept his thesis that Aristotelian-Thomism was dislodged from its rightful place, and consequently, why the loss of that tradition was in fact misguided.

Thus a sound justification for MacIntyre’s genealogy rests on whether it is successful in answering the following question: how helpful is MacIntyre’s genealogy in demonstrating that the corruption, and subsequent loss, of Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics and its corresponding teleology, is best understood as an unfortunate consequence of crucial mistakes on the part of Renaissance Aristotelians such as Piccolomini? And is this explanation is adequate for the purpose of reviving at least some aspects of the teleological/functional view of human nature contained in that tradition? I should emphasize that the price of failure here is rather high; for if MacIntyre fails to demonstrate why the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition was prematurely sidelined, or at least show us that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition contains important insights that make it of considerable value, his own position as an Aristotelian-Thomist is in peril.

Setting aside the criticisms I have advanced against MacIntyre’s genealogical argument thus far, let us suppose for a moment his account is more or less correct, at least as a possible description of a series of events which together hastened the marginalization of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. If we accept MacIntyre’s genealogy as a more or less correct description of a number of historical events, it might be possible for him to argue that the Aristotelian-Thomistic teleological insights weren’t really displaced in the advance of moral traditions. I will now briefly review a possible line of argument MacIntyre can deploy to counter the criticisms I’ve advanced in the above discussion of Piccolomini and Aquinas.

MacIntyre stated that the goal of this historical narrative (genealogy) was to reveal how the Aristotelian and Thomistic teleological world view, and more specifically the teleological/functional view of human nature, came to be displaced in the historical transition to the modern era. What MacIntyre is really after is recovering what he considers are essential teleological (or functional) resources from the Thomistic tradition to use in our contemporary ethics, since he knows full well that given the drastic differences that separate our contemporary social circumstance from that of Aquinas, we cannot possibly have any reasonable hope of recovering all of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and its corresponding social structure and institutions. Thus MacIntyre has to find a way to reasonably demonstrate how those resources can be recovered for contemporary use. From this standpoint the form of his argument – that Renaissance Aristotelians, by revising important aspects of Aristotle, paved the way for the rejection of Aristotelian teleological ethics – makes perfect sense. And so MacIntyre argues that what was actually rejected wasn’t necessarily Aristotle’s ethics, rather it was a simulacrum, or perhaps a vulgar form, of Aristotelian ethics. Consequently, the eventual eclipse of Aristotelianism should not be attributed to failures in Aristotle’s moral philosophy itself. The inference that MacIntyre wants us to make here is that because Aristotelian ethics proper wasn’t actually rejected, we can appropriate Aristotelian resources and especially teleological resources – namely, the functional view of human nature – for use in contemporary moral philosophy.

Thus MacIntyre’s argument for recovering the teleology in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition rests on showing that in fact it wasn’t Aristotle’s ethics itself which was displaced in the transition to the modern period, but a simulacrum of that ethics – represented in the work of, and epitomised by, Renaissance Aristotelians such as Piccolomini. Nevertheless, this characterisation of Renaissance Aristotelians and MacIntyre’s criticism against their account misses the mark, in part because there is a distinct and perhaps more general problem with this type of account; namely, that it isn’t fair to the actual philosophical treatment of Aristotle’s philosophy by the early moderns. Ultimately, the problem here isn’t simply that the philosophical account which was rejected in the march of the history of moral inquiry was a simulacrum of Aristotle’s ethics, but that Aristotle’s metaphysics *itself* emerged as problematic – especially the idea of comprehending essential natures and essences, which happened to be the foundational concepts in Aristotle’s teleology – for good reasons. It is worth emphasizing this point, seeing that in the early modern period, a whole set of Aristotelian metaphysical concepts came to be viewed as detrimental to scientific inquiry, and by extension philosophy, considering that the separation between philosophy and science did not emerge until much later, at the cusp of the late 18th and early 19th century. It seems to me then that the ‘story of science,’ which I outlined earlier, affords a better explanation. On this story, Aristotle’s problematic metaphysics was eliminated due to some important limitations which hindered inquiry more generally; and because the metaphysics was discarded it was difficult to hold on to Aristotle’s teleology which crucially depended on his metaphysics.

However, MacIntyre might respond that without the change to a more theoretical form of moral philosophy, we could have preserved a role for some form of teleology in moral philosophy and moral education. Perhaps we could have discarded teleology with respect to the sciences but kept it in moral education. The problem with this answer are two-fold: first, based on what we considered in the above discussion, the move to a more theoretical approach in ethics was in fact made by Aquinas; and if we condemn Piccolomini’s revision of the Aristotelian corpus as MacIntyre suggests, we have to likewise censure Aquinas. Second, it is important to note that philosophical inquiry in the 16th and 17th century refers to both philosophy and science; and thus at the time when Aristotle’s metaphysics came to suffer from disrepute, philosophy and science were more or less indistinguishable. Hence, without any real distinction between philosophy and science once Aristotle’s metaphysics and teleology were found to be wanting, it might be reasonable to conclude that they were viewed as problematic in all forms of inquiry (both moral inquiry and science, taken together as a whole).

Now, if we take into account not only this last specific criticism but also the other criticisms I’ve advanced thus far, it seems that MacIntyre’s genealogy considered as a demonstration for the historical folly of the intellectual marginalization of Aristotelian-Thomism, and specifically, the teleological (or functional) view of human nature, cannot be considered a success. Ultimately, the problem with MacIntyre’s genealogy is that it fails to offer us good reasons for the recovery of the teleological (functional) insights in that tradition, or why we should come to believe that the displacement of the Aristotelian-Thomism wasn’t for the most part justified.

Therefore, MacIntyre’s attempt to resolve the difficulty that is generated by the first tension in his account is questionable, because the genealogy itself doesn’t seem to explain the eclipse of Aristotelianism in a way that allows MacIntyre to present a convincing case for a mistaken decline of Aristotelian-Thomism, and therefore, the recovery of the teleological resources in that tradition.

Considering this challenge, our only hope appears to be the articulation of a much more modest version of teleology, without the metaphysical baggage that makes it less compatible with a more modern conception of inquiry, as empirically informed.

I would like to conclude here with an optimistic suggestion. It may be possible to offer a different kind of explanation that could aid us in capturing the kind of insights which MacIntyre is really after – a teleological/functional conception of human nature and explanations for use in normative contexts. In the next chapter, I will argue that another kind of account – perhaps an alternative pragmatic teleology – could offer a better way for resolving the first tension that plagues MacIntyre’s account, in a way that renders his project more coherent.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I considered the first problem that emerges for MacIntyre’s work, specifically when we take into account MacIntyre’s later endorsement of Thomism, and the various historicist and contextualist commitments that emerge from his historical account of tradition-guided moral inquiry, for it seems that under the same historical account, Aristotelian-Thomism was in fact discarded, or at least marginalised.

First, I made a distinction between two aspects of progress – ‘intellectual’ (or rational) and ‘material.’ I argued that the success of MacIntyre’s argument for a mistaken or premature marginalisation of Aristotelian-Thomism rests on whether he is able to successfully disentangle these two aspects in a meaningful sense. I also argued that MacIntyre’s answer to this question is crucial to his overall project, and that should MacIntyre’s attempt at securing the teleological resources in the Thomistic tradition fail, he is not able to offer a compelling account that is capable of reconciling or adjudicating between rival moral claims. I went on to suggest, nevertheless, that MacIntyre is in fact cognizant of this problem.[[217]](#footnote-217)

I then outlined an attempt by MacIntyre to precisely address just this difficulty. Now, MacIntyre utilised Piccolomini as a paradigmatic example of Renaissance Aristotelianism, to argue that Piccolomini and other Renaissance figures, made important modifications to the standard Aristotelian account. MacIntyre however argued that unfortunately, by diverging from the Aristotelian account, specifically with respect to moral knowledge and moral education, Renaissance Aristotelians paved the way for marginalisation of Aristotelian ethics and its corresponding teleology. Nevertheless, after a careful consideration of MacIntyre’s hypothesis, I argued that there is a much more plausible explanation for the decline of the Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics, and its respective teleology; namely, *the story of science*. Moreover, I proposed that MacIntyre’s explanation for the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism turns out to be counterproductive, for MacIntyre’s condemnation of Renaissance Aristotelians could correspondingly apply to Aquinas’ moral philosophy, given that Aquinas likewise modified the Aristotelian account to a considerable extent.

First, I demonstrated that Aquinas, in order to synthesize Augustinian insights into the Aristotelian tradition in fact ended up substantially revising Aristotle’s account of moral knowledge and moral education. Second, I suggested that Aquinas’ natural law account and its corresponding formulation of moral knowledge, does not easily with the Aristotelian account of moral knowledge and education. Third, utilising Schneewind’s argument, I stated that the problem of fitting together Aquinas’ natural law – with respect to moral knowledge – within the standard Aristotelian account, remains problematic; this is precisely because the Christian Augustinian account, especially its eschatology, cosmology, and subsequent rejection of hierarchy, is in conflict with fundamental aspects of the Aristotelian world-view.

Finally, I concluded that MacIntyre’s account for the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism isn’t ultimately successful. Here, MacIntyre’s explanation for the loss of the Aristotelian-Thomistic teleology doesn’t seem to afford us a sound justification for the marginalisation of that tradition, and its associated teleological resources. And while MacIntyre endorses Aristotelian-Thomism, in the absence of a compelling explanation that can offer a reasonable case for the mistaken (or wrongful) marginalisation of that tradition, he isn’t able to ultimately retrieve the relevant teleological resources available in that earlier tradition, even though those resources appear to be crucial to the overall success of his account.

# Chapter 3: Deweyan Democracy as a Way of Life

## 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we discussed the first difficulty that emerged for MacIntyre’s account of tradition guided moral inquiry. There I argued that MacIntyre’s historical account of traditions seems to suggest that Aristotelian-Thomism – his own preferred tradition – was displaced in the transition to the modern period. Nevertheless, MacIntyre argued that that tradition was displaced in part due to a series mistakes by Renaissance Aristotelians, and especially their emphasis on theory over exercise of correct habits, gradually undermined a properly Aristotelian mode of education.

Ultimately, MacIntyre used his genealogy to argue that Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics was marginalized due to a number of errors committed by Renaissance Aristotelians that transformed Aristotle’s ethics in distinctly unAristotelian ways. But he also argues – albeit less convincingly – that the final demise of Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics and its associated teleology was not a refutation of Aristotelian ethics as understood by Aristotle, but a rejection of a simulacrum of that ethics. MacIntyre is in effect suggesting that because a bona fide Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics wasn’t really rejected, it is possible to recover important teleological resources that were available in that earlier tradition. Nonetheless, I argued that if MacIntyre is to be consistent in his condemnation of Renaissance Aristotelians for diverging from Aristotle, he should also reproach Aquinas for similarly deviating from Aristotle’s account of ethics. I then suggested that the conceptual positions offered by Renaissance Aristotelians were not very different from the position that was adopted by Aquinas, and that they could be viewed as a natural progression from the position taken up by Aquinas. Therefore, conceptually, Aquinas appears to set the stage for the work of Renaissance Aristotelians who on MacIntyre’s view are responsible for the gradual decline of Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics.

I concluded that MacIntyre’s genealogy appears ill equipped to resolve the first difficulty that emerges under his account, precisely because there were a number of other valid social, historical and intellectual reasons for the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism (especially difficulties with the teleological or functional view of human nature which was a primary component of that account). Recall that earlier, I suggested that what MacIntyre is really after in offering a genealogical narrative for the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism, is the recovery of a teleological (or functional) view of human nature for use in ethics. On MacIntyre’s view, the Enlightenment Project’s need for a rational justification of morality precipitates in part on account of the loss of the teleological view of human beings moving from an untutored state, to realizing their potential as human beings. Ultimately, for MacIntyre, even the failure of the Enlightenment Project is primarily because we no longer had access to teleological resources since discoveries in science had undermined the traditional teleological forms of argument. This loss of a teleological conception seems more central to explaining the decline of Aristotelianism than any of the issues addressed by MacIntyre’s genealogical argument.

Furthermore, I argued in Chapter One, that MacIntyre’s three-fold account of the virtues in *After Virtue* is a kind of social teleology that MacIntyre presents as an alternative. Yet, ultimately this fails since MacIntyre’s first concept of practice is embedded within a very ambiguous and open-ended definition of the good, and therefore generates many different kinds of practices and heterogeneous set of goods that are difficult to reconcile under his account. Bernstein and Schneewind then argued that MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue* seems to reinforce, rather than undermine, emotivism. Therefore, notwithstanding the failure of MacIntyre’s efforts in *After Virtue*, the recovery of some form of teleology or functional view of human beings in ethics has been a central goal for MacIntyre going all the way back to that work.

However, in Chapter Two I concluded that the recovery of a traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic version of teleology is all but impossible, in part because the recovery of the Thomistic conception of the good is unlikely. The question now is: can we formulate a more modern teleology that can help fill in the gap in MacIntyre’s account – namely, the lack of an adequate teleology? I will argue that the sort of teleology MacIntyre needs can in fact be found in John Dewey’s formulation of ‘democracy as a way of life.’ On this view, democracy is a way of life and not simply a form of government. Dewey’s democracy as a way of life is a particular orientation towards living in which human beings are understood as irreducibly social problem-solving animals that flourish in communal settings and in the context of interdependent living. Democracy as a way of life is then the condition for a free rational egalitarian communal living; one that is best able to ameliorate social problems and engender human flourishing and self-realization. Viewed in this way, Dewey’s democracy as a way of life allows me to capture important teleological insights that on my view will benefit MacIntyre’s account, and ultimately resolve the first tension that is generated under his account.

In the next section, I will argue that Dewey’s democracy as a way of life offers MacIntyre a conception of flourishing that can help ease the first difficulty in MacIntyre’s account. In section three, I will consider three particular worries and try to provide answers that will alleviate them. Finally, in sections four and five, I consider a final possible objection, namely, that the ‘science/ethics’ distinction disbars us from the engaging in the type of ethical inquiry that Dewey envisions. I will utilize Putnam’s arguments in his paper ‘The Science-Ethics Distinction,’ and his later book, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*, in order to undermine a strong distinction between ‘fact/value’ and ‘science/ethics.’

Now, before I advance the shape of the Deweyan account that can fulfill the promise of MacIntyre’s project, I should say something about (i) the features of MacIntyre’s account that I intend to retain; (ii) my intentions to address the particular gap in MacIntyre’s account; and (iii) the best way to cash out my synthesis of MacIntyre and Dewey. First, I think we can retain significant portions of MacIntyre’s three-fold social teleology, with the caveat that the concept of tradition needs to be sufficiently modified to account for the role which power plays in the development/decay of traditions. Second, instead of utilising MacIntyre’s account of the good in *After Virtue* or his later Thomistic conception of the good, I will use Dewey’s account to ground (or underwrite) MacIntyre’s three-fold conception of the virtues. On my view, the Deweyan account – democracy as a way of life – is in a better position to defend itself against the kinds of criticisms that ultimately undermined MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue*. Third, by utilising Dewey in this way, I am framing MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue* within a Deweyan ethical foundation (or structure), and by the same token MacIntyre’s account ought to be understood as the ethical superstructure that overlays the Deweyan foundation.

Lastly, I do realize that I am not resolving the problem in the way MacIntyre himself perhaps imagines. What I mean by this is that I am not offering better historical arguments for tracing the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism, in order to recover the teleological insights from that earlier tradition. Instead, I will attempt to show that Dewey’s conception of democracy as a way of life can stand in as an alternative teleology – one that is both modern and empirical; and one that I will argue is substantive enough to answer the sort of criticism advanced by Bernstein and Schneewind.[[218]](#footnote-218) Therefore, I am resolving this tension by sidestepping the question of trying to recover and defend Thomism. I can accept the decline of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition in the historical account of traditions that MacIntyre seems to present in his work. But it seems to me that it isn’t necessary to defend a more traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic position, or recover the teleology of that earlier tradition: we are still able to utilize the insights of Dewey’s alternative pragmatist teleology to draw a number of cognitivist – or anti-emotivist – inferences that MacIntyre would be happy with, without the need to posit a strong moral realism.

## 2. Deweyan Democracy as Teleology

Before I begin my discussion of Dewey’s view, it is useful to set some parameters. Three important questions that must be answered are: First, what is traditional teleology? This question might appear as a diversion, but it needs to be addressed in order to answer the second question – namely, how can we articulate an alternative teleology that will avoid some of the objections raised against traditional teleology? The third and final question arises from an understandable scepticism in relation to the fit between Dewey and MacIntyre. Put differently, in the context of MacIntyre’s overall project, what is it about Dewey’s account that makes it a more attractive remedy than other options? In order to advance my argument I will at certain points refer to Dewey’s essay “The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy.”[[219]](#footnote-219)

Beginning now with the first question, broadly speaking, traditional teleological explanations can be described as an examination of causes and effects with a view to an ultimate purpose, or an explanation of phenomena by the purpose it serves, as opposed to efficient causes. Dewey argues that traditional teleological explanations were premised on two important ideas. First, traditional teleology rested on the idea that we could come to know natures (or essences) through reason; and second, that regulative changes observed in all life forms – namely, the orderly cumulative changes that take place in all living things where animals and plants appear to naturally advance from earlier, to later, stages of development in which each stage prepares the way for the successive stage – and the apparent perfect adaptation of all life forms to their environment, strengthened the case for teleological explanations.

However, I take it that the emergence of early modern science undermined Aristotle’s teleology because it undermined this first premise, namely, that we can through reasoning come to understand the eternal nature of things. On Dewey’s view, this conclusion was initially reached with respect to the scientific understanding of the physical world, and hence teleological explanations were still seen as useful in explaining biological phenomena. Nonetheless, the revolutionary changes that followed from Darwin’s theory of evolution rendered teleological explanations untenable, precisely because they undermined the second premise – namely, teleology seen as a purposive regulative principle in which each stage of development perfectly anticipates and prepares for a later stage – which in turn supported teleological forms of explanation. If the myriad of adaptations observed in different life forms are simply due to the constant variations in the expression of genes in individual members of a species; and if contingent historical material conditions render the expression of certain genes more (or less) useful in the struggle for survival, then it is not clear how we can cash out an all-encompassing conception of purposiveness from those particular expressions (of genes in individual members of a species) that purely by chance, happen to be less useful in that struggle.

Therefore, we can’t inquire by reason alone into the ultimate nature or essence of species, partly because science has showed that that sort of reasoning is faulty, and after Darwin, the older static conception of species is no longer tenable owing to the fact that species evolve – they are historical. Consequently the idea of inquiry into a final static nature doesn’t make sense in an historical universe. Second, in an historical stochastic universe where chance and probability to some degree condition all outcomes, the whole idea of a necessary purposiveness in the generation and development of all things is implausible. Recall that MacIntyre’s account needs teleological explanations to be able to make the sort of functional claims, in which we derive ‘ought’ conclusions from ‘is’ premises; so, for example, ‘If X has Y nature it ought to Z,’ or ‘Because X is Y sort of creature, it ought to adopt Z way of life.’ Nonetheless, an implication of Darwinian evolutionary theory is that we can’t identify the real (final/ideal) nature of human beings, in part because the various adaptations we have thus far accumulated as a biological species, are the result of a long drawn out process of variations, and the elimination of some of the less useful instances in the struggle for survival against contingent material conditions.

It would appear that we have thus far strengthened the Humean injunction against moving from any ‘is’ premises to ‘ought’ conclusions, and as a consequence further undermined the possibility of any teleology. Having said that, if Aristotelian teleology appears to be untenable, what sort of conditions must our revised formulation meet so that it can address the above objections, and still be meaningfully understood as a kind of teleology?

At this point, it is instructive to turn to Dewey, for the follow reason: while he takes Darwin’s impact very seriously, Dewey does not end up throwing his lot in with the emotivists; consequently, he does not reject the possibility that we can perhaps identify and describe normative phenomena in some objective sense. It is rather that Dewey discusses Darwin in order to articulate the following claim: that while philosophy should not concern itself with inquiring into ultimate values, final nature/essence, or final purpose, it should instead reorganise itself as a discipline trying to answer questions concerning specific values and particular natures as they are found under concrete historical conditions.[[220]](#footnote-220)

Thus, Dewey argues that an historical universe leads us to ask different kinds of questions. For Dewey, we can’t inquire into the eternal nature of things, but we can inquire into the historical concrete nature of particular phenomenon – that is, we can inquire into the specific conditions that spawn some particular phenomenon and study the consequences that follow its generation. We can then intelligently administer the particular material conditions, so as to incrementally generate better outcomes. We can speak in terms of realising increments of justice, freedom, equality, prosperity, and improvement in material conditions. Finally, in an historical universe the question of ultimate purpose doesn’t make sense. We don’t need an ultimate purpose to make sense of the constitutive features of our social world, and make improvements upon it. On this revised teleology, our purpose isn’t transcendent; the purpose is then nothing more than the democratic intelligent administration of inquiry, geared towards realising increments of better outcomes that improve actual concrete conditions. Dewey indentifies this process – which we can define in terms of goal or purpose – as *growth*.

"Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society."[[221]](#footnote-221)

Therefore, Dewey’s account can be understood as a kind of *via media* between traditional teleology and abandoning teleology altogether. On my view, if we follow Dewey and grant his account of intelligent inquiry through participatory democratic means, it seems that we can indeed advance from some ‘is’ premises to ‘ought’ conclusions. Now, our ‘is’ premises and ‘ought’ conclusions are historical, fallible and subject to change as a result of further inquiry. Having said this, if we are to understand Dewey’s account as affording us a framework for some sort of alternative teleology, it has to make some universal or necessary claims. In order to advance even a moderate teleological claim, it is not enough to simply infer values from facts; we need to also show that we can derive certain specific ‘ought’ claims, from particular ‘is’ claims. So what are the necessary claims in Dewey’s teleology, or democracy as a way of life?

On my view, Dewey makes two such claims (these claims will become more apparent once we discuss Deweyan democracy later in this section). First, for Dewey, human beings are seen as inherently *social creatures*, and second, that human beings are *problem-solving animals*. These are then facts about the sort of creatures we are. In addition, there are facts about our world – namely, that the world is historical and that conditions are liable to change. Hence, in virtue of the fact that we are social creatures, have over the course of history developed impressive problem-solving capacities, and encounter an historical world with changing material conditions, what conditions afford greater cooperation and problem-solving so that we can not only survive, but thrive and flourish in such a world? If we then accept these two claims, and make the appropriate consideration for the particular historical condition that is constitutive of our social world, then this conclusion follows: *the best way to live is through adopting democracy as a way of life in all of our social relationships, and we ought to pursue the sort of inquiry that is established on the principles of democratic participation, amelioration, fallibilism, and experimentalism*. Therefore, the claim can be put as something like ‘because we are X sort of creatures, and live under Y conditions, generally the best way to live is according to Z.'

Now, for Dewey, autonomy – namely, individual freedom such as freedom of expression and thought – are important goods, because they allow our minds to develop in ways that help us become more adept at solving problems; and given the structure of the world, and the fact that we encounter the world as historical creatures, problem solving is crucial to the kind of social and communal creatures that we indeed are. Now, if we take into account additional facts about our contexts that make it all but impossible to forgo a life that is highly interdependent, this means that a democratic cooperative and participatory approach to life is more likely to afford better outcomes, in the context of our encounter with the world, and in terms of our capacity to tackle and solve the problems generated by that encounter. Thus, Deweyan democratic inquiry can be understood as a commitment to these values and a commitment to realizing them on the largest possible scale, for the sake of advancing and realizing incremental improvements in concrete material conditions. Of course, our claims can be revised or modified as a result of inquiry over the long run, but it seems that at least to begin inquiry we need to accept something like them.

Advancing to our third and final question, one might wonder whether Dewey’s philosophy is a good fit for MacIntyre’s account. My reasons for maintaining that Dewey is in fact a good fit are the following: (i) both accounts are open ended – namely, it is about the individual discovering and inquiring into our individual and common good as human beings; (ii) both accounts see human beings as irreducibly social creatures and their ultimate good is defined in social terms; (iii) and both accounts are historical and therefore sensitive to contingent historical material conditions.

Notwithstanding the propriety of the fit between the two view, Dewey’s framework improves on MacIntyre’s account in the following ways: (a) Dewey’s account is dynamic and its dynamism is grounded in Dewey’s reflexive democratic epistemology; (b) Deweyan democracy, and its problem solving approach, is better able to organise and order social/political activity towards the resolution of social problems and the realisation of growth; (c) Deweyan Democracy offers a more substantive and determinate account of the good than MacIntyre’s conception of the good in *After Virtue*;[[222]](#footnote-222) (d) and lastly, a crucially attractive feature of Dewey’s account is Dewey’s whole-hearted embrace of Darwin, and the integration of important Darwinian insights in his epistemic framework. Now, by utilising Dewey, we have the added benefit of improving MacIntyre’s Neo-Aristotelian account so it more effectively resist the kinds of criticisms – advanced by meta-ethicists, and especially expressivists – against a wide range of Neo-Aristotelian accounts, especially those of the naturalist variety advocated by Philippa Foot, John McDowell, and Michael Thompson, and which would nonetheless equally apply to MacIntyre’s distinctive rendition of Neo-Aristotelianism.[[223]](#footnote-223)

I will now proceed to outline some of the features of Deweyan democracy, for the purpose of articulating why in Dewey’s conception of ‘democracy as a way of life,’ we possess an alternative pragmatic teleology that can remedy the difficulty in MacIntyre’s account.

## 3. Democracy as a Way of Life

In furthering our understanding of Deweyan democracy – democracy as a way of life – we should begin our discussion with specifying what Dewey means by democracy. The usual (instrumental) definition of democracy is that it is a form of government. In modern representative democracies, citizens of a state participate in elections and choose representatives to represent them in a legislative assembly. The members of legislative assemblies who are chosen by the people through some electoral mechanism, are then empowered with a number of powers and responsibilities, and at least ideally, are supposed to undertake actions that are in line with the interests of their respective constituents. When it comes to legislation, a number of policies are usually drafted and discussed first by legislative leaders; the policies that pass the vetting process are then presented to the rest of the assembly. In the context of parliamentary rules and procedures, the votes of different members of a legislative assembly, representing different constituencies, are aggregated, and the legislative measures that receive a majority of the votes in the legislature are then enacted or otherwise pursued.

However, Dewey’s conception of democracy is not simply democracy as a form of government, or put differently, democracy is not merely the particular form of the institutional apparatus through which we engage in politics and secure our interests and preferences.

“We have had occasion to refer in passing to the distinction between democracy as a social idea and political democracy as a system of government. The two are, of course, connected. The idea remains barren and empty save as it is incarnated in human relationships.”[[224]](#footnote-224)

Even in his earlier work, “The Ethics of Democracy,” Dewey rejects the instrumentalist conception of democracy – democracy as a tool for numerically aggregating interests and preferences – because it assumes that human beings are atomically isolated individuals; individual isolated from communication, association, and cooperation. This view makes the further assumption that the individual and her interests exist prior to, and apart from, socialisation and association. For Dewey, this instrumentalist model of democracy is implausible given that it fails to sufficiently acknowledge the idea that the ‘self’ is irreducibly social, and that prior to politics the conditions for social life emerge precisely because of group formation and association between individuals.[[225]](#footnote-225)

In contrast, for Dewey, democracy as a way of life “exists in the attitudes and values and meanings of individuals in their interactions with one another.”[[226]](#footnote-226) On this view, democracy “is a personal way of individual life; that it signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life.”[[227]](#footnote-227)

“The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion. And even as far as political arrangements are concerned, governmental institutions are but a mechanism for securing to an idea channels of effective operation.”[[228]](#footnote-228)

What follows from this is that democracy as a way of life requires a particular orientation towards living generally. And, this democratic orientation is a requirement in all social interactions and relationships, and not just those in the context of politics. What does this consist in? Dewey states:

“From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are in common”.[[229]](#footnote-229)

Dewey seeks to achieve a kind of society where democracy is not just a form of government, but a way of life – what Dewey calls a “Great Community.” When democracy as a way of life is widely realised at the various levels of the social life of a particular society, it engenders the harmonious development of individuals within that society, and realises the growth of society as a whole. Now, the interests of individual citizens can remain aligned with society’s interests as a whole, if we can make a reasonable case for two further claims.

First, under Dewey’s conception of society (or Deweyan social model) the highest goods that human beings can potentially realise are irreducibly social goods – goods that are the outcome of participation in cooperative activity, and in transaction with the rest of society and its institutions. The implication is that the close interdependence between the individual’s good and social goods that are a part of publicly realised cooperative activity will ensure an alignment between the interest of the individual and society. Nevertheless, this rationale by itself is insufficient to ground an adequate degree of concordance between the individual’s good and societal good, precisely because the standard by which each are evaluated, could potentially diverge.

Thus, Dewey needs to closely connect these two standards, and it is at this point we can move to consider the second claim. Here, we discover that the standard of success for the Deweyan democratic model is defined in terms of the degree to which the conditions for freedom and emancipation are manifest, and widespread participation by individual members of the community in those conditions emerge. I will tackle the first claim before moving on to the second.

What is the basis of the first claim? On Dewey’s account, human beings are viewed as inherently social creatures, embedded in a variety of social relationships; furthermore, the experience attained in the contexts of those relationships is inherently part of what it means to be human. For Dewey, “we develop our humanity, our individuality, in the midst of community living.”[[230]](#footnote-230)

“Individuality is a social product, a result of social relationships, a consequence of publicly acknowledged and stable social functions. We are born as separate (and, in this sense, individual) organism, but we are not born individuals. Individuality is not a given fact about human beings, something static, guaranteed … individuality … is an achievement, the result of an irreducibly social development process.”[[231]](#footnote-231)

Individuality in this sense is the historical social development of the self, and on Dewey’s view, this process of development is continuous with the development of democracy as a way of life – as taking a particular stand and orientation towards life. For Dewey, the process by which we realise our individuality is best understood as self-realisation; it involves the continuous development of the self in the context of all its social relationships. As one commentator puts it:

“Individuality, then, is not reverse-conformity, self-sufficiency, or a necessary, natural human quality. Instead, for Dewey, individuality, like community, is a process of growth. It is self-realization, the continuous development of one’s potentialities. Seen in this way as self-actualization, individuality is fragile. It does not happen naturally or automatically, but rather requires the presence of those conditions which make possible continuing growth.”[[232]](#footnote-232)

We can then understand democracy as a way of life, as the intelligent realization of the individual’s potentialities through continuous social development, precisely because the social process from which democracy as a way of life emerges is the same as the social process that realises ‘individuality.’

The second claim is motivated by the fact that democracy as a way life can only emerge, and growth of individual and society as a whole can only be advanced, under certain social conditions. So what are those conditions that make growth possible? Dewey argues that ‘freedom’ makes growth possible and defines it not only as the presence of the conditions necessary for self-realisation, but also the widespread participation by members of the community in the conditions necessary for self-realisation.[[233]](#footnote-233) Thus freedom for Dewey can’t simply be defined in negative terms, since the absence of overt material or legal obstacles to growth isn’t by itself sufficient for the realisation of genuine freedom.

“The real fallacy [of classical liberalism] lies in the notion that individuals have such a native or original endowment of rights, powers, and wants that all that is required on the side of institutions and laws is to eliminate the obstructions they offer to the ‘free equipment of individuals.’ The removal of obstructions did have a liberating effect upon individuals as were antecedently possessed of the means, intellectual and economic, to take advantage of the changed social conditions. But it left all others at the mercy of the new social conditions brought about by the freed powers of those advantageously situated. The notion that men are equally free to act if only the same legal arrangements apply equally to all – irrespective of differences in education, in command of capital, and the control of the social environment which is furnished by the institution of property – is a pure absurdity. Since actual, that is effective, rights and demands are products of interactions, and are not found in the original and isolated constitution of human nature, whether moral or psychological, mere elimination is not enough. The latter merely liberates force and ability as that happens to be distributed by past accidents of history.”[[234]](#footnote-234)

Thus, the realisation of freedom is dependent on the presence of the right set of social conditions; conditions where all members of the community are empowered to participate in substantive dialogue with each other as co-equal interlocutors, and in which intelligent inquiry is utilised to address the various social and political problems that emerge in all human communities. Dewey identifies these conditions as the conditions that generate democratic inquiry, and more broadly, democracy as a way of life. Dewey then concludes that genuine freedom requires constructive democratic changes to social arrangement, in order to create the conditions for the emergence of a “Great Community” – namely, a society that has adopted democracy as a way of life.[[235]](#footnote-235)

So why are democratic inquiry, and more broadly, democratic activity, important goods? A skeptic might question the value of democratic inquiry and democracy as a way of life. She could reasonably argue that political activity doesn’t interest her, and that she does not see the value in adopting Deweyan democracy as a way of living more generally. Therefore, we should offer good reasons as to why her interests are better served when she becomes a willing participant in Deweyan democracy. Now, on Dewey’s view, democracy as way of life is a necessary condition for realizing genuine freedom; and freedom is a significant moral good. If I don’t end up adopting the right habits – habits that are constitutive of democracy as a way of life and democratic inquiry – I fail to realize freedom, or put differently, I fail in realizing my potential as a human being. On this Deweyan view, if we do end up rejecting democracy as a way of life, we shall suffer an ethical (or moral) loss. If we accept this conclusion, then democracy as a way of life (and democratic inquiry) can be understood as a form of teleology committed to a particular conception of the good.

Thus in Dewey’s *democracy as a way of life*, we have a concept of human flourishing and self-realisation that on my view, affords us a more substantive definition of the good than the account which MacIntyre proposes in *After Virtue*; which can in addition form a plausible basis for an alternative pragmatist teleology. Still, Dewey’s teleology isn’t grounded in a static account of human nature; human nature, on this view, is not entirely known to us – it is through the process of continuous social development, a process which is in part constituted through the amelioration of normative and practical problems, that we develop the range of our abilities and capacities. Democracy as a way of life, then, allows us to fully explore a range of human capacities in accordance with the common good and common interests of the community.

## 4. Three Possible Objections

At this point there are at least three potential lines of attack to my argument for utilising Dewey’s democracy, as the sort of account that can adequately address the lack of a viable teleology in MacIntyre’s account.[[236]](#footnote-236) The first objection is that my argument doesn’t furnish MacIntyre with a sufficiently substantive teleology; put differently, if indeed Dewey’s account points to a version of teleology, it is nonetheless too weak to address our particular difficulty. The second objection concerns whether Dewey is able to avoid the kind of criticisms – criticisms advanced by Bernstein and Schneewind – that ultimately undermined MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue*. Third, even if Dewey can avoid the first two criticisms, it seems that Dewey’s anti-metaphysical and anti-essentialist philosophical positions do not fit well with MacIntyre’s Aristotelian-Thomism. I will turn to considering some possible responses that could address each of these objections.

### 4.1 First Objection:

The worry here is that Dewey’s democracy as a way of life, and his conception of flourishing, isn’t adequately substantive or rather non-instrumental to generate a distinctive conception of flourishing.[[237]](#footnote-237) Consequently, in the liberal context, Deweyan democracy can only be just one more way of life among many other ways to live.

Now, if we define ‘substantivity’ (or ‘non-instrumentality’) as endorsing a static system of values for all time, then indeed his account isn’t substantive or non-instrumental in this sense. Nevertheless, Dewey wants to maintain that by adopting democracy as a way of life we do commit to certain values that make cooperative rational inquiry, and ultimately growth, possible; namely, fallibilism, meliorism and a commitment to learning from experience. Ethics as conceived by Dewey, is then tasked with developing ways of ameliorating problematic social situations and thereby developing solutions to the problems that emerge in specific contexts. On Dewey’s view, problems are always specifically tied to particular social and historical contexts, and these kinds of problems will often have particular solutions. Dewey is optimistic that through democratic inquiry, we can rationally converge on concrete solutions to at least some of those (social) problems, with the express aim of generating better practical social outcomes. In converging on solutions to social problems we are then able to make the relevant sort of normative claims that are the outcome of our careful deliberations. Those claims are obviously subject to further rational inquiry in the long run, yet they would remain objective in the relevant sense.

Still, I have not yet really answered whether Dewey’s account is substantive enough to afford a particular way of life for the individual to adopt. I would like to argue now that Dewey’s democracy as a way of life is in fact non-instrumental in the appropriate sense,[[238]](#footnote-238) and therefore, is able to provide the basis for a viable conception of flourishing and ultimately strengthen the weakness in MacIntyre’s social teleology (as it is presented in *After Virtue*). In characterising Deweyan democracy in this way, I mean to say that the Deweyan commits herself to a particular way of life; and although there are potentially numerous ways to live in liberal societies, for the Deweyan, democracy as a way of life is the right (or ethical) way to live and that human ethical life is continuous with social and political life. What do I mean by right or ethical? Namely, that Deweyan democracy subscribes to a distinctive non-neutral and non-instrumental conception of the good with respect to human flourishing.

I will make use of Robert Talisse’s argument to show the substantive nature of Dewey’s teleology, namely, Dewey’s conception of democracy as a way of life. Talisse’s central claim is that Dewey’s account of democracy – and specifically his continuity thesis and democracy as a way of life – is much too substantive to be properly counted as liberal in the Rawlsian sense. I will show how Talisse’s argument demonstrates that Dewey indeed subscribes to a (moderately) substantive teleology. I will then argue that Talisse rejects Dewey’s account, precisely because Dewey’s democracy as a way of life requires us to make the kind of substantive teleological claims that are the outcome of adopting and endorsing a certain mode of living, and a distinctive conception of human flourishing.[[239]](#footnote-239)

Talisse, in support of his claim, offers four hypotheses he identifies in Dewey’s account of democracy. For my purposes I will only consider the first three.

1. The Continuity Thesis: “The democratic political order is a moral order characterized by a distinctive conception of human flourishing.”[[240]](#footnote-240)

Now, for Dewey, human beings are social creatures and their good is achieved in the process of socialisation, so that on Dewey’s view ethics and politics are essentially interdependent.[[241]](#footnote-241) Now, if we concede that the democratic order is a moral order characterised by a distinctive conception of flourishing, we end up following in the footsteps of Aristotle and accept continuity between ethics and politics.

1. The Transformative Thesis: “The democratic process is one in which individual preferences, attitudes and opinions are informed and transformed rather than simply aggregated.”[[242]](#footnote-242)

Talisse argues that the type of democracy Dewey advocates is rooted in Dewey’s conception of growth. The process in which the individual develops, and becomes an active participant in Deweyan democracy, is rooted in the same account of individual growth – and growth, on this view, remains irreducibly social. Summarising Dewey’s account of democracy, Talisse claims that for Dewey “participation in a democratic community is not simply a matter of voting, campaigning, canvassing, lobbying and petitioning in service of one’s preferences; rather, participation requires citizens to engage in activities by which they may by free and open discussion ‘convince and be convinced by reason’.”[[243]](#footnote-243) Talisse then concludes that Deweyan democracy adopts a transformative model of democracy, one in which the development and growth of individuals, and wider societal development, are seen as interdependent.[[244]](#footnote-244)

1. The Way of Life Thesis: “Democracy is not simply a kind of state or a mode of government, but a way of life.”[[245]](#footnote-245)

Given that I’ve previously considered Dewey’s ‘democracy as a way of life,’ I won’t restate it again except to emphasize that in Deweyan democracy, we are committed to a particular way of life and a particular orientation towards life, being the right sort of life in terms of realising growth. And realising growth is something we ought to achieve – precisely because human beings are irreducibly social problem-solving animals. It is in this sense that Dewey’s account involves a functional or normative ought.

What follows from the first and the third thesis is that Dewey’s politics endorses a particular moral order, a distinctive conception of flourishing, and that it treats ethical life and political life as continuous. Now, as Talisse argues, a commitment to this thesis violates liberalism’s neutrality criterion – a criterion generated by the “fact of reasonable pluralism”[[246]](#footnote-246) – namely, the idea that “there is no single comprehensive philosophical, religious or moral doctrine upon which reason converges, and there are severally mutually incompatible doctrines that are nonetheless consistent with the core commitments of liberal democracy.”[[247]](#footnote-247)

With respect to the second thesis (the transformative thesis), we learn that Dewey explicitly argues in favour of the public consideration of at least some normative or ethical questions; and ultimately, this process involves converging publicly on at least some of those questions.[[248]](#footnote-248) The problem that Dewey’s transformative democracy presents for Talisse is that the fact of reasonable pluralism prohibits *publicly* choosing between different conceptions of the good. Of course we are free to adopt in our private lives – that is, *privately* – some particular conception of the good and particular mode of living; be that as it may, we are disbarred from any sort of public consideration of such a choice.

The upshot of Talisse’s hypotheses is that because Dewey’s account endorses a distinctive substantive conception of the good, it violates the fact of reasonable pluralism and the principle of neutrality; therefore it is incompatible with Rawlsian liberalism.[[249]](#footnote-249) For Talisse, the third thesis follows from the first two. If we accept the first hypothesis – namely, that ethics and politics are continuous – and accept growth as a moral end, we are committed to evaluating different ways of life according to their capacity for promoting growth. And if by democracy as a way of life we refer to those practices and habits that promote growth, then this sort of democracy is both the private (personal) and the public (political) realisation of growth of all members of society in harmony.[[250]](#footnote-250)

Talisse’s concludes that Deweyan democracy is too substantive to be compatible with neutrality requirements in liberalism (and pluralism). On Talisse’s view, in order that Deweyan democrats maintain a meaningful degree of concordance with the requirements outlined by pluralism, they need to think of ‘democracy as a way of life’ as one more way of life and mode of living, among many other modes available in a liberal society, which we could reasonably choose from. Of course, on Talisse’s view, what follows from this is that liberalism cannot endorse Deweyan democracy as being superior to other conceptions of flourishing available in liberal societies. Yet Talisse also thinks that it is not possible for the Deweyan democrat to make such a move and still retain an account that could be meaningfully understood as Deweyan.

On my view, the reason Talisse rejects Dewey’s account is because of the teleological implications that are inherent in Dewey’s view of democracy as a way of life that is directed at the individual’s and the community’s realisation in the context of the common good. And democracy as a way of life is grounded in a non-instrumentalist, and essentially social, conception of flourishing – ‘growth’ – where ‘growth’ is indeed non-neutral and normative.[[251]](#footnote-251) Thus, Dewey’s conception of growth is committed to a more substantive account than the Rawlsian liberal could allow, since growth itself necessitates the careful consideration and evaluation of first-order goods, as part of a cooperative democratic inquiry aimed at the amelioration of social problems.

In contrast to the liberal account, Dewey’s account of growth is not primarily aimed at generating a stable and orderly social order where individuals pursue competing goods; rather, it aims at a kind of social order where goods are evaluated democratically through cooperative inquiry. Thus, it seems that Talisse has a reasonable case in concluding that Dewey’s conception of democracy has a substantive non-neutral character with respect to human flourishing, and thus it is in conflict with core liberal principle of neutrality and the fact of reasonable pluralism. On my view, Talisse’s argument brings out quite well that Dewey’s account indeed presupposes a form of teleology because it is grounded in a distinctive conception of flourishing. Of course, Deweyan democracy isn’t committed to an Aristotelian teleology; but it is nonetheless committed to some form of teleology.

In our discussion thus far, we have seen the ways in which Dewey’s political philosophy isn’t fully compatible with Rawlsian liberalism.[[252]](#footnote-252) I have argued that it isn’t, and it isn’t in part because it endorses a particular way of life, and that it is committed to a version of teleology with a distinctive conception of human flourishing. In any case I am not attempting to woo the liberal philosopher with Dewey’s argument here; my primary aim is to formulate an account that can ameliorate the problem in MacIntyre’s position. I would like to suggest that while MacIntyre has been searching for a teleology which can make sense of ethics in the contemporary context, Dewey’s account of democracy offers a plausible form of teleology (or conception of flourishing) that can to a large extent help put an end to the difficulties that MacIntyre faces here.

Furthermore, precisely because Dewey’s account is different from the standard liberal view, it offers interesting possibilities for MacIntyre. After all, MacIntyre has famously rejected liberalism. As far as MacIntyre is concerned, the fact that Dewey’s account doesn’t fit into the liberal view is a plus, rather than a negative. And the violation of liberalism’s neutrality principle is not a problem for MacIntyre, since he in fact argues that liberalism itself offers only a poor façade of neutrality.[[253]](#footnote-253) MacIntyre argues that in reality, not only is liberalism not neutral, but it actively promotes a particular way of life – one that is highly individualistic, oriented towards consumption of material goods, and for the most part views flourishing in economic terms – a conception that for the most part identifies and describes human beings through the lens of *Homo Economicus*.

### 4.2 Second Objection:

Can Dewey’s teleology answer the criticisms advanced against MacIntyre’s three-fold social teleology in *After Virtue*?

Up until this point I have been using Talisse’s argument to bring out the extent to which Dewey’s democracy as a way of life subscribes to a thesis that acknowledges non-instrumentality (or substantivity), owing to the various commitments it entails and the degree to which those commitments involve adopting a particular way of life that is incompatible with liberalism. However, a question that is left unanswered is whether democracy as a way of life offers a unified conception of life where we can order the various goods that emerge in human communities. Recall the criticism levelled by Bernstein and Schneewind – namely that MacIntyre’s three-fold account of the virtues is too open-ended, and generates a diverging set of goods that are not easily reconcilable, primarily because his definition of the good (or flourishing) is opaque and abstract. Therefore, it is not clear how we can resolve conflicts, or order goods, in our lives in a way that endorses a distinct conception of human flourishing.

They both argued that the basis for MacIntyre’s three-fold teleology isn’t substantive enough to make sense of the conflicting heterogeneous set of goods that his account ultimately generates; and they concluded that MacIntyre’s three-fold teleology ends up inadvertently reinforcing, rather than undermining, emotivism. The relevant question is whether Dewey’s account is better placed to defend itself against the sort of criticism levelled by Bernstein and Schneewind at MacIntyre in *After Virtue*? I will argue that Deweyan democracy is in fact better positioned to defend his teleology against those sorts of criticisms, because while Deweyan democracy is open-ended, it is substantive in the sense I argued earlier, and that it subscribes to a methodology which seems capable of rationally evaluating a range of different goods.

From what we have considered thus far in our discussion of Dewey, it would appear that Dewey’s teleology – the idea of growth – allows for a multiplicity of ways in which growth can be realised. Indeed for Dewey, human nature isn’t static, nor is it entirely known to us. Hence, Dewey would grant that his account of growth allows for a rich diversity of lives that generate a heterogeneous set of goods; and some of those goods are potentially incompatible with each other, especially given the nature of large contemporary societies. Dewey therefore would concede that in realising growth we do in fact generate goods that certainly appear to be in conflict with each other. Might then Dewey’s teleology be susceptible to the sort of criticisms advanced by Bernstein and Schneewind?

I propose a negative response to this question, and on my view, Dewey’s teleology doesn’t ultimately succumb to this type of criticism. Bernstein in fact argues in “Creative Democracy”[[254]](#footnote-254) that Dewey’s conception of democracy as a way of life offers an especially promising substantive non-instrumentalist conception of human flourishing. What Dewey’s account does is that it sets the parameter for growth – growth defined as the intelligent realisation of human potential through association and cooperative inquiry for the amelioration of social problems. While growth is multiply-realisable, growth is committed to the values of intelligent inquiry, experimentalism, and fallibilism, all directed towards the amelioration of social problems. These values will ensure that whatever the peculiar character of contingent social problems may be in some particular social context, these problems are evaluated democratically by the way of intelligent cooperative inquiry. Therefore, growth essentially accepts that human beings are fundamentally social cooperative problem solving animals.

Now, in Dewey’s democracy as a way of life, our life is oriented towards resolving problems in the social context intelligently through cooperative deliberation. While conflicts inevitably emerge between various goods that are generated in various social contexts, the life of the individual remains democratically oriented towards ameliorating problematic social/normative situations through method of inquiry and experiment. The process in which social problems are tackled and resolved will sometimes involve adjudicating rationally between competing goods. Here, we are at times successful in our efforts towards a resolution of these problems, while at other times we come up short.

On Dewey’s view, what we need is not a way to antecedently rank-order all the possible goods that are generated by society. Instead, what is essential is that we remain committed to considering the various goods generated in our communities, and evaluate them using the method of inquiry to see whether they contribute to, or undermine, growth. In this sense, Deweyan democracy has a way of rationally evaluating and adjudicating between conflicting priorities (or goods) to see which of those priorities are more apt to advance growth. This good is not then defined in any final sense; rather, it is defined in terms of realising concrete incremental improvements in material, social, and political conditions.

Now, while it is certainly true that we cannot converge on all goods beforehand in a readymade fashion, the reality of social life is itself only possible because human beings often come together in order to cooperate; and that is partly made possible because they do in fact converge on some important goods. The success of growth is then not measured by offering a ready-made list of all goods ordered into a single life. Rather growth is measured by (i) how well a society, steeped in democracy as a way of life, deals with the various social problems through *the method of cooperative inquiry and deliberation* – deliberation that would have to be, as much as possible, democratic; and by (ii) how widely members of that society *participate in the conditions for growth and self-realisation*. Thus, Dewey’s teleology – democracy as a way of life – subscribes to the right sort of non-instrumentality (or substantivity) – one that in fact endorses a particular way of life with its own distinctive conception of flourishing. This conception of flourishing isn’t grounded in a complete philosophical system that assigns rank and order to a varied set of human goods. For Dewey then to adopt democracy as a way of life is to have faith in the cooperative capacity of human beings to come together,[[255]](#footnote-255) as equal participants in the social and political order, and help foster an environment where social problems are resolved through cooperative dialogue and the method of intelligent inquiry.

“‘Agnosticism’ is a shadow cast by the eclipse of the supernatural. Of course, acknowledgment that we do not know what we do not know is a necessity of all intellectual integrity. But generalized agnosticism is only a halfway elimination of the supernatural. Its meaning departs when the intellectual outlook is directed wholly to the natural world. When it is so directed, there are plenty of particular matters regarding which we must say we do not know; we only inquire and form hypotheses which future inquiry will confirm or reject. But such doubts are an incident of faith in the method of intelligence. They are signs of faith, not of a pale and impotent skepticism. We doubt in order that we may find out, not because some inaccessible supernatural lurks behind whatever we can know. The substantial background of practical faith in ideal ends is positive and outreaching…We who now live are parts of a humanity that extends into the remote past, a humanity that has interacted with nature. The things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it.”[[256]](#footnote-256)

Thus, Dewey’s faith is a social faith in humanity’s capacity for inquiry and social cooperation, and his teleology isn’t an attempt to offer us a unified life that answers all ethical situations once and for all. Dewey’s account, if my reading is in fact correct, endorses a particular way of life that can best rationally deal with various normative and social contingencies that emerge for all human beings, and all human communities, at one time or another.

### 4.3 Third Objection:

The third line of criticism against my appropriation of Dewey’s democracy for supplementing MacIntyre’s account is that Dewey’s eschews metaphysics and his philosophy is generally considered to be instrumentalist. And on the face of it, his instrumentalism would put him at odds with MacIntyre’s Aristotelian-Thomism. For example, on Dewey’s view (i) political concepts have no absolute/final meaning; (ii) political terms are historically bound and thus are only fully intelligible within the particular historical context which furnished them their meaning; (iii) and many of these inherited concepts no longer advance the common good.[[257]](#footnote-257)

Nevertheless, I think that I have already shown that the kind of instrumentalism that Dewey espouses is a weak or moderate form of instrumentalism and certainly not instrumentalism *tout court*; it could then reasonably be characterised or viewed as (moderately) non-instrumentalist. Notwithstanding my suggestion that Dewey should be read within a framework that endorses some form of (moderate) non-instrumentality, and therefore, granting that Dewey is committed to some version of instrumentalism, I would argue that MacIntyre could accept the kind of instrumentalism I have identified in (ii) and (iii). In fact much of MacIntyre’s effort in *After Virtue* is spent arguing for (ii) and (iii). Thus, the more pertinent question seems to be whether MacIntyre could agree with (i). Now, my contention is that Dewey’s account offers a possible way out with respect to (i).

Dewey argued that even though we can’t inquire into absolute and final meanings, we can conduct inquiry into the workings of concrete social and political phenomenon, identify the conditions under which they are generated, and evaluate the practical normative consequences that follow from them. The process of discussion and communication in democratic inquiry is central to generating both individual and social growth; and the more we discuss social problems, the better the odds are that we develop resolutions to those problems and thereby realise growth.[[258]](#footnote-258) On this view, just as we use the method of inquiry to posit hypotheses in the domain of science and rely on our past stock of experiences within that domain to test various hypotheses, we can similarly direct inquiry at efforts that can help identify better or worse resolutions to various social problems.[[259]](#footnote-259) Here, we rely on our accumulated historical experience in dealing with social problems, and we learn from those earlier lessons, both in cases of clear successes, as well as failed cases. Thus, in a methodological sense Dewey’s account can be viewed as instrumentalist, and therefore can be read as supporting (i).

However, there is a normative sense in which his account isn’t as susceptible to the charge of instrumentalism. First, while for Dewey human nature isn’t static, there are aspects of that nature that Deweyan democracy confidently accepts. On this view, human beings to a large degree realise themselves in social settings, and as problem solving animals. Second, Dewey’s definition of growth is non-instrumental, not only because he begins with these premises, but perhaps much more decisively on the account that he views, growth and freedom as continuous. Growth is then the wide-spread proliferation of diverse human capacities (or freedom) – capacities that at least in part should be directed at developing and articulating resolutions to various social or otherwise normative problems. However, resolutions of a set of social problems is not the only reason why we should aim at increasing the proliferation of freedom on the largest possible scale, and increasing the degree to which emancipation is realised on that same scale. It is also in part because through this same process of growth, we are able to achieve our own good as individual human beings, and we realise that this good is irreducibly social, for it is generated through a set of social processes in concrete social settings. Therefore, to the extent that we follow Dewey, we bind freedom and growth of human capacities to our sense of self and our individuality, and thus recognise through the irreducibly social character of our good, that growth and freedom are not only continuous, but could be suitably defined in non-instrumentalist terms.

Still, one might object that the substantive non-instrumentalist sense in which we described Dewey’s growth isn’t going to necessarily sway the Thomist MacIntyre. Why? Because for the Thomist, in order that our telos remains meaningful it must be directed at a transcendent source – namely, God; yet, the teleology in Deweyan democracy is indeed worldly, directed towards the incremental resolution of practical problems through democratic cooperative inquiry.[[260]](#footnote-260) However, my aim is not primarily to sway the later Thomist MacIntyre, although admittedly, it remains a secondary goal. Instead, as I indicated earlier in the introduction to this thesis, I am for the most part directing my argument to the MacIntyre we find at the end of *After Virtue*. I should emphasize that the MacIntyre at the end of *After Virtue* *is* *not* committed to a substantive metaphysics; [[261]](#footnote-261) in fact he rejects Aristotle in part because he thinks that given the conditions that define contemporary social life, we can’t make sense of an Aristotelian metaphysical biology,[[262]](#footnote-262) which could underwrite a viable conception of human flourishing.

Therefore, my account ought to be viewed as an attempt to articulate Deweyan democracy as a way of resolving the kinds of difficulty that MacIntyre faces at the end of *After Virtue*, and certainly after the criticisms levelled against MacIntyre’s three-fold account of the virtues, by Bernstein and Schneewind. Recall that the whole crisis of morality, on MacIntyre’s view, is primarily blamed on the loss of the functional/teleological forms of explanation in ethics. MacIntyre argued in *After Virtue* that all of the various enlightenment efforts to independently justify morality failed, precisely because they could no longer rely on the teleological resources in Aristotle. And MacIntyre’s three-fold account of the virtues in *After Virtue* is a kind of social teleology. Nonetheless, both Bernstein and Schneewind separately argued that MacIntyre’s three-fold concept of the virtues doesn’t furnish him with an adequate conception of flourishing, primarily because it lacks a distinct conception of flourishing, and thus generates a heterogeneous set of goods that are not easily reconcilable. Therefore, under MacIntyre’s account, we do not have compelling reason to order the goods in one way as opposed to another, and consequently, we cannot definitively endorse a distinctive way of life in terms of its characteristic opposition to other ways of life, owing to the fact that MacIntyre’s definition of the good, which underpins his three-fold concept of the virtue is much too open-ended, and as a consequence generates varied conceptions of the good life.[[263]](#footnote-263)

However, I would like to suggest that Dewey’s teleology in his democracy as a way of life thesis offers MacIntyre the type of resources that could support a more empirical Neo-Aristotelianism. Dewey’s teleology, namely, democracy as a way of life, allows us to fully explore and realise our human potential, in harmony with the common good of the community as a whole. This of course means that Dewey’s teleology or democracy as a way of life and his conception of flourishing are irreducibly social and political. Human beings flourish within the context of a community, and as a member of some community. That is, human beings realise their potential in their interactions with the larger community, and through their interdependencies with other members of that community. Hence, Dewey’s account remains social and political, because for Dewey ethics and politics are continuous – namely, that human beings ultimately flourish as social and political organisms.

Nonetheless, a new problem appears to emerge at this point, which could make Dewey’s approach as problematic as MacIntyre’s. The problem surfaces owing to the fact that Dewey’s conception of growth and flourishing only makes sense if we assume that the method of inquiry can apply equally to ethics, as it does in science. Dewey argues that, more or less, similar methods of inquiry – experimentalism, fallibilism, amelioration (or problem solving) – employed in the sciences can be utilised in ethical and normative inquiry. Now, the immediate objection that one could raise is that drawing this sort of parallel between science and ethics is a dubious move; and that moral inquiry just isn’t the same sort of activity as scientific inquiry into the workings of the physical world.

When it comes to scientific inquiry into the physical world, theory proposes a model that makes a certain number of predictions with which we can test observation sentences. If the theory works – namely, that those observations sentences are not rejected – it is able to describe some physical phenomenon and predict it more or less regularly. Now, the theory’s observation sentences track physical objects in the world. On the other hand, in ethical inquiry we don’t really track physical phenomena in the world in the way science does, because for one, normative phenomena are much too complex to be described using methods of science. But, much more importantly, scientific models offer observation sentences that track some physical phenomena in the world. However, normative inquiry doesn’t track any physical facts which correspond to the world. Namely, normative phenomena do not map onto nor refer to objects in the world, they are not object placing, and that whatever objects they may refer to – as part of an objectual array – do not obtain.

Instead, so the objection goes, what normative inquiry really maps onto are individual preferences, desires, and attitudes, all grounded in values, as opposed to any sort of physical fact that could reliably describe the world. Thus, if facts about the physical world are fundamentally different than values, the ‘fact/value’ and the ‘science/ethics’ distinctions potentially undermine the possibility of the Deweyan account getting off the ground.

It is in no small part that the distinction between facts and values renders emotivism, or its more modern iteration, expressivism, as one of the more, if not the most, compelling, and widely discussed, accounts in metaethics. It would appear that MacIntyre, even with Dewey’s help, still has an emotivism problem. What do I mean by this? If we can’t draw a parallel between science and ethics, we can’t conduct the kind of inquiry in ethics that Dewey encourages, and so we can’t make sense of his account of growth and flourishing, precisely for the reason that Dewey’s account is framed in terms of *an inquiry* into growth and flourishing. Now, should this transpire and we fail to devise an escape from this impending conclusion, we are not able to then propose Deweyan democracy as a potential remedy for the lack of a suitable teleology in MacIntyre’s account. Emotivism (or more likely expressivism) would then be rendered the most plausible and compelling account in metaethics, and MacIntyre’s historical account in *After Virtue* would serve to reinforce it, and ought to be viewed as a rational historical reconstruction of the contemporary metaethical stance.

In the next section, I will consider a way out of our dilemma. I will argue that there may be a way of undermining the ‘science/ethics’ and ‘fact/value’ distinction, in a way that can revive the possibility for applying Dewey’s method of inquiry in ethical debates, which could then be used to support the Deweyan resolution we have considered in this chapter. Now, in order to defend this sort of claim, as part of my overall argument in support of Dewey, I will use Hilary Putnam’s paper the ‘The Science-Ethics Distinction’ and his book *The Collapse of Fact-Value Dichotomy*.

## 5. The Analytic/Synthetic and the Fact/Value distinction

This objection stated simply is that Dewey seeks to model (ethical) inquiry on scientific inquiry; but critics argue firstly that those two are very different activities, and secondly, they are different in part because factual claims are fundamentally different from evaluative claims (the ‘fact/value’ distinction). On Dewey’s pragmatist conception of inquiry, moral inquiry just like scientific inquiry is subject to evidence, and it is subject to good, as well as bad, forms of reasoning. Thus, moral inquiry as an activity isn’t necessarily very different from inquiry in the sciences. Nonetheless, the ‘fact/value’ distinction appears to pose a clear obstacle to this approach. In the following, I consider Hilary Putnam’s pragmatic response to this problem. It will turn out that factual claims are entangled with evaluative components; and that we reason badly if we reject the possibility of Deweyan ethical inquiry on account of a strict ‘fact/value’ distinction.

In Chapter One of *The Collapse of Fact/Value Dichotomy*, Putnam looks to provide an historical reconstruction of the origins and the emergence of what he identifies as the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy. His overall aim in this book is to undermine a strong (or metaphysical) form of the ‘fact/value’ distinction. His initial argument against a strong version of the ‘fact/value’ distinction appears to be that the strong form of this distinction was based on a now largely discredited distinction between analytic and synthetic statements; hence, we have good reason to be sceptical about a strong ‘fact/value’ distinction. Let me consider this in a little more detail.

On Putnam’s view, the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy presupposes another distinction – namely, the analytic vs. synthetic class of statements.[[264]](#footnote-264) Now the discussion of this distinction is important because the ‘analytic/synthetic’ distinction rested on a specific Humean conception of facts rooted in late 17th early 18th century account of psychology; and this same conception of facts formed the basis for the original ‘fact/value’ distinction. Thus, if it turns out that this conception of facts is indeed wrong, in part due to the limitations of that psychology, and partly owing to later scientific discoveries demonstrating that facts are indeed more complex than the Humean view allows for, we have reasons to worry about drawing a sharp distinction between facts and values.

Putnam begins by arguing that the ‘analytic/synthetic’ distinction was undermined by Quine’s work, and more specifically Quine’s famous paper the ‘The Two Dogmas of Empiricism.’ Quine’s insight was that there is a large range of statements that do not fall neatly into the analytic or synthetic classification. Quine, by revealing the factual (or synthetic) components of analytic statements and the conventional (or analytic) components of synthetic statements, in effect established that both sides of this ‘divide’ are in fact entangled with one another. Quine demonstrates this by arguing that there are two categories of analytic statements: (i) those that are true in all possible worlds; and (ii) those that are true in virtue of synonymy.[[265]](#footnote-265) He then argues that those that are true in virtue of synonymy cannot be true in all possible worlds since synonymy relies on particular contingent facts.[[266]](#footnote-266) Hence, these second forms of analytic statements are parasitic on synthetic statements – or put differently, they are entangled. The upshot here is that all those analytic statements that are true in virtue of synonymy, can no longer be counted as analytic, or truths of reason, in the sense that Kant or Leibniz, respectively, could have entertained – namely, true in all possible worlds. Thus, if analytic statements are seen as dependent on factual statements, we come to possess many statements that cannot be exclusively (or definitively) classified as factual on the one hand, or on the other hand as conventional.

For Putnam, Quine demonstrates the collapse of the ‘analytic/synthetic’ distinction owing to entanglement between facts and conventions. Nonetheless, Putnam also argues that the nature of entanglement between facts and conventions became more apparent to Quine and other philosophers, primarily as a result of developments in science. The story that Putnam narrates is this: Because of developments in physics, analytic philosophers had to account for a broader and more complex conception of factual predicates. Therefore, Carnap and other logical positivists were forced to expand the scope of ‘facts’ as it was originally understood, namely Hume’s understanding of ‘fact’ as a sensible impression. But by inflating and therefore expanding the class of factual predicates, Putnam argues, they undermined a strong reading of the ‘fact/value’ distinction.

Under Hume a fact equated with a sensible impression.[[267]](#footnote-267) On this view, the property of those statements that refer to ‘matters of fact’ must be sensible to us as physical sense impressions;[[268]](#footnote-268) and this is necessary for identifying those statements as objective – that is, they can be identified as true or false. For Hume, we cannot sensibly – through sense impression – imagine the properties of a virtue in the same way that we can for those statements that refer to ‘matters of fact’ – such as sensibly imagining the properties of an apple.

Now, logical positivists had inherited this Humean legacy; therefore, they initially argued that all factual statements can be transformed into statements about the subject’s own sense experience, namely that all factual predicates must be definable using observational terms.[[269]](#footnote-269) Nonetheless, given the developments in science – chief among them the discovery of the atom and smaller subatomic particles, as well as the existence of curved space – Carnap and other logical positivists stretched the notion of ‘fact’ to a considerable extent. Therefore, Carnap, in 1936, liberalised the concept of fact and defined it as factual predicates that are meaningful observation terms or reducible to such terms.[[270]](#footnote-270) However, after 1938, Carnap went a step further and altogether jettisoned “the requirement that a meaningful factual predicate must be either an observation predicate or ‘reducible’ to observation predicates.”[[271]](#footnote-271) Under this newly revised model, the requirement was modified so that the whole *system* of scientific statements must have factual content, rather than any particular statement; notwithstanding these corrections, Carnap still insisted on a distinction between ‘observational’ terms and ‘theoretical’ terms, the latter as partially, and the former as fully, interpretable.

Putnam argues, however, that logical positivists like Carnap, by extending the definition of a fact from sensible impression to one that includes theoretical/conventional elements, undermined the ‘analytic/synthetic’ distinction. On Putnam’s view, the extension by logical positivism of what is to be counted as a fact undermines the ‘synthetic’ vs. ‘analytic’ distinction, since it counts as ‘synthetic,’ statement terms that cannot be clearly classified as ‘synthetic’ or ‘analytic.’ Even Carnap’s strict separation between ‘observational’ and ‘theoretical’ terms, namely the ‘observation’ vs. ‘theory’ distinction, is itself undermined and discarded rapidly given the developments in the philosophy of science, starting with Kuhn.[[272]](#footnote-272) In his seminal work,[[273]](#footnote-273) Kuhn argued that observational terms are theory-laden, namely, their semantic contents are not independent of theoretical presuppositions.

On Putnam’s view, when we take stock of the way in which the hard distinction between ‘fact/value’ was supported and premised on a clear ‘analytic’ vs. ‘synthetic’ distinction – a distinction that was undermined by Quine – there are good reasons for us to abandon our commitment to a strong form of the ‘fact/value’ distinction. For Putnam, the class of ‘analytic/synthetic’ is only an occasionally useful notion, and not a powerful metaphysical tool to be bandied about often in ways that block potential avenues of inquiry. The danger of employing this distinction in a metaphysically inflated sense is that we end up ignoring or discarding the range of statements that do not fall neatly into either category. Modern science has shown us that many statements of science are entangled with both ‘observational’ and ‘theoretical terms,’ and indeed even observational terms are theory-laden,[[274]](#footnote-274) meaning that observation in science can only be interpreted through a prior understanding of theory. For example, the observational term ‘mass’ has a different meaning under Newtonian mechanics than it does under the theory of relativity; while, in the former it is constant, in the latter the mass of an object can only be determined in relation to its velocity.

At this point it is worth noting what we have accomplished so far. Putnam argues that the ‘fact/value’ distinction was itself parasitic on a clear distinction between ‘analytic’ vs. ‘synthetic’ statements – a distinction that was largely undermined by Quine. In addition, the entanglement between analytic and synthetic statements became more pronounced when logical positivists modified their conception of fact (largely due to developments in physics). However, in the process, they destroyed Hume’s idea of fact as a sensible impression. Non-observable entities and later abstract theoretical entities were included under the description of ‘matters of fact,’ even though Hume’s notion of fact was that of something which affords us ‘sensible impression.’ Thus, the synthetic-analytic distinction was undermined given that a range of scientific statements could not be neatly classified under the synthetic-analytic distinction, and we discovered that theory and observation were entangled in ways which logical positivism failed to appreciate. The upshot of all this is that because the ‘fact/value’ distinction was supported and premised on a clear distinction between ‘analytic’ vs. ‘synthetic’ statements – a distinction that now seems suspect – there are good reasons for us to abandon a strong form of the ‘fact/value’ distinction.

Now I should emphasize that Putnam’s argument thus far does not directly undermine the ‘fact/value’ distinction. All that it accomplishes is to show that the ‘fact/value’ distinction was in part premised on an earlier, now defunct, distinction; thus, it provides no more than an indirect argument – albeit one that on my view remains significant – for maintaining some degree of scepticism about a strong ‘fact/value’ dichotomy. However, Putnam does not stop here. He also offers a direct argument for undermining a strong ‘fact/value’ distinction; his argument is that entanglement between descriptive and evaluative components of semantic content undermines a strong divide between the factual and the evaluative, between facts and values. I will consider this line of inquiry in the next section.

## 6. The Entanglement of Fact and Value

We saw that the logical positivist conception of the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy was not based on a serious discussion on the nature of values or evaluative judgments; instead, it relied on an impoverished empiricist view on the status of factual statements.[[275]](#footnote-275) Yet by extending the definition of fact, logical positivists diluted the distinction between ‘synthetic’ and ‘analytic’ statements, for these concepts were now entangled under their modified classification system. Therefore, Putnam argued, they undermined the distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘value’ precisely because the notion of ‘fact’ for them relied on a clear class of ‘synthetic’ judgments. Putnam then further stipulates that in the absence of a clear class of ‘synthetic’ judgements we run into the problem of entanglement for we discover that description and evaluation are interdependent and entangled in ways that are not always fully appreciated.

On Putnam’s view, once we discard our narrow conception of values as just ethical values, we find that not only are there clear instances of entanglement between observational, and theoretical, terms, but in addition, the activity of scientific theorizing itself presupposes values – it presupposes epistemic values, the so-called theoretical virtues. Judgments of parsimony, consistency, elegance or beauty, symmetry, coherence, reasonableness, and plausibility are all value judgments that are very much employed in various scientific domains.[[276]](#footnote-276) Still, someone could counter this and say ‘the activity of science is one thing, and its products, another thing altogether.’ He or she could then grant that science as an activity is value-laden, but nevertheless continue to argue that the achievements of science are not. The problem with this approach is at least two-fold.

First, I am uncertain as to whether the distinction between the methods and activity of science on the one hand, and its product on the other, is uncontroversial. The objectivity of science in part rests on its particular method, and the shape of its activity. Conversely, but similarly, it is also argued that ethical inquiry isn’t objective because moral inquiry doesn’t utilise the method of science. Second, on this view, there seems to be an accidental (or contingent) relationship between the activity of science, and its product; and that would mean any sort of activity that produces a particular product which accidentally maps onto and obtains objects in the world, is worthy of the name science.

Now, if there is something to say about the relationship between an activity and its product, and that they are interdependent in some meaningful way, the sort of objection I have considered here is less decisive than it might appear. Therefore, if I am correct to suggest that we should indeed take Putnam’s argument seriously, it seems that the knowledge of particular fact presupposes knowledge of theories, and knowledge of theories presupposes knowledge of particular facts; furthermore, knowledge of facts presupposes knowledge of values, and vice versa.[[277]](#footnote-277)

“Quine’s critique of the logical positivists’ picture of what they called language of science as neatly divided into a ‘factual’ part and an ‘analytic’ part, *the whole argument for the classical fact/value dichotomy was in ruins*,[[278]](#footnote-278) and that ‘as far as logical empiricism could tell,’ science might presuppose values as well as experiences and conventions. Indeed, once we stop thinking of ‘value’ as synonymous with ‘ethics,’ it is quite clear that it does presuppose values – it presupposed epistemic values.”[[279]](#footnote-279)

The narrow logical positivist view is confident in the knowledge that the questions of values are subjective and there can be no question of any rational agreement as part of an objective inquiry. But this false confidence is settled with its own limitations and suffers insofar as it subscribes to a myopic conception of factual statements, which as a result fails to carefully consider the role of non-ethical evaluative judgments in formulating factual claims. It falsely believes that science is ‘Objective’ in a Euclidean sense – namely that it is value free; and thus, it denies a fundamental understanding of how science works in practice, by failing to fully appreciate the way in which epistemic values underwrite scientific inquiry. Nonetheless, Putnam argues that on the pragmatist view, such as that of Dewey, Peirce, and James, value and normativity are a constitutive part of all experience, including scientific practice.[[280]](#footnote-280)

Putnam then argues that the grounds for a strong ‘fact/value’ distinction is in the process diluted, not only on account of the demise of the ‘synthetic/analytic’ distinction – owing to the entanglement between fact and convention – which supported and reinforced the distinction between ‘fact/value,’ but also because in our everyday use, and more in depth consideration, of ordinary language terms, it becomes quite obvious that descriptive and evaluative terms are often entangled. Putnam considers the term ‘cruel,’ and argues that this term and other less abstract (ethical) terms – often referred to by philosophers as ‘thick ethical concepts’ – are entangled; and that there isn’t really a satisfactory way of disentangling them. Now, ‘cruel’ is both a descriptive and an evaluative term.[[281]](#footnote-281) For example, with respect to the ethical or normative use of cruel, I cannot say that X is a very cruel woman and that she is good woman, and simultaneously remain coherent. If X turns out to very cruel it means that X cannot be a good person. However, the term cruel has clear descriptive uses as well. For example, when a scholar of history says that “X’s short rule was mired by widespread cruelty, which generated a popular rebellion against X’s rule,” she is providing a description of some historical event, and possible causes that forms the explanatory basis for the particular turn of events.

Of course, Putnam concedes that the phenomenon of entanglement, which he is considering with respect to the term cruel, has been pointed out earlier by other critics of the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy.[[282]](#footnote-282) Yet, the most common objection various defenders of the strong ‘fact/value’ distinction have advanced is that this is not really a case of entanglement since we can simply reduce or otherwise disentangle thick terms into descriptive and evaluative components. On this view, thick concepts can be factored into a purely descriptive as well as an attitudinal component. The descriptive component states the matter of fact that the predicate corresponds to, and the attitudinal component expresses an “attitude” (an emotion or volition).

Putnam, nonetheless, argues that the locus of entanglement between descriptive and evaluative components of thick concepts cuts deeper than what the supporters of the fact/value dichotomy have allowed. Here, he claims that factoring doesn’t always work, because often we are unable to factor the descriptive aspect of the word ‘cruel,’ without using the word ‘cruel’ or another of its synonyms. Using the original term would leave the term ‘cruel’ entangled, and using a synonym would just kick the problem up one level (the synonym for ‘cruel’ would now have to be disentangled using another synonym). The issue for us is that when we use a thick term like ‘cruel,’ in order that we can continue to make sense of the term and retain its semantic content, we are pressed to identify imaginatively with a particular evaluative point of view. Putnam therefore argues that in the case of thick concepts like ‘cruel,’ the descriptive component is parasitic on the evaluative component. It then becomes impossible to coherently disentangle thick terms into clearly distinct descriptive and evaluative components.

Putnam claims that the current status of this debate has led many of the defenders of the strong ‘fact/value’ distinction to agree that entanglement between ‘fact/value’ indeed poses a recognisable, and not easily dismissible, problem, and that factoring does not always work. Nonetheless, he argues that the defenders of the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy continue to defend it by employing some version of physicalism. Physicalism is the position that everything which exists is no more extensive than its physical properties – that is, everything that fundamentally exists are physical substances.

Bernard Williams offers a sophisticated example of such a defence. He argues for a more general distinction between ‘fact/value’ that is based on a distinction between local facts, and an absolute conception of the world of a completed science. While the absolute conception of the world is independent of any local perspective, a local fact for Williams is a correct assertion in a local language game.[[283]](#footnote-283) For example if I identify the colour of my shirt as blue, I am stating a local fact, and not an absolute fact – that is, a fact about the world independent of any and all particular perspectives.

“the world as it is in itself, independent of all observers, can be described using only such scientific terms, according to Williams. A fact, in what Williams calls an absolute sense, is something that can be described in the vocabulary that science is destined to ‘converge’ upon in its indefinitely continued inquiry…it will be the vocabulary of (an improved and perfected) *physics*, a physics that describes the world in terms of *primary qualities* alone.”[[284]](#footnote-284)

Putnam argues that what follows from Williams’ account is not a strong ‘fact/value’ distinction, but a distinction between absolute facts that are independent of any observer, and facts that are local – namely, relative to one or another observer. Placing Putnam’s objection aside for a moment, even if there is way to read Williams’ distinction between absolute and local facts as supporting a strong ‘fact/value’ distinction, it seems that it isn’t altogether clear that this new distinction remains desirable for those whose want to usefully maintain a strong form of the ‘fact/value’ distinction. The problem Williams’ distinction poses for the defenders of the strong distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘value’ is that Williams ends up casting a very small net. What I mean to say is that in stark contrast to the normal or common usage of the distinction between facts and values in our ordinary use of natural language, very few facts will figure into the absolute conception of the world; therefore, genuine facts will only end up figuring in the discussions between theoretical physicists and local facts together with values, will fall on the wrong side of the distinction between facts and values.

Furthermore, Williams’ argument appears to remove the possibility of making sense of many ordinary factual claims that we would ordinarily categorise as facts. For example, the claim that “grass is green” falls on the wrong side of the distinction since it isn’t independent of any local perspective, and so wouldn’t belong to the class of facts that figure into the absolute conception of the world. Needless to say, ethical claims do not figure in the absolute conception of the world; the claim that “murder is wrong” can only be a local fact, local to some particular social context or other.

Now, in my view, Williams’ distinction between local facts, and facts that underwrite the absolute conception of the world, isn’t a good argument for a strong ‘fact/value’ distinction, since many of those statements that users of the strong ‘fact/value’ distinction would normally identify as facts, would now be classified as local facts. Thus, those who defended the strong ‘fact/value’ distinction on the basis of some substantive or metaphysical ground, which seeks to distinguish facts from values more generally, will end up having very few facts to count on that could be classified as facts with respect to an absolute conception of the world; hence, the number of statements that would fall into the ‘local fact-value’ side of the distinction would turn out to be enormous. Here, the users of the strong ‘fact/value’ distinction would have to place many descriptive statements on the ‘local fact-value’ side of the dichotomy; on the other hand, what takes up residence on the bona fide ‘fact’ side of the dichotomy are only those things that are described in the language of a completed physics. It then seems reasonable to conclude that we now have very few (if any) genuine facts to refer to in the normal discourse between non physicists – owing to Williams’ industrial scale inflation of the ‘local fact-value’ side of this distinction – we have in effect undermined and diluted the force of the distinction between fact and value.

But there is another problem with Williams’ view. Putnam argues that the view of physics that Williams espouses – namely, that science converges on a singular explanatory framework for the universe – is at least thus far, demonstratively incorrect,[[285]](#footnote-285) and that Williams’ picture of science does not accurately account for the way in which science converges on inferences that figure into our the description of the world; hence, we do not have compelling reasons to argue that physics will ultimately afford us a description of the universe using a single theory, or theoretical framework. For example, depending on the conditions of a quantum mechanical state, we could describe the state of a system in terms of particles, or alternately in terms of waves – this is the famous wave-particle duality. In theoretical physics space-time geometry we can identify space-time points as individual points or simply as limits. In both of these examples, not only do we possess more than one description to describe one particular phenomenon, but also those descriptions are accompanied by different ontologies.

More than that, the locus of scientific activity is its explanatory and descriptive basis; and this framework has often meant that scientists have had to endure extensive modifications and in some cases wholesale transformations of the theoretical paradigm, as part of the continuing activity and developments in science. For example, the equation in Newtonian gravitational theory, under certain conditions, offers a correct account of the gravitational fields of a body. But we also know that Einstein’s general relativity has altered that picture dramatically and superseded the Newtonian paradigm. Even now, advances in theoretical physics specifically in quantum field theory are undermining Einstein’s picture of relativity.

“Not only do single theories have a bewildering variety of alternative rational reconstructions (with quite different ontologies); but there is no evidence at all for the claim (which is essential to Williams’s belief in an ‘absolute conception of the world’) that science converges to a single theory. I do not doubt that there is some convergence in scientific knowledge, and not just at the observational level. We know, for example, that certain equations are approximately correct descriptions of certain phenomena. Under certain conditions, the Poisson equation of Newtonian gravitational theory gives an approximately correct description of the gravitational field of a body. But the theoretical picture of Newtonian mechanics has been utterly changed by General Relativity; and the theoretical picture of General Relativity may in turn be utterly replaced by Supergravitation theory, or by some theory not yet imagined. We simply do not have the evidence to justify speculation as to whether or not science is ‘destined’ to converge to some one definite theoretical picture.”[[286]](#footnote-286)

Thus, if we reject the as of yet unsupported and unwarranted assumption that science is ‘destined’ to converge on a single theory with a distinct ontology, the foundation for Williams’ absolute conception of the world becomes more and more doubtful. It therefore follows that the physicalist argument can no longer form the basis of a strong (or metaphysical) distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘value.’

In our discussion thus far, we have considered the main objection posed by the defenders of the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy – namely, that we can reduce thick concepts into descriptive and evaluative components – and we have seen that this position proves unsatisfactory. In addition, we observed that Putnam argues that the physicalist view defended by Williams, remains unsuccessful as an argument in support of the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy. Why? Because Williams’ physicalist argument isn’t really an argument for a strong ‘fact/value’ dichotomy; instead, it seems to be an argument for a distinction between local facts, and absolute facts. I then argued, nevertheless, that a distinction between local and absolute fact isn’t really an attractive option for the defenders of the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy. The reason for this is that when we carefully consider the consequences that follow from Williams’ distinction between local facts and absolute facts as a way of upholding the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy, it becomes painfully obvious that we end up greatly expanding one side of the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy – the value side, since local facts are observer/context dependent, and hence can no longer count as genuine facts – to such a degree that it altogether weakens the relevance and strength of the dichotomy.

In the above discussion, I have utilised Putnam’s argument to show how entanglement between descriptive and normative components of thick concepts makes the whole enterprise of positing a strong ‘fact/value’ distinction suspect. Now for my purposes, I will accept that Putnam’s account is largely correct. The upshot of his arguments is that it is not reasonable to maintain a strong ‘fact/value’ distinction, because descriptive and evaluative terms are often entangled. Therefore, if I have correctly used Putnam in my effort to undermine the basis for a strong ‘fact/value’ and ‘science/ethics’ distinction, then (as Dewey suggests) it seems we can utilise methods of rational inquiry in areas outside science.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I first argued that since MacIntyre’s explanation for the wrongful decline of Thomism isn’t persuasive, the lack of a viable teleology poses a major dilemma for his position. I argued that Dewey’s idea of democracy as a way of life can be fruitfully read as a form of social-political conception that amounts to a distinctive conception of flourishing. Now, the implication here is that Deweyan democracy affords us the basis for a teleological framework, and that his account, is well placed to fill a critical gap in MacIntyre’s project.

In considering Deweyan democracy, we observed that Dewey’s method of cooperative inquiry implicit in democracy as a way of life aims at creating the conditions under which members of the community participate as co-equal interlocutors in order to ameliorate social problems. Therefore, a Deweyan form of inquiry in ethics, viewed as a problem solving methodology with respect to social and normative problems, appears to be plausible. Here, the amelioration of normative/social problems through democratic cooperative inquiry renders Dewey’s conception of growth and flourishing coherent. We can then make sense of Dewey’s teleology and his conception of growth, precisely because growth is generated and reinforced through democratic cooperative activity for the sake of resolving social problems – problems that stand as obstacle in realising growth.

Next, I explored a number of possible objections that could potentially undermine my interpretation of Deweyan democracy, as a form of teleology. First, I examined whether the Dewey’s social-political teleology – namely, democracy as a way of life – is sufficiently non-instrumental (or substantive) to generate a distinctive conception of flourishing. Utilising arguments offered by Talisse, I suggested that Dewey’s account is adequately substantive, and therefore, remains capable of generating a distinct conception of human flourishing – namely, growth.

I then examined whether the Deweyan conception of flourishing can defend itself against the kinds of paradigmatic criticism raised against MacIntyre’s social teleology in *After Virtue*, by the likes of Bernstein and Schneewind. I argued that Dewey’s democracy as a way of life can answer those kinds of worries. I proposed that we can effectively address those kinds of worries, partly because (i) Bernstein acknowledges the strength of Dewey’s conception of democracy as a way of life, insofar as it offers a (moderate) non-instrumentalist conception of the good; (ii) Dewey’s conception of the good – namely, growth – while it remains multiply realisable, remains grounded in the reasonable assumption that human beings are fundamentally *social* *problem-solving* animals; and in part because (iii) we can measure the pace of growth by the degree in which individuals in a society cooperate for the sake of solving *particular* social problems under *particular* conditions, using the pragmatist method of intelligent cooperative democratic inquiry.

I then advanced a third objection – namely, that Dewey’s non-instrumentalist account does not sit well with MacIntyre’s later adoption of Thomism. While I agree that Dewey’s social-political teleology isn’t perhaps convincing enough to sway the later MacIntyre, it remains nonetheless a serious contender for successfully attending to the distinctive problem that plagued MacIntyre’s three-fold account of the virtues – namely, the lack of a meaningful conception of the good that is not only capable of underwriting his social teleology in *After Virtue*, but also of allowing MacIntyre to consistently maintain those commitments that are born out of the contextualism-historicism, in his work.

Lastly, I considered a final objection: namely, whether Dewey’s teleology, or democracy as a way of life, rests on the assumption that the pragmatist methodology of inquiry can just as well apply to moral inquiry as it does to other areas of inquiry, especially scientific forms of inquiry. Using the arguments offered by Hilary Putnam, I put forward a defense of the Deweyan conception of inquiry. Using Putnam’s arguments, I proposed that a hard and fast distinction between science and ethics, and facts and values, is not merited. Here, I argued that when we carefully consider a number of factual and evaluative sentences, it becomes obvious that factual and evaluative predicates, especially with regards to social-practical facts, are often entangled. Finally, I rejected Bernard Williams’ argument that ‘physicalism’ justifies a strong distinction between facts and values. First, it seems that the upshot of Williams’ argument is not a strong distinction between facts and values, rather a distinction between local facts and absolute facts. Second, I argued that Williams’ distinction between local facts and absolute facts ultimately places a lot of ordinary factual claims on the wrong side of the distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘value.’ Therefore, Williams’ distinction isn’t altogether an attractive alternative for the defenders of the ‘fact/value’ dichotomy, if they want to meaningfully use the distinction in defence of ordinary descriptions in natural language, and not those descriptions that are located in the domain of theoretical physics.

Taken overall, therefore, I hope to have established that a broadly Deweyan approach can help MacIntyre deal with a fundamental difficulty we have raised for his project, by offering him a plausible alternative to the Aristotelian-Thomistic account of the human good, thereby enabling him to offer a sufficiently substantive conception of this good on the one hand, while on the other hand escaping the difficulty of attempting to revive a position that on his own account, ought to be viewed as surpassed. In this way, I have shown how pragmatism can be used to complement MacIntyre’s work, in ways that he may have found surprising, but which (I have argued) he has good reasons not to resist if that work is to be rendered stable and coherent. In turning now to the second central difficulty I raised for MacIntyre’s project, we will come to see that a similar turn to pragmatism could likewise prove profitable.

# Chapter 4: MacIntyre’s Political Philosophy: Historicity, modern political philosophy, and the Aristotelian Polis

## 1. Introduction

In Chapter Two, I explored the tension between the contextualist-historicist commitments that follow from MacIntyre’s historical account of tradition-guided inquiry, against those claims that emerge from his endorsement of Aristotelian-Thomism. We discovered that MacIntyre’s historical narrative of tradition-guided moral inquiry appears to highlight two distinct aspects of progress (or development) – an ‘intellectual/rational’ aspect, as well as a ‘material’ aspect; and, owing to the fact that these two aspects are independent and do not necessarily align with each other, this means that they can potentially come into conflict. This, on my view, is the locus of the first tension in MacIntyre’s account. Notwithstanding the potential conflict between these two aspects, I nonetheless argued that Aristotelian-Thomism was indeed displaced and marginalised under both of these different aspects. I then went on to consider a pragmatist proposal for removing this tension, by addressing it at its source – namely, through a resolution of the conflict that emerges owing to MacIntyre’s various contextualist-historicist commitments, in light of his later Thomistic turn.

Now, in our discussion of the first tension we therefore considered the historical-cum-philosophical character of the instability in his account, which then implied a degree of incoherence attached to MacIntyre’s project. In this chapter I look to explore what I take to be the second tension in MacIntyre’s position. As I indicated earlier, this second tension is related to the first tension; that is, it is an implication of the first tension, but this implication (or upshot) is rendered more acute owing to MacIntyre explicit disavowal of liberalism and its politics, especially any portion of it that involves a critical-cum-constructive engagement with the liberal state. Now, the second difficulty (or tension) emerges because while MacIntyre seems to agree that liberalism is in fact the dominant tradition and that it indeed epitomises social and cultural life under contemporary social-political conditions, he also rejects liberalism and the liberal political order, and instead favors what seems to be a communal Thomistic form of politics, as well as small-scale social-political associations.

Nevertheless, if traditions of moral theory are always connected to the wider social-cultural-political context and are essentially a conceptual formulation of socially embodied practices, a conclusion that his first four hypothesis seem to support, it seems that the liberal tradition is the dominant modern tradition and appears to be the outcome of a long run process of moral and political inquiry. Since MacIntyre agrees that the liberal tradition is the dominant contemporary tradition, yet rejects it as problematic, he needs to show why liberalism as a moral and political tradition fails in a significant way. Moreover, under the historical contextualist account MacIntyre presents in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice*, moral theory in the context of traditions is always connected to the wider socio-political context; yet, it seems that our contemporary socio-political context is far removed from the social context of Aquinas and Aristotle. Therefore it is an open question whether Aristotelian-Thomism seen as a tradition that best expressed moral claims for the medieval feudal social structure, could also express and conceptually formulate social norms and practices that are applicable to the contemporary socio-political context.

While this second tension ultimately originates in the first tension, it nevertheless speaks to a number of political-cum-philosophical themes of MacIntyre’s position. I will try to briefly clarify what I mean by this. In MacIntyre’s account, ethical practice is grounded within a shared conception of the goods embedded in particular historically contingent communities, in their attendant culture, language and modes of socialization. More significantly, the shared conception of the good can only be achieved by engaging in the activity of politics, and remains a necessary condition for the complete fulfilment of individual good and individual flourishing. This suggests at least two things: *first*, that MacIntyre’s ethical account is historicist in some robust sense;[[287]](#footnote-287) and *second*, that there is some important continuity or interdependence between ethics and politics.[[288]](#footnote-288) I will now explain these two points in more detail.

If we accept the first claim, a problem that emerges for MacIntyre’s account is that Thomism, as a tradition that can inform our moral practice, is on MacIntyre’s own account a theoretical articulation of ethical standards and shared cultural practices of a historically contingent society. MacIntyre’s historicist account could not and in fact does not deny that contemporary society is the outcome of contingent socio-historical transformations. On this historicist thesis, we can uncontroversially accept that the transition from the Aristotelian-Thomist communities in the past to our contemporary society has generated large-scale changes in those features that constitute our contemporary social form, distinguishing it fundamentally from those features of historical societies to which Aquinas and Aristotle belonged.

For MacIntyre, the social-historical context of moral and political philosophy is not some auxiliary datum to be discarded by an abstract mode of philosophical inquiry; instead, on his view, the historicity of social forms, and the kind of normativity they generate, is an important feature of any serious moral-cum-political philosophy. Thus, on the historicist thesis, given the significant differences between on the one hand the socio-historical context in which Thomism flourished as a theoretical articulation of particular historical cultural and social practices, and on the other, our modern contemporary social circumstance, it is not clear how the Thomistic tradition can effectively articulate the social and cultural practices peculiar to the modern context. Put differently, it is not clear that on the historicist thesis, Thomism as a tradition is best able to give expression to a reconstituted moral and political framework – a framework that can successfully integrate within its confines important features of the modern social context.

Now, MacIntyre maintains that the Thomistic tradition is a successful fusion of Aristotelian and Augustinian traditions; and his historicism would mean that Aquinas’ ethical account is best understood as a theoretical synthesis of Augustine and Aristotle, that was developed to meet the needs of a contingent (historical) social context. Hence, Aquinas’ social context lends itself to a theoretical articulation of ethical enquiry grounded in a particular conception of community – one peculiar to Aquinas. But the contemporary social context no longer possesses those features that characterised the Aristotelian *polis*, nor those that distinguished Aquinas’ *feudal* community and ways of life. Thus, if MacIntyre’s moral-cum-political project is to be made consistent with his contextualist-historicist thesis, [[289]](#footnote-289) one that is deeply embedded in his overall account of tradition-guided inquiry, he cannot not ignore the objection that he himself is overlooking history by assuming the adequacy of a tradition that is the product of the thirteenth century. This, then, is the second tension in MacIntyre’s project.

Next, consider that MacIntyre’s second claim highlights an important continuity or connection between ethics and politics, since the human good cannot be achieved without engaging fruitfully in politics. Therefore, ethics cannot be divorced from politics. For MacIntyre, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* cannot be separated from Aristotle’s *Politics*. This means that on the Aristotelian account of moral philosophy, the individual is only able to truly flourish and achieve the virtues insofar as that person is situated in a political community, and actively participates in the polity for the sake of realising his or her individual good, as part of the wider common good. On this view, the individual good is not defined separately from the common good – that is, the individual’s good is continuous with the common good of the community; or put differently, the individual achieves her good insofar as she participates in social practices that are partially constitutive of the common good. Thus, following Aristotle, MacIntyre views ethics and politics as interdependent or continuous. In fact, MacIntyre argues that a principal mistake of contemporary moral discourse is that it often divorces itself from political problems.[[290]](#footnote-290)

This second claim is important since I believe it serves to strengthen the force of the second tension in MacIntyre’s account. Why is that? If the connections between ethics and politics are close, such that without the delineation of a properly conceived politics, ethical inquiry fails altogether, then MacIntyre’s account requires in addition to a properly formulated ethics, a positive political account that synthesizes elements of Aristotelian-Thomism, in a historically informed manner, for use in the contemporary social-cultural context.

Now, I should point out that MacIntyre argues in support of a communal form of Thomistic inspired politics, defined in terms of the common good realisable in the social life of small-scale communities.[[291]](#footnote-291) However, MacIntyre simultaneously argues that this sort of local politics is perpetually at the mercy of large-scale political structures and institutions in the liberal state, owing to their tendency to corrupt local communal forms of politics. Here, MacIntyre’s description of our circumstance is very pessimistic, since many of the examples of local communal politics in his discussions are examples of communities that have succumbed to the powerful forces generated by the liberal political order. We are then seemingly left with a local politics of the common good, which even when read charitably, doesn’t ultimately possess the kind of content that would permit a sustained defense against what MacIntyre describes as the morally problematic consequences of large-scale politics and political structures. And, given the social and historical transformation of modern society, and its distance from the Aristotelian polis and the kinds of medieval communities to which Aquinas belonged, it is not clear that a Thomist politics can avoid the second tension identified in our discussion.

However, at this point, it would be highly premature to conclude that MacIntyre doesn’t have the resources to rebut my criticism. It may be that he has formulated a form of Thomistic politics that escapes my criticism. Thus, we need to inquire whether MacIntyre has augmented the standard Thomist account, and by so doing, has found the resources that permit him to disarm the second tension generated under his account. In the next section, I will examine whether MacIntyre has augmented Thomism in ways that successfully answers the above criticism. Only after evaluating MacIntyre’s synthesis of Thomism with more modern views, will we arrive at a place where we can then put together the core constitutive elements of his politics. In section 3, I will outline the core elements of MacIntyre’s political philosophy to see whether MacIntyre is able to advance a type of politics that can defend his conception of local communal politics of the common good. In section 4, I will first consider whether MacIntyre’s criticism and the ultimate dismissal of large-scale politics remains warranted, and second, whether his account of politics as a form of practice is coherent. I will go on to suggest that we can only make sense of MacIntyre’s account of local politics if he supplements his account with a kind of politics that critically engages with large-scale social and political institutions, for the sake of reforming (or correcting) them. It will turn out that in order for MacIntyre to successfully escape my criticism and defend his politics of small-scale communities, he has to offer a positive politics that seriously engages contemporary large-scale politics.

## 2. MacIntyre’s Revolutionary Thomism

In this section I will examine whether MacIntyre’s version of Aristotelian-Thomism has been augmented or developed in a way that deflects the tension (or difficulty) outlined in the introduction to this chapter. We can express this tension in the following question: the problem for MacIntyre is *how do we go about formulating an alternative account of politics, one that is both sensitive to our socio-historical context and at the same time is Thomistic and Aristotelian in some meaningful sense?* Such an account could then potentially, not only deflect the worry that his historicism should rule out Thomistic political philosophy, but also show how he can provide a meaningful alternative to contemporary accounts in liberal political philosophy, parallel to the way in which his positive ethical account – MacIntyre’s three-fold concept of the virtues: (i) practice; (ii) narrative quest in the unity of a human life; and (iii) traditions – makes a genuine constructive attempt at challenging contemporary expressivism,[[292]](#footnote-292) and emotivism.[[293]](#footnote-293) We should therefore look to see if MacIntyre has augmented the Thomistic tradition with the type of resources that allows it to deflect the concerns I have outlined, while simultaneously offering a rival alternative politics to that of dominant liberal political philosophy, thus making that earlier tradition relevant to our times.[[294]](#footnote-294) I will now consider an interesting possibility along these lines.

In an important paper entitled ‘Alasdair MacIntyre’s Revisionary Aristotelianism: Pragmatism Opposed, Marxism Outmoded, Thomism Transformed,’ Kelvin Knight discusses how MacIntyre’s ‘Revisionary Aristotelianism’ can be understood as a fusion of not only Aristotle and Aquinas, but also Marx in a way that overcomes the limitations of Aristotelian-Thomism. On Knight’s reading of MacIntyre, MacIntyre is able to address an important flaw in Aristotelian-Thomistic moral and political philosophy. On this view, the uncritical extension of teleology through the metaphor of the state as a biological organism, and the sovereign as the head, is a problem for the Thomistic tradition. If we understand the state and the sovereign in this way, it seems to inoculate authority and social institutions from criticism. MacIntyre is able to overcome this problem by using a combination of Hegel and Marx to advance a social critique; and MacIntyre’s appropriation of a Marxist inspired social critique, subjects the entire social structure to a range of criticism including for example the relationship between the state and the sovereign. Now, on Knight’s view, this sort of criticism was missing from the work of Aristotle and Aquinas.

Knight expands on MacIntyre’s appropriation of Marx’s social critique for the purpose of augmenting the Aristotelian-Thomistic framework, in the following way. MacIntyre, in following Marx, agrees with the notion that the historically contingent separation of civil society from the state and its institutions, occasions the alienation of labour from its activity. This bifurcation of the individual from the state, along with the alienation of labour, is accompanied by a closer integration of the market with other institutions of the state. Knight’s final analysis of MacIntyre’s account is that the social, economic and political structure of society under the capitalist model of production and consumption undermines the common good. Why? Because common good, as defined by MacIntyre, can only be engendered within a framework in which human beings are habituated into the virtues through participation in various social practices, and each person has a genuine hand in the democratic ordering of the goods generated by different practices. Here, the ordering of the goods generated by different (social) practices is constitutive of a genuinely Aristotelian politics. Yet ordering goods in this way remains at odds with the capitalist model of consumption and production in which the market is essentially tasked with ordering a range of goods, including many of the goods that are a derived when undertaking some social practice or other. Of course, the market does not order those goods through a process of sustained deliberation, and in the context of democratic forms of inquiry; instead, it takes individual desires and preferences for a variety of goods as basic or given.

On Knight’s view, the upshot of MacIntyre’s account is that, by appropriating Marx’s critique, MacIntyre in effect revises Aristotelianism so that it becomes capable of criticizing society and its institutions. For example, Marx’s account closely connects ‘labour’ to its ‘use-value,’ and hence it transcends the capitalist model that alienates labour. Thus Marx goes beyond the Aristotelian picture in which labour is associated with servility, and so his conception of labour allows for the potential that un-alienated human labour can lead to flourishing of the individual *qua* human being. Knight tells us that MacIntyre adopts the socio-historical standpoint of Hegel without falling prey to his holism – consequently in this way, he overcomes Aristotle’s limitations. Progress is not possible insofar as progress is the actualization of human potentiality under the capitalist mode of production, because capitalism’s systematic alienation and exploitation of labour prevents actualization of human potential.

The pluralistic structure of MacIntyre’s account replaces the Aristotelian conception of a single highest good; hence, it overcomes the Aristotelian error that prioritizes *philosophical life* over the *political life*. Consequently, MacIntyre’s revision of Aristotle is more inclusive of society as a whole, and in this sense it is an *egalitarian* form of Aristotelianism. This is because the Marxist critique that MacIntyre brings to the context of Aristotelian thought revises and expands on Aristotle’s traditional idea of what it is for human beings to flourish. This revised concept of practice, one that is inclusive of internal goods, dispenses with the Aristotelian distinction between *technai* and *praxis* that led to Aristotle’s diminution of productive labor and craft. Thus, it overcomes the opprobrium that Aristotle attaches to productive work as servile slavish action. Likewise, capitalism engenders the alienation of labor from its product and consequently encourages relentless production and consumption. Thus in a distinctly different yet parallel sense, the capitalist mode of production encourages servility in the excessive worship of a blind detached materialism; such an outcome nevertheless can only serve to further alienate individuals from constructive social relationships – namely, those social and political relationships that seek to advance human flourishing broadly construed. But why must we understand the relationship in this way?

The interdependent nature of the relationship between the individual and social and political activity, properly understood, means that individuals that actively engage in the discussion of, and deliberation on, social and political matters, are likely better placed to make informed decisions. Therefore, a public that is not engaged in this kind of political activity will more than likely make lesser choices. Now, a series of lesser choices over the long run will tend to generate lesser results and outcomes; and a series of poor outcomes tends to generate a kind of politics in which individuals are more likely to find themselves alienated from political activity, since their action is seen as having little impact.

Therefore, politics as a practice in MacIntyre’s sense requires an engaged citizenry that actively participates in a variety of practical deliberations on matters pertaining to the life of that political community, and what constitutes their *common good*; and the *common good* is advanced through shared practical deliberation on how to order the goods of different social practices. Here Knight argues that it is just such a conception of the common good that is ruled out in contemporary politics. How so? Compartmentalization within the modern social structure distorts our social agency since one activity, typically our employment, comes to be the predominant practice, and in effect exerts wide ranging influence on a variety of our practical (normative) decisions. Therefore, the predominance and importance of our employment and the fact that it sustains our other activities, tends to skew our practical reasoning in ways that undermines our moral agency. This type of compartmentalization is nevertheless incompatible with the purposive ordering of goods of practices – a political activity – as defined by Aristotle.[[295]](#footnote-295) Thus, politics in the Aristotelian sense is incompatible with the social structure of the modern state.

Knight then argues that on MacIntyre’s account, we cannot become independent practical reasoners without also becoming in some sense political reasoners; and the reason for this is that both types of reasoning tend to deal with the ordering of various goods in our lives, either individually or cooperatively. Under this account, the type of social forms that could engender practices and their internal goods of virtue, are small communities, not the large nation state, because a society that understands politics as a practice (in MacIntyre’s sense) must be arranged in a genuinely participatory fashion and therefore it cannot be of an indefinite size. Knight offers us MacIntyre’s examples of (i) fishing communities in New England; (ii) Welsh mining communities; (iii) and Mayan towns in Guatemala. The above are examples of particular communities that are networks of giving and receiving where practices are institutionalized under conditions which strengthens them. These examples serves to provide the type of resources that on MacIntyre’s account engenders a form of social life that facilitates the genuine practices of the virtues.[[296]](#footnote-296) It seems that MacIntyre politics is then a politics of small-scale communities – communities that display close social bonds.

So how has MacIntyre augmented Aristotelian Thomism? The most important claim that Knight makes which concerns our line of inquiry is that MacIntyre has revised and transformed Aristotelian-Thomism through augmenting that tradition with a sociological critique of society and its institutions. To this extent, then, it could be argued that Knight shows how MacIntyre’s position, while deeply influenced by Aristotle and Aquinas, can be developed in such a way as to inform our understanding of the modern world, and in the process, MacIntyre is able to address the second tension I outlined earlier.

However, an immediate difficulty that emerges here is that on Knight’s reading of MacIntyre, the social critique that MacIntyre adopts seemingly rules out the possibility of an Aristotelian politics in the modern state; instead the main thrust of MacIntyre’s politics is at the level of local communities instead. Yet it seems reasonable to maintain that MacIntyre’s defence of politics at the level of local communities requires some level of engagement and interaction with the state. This is important on account of that fact that in our contemporary world, globalization and large nation states are a fact of life. Now, in addition to our membership in the local community where we reside, we are simultaneously members of large nation states, and in an ever increasingly technologically connected world, we are at once members of trans-national (and often digital) cooperative/competitive entities. I should emphasize here that the kind of historicism that MacIntyre seems to support[[297]](#footnote-297), presupposes just this sort of claim. Therefore, an important worry seems to emerge if MacIntyre’s sole and primary focus is on local politics: what sort of politics can encapsulate MacIntyre’s revival of a Thomistic-Aristotelian local politics of the common good, yet at the same time be consistent with the type of historicism explicitly formulated in MacIntyre’s work?[[298]](#footnote-298) And what sort of politics of the common good can be made consistent with MacIntyre’s own historicism?

We can readily observe that large nation states and globalization are salient facts of the modern world. Nevertheless, this is in some sense incompatible with MacIntyre’s politics of the common good, for on his account, the contemporary nation state, and in some cases even cities, are so large as to limit the practice of a properly deliberative Aristotelian form of politics. Yet, it seems to me that a complete withdrawal from large scale politics is not only unrealistic, but appears to violate MacIntyre’s historicist thesis since such a withdrawal implicitly ignores salient facts constitutive of the contemporary social context. To escape this criticism MacIntyre needs to offer a type of politics that takes its historicity seriously, while simultaneously remains allied with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition in some meaningful sense. This would suggest an account that retains both a place for local politics, and large scale politics at the state level.

I should emphasize that MacIntyre’s own account seems to suggest that the state is a necessary condition for at least some important goods – goods of collective defense, security and peace.[[299]](#footnote-299) Hence, the state appears to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for MacIntyre’s politics of local communities. Recall that on MacIntyre’s account, the structure of the modern state is incompatible with the type of small-scale politics which he envisions. Therefore, in the absence of an appropriate argument or justification that reconciles these two positions, it remains a difficult proposition for MacIntyre to hang onto both claims. Without such an argument, it is not clear why we should accept that no possible modification of the state vis à vis local politics could occasion the democratic ordering of goods at the political level, which would then improve the possibility of realizing a genuine participatory politics.

Even Knight acknowledges that the task remains for MacIntyre to show how politics is supposed to be conducted in a society that is structurally incapable of combining pursuit of various goods into a single order for the sake of the common good.[[300]](#footnote-300) On my view, Knight attempts to answer this question, but his response is seemingly broad and ambiguous. Knight suggests that by engaging with the Marxist tradition, Aristotelian Thomists can operate as individuals within the modern socio-political structure, while at the same time pursue the internal goods of virtue and maintain their moral integrity in the face of the broader challenge of liberal modernity and the ever encroaching forces deployed by the ‘state-market.’[[301]](#footnote-301) Thus, Knight follows MacIntyre in a parallel way – namely, by engaging between the two traditions of Aristotle and Marx, we can carry out our various practices in local communities in ways that maintains the integrity of these practices and hence sustains their internal goods, namely, the virtues.[[302]](#footnote-302) Nevertheless, I think that this sort of answer ultimately fails to properly address the question. If we have already accepted MacIntyre’s claim that the state’s influence is so great such that local communities are not able to effectively resist the subversive acts of the state, it doesn’t seem plausible to then suggest that individuals residing in local communities can somehow inoculate themselves against those same subversive actions.[[303]](#footnote-303)

While it seems to me that Knight appreciates that an important constitutive element is missing in MacIntyre’s political philosophy, as far as I can tell his suggestion doesn’t amount to a concrete political alternative. Even if one is already an Aristotelian Thomist and agrees with the Marxist inspired critique that MacIntyre offers, it is still not clear what practical ways we have to effectively resist the state, let alone develop a coherent political alternative. Put simply, it appears that Knight’s analysis does not ultimately address the problem that the state, or even larger communities, presents for MacIntyre’s politics. It seems to me that Knight does not go far enough to address the absence of a viable political conception in MacIntyre’s account. Recall that the suitability of MacIntyre’s Thomist revival as it stands is in question, given that it corresponds to the particular historical circumstance and social context of Aquinas and Aristotle, and its corresponding conception of *polis* – a political conception that is in profound conflict with many features of our contemporary social context, including the liberal nation state.

Thus, it appears that MacIntyre’s synthesis of Aristotelian-Thomism with his Marxist inspired social critique isn’t able to address the second tension in MacIntyre’s project. Moreover, it appears that the sociological critique adopted by MacIntyre is mostly a resource which he utilizes in order to reject contemporary liberal politics, and especially, politics at the state level. But recall that for MacIntyre, in lieu of a positive politics, the tension is especially acute insofar as he closely connects ethics and politics; and in the absence of a positive political account, his ethical project as a whole is placed in danger.

Therefore, MacIntyre needs a kind of politics, which remains sensitive to our contemporary social circumstance and one which critically, yet constructively engages the dominant liberal political tradition. To put it differently, the kind of politics that MacIntyre adopts ought to remain cognizant of the fact that any viable politics must deal with problems that arise as part of the ongoing relationship between small-scale and large-scale political systems.

But before we can pass judgment on the limitation of MacIntyre’s Thomist inspired local politics of the common good and answer whether MacIntyre indeed fails to advance a positive politics, we need to coherently piece together, as best as we can, some important constitutive elements of his political philosophy, and more specifically, the primacy of the common good in genuine (Aristotelian) political activity.

## 3. MacIntyre’s Political Philosophy

Thus far, I have tried to reveal how MacIntyre’s engagement with Hegel and Marx has expanded upon Aristotelian-Thomism in a way that has surpassed the original discourse offered in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. I nevertheless argued that viewed as a resolution to the second tension, this engagement remains largely unsuccessful. While MacIntyre argues that we ought to defend local communities, he doesn’t really offer any sort of concrete proposal how this can be accomplished. What I would like to suggest here is that in order to defend and sustain local communities of the common good against encroachment by the state, MacIntyre ought to articulate a kind of politics that can effectively manage the relationship between local communities and the state, and therefore, propose an account that outlines practical ways of defending the political power of local communities.

Now, I should emphasize here that MacIntyre’s critique of liberal politics and the liberal state may nonetheless be justified independently of whatever vulnerability or shortcoming are attributable to his brand of communal politics. It may be that the liberal state is in fact problematic in so many ways, and hence, we may be in need of a MacIntyrean critique – one that problematizes liberal theory and the liberal state in some fundamental way. However, it is also a fact that we do actually live in the liberal state, and so we can’t abandon all attempts at politics at the state level. My suggestion here is that MacIntyre should remain open to the possibility of an alternative critical politics – one that engages liberal theory, but also avoids its mistakes. Still, MacIntyre could perhaps argue that his effective criticism of the liberal state ushers in a type of local politics which can altogether ignore any systematic constructive philosophical (or theoretical) engagement with state level politics.

Now, in order to understand why MacIntyre dispenses with state level politics, I have to first carefully consider the arguments and claims MacIntyre advances against modern liberal politics and political philosophy. This is because MacIntyre’s politics is in large part a critique of the liberal state and contemporary liberal political philosophy. Thus, before I can further advance the argument that MacIntyre’s politics undermines his ethical-cum-political project, I need to draw out the main claims in MacIntyre’s political philosophy. Once I have achieved greater clarity in this task, I will be in a position to better formulate the inadequacies and sources of instability in his position.

So what are the various claims and arguments that constitute MacIntyre’s political philosophy? MacIntyre’s political philosophy is interspersed throughout his various works, and so it can be difficult to combine them into a unified account. Therefore, in addition to examining MacIntyre’s writings, I will also make use of secondary sources to piece together a concise summary of MacIntyre’s political philosophy. I will first outline those elements in MacIntyre’s politics which explain the relationship between the individual’s good and the common good in local communities, and then, the relationship between the individual’s good and the public interest in the modern state.

MacIntyre tells us that the *common good*, properly understood,

“the goods of the association cannot be constructed out of what were the goods of its individual members, antecedently to and independently of their membership in it. In these cases the goods of the whole cannot be arrived at by summing the goods of the parts. Such are those goods not only achieved by means of cooperative activity and shared understanding of their significance, but in key part constituted by cooperative activity and shared understanding of their significance, goods such as the excellence in cooperative activity achieved by fishing crews and string quartets, by farming households and by teams of research scientists.”[[304]](#footnote-304) And again that “the common good can *only* be pursued by those individuals who are acting as parts of some communal whole, and who, implicitly or explicitly, understand their individual good as partly constituted by a good or goods characterizable independently of and antecedently to the characterization of their particular individual good.”[[305]](#footnote-305)

On this view, the common good is not reducible to a prior notion of the individual’s good, and nor is it defined independently of the individual’s good. The common good, thus understood, is defined in terms of the individual’s social participation in a set of practices that contribute to the shared goods of those practices. It is through participation in a diverse set of practices that the individual realizes her own good as partly constituted in the realization of those shared goods held in common. So for example, the good of the individual members of the fishing crew is not independent of the good common to all members of the crew. Such common good is achieved by the way of participation in a craft or practice. Participating in social *practices*[[306]](#footnote-306) generates the good held common in those practices, but such goods are not separate from the goods of the individual agents who participate in the practice.[[307]](#footnote-307) Now common good, understood in terms of participation in a varied set of social practices while it is defined independently from the good of any one individual agent’s first-person perspective, is still inextricably intertwined with the concept of the individual’s good; more precisely, common good, broadly understood, remains a good that is common to members of a community who have converged on a range of commonly held goods, through a process of active participation in practical reasoning.[[308]](#footnote-308) It follows that practical deliberation by individual members of a community in ordering the goods of various practices is central to MacIntyre’s account of the common good. Thus MacIntyre’s notion of the common good isn’t reducible to, nor is it defined simply in terms of, a first-person account of the individual good. MacIntyre’s account understands the relationship between common good and individual good as one that is irreducibly social; namely, that the individual good is (at least in part) realised only as part of a shared realisation of the good through participation in shared social activity.[[309]](#footnote-309)

Mark Murphy, a political philosopher who has regularly engaged with MacIntyre’s work, contrasts MacIntyre’s conception of the common good, with the concept of *public interest* as defined by MacIntyre.[[310]](#footnote-310) For MacIntyre, the notion of public interest prioritizes the individual good over that of public interest – here, the concept of public interest is subordinate to the individual’s good. Murphy summarises this contrast in the following way. In contemporary liberal politics

“public interest is defined in such a way as to be logically posterior to the goods of the members of the public: it is a set of conditions that support individuals’ good. We would have to be able to provide an account of the individual’s good that is independent of the notion of public interest in order to make sense of that idea.”[[311]](#footnote-311)

Therefore, the concept of the individual good – in the liberal state – is prior to the notion of public interest. Public interest is then a set of political conditions that best realize a diverse range of goods for individuals who reside in society – goods which are defined in terms of the individual’s own subjective preferences, and therefore, a purely first-person perspective account of an individual’s good. Now, this account of public interest can be understood in either utilitarian or Rawlsian terms. So for example, on the utilitarian view, public interest can be understood either as a set of conditions that achieves the greatest happiness – namely, the happiness of the greatest number of individuals – or alternatively, it can be understood as an aggregate of the happiness of greatest number of individuals. In either case, the notion of public interest is defined in terms of the individual’s good. In a parallel fashion, for the Rawlsian, an overlapping consensus on a principle of justice generates a set of conditions that best realizes the right kind of political institutions. And the set of conditions that realize the right sort of political institutions are those that generate a type of society in which the individual person can pursue his or her own autonomously chosen individual good, defined in terms of his or her own subjective preference.

We can now safely accept that public interest is defined as a set of conditions that best realize the social and political conditions in which individuals can freely pursue their subjective preferences. Needless to say, that public interest, defined in this way, is very different from the sort of common good that MacIntyre identifies. On this account, the individual realizes his or her good through participation in social practices, and social practices when well-ordered, realize the common good. In addition, the account of public interest in liberal theory is very different from the Aristotelian common good; common good, thus conceived, necessitates engaged practical deliberation by individuals not only for the purpose of evaluating the goods of various practices, but also, ordering the goods of a range of different practices. Politics thus defined is then a kind of sovereign practice – one that orders the various goods[[312]](#footnote-312) of the different social practices in which a community engages. By contrast contemporary liberal politics is not primarily aimed at ordering various social goods; rather it is for the most part concerned with realising a minimal set of conditions which empowers each individual person to pursue their own particular interests, whatever they may be. On this view, the ordering of various social goods is ultimately reducible to an individual, first-person perspectival exercise of ordering one’s own subjective preferences.

However, for MacIntyre, this account of public interest in liberal politics generates an important problem for the liberal state.[[313]](#footnote-313) Every state must obtain the services of a number of individuals who are then tasked with the performance of certain dangerous tasks on behalf of the state, without which the state could not function.[[314]](#footnote-314) On MacIntyre’s view, politics in the liberal state generates the type of conditions where it is not clear why an individual should subordinate his or her own good for the sake of public interest, given that the individual’s good is defined prior to and separate from the concept of public interest. Here, liberalism’s appeal to impartial principles of morality understands them in a way in which rules of justice are justified without any appeal to one’s own particular conception of the good. Hence, it is difficult to see how we can make sense of justice as allegiance that an individual owes to a particular state, if that same individual fails to embrace any particular (public) conception of the good. Since justice can only be realized within a particular setting and under particular institutions, the appeal to the neutral state and its accompanying thin conception of the good, fails to generate a substantive notion of a common or communal good.[[315]](#footnote-315) Therefore, it is not clear why one should sacrifice the pursuit of one’s own desires and interests, for the sake of the public’s interest.

On MacIntyre’s view, the question of allegiance to the state, to this or that political authority, is unresolved under the liberal order, owing to the fact that the individual’s good sits prior to, and is defined in independence of the public’s wider interests; hence, the relationship between the set of actions that potentially advance public interest, and those actions that best realise an individual’s subjective desires and preferences, can pull apart.[[316]](#footnote-316) By contrast, the concept of the common good, on MacIntyre’s view, is not subordinate to the individual’s notion of the good. For MacIntyre, because the concept of common good is not defined separately from the individual’s good, it is not susceptible to this sort of criticism.

On the one hand, the concept of public interest, as either a set of conditions that realizes the right sort of political conditions for the pursuit of individual preferences, or as the sum of all such preferences, is conceptually distanced from understanding one’s own good viewed as the pursuit of subjective preferences. On the other hand, MacIntyre understands common good in a way that it continues to remain closely connected to the individual’s good. For MacIntyre, many important individual goods are essentially derived from the individual’s participation in a diverse set of social practices that simultaneously advances the common good. Nevertheless, *public interest*, because it doesn’t quite capture the appropriate form of *common good* – a common good that on MacIntyre’s view is irreducibly part of the individual’s good – fails to offer an adequate resolution for the problem of allegiance, given that it is not altogether clear why we should sacrifice our *individual good*, for the sake of *public interest*. On this view, liberal principles of justice can’t offer a convincing explanation for subordinating the individual’s good, in the interest of the public’s interest. Therefore, under the conditions of modern liberal politics, individuals will often fail to see how their own individual good is closely connected to shared (or common) goods; and why the individual possesses good reasons for subordinating what they take to be their own good, desire, and preferences, for the sake of the public interest.

Now, the distinction between public interest and common good is important because it potentially offers MacIntyre good reasons for rejecting the politics of the liberal state. Why? Politics in the liberal state limits the realization of the sort of common good that MacIntyre desires. While *public interest* is the realization of a set of conditions which are supposed to empower individuals to pursue their diverse, and often diverging, set of preferences, MacIntyre’s conception of the common good entails that an individual’s good is realized insofar as that person participates in a range of social practices (practices that are well-ordered); and the individual’s participation in a range of social practices likewise advances a number of shared goods in the context of the practices of a community, and in part constitute the *common good* of the whole community.

Politics in communities of the common good is then a democratic deliberative process of sorting through, and arranging, the goods of various social practices. Now, this task is accomplished within a framework that is directed towards the broader common good, and more generally, it is in this sense that we achieve flourishing human communities.[[317]](#footnote-317) Effective common deliberation by members of the community, that is to say, the practice of politics, is central to generating certain common actions that advance the common good.[[318]](#footnote-318) Nevertheless on MacIntyre’s view, this can only be achieved at the level of local communities. Why? Because effective democratic deliberation is in practice only possible when individual members of the community are engaged in the discussion and evaluation of their common good, namely, that of arranging the shared (or common) goods of the various practices. And it seems that from a practical standpoint, this sort of politics is just not feasible on large scales, something that is nevertheless a demographic and political reality in the liberal state. But there are three additional differences between the politics of the common good, and the kind of politics that is practiced in the modern state.

First, MacIntyre’s common good politics is partly consists in ranking and ordering the various internal goods of practices. Internal goods of practice are the goods of the virtues. This sort of community is actively engaged in first order discussions on substantive conceptions of the good.[[319]](#footnote-319) Nevertheless, the principle of neutrality in the liberal state[[320]](#footnote-320) implicitly rejects a politics of the common good, for it rules out all appeals to first order goods.

Second, under the conditions of the liberal state, the external goods of practices are dealt with through the mechanism of the market. While this mechanism is supposed to be more or less neutral, in practice this is not the case, for the reason that markets pursue goods of effectiveness, and for the most part those goods are external material goods (i.e. goods that can be quantified and monetized). The pursuit of money and monetary goods then privileges an excessively materialist conception of the good. By contrast, MacIntyre’s account of common good politics not only undertakes ordering the internal goods of practices, but it also tasks itself with ordering the various external goods of practices; and these tasks are then grounded in an Aristotelian inspired account of justice.[[321]](#footnote-321) This means that MacIntyre’s politics has to balance the re-appropriation of some external goods, against the needs of the community to ensure that the conditions for the realization of the wider common good (of the community) are not undermined. Yet, conditions in the liberal state preclude us from pursuing this possibility, owing to the fact that the liberal state limits first-order appeals to substantive conceptions of the good – i.e., it rules out public discussion of internal goods of practices – and instead it utilises the mechanism of the market to arrange material goods produced by society – i.e., the external goods of practices. MacIntyre does not of course deny that local communities possess some sort of exchange mechanism; rather his argument is that the mechanism of exchange in local communities is better able to balance the pursuit of profit (external goods) against the social/normative needs of a community (internal goods).[[322]](#footnote-322)

But it seems that the liberal state and its institutions, especially in the era of increasing globalisation (including closer integration of trade and legal mechanisms for the settlements of disputes often reached through compromise with trans-national conglomerates), has little choice but to restrict the sort of activity that is characteristic of MacIntyre’s communities – that of ongoing deliberations on how to evaluate and arrange the internal and external goods of various social practices – for the reason that some of those activities are accomplished through the market and the institutions of the market economy. The structure of politics in the liberal state is then not only incompatible with the sort of politics advocated by MacIntyre, but the conditions for the realization of MacIntyre’s common good politics remain unrealized.

Lastly, MacIntyre’s common good politics must adhere to some fundamental precepts of natural law. What are such precepts? They are rules against the use of force, lying to, or betraying other members of the community, who are involved in the common enterprise of politics.[[323]](#footnote-323) Put differently, it is a prohibition against engaging in activities that undermine practical reasoning directed towards the realisation of the common good. Yet, for MacIntyre, the liberal state doesn’t engender the conditions where all individuals are capable of effective and productive engagement in the political system, without abandoning at least some of those precepts.

MacIntyre also rejects the other possibility, that of a state appealing to some non-neutral conception of the good. MacIntyre believes that a non-neutral state that pursues some substantive conception of the good, a position that is parallel to some communitarian accounts,[[324]](#footnote-324) can precipitate the evils normally associated with totalitarianism. Why? For the important reason that on MacIntyre’s account, a top-down imposition of a first-order conception of the good by the state is intolerable since the decision making processes at the level of the state are isolated from procedures of rational inquiry – that of moral and political deliberations conducted at the level of individual participants in the context of small-scale political associations. This is unacceptable on MacIntyre’s Aristotelian view, for the common good is realized on account of the discussions individuals undertake in their community, for the purpose of ranking the goods derived from a range of practices; therefore, a politics of the common good must meet this condition. Now, if a (top-down) conception of the good is imposed and enforced on the citizenry, members of the community will have little opportunity to realise their good, since the process of practical reasoning is frustrated by state oppression.[[325]](#footnote-325)

Thus far, we have observed that MacIntyre’s account suggests that the neutral liberal state’s attempt at advancing an account of allegiance to a political authority is frustrated, because its thin account of public interest lacks a more substantive notion of common good not found in our contemporary liberal social context, and large scale political structures and institutions.[[326]](#footnote-326) What is implicit in this critique is that the condition for practical deliberation by individual members of the community does not exist, and so efforts to arrive at a substantive conception of the good, and attempts to order the various goods of practices for the sake of the common good – that is, the practice of politics – must inevitably fail.[[327]](#footnote-327) The upshot of MacIntyre’s account of local politics is that the state’s pseudo-neutral materialist conception of the good is inimical to the type of values that engender flourishing local communities. State institutions pursue the goods of effectiveness,[[328]](#footnote-328) those of power, money, fame, etc.; yet, in direct contrast, the common good of local communities is constitutive of those goods that enable the community to flourish, namely, goods of excellence – goods that are generated by achieving the internal goods of different (social) practices. And because the state, through various coercive means, exerts considerable influence on local political structures, there is a tendency for the goods of effectiveness – pursued by the state and market institutions – to overshadow (or subvert) the internal goods pursued by local communities. Thus, an important condition for the realization of flourishing at the level of local communities is in an important sense in conflict with the demands put forth by the liberal state and market institutions.[[329]](#footnote-329)

We may therefore summarize MacIntyre’s position as follows. First, MacIntyre focuses on the question of public interest because he takes that concept to represent a pseudo-communal notion of the good available in the neutral state. Second, we observed that MacIntyre’s notion of common good is not equivalent to the notion of public interest in the liberal (neutral) state, because public interest is defined separately and remains subordinate to a prior notion of the individual good; on the other hand, the common good in MacIntyre’s politics is in part constitutive of the individual good. Third, on MacIntyre’s account, politics is defined as a second order practice, yet the conditions that could generate this sort of politics are not realized in the liberal state. Finally, we observed that a thick conception of the good adopted at the level of the non-neutral state is similarly unacceptable, for the reason that MacIntyre’s notion of common good has its place at the level of individuals, participating as co-interlocutors in practical deliberations with respect to the common good. Hence implicitly, a top-down conception of the good fails to advance the sort of common good which MacIntyre advocates.

While I have summarized four distinct claims generated by MacIntyre’s politics, the second and third claims are more crucial to advancing our discussion. I will identify the second and third claim as A and B, respectively.

1. Public interest is a set of conditions directed towards the realization of a state of affairs in which individuals can freely pursue their diverse and varied preferences. On the other hand, common good is partly constitutive of the individual good of each member of society; and therefore, in an irreducibly social way, the individual’s good is derived from participating, and sharing, in the those goods inferred by various social practices. *Therefore, common good of local communities is very different from the notion of public interest in the liberal state. Public interest in the liberal state isn’t the same as common good defined by MacIntyre.*
2. In order to achieve the common good, we need to conceive of politics as a practice in which our (common) good is advanced through a process of shared deliberation by members of the community. Politics is here viewed as a kind of second order (or sovereign) practice, one that involves the ranking the goods of a range of social practices, not only through means that are democratic and participatory, but are in addition genuinely deliberatory. *Nonetheless, it seems that the large-scale structures of the liberal state limit the possibilities for participatory democratic deliberation, and therefore impede the realization of MacIntyre’s common good politics.*

The above two claims are important for they point to a seemingly intractable and antagonistic relationship between MacIntyre’s small-scale communal politics, and the preeminent form of contemporary political governance in the West – namely, the modern liberal state. Now, the antagonistic relationship between small-scale and large-scale political structures generates additional concern, because MacIntyre has argued that the state furnishes local communities with important shared goods essential to the existence and maintenance of local communities.[[330]](#footnote-330) It would appear, then, that the state remains a necessary, although not sufficient, condition, for the well being of local communities. In the next section I will explore this issue in more detail.

## 4. Liberal State and Local Politics

In what follows, I will consider (i) whether MacIntyre’s critique of the liberal nation state stands up to a profound concern – can MacIntyre’s local communities do without the existence of such a state in the modern world? I will then examine (ii) whether MacIntyre’s account of local politics – that of politics as a practice – is unstable. This line of argument is promising because if MacIntyre is not able to offer an adequate response to these two questions, it could potentially undermine the conclusion of claim (B). Consequently, if MacIntyre’s politics ultimately proves inadequate, we need the kind of alternative account that can try to capture, as much as it can, the contents of claim (A).

Now, given that MacIntyre appropriates a considerable portion of Marx’s social critique, we would be forgiven for perhaps believing that MacIntyre’s profound and sustained critique of the liberal state would lead him to adopt a Marxist inspired social engineering scheme that dispenses with the idea of a liberal nation-state. Yet, contrary to this first (mistaken) impulse, we find that MacIntyre’s thoughtful and sophisticated criticism is well aware that history has been, more often than not, less than auspicious to most such schemes. MacIntyre’s view on strategies where an all-encompassing conception of the good is embraced by the state is that such projects have often led to tyranny and despotism: "I...believe that attempts to remake modern societies in systematically communitarian ways will always be either ineffective or disastrous."[[331]](#footnote-331)

Consequently, on MacIntyre’s account, the liberal nation-state is viewed as ineliminable. More importantly, often on many occasions there is no efficient way for local communities to achieve certain ends other than through cooperating with the state, and so there will be times that individuals in local communities have to acquiesce and therefore participate in the state’s programs or projects.[[332]](#footnote-332) What is noteworthy is that there are some common goods, such as the goods of peace and security, which require the kinds of resources that are beyond the means of individual communities. So is the modern state as dismal and hopeless as MacIntyre makes it out to be? [[333]](#footnote-333) If the state is a precondition for local communities to achieve some important common goods, goods that are essential to their sustained existence and proper function, then this raises an important follow up question – a question that was first raised by Mark Murphy.

### 4.1 Is the State a Necessary Condition for Local Politics?

Murphy asks if there were no state to begin with, would individuals in local communities be forced to invent (or set up) institutions analogous to that of the state in order to achieve certain common ends? And if this is so, is it then plausible to suggest, as MacIntyre does, that the state is so fundamentally flawed, or rather, that it remains an imperfect (or flawed) realization of a system of politics indispensable to the realization of common social and political ends? And if state-level structures and institutions are to some extent generated as a resolution to a set of coordination problems, bearing in mind that large-scale structures are the most efficient means through which a great number of communities can advance a range of desirable goods – goods that are otherwise not easily obtainable and remain essential, to their survival and sustaining a range of social practices including that of politics – wouldn’t this again suggest that state is a flawed fulfillment of political structures that are fundamentally sound?[[334]](#footnote-334) Perhaps then the state is a sub-optimal manifestation of a range of structures that could potentially, through a sustained project of correction and incremental improvement, generate a more ideal society.

On Murphy’s view, MacIntyre’s account of local politics necessitates a demanding set of external goods achieved by political institutions such as security, wealth, etc., which then generates the conditions that occasion the possibility of common deliberation about the common good. Hence, there are important reasons for local communities to work together and generate political institutions at the state level. It is only then that they can efficiently appropriate the external goods offered by state politics, such as security and wealth; goods that will be more difficult if not impossible to achieve individually.[[335]](#footnote-335) Yet, the state, because it must inevitably combine the interests of many communities, must limit the extent in which effective deliberations can take place by all individuals within the many communities that constitute the state. Similarly, given that the state has to take into account and consolidate the various interests of the many communities it represents, it must proceed from a *thinner* conception of the good, for its mandate is to afford a limited set of external goods, i.e., security, wealth, while largely remaining neutral between rival conception of the good in the political arena.[[336]](#footnote-336)

Murphy’s criticism suggests that politics in local communities requires the efficient provision of external goods (security, wealth); and, the arrangement of such goods can be best generated through state-like institutions that overlap the boundaries of various communities. Second, deliberation at the level of state institutions, due to the size of the constituencies they represent, and the nature of their diverse interests, would in effect be thinner than deliberations at the level of local communities.

Still, MacIntyre could raise some objections against Murphy’s two conclusions. He could reject the first conclusion, and instead offer a historical materialist (or Marxist) response. On the historical materialist view, he could argue that institutions in fact fail to appropriately and efficiently distribute resources to the communities. Here, the state obtains its resource from general taxation, and taxation is in large part distributed through the various forces which the market brings to bear on state institutions. The market nevertheless remains vulnerable and susceptible to manipulative actions exerted by those actors and participants with the largest concentration of power. Now, given that the state allows market institutions to self-regulate, and the regulative apparatus are in turn filled with a cast of characters that constitute the wealthy capitalist class or are liable to the influence of that class, the market remains very much susceptible to forces directed by special and narrow interests representing a small sub-section of society. Now, seeing as the average market participants do not enjoy similar levels of material resources, in the long run, the system ends up ruling on behalf of the capital owning classes. Therefore state institutions instead are configured in a way that favours the distribution of resources to those wealthy classes, and this does not necessarily involve the most efficient distribution of resources.

Still, I wonder if this is enough given that MacIntyre rejects the Marxist solution to this problem – namely, socialist revolution and wholesale change of the state. Thus, even if this sort of criticism is effective, it seems MacIntyre has to offer a positive politics – one that is open to the possibility of correcting politics in the liberal state, in a more deliberate and gradual manner.

With respect to the second suggestion, MacIntyre could reject the view that the state’s thin account of the good ensures that its neutrality between rival conceptions of the good. He in fact tell us that the so called neutral liberal state is actually *not* neutral between rival conceptions of the good, for the market and related institutions are already partial to mechanisms that promote accumulation of external goods. Therefore they already possess an attitude already partial towards a particular conception of the good. Over the long run, the preference for an acquisitive-materialistic conception of the good tends to subvert or corrupt the internal goods of practices constitutive of the common good. MacIntyre seems to maintain some such view since he believes that local communities can effectively resist the state to the extent that they restrict their dealings with the state, so as to interact as little as possible with the state and its institutions.[[337]](#footnote-337) In addition, he maintains that local communities should adopt a sceptical and prudential attitude in all their dealings with the state; and that they should restrict such transactions to those that procure important external goods (as efficiently as possible), while giving up as little as possible in all other areas.[[338]](#footnote-338)

Keith Breen nevertheless makes an observation that has vital implications for MacIntyre’s account. It seems that on MacIntyre’s account, local communities are unable to give expression to many important political concerns, such as civil liberties, and economic redistribution. It appears then that the state has to intervene when civil liberties are involved and it seems that economic justice requires a redistribution and diversion of resources from some local communities who fare better or are wealthier, to those communities which are worse off. But if wealthier communities have to limit transaction with the state and protect their resources from appropriation by the state, the possibilities for economic redistribution are undermined. In addition, local communities dealing with the state must assume a purely cost-benefit instrumental approach in transacting with the state. Hence, in dealing with the state, communities ought to assume a business-like relationship in their transactions with the state, and so they should try to exact as much as possible from the state while offering up as little as possible in all such transactions.[[339]](#footnote-339) This type of relationship between communities and the state nonetheless boils down to negotiation, persuasion, and even manipulation so that each party achieves the most favourable arrangement relative to its concerns. Now, this sort of arrangement means that when it comes to the type of relationship MacIntyre favors between communities and the state, emotivism is indeed true.

A distinct problem therefore emerges for MacIntyre’s account of local politics. On the one hand, internal goods of practices and the virtues attached to them can only be realized within local communities that prioritize internal goods over external goods. That is, communities represent the spaces in which our attitudes towards internal goods of the virtues are nurtured. But on the other hand, communities ought to retain a prudential sceptical attitude in their dealings with the state. That is, they should take up a cost-benefit approach to procuring goods from the state, while giving up as little as possible. Here, it seems, local communities must also nurture a prudential cost/benefit attitude in their dealings with the state. Yet, this is an attitude that prioritizes external goods of effectiveness, over the internal goods of excellence (or the virtues). Thus local communities must conduct a double life in which their members at once nurture the internal goods of the virtues in their internal dealings, yet they must simultaneously develop a prudential (emotive?) attitude when transacting with the state and its institutions. Breen notes that this double attitude, which local communities must possess, is one that already assumes an emotivist culture and a modern bureaucratic compartmentalization of political activities.[[340]](#footnote-340) Now, I should say that I agree with Breen, and only add that Breen’s point seems to generate yet more difficulties for MacIntyre’s politics.

An implication or upshot of our discussion thus far is that there are striking similarities between the state that MacIntyre criticises, and the sort of state that on Murphy’s view allows local communities to come together and achieve a set of goods, those of wealth and security – goods which are a necessary, yet not sufficient, condition for effective democratic deliberation in local communities about the good. They both possess a thin conception of the good and limit the scope of public debate and deliberation about various goods. Yet, recall that on MacIntyre’s view, just such a *thin* notion of the good fails to generate the proper sort of common good, insofar as the thin notion of the good found in the concept of public interest is unconnected to, and distinct from, the concept of common good understood by MacIntyre in which the relationship between the common good and the individual’s good is closely intertwined. For MacIntyre, under the liberal political order the concepts of individual good and public interest often diverge and come into conflict with each other.

Therefore, the fault with the state then perhaps lies with its apparent inability to properly constitute a framework in which democratic participatory deliberations on practical matters can take place, in ways that secure the widespread participation of the state’s populace. But if the state, due to its size and the fact that it represents communities with varied interests, is inherently diminished in its ability to make such an arrangement possible, how do we then develop a resolution to this problem?

Now, Murphy suggests that MacIntyre has to allow for the possibility of innovation within the political sphere. He argues that “even if we were to concede that it is not clear how it is even possible for rules of justice to be defended without a substantive theory of the good…with no direction of progress apparent, the possibility that progress will emerge is a live one.”[[341]](#footnote-341) While we could agree with MacIntyre and accept that the liberal state is indeed flawed, I should reiterate that on his own account, the state is essential to the sort of local communities he sanctions; thus, *pace* MacIntyre, it seems we must remain open to the possibility that we can rectify the shortcomings of the liberal state and its politics. So for example, it might be possible that the reconfiguration of policies or practices by state institutions can generate better outcomes vis à vis the relationship between state and local communities, on terms that are agreeable, and ultimately profitable to those communities. This suggests that it is not entirely clear that the liberal state is in as bad of a shape as MacIntyre claims, and it seems that his historical (and empirical) commitments[[342]](#footnote-342) suggests that he ought to remain open to the possibility of correcting the shortcomings of the politics associated with the liberal state.

### 4.2 Politics as a Second-order Practice

I will now consider the second question that Murphy poses for MacIntyre. Murphy asks whether MacIntyre’s concept of politics as a practice coherent? This is especially relevant because MacIntyre’s account of local politics (or Thomistic politics of the common good) is largely grounded in the idea of politics viewed as a practice. If there is some inconsistency in MacIntyre’s account of local politics, as Murphy suggests, then we need a way to address this worry.

On MacIntyre’s account, politics is a form of practice, one that involves evaluating and arranging the goods of different practices.[[343]](#footnote-343) Hence politics is a type of second-order practice. I should emphasize that on his view, those not engaged in a particular practice are ill equipped to judge the internal goods of that practice. Thus, we can only come to learn the goods afforded by a particular practice by becoming a practitioner of that practice. The problem that emerges here is how is it possible for individuals within a community to participate in politics as a second-order practice, that of deliberating about the internal goods of other practices? This is because no one can be sufficiently well versed in the evaluating and judging the internal goods of all first-order practices that constitute the range of practices exercised within some community or other. Thus, it is not entirely clear how we can comparatively evaluate the goods of different practices and arrange them in a way that advances the common good of the entire community.[[344]](#footnote-344)

But perhaps I am being less than charitable to MacIntyre. After all, MacIntyre could retort that while it is not in the ability of any one individual reasoner to possess the adequate proficiency in a heterogeneous set of practices, it remains possible for a diverse group of individuals to come together in joint deliberation, for the sake of evaluating and arranging the goods derived from different practices.[[345]](#footnote-345)

Still, Murphy finds a problem with this sort of response, given that what is required for the diverse set of reasoners to rank and order practices is not simply a jointly held discussion on the relative merits of a range of practices in which they are well versed as individuals. What they need instead is ­the *comparative knowledge* of a diverse set of practices and their respective goods – namely, a consideration of whether the goods of one or more practices should be ancillary to the goods of some other practice. Nevertheless, it appears that at first glance, this sort of comparative knowledge could not be the sole outcome of practical deliberation and discussion among various reasoners. Comparative knowledge of the sort necessitated by deliberation on and evaluation of a range of practices means that an individual reasoner ought to be well educated in that same range of practices under consideration in our deliberations. Yet, this sort of approach remains in principle unavailable to the individual reasoner, for it seems implausible that the *normal reasoner* possesses the sort of wide ranging knowledge necessary for evaluating and ordering goods derived from different social practices.

But perhaps MacIntyre can answer Murphy’s objection in another way. Here, he could agree that simply by engaging in sustained discussions, individual reasoners would not possess a fully informed comparative knowledge of various social practices to make the relevant judgement necessary for evaluating the particular merits of each practice. Yet individual reasoners in local communities, through sustained discussions, could gain the ability to rank the goods of various practices, through the quality of the various arguments made against, or in favour of, arranging the goods of various social practices in one way or another.

Nevertheless, this would leave MacIntyre with another problem. An individual who may be well versed in the merits of a particular practice – a practice that should perhaps rank higher in the pecking order of the practices of a community (in order for the community to flourish) – may nonetheless have diminished rhetorical and discursive skills to convey the relative merits of that practice. Alternatively, a reasoner versed in an ancillary practice may nevertheless possess the capacity to persuade others of the importance of her particular practice. In this way a community of individual reasoners well versed in different practices, could come to arrange practices in ways that diminish the community’s capacity to realise its common good. Could MacIntyre offer us a different rejoinder?

Perhaps MacIntyre can accept that sustained discussion on the relative merits of various arguments made for and against a particular arrangement of goods is not a necessary and sufficient means through which a community realises the best arrangement of those goods. A democratic process would supplement the sustained discussion by the individual members of the community to ensure some balance in organizing the practices. MacIntyre could offer policy forums at the level of local communities as a solution to this problem. Policy forums would then employ the collective resources of a representative set of individuals within the community who are adequately versed in a diverse set of practices. Such a forum would not only sustain the discussion of the relative merits of various practices, but also avoid the type of outcome in which the discursive skills of some members of the community disproportionately promotes a particular practice in ways that undermine the common good of the community as a whole.

This solution, at least *prima facie*, appears to be similar to the type of solution afforded by *bureaucracies* and *institutions* at the level of large-scale political structures. But on MacIntyre’s account, bureaucracies and institutions, at the state-level, are subject to the type of pressures that undermines the internal goods of practices. This is because institutions and bureaucracies tend to gradually corrupt the original purpose of the institutions tasked with sustaining social practices. The consequence of this is that the (internal) goods of excellence in the various practices are subordinated to the (external) goods of effectiveness. MacIntyre has persuasively argued in his writings that bureaucracies and institutions pursue external goods of effectiveness, namely, those of material goods and power, over the goods of excellence – those goods internal of practices, which helps to sustain them such as truthfulness, courage, and fairness.[[346]](#footnote-346) MacIntyre’s commitment to claims about the nature of bureaucracies and institutions undermines his ability to furnish us with this type of answer, since it seems that policy forums appear to be less complex forms of bureaucracies. In any case, either the concept of politics as a practice is incoherent, or MacIntyre would have to sanction some form of bureaucracy at the level of local politics, a position that does not fit well with his rigorous critique of bureaucracies and institutions.[[347]](#footnote-347)

But perhaps MacIntyre can answer in a different way. He could weaken the connection between the knowledge of the goods afforded by a practice, and participation in that practice, so that it is no longer necessary to participate in a social practice for one to fully apprehend and appreciate its goods. Here, MacIntyre could claim that the practice of politics is always accomplished as part of a continuing tradition. Politics might then be a sort of repository of collective wisdom. People in traditions inherit this collective wisdom in the practice of politics and its related institutions. Thus, a person who isn’t a practitioner of a range of social practices could in principle possess the ability to evaluate and arrange the goods they afford. Therefore, discussions with respect to arranging the goods of practices are always possible among different participants. Nevertheless, this last suggestion is only possible if MacIntyre decides to extend his account in ways that offers a constructive role for institutions, bureaucracies, and more generally, that he remains otherwise open to correcting the inadequacies exhibited by large-scale politics structures. This however reinforces the conclusion we reached earlier – namely, that MacIntyre has good reasons to remain open to correcting the liberal state and its associated institutions, in appropriate ways.

Therefore, in order for MacIntyre to defend a communal form of politics, and put together a coherent political account, he ought to articulate a kind of politics that addresses the deficiencies he identifies in large-scale political structures; namely, he need to formulate a kind of politics that can constructively engage with the state and its institutions.[[348]](#footnote-348) Nevertheless, in the absence of a positive political account, the second tension limits the coherence and effectiveness of MacIntyre’s overall project.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I considered in some detail the second difficulty that emerges under MacIntyre’s overall account: namely, MacIntyre’s wholesale rejection of a liberal socio-political order and his support for a Thomistic small-scale politics seems to be at odds with his contextualist-historicist thesis in which liberalism – viewed as the dominant tradition – in fact encapsulates and expresses contemporary everyday social and cultural norms. First, I unpacked some of the consequences that are generated by this difficulty. In addition, I argued that MacIntyre’s Aristotelian roots closely connect ethics and politics, and on this view, political questions are ultimately ethical questions; nevertheless, the close connection between ethics and politics in MacIntyre’s account only serves to heighten the concerns raised by this worry. Second, I considered whether MacIntyre’s engagement with Marx and Hegel immunises his political account against the kind of objections that emanate from the second tension (or difficulty) in his work. I argued that MacIntyre’s engagement with Hegel and Marx furnishes his account with a powerful social critique. MacIntyre appears to utilise this social critique to criticise liberal society and the liberal state, and argues for a decisive rejection of large-scale political systems, including the liberal state. In its place, MacIntyre’s political philosophy seems to solely focus on the defence of local/communal forms of political associations.

Nevertheless, I maintained that his engagement with these authors isn’t sufficient on its own, for it seems that MacIntyre’s politics generates a new set of worries. Namely, by failing to engage constructively with the liberal state and its institutions, he isn’t able to propose a range of concrete guidance as to how we can mount a successful defence of local/communal politics. Therefore, the tension in MacIntyre’s account remains unaddressed precisely because MacIntyre’s historicist commitments suggests that his sole focus on a Thomistic inspired form of communal politics may be ill suited to deal with the distinctive range of problems generated by modern social-historical conditions.

I then examined the reasons behind MacIntyre’s wholesale rejection of the liberal state. I argued that MacIntyre’s reason stems in part from his view that large scale political systems such as the liberal state are not properly participatory, and hence they fail to advance the common good; and partly because large-scale political structures tend to subvert the common good of local political associations. MacIntyre’s strongest reason for the rejection of the liberal state is however the failure of the liberal state to advance the sort of common good that closely connects the individual’s good to the common good, in a way that could be recognised as Aristotelian-Thomist. MacIntyre argued that a properly conceived Thomistic common good has a close conceptual relationship with the individual’s good, because the individual’s good is only realised through participation in social practices that are directed towards advancing the common good. However, an individual’s desire or preference is not irreducibly connected to the notion of public interest. Thus, the concept of public interest doesn’t hold the right sort of conceptual relationship with an individual’s good; hence, an individual could question why they ought to sacrifice their own desires and preferences for the sake of public interest.

I then examined some important consequences that follow from MacIntyre’s wholesale rejection of the liberal state. Here, I utilised Mark Murphy’s argument to examine two particular difficulties that emerge as a result of MacIntyre’s singular focus on communal politics, as well as his rejection of large-scale political systems. First, MacIntyre agrees that the state is essential to the existence of small-scale political systems and that local communities often rely on the state for a number of important goods; and second, MacIntyre’s account of politics conceives politics as a second-order practice – a practice in which individual reasoners participate in the ordering of the goods of a diverse set of social practices. However, MacIntyre’s political account runs into significant inconsistencies. On MacIntyre’s view, the state generates a number of goods that are necessary for communal local politics. Nevertheless, the liberal state appears to actively corrupt the sort of common good pursued by local communities; and MacIntyre rejects the liberal state because it fails to embody a more substantive conception of the good. In addition, MacIntyre’s Thomistic account of politics means that the goods of different social practices ought to be organised through an extended deliberative mechanisms. Nonetheless, MacIntyre’s definition of social practices entails a marked degree of reliance on large-scale political structures, employed to underwrite MacIntyre’s communal form of politics.

I concluded that a number of MacIntyre’s political commitments appear to be inconsistent. If MacIntyre indeed accepts that the shortcomings of large-scale political systems are for the most part permanent, he leaves open the possibility that local political structures are inevitably corrupted, precisely because of their vulnerability to political machinations – machinations which on MacIntyre’s view are an all too familiar part of all contemporary large-scale political systems. Therefore, MacIntyre’s communal politics is susceptible to what he identifies as the subversive nature of large-scale political systems. And in the absence of a sufficiently detailed constructive approach to politics – one that could potentially mitigate the subversive effects of large-scale political structures – we are unable to defend local communities, which are on his account the locus of the common good. While MacIntyre espouses a defence of local communities, under his account, politics in local communities remain largely at the mercy of large-scale political structures.

# Chapter 5: Two Potential Political Strategies – Ideal Theory vs. Traditional Aristotelian-Thomism

## 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the second tension in MacIntyre’s project between on the one hand, the historicism central to his overall account, and on the other, an Aristotelian-Thomist politics of the polis. What follows from the historicist thesis is that Aristotelian or Thomist politics seems to be a theoretical articulation of a politics appropriate to a particular historical social context in our past. If we then accept that the modern social form is very different from the Aristotelian polis, the appropriation of an Aristotelian-Thomistic politics for the modern context appears misguided. This problem is then made more acute for MacIntyre since on his account ethics and politics are interdependent or continuous. Hence a failure to remove the tension in his political work has repercussions for his ethics.

I then turned to considering whether MacIntyre might be able to deflect my criticism through his engagement with Marx and Hegel. While MacIntyre’s engagement with Marx and Hegel affords his Aristotelian account a resource for social criticism, his prescription of defending local communities and ways of life doesn’t possess the sort of content that could mount a successful defence. I argued that MacIntyre’s political account is for the most part a critique of modern contemporary state politics. Now, MacIntyre rejects macro or large-scale politics as not properly aimed at the common good, nevertheless he also suggests that the state provides important goods that are essential to engendering politics in local communities. But if MacIntyre fails to engage with the range of problems that emerge as part of the relationship between small-scale and large-scale political structures, we are left in the dark as to how best we can defend local communities. Finally, I argued that MacIntyre can defend his account of politics as a practice,[[349]](#footnote-349) insofar as he can advance an account that deals with institutions – yet, institutions are nonetheless part of large-scale political structures which he rejects.

I now want to consider in this chapter two particular responses that one could offer on MacIntyre’s behalf, and which could in turn potentially resolve the second tension (or difficulty) that has beset his account.

First, MacIntyre could reply that he is an *ideal theorist*, and therefore the objections I have raised do not ultimately undermine his position. As an Aristotelian ideal theorist, MacIntyre could accept that while ethics and politics are continuous, the right kind of Aristotelian virtue ethics is incompatible with the contemporary arrangement of socio-political structures; hence, a properly Aristotelian form of inquiry in ethics or politics is incompatible with the reality of present-day large-scale political structures and social life. This would then suggest that we should perhaps proceed at the level of ideal, rather than real, theory. After all, we find that in *After Virtue* MacIntyre tells us that we are in the midst of a new dark age.[[350]](#footnote-350) There is no great conceptual leap from this pessimistic view to the view that the contemporary social structure is anathema to any properly conceived life of the virtues. Using this strategy MacIntyre might find some success in defusing the second tension in his account.

In the next section I will consider the merits of this strategy in some detail. I first briefly outline some important features of Ideal vs. Real theory. I then turn to considering whether we can read MacIntyre as an ideal theorist. I will suggest that while this strategy can help deflect the tension, it will nonetheless certainly undermine chief constitutive elements, as well as important internal commitments that are a crucial and significant part of his overall philosophy. Most importantly, by deploying this strategy, MacIntyre can neither maintain, nor advance, what is unique and interesting in his project.

Finally in section 3, I explore a second possible strategy that MacIntyre can potentially utilise to develop a viable politics. Here I ask whether it is possible for MacIntyre to revive an orthodox Aristotelian-Thomism by abandoning the internal commitments that constitute the historical and contextualist elements in his philosophy. I will show that Thomism appears to have the resources to develop a politics that can defend MacIntyre’s local communities – that is, it may be possible to defend MacIntyre’s local politics of the common good in Thomistic terms. However, I will go on to suggest that this strategy isn’t fruitful because on MacIntyre’s reading of the modern state, a Thomistic common good politics isn’t really available to us; for on MacIntyre’s view, the relationship between the individual’s good and the shared goods secured by the state, fundamentally lacks those characteristics which generate the right sort of relationship between the individual’s good and common (or shared) goods realised in social-communal contexts.

I will conclude by suggesting that via an appeal to Pragmatism, it may be possible for us to formulate an alternative politics that can realise some of the benefits available to a Thomistic framework, and has the resources to formulate a type of democratic common good that enjoys the right sort of relationship with the individual good. Lastly, the benefit of this form of politics is that it can be advanced, without forsaking the historical and contextualist commitments that are part of MacIntyre’s philosophy as a whole.

## 2. MacIntyre as an Ideal theorist

Before we can see whether MacIntyre is an ideal theorist, I will briefly outline some important features of the two contrasting views of *ideal theory* and *real theory* in political philosophy. I then try to show how different elements of MacIntyre’s political philosophy can be read in ways that emphasize the real vs. ideal characteristics of his political account. In what follows, I will start by elaborating the *realist* position in political philosophy, followed by what is referred to by scholars as *ideal*[[351]](#footnote-351)(or *normative* or *moralist*) political theory.[[352]](#footnote-352)

### 2.1 Ideal vs. Real Theory

Political realism is often characterized as eschewing abstract normative political theory, in favour of historicizing the project of political philosophy. The realist position in political philosophy emphasizes the importance of socio-historicity, contingency, and pluralism. Most realists tend to believe that value pluralism is a condition of the political, where competing conceptions of the good vie for allegiance in the political arena. Realists are often value pluralists and tend to maintain that values are incompossible, precisely because rational methods underdetermine the relative priority of values when they do come into conflict.

Realists argue that liberal ideal theorists, like Nozick, Rawls, or Dworkin, by importing moral presuppositions, end up only paying lip service to the concept of neutrality; and that their work, by ignoring political realities, amounts to an evasion and displacement of important problems in the political arena, and therefore should not be viewed as genuine attempts to engage and ultimately address those problems.[[353]](#footnote-353) In addition, realist political philosophers reject ideal theory because of its tendency to utilise an abstract ahistorical approach to moral and political problems. They hold that normative political philosophy is only ostensibly universalist and that it can’t but embody the bias and prejudice prevalent in all particular historical contexts. The ideal theorist’s universalist appeal to reason and correct rational procedures are in actual fact appeals to the type of reasons and procedures that are most prominent within the moral discourse of some particular historical social form or other.

Therefore, normative political theory appears to maintain a greater level of commitment to its models, than to the political realities such models are supposed to explain. For realists, politics must be concerned with political concepts such as power, legitimacy, and other similar concepts.[[354]](#footnote-354) Politics, viewed in this light, involves the exercise of the sort of judgments that are not reducible to any other principle, whether economic, legal or moral.[[355]](#footnote-355) Hence a politically moral action is not equivalent to an individual moral action.[[356]](#footnote-356) Thus, realists hold that ethics and politics are distinct; hence, importing moralist commitments ensures that we continue to lack the kind of political philosophy that is capable of coming to terms with the real world.[[357]](#footnote-357)

Proponents of the second prominent school in political philosophy are not as cohesive a group as the realists, and so are alternately classified as political moralists, ideal theorists, or normative theorists.[[358]](#footnote-358) As a group, their work is perhaps best understood in terms of its opposition to political realism.[[359]](#footnote-359)

Theorists categorised as ideal/normative/moralist generally (but not always)[[360]](#footnote-360) hold that normative political theorizing should start primarily with ethical or moral claims, and employ these claims in order that it can construct political theories about the fundamental structure of politics; one that utilizes the right procedures to bring about the right type of political communities.[[361]](#footnote-361) Consequently, the correct set of procedures should be exercised in order that the conditions where the various moral and political goods of the community, such as justice, liberty, or autonomy, etc., are advanced. John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Ronald Dworkin, and G. A. Cohen, are alternatively categorised as ideal theorists or political moralists.

The assumption shared by ideal theorists from a variety of different spectrums is their desire to converge on the idea that success is the absence or the reduction of forceful conflict and interminable struggle in the political domain. Politics, viewed in this light, has the regulatory task of stabilizing social institutions, maintaining agreement and consolidating communities in ways that lead to the resolution of most conflicts.[[362]](#footnote-362)

Up to this point I have tried to provide a very concise high level account of the two major views in political philosophy. In what follows I will venture to place MacIntyre’s account of politics discussed in the previous chapter, within the wider debate between these two opposing camps in political philosophy.

### 2.2 MacIntyre’s Politics in the Context of the Ideal vs. Real Theory

We observed that on MacIntyre’s account, participation of individual agents within local communities in the practice of politics generates the common good of the community. Here, politics viewed as a second order practice is tasked with ranking the various goods within the political community, and members of community achieve this through participatory practical deliberation.

In contrast, the neutral state and its thin notion of public interest, fails to furnish us with a substantive conception of the good. This is because the state’s thin notion of public interest is distinct from, and posterior to, the individual’s interest; hence, in the modern state, the notion of public interest is parasitic on the concept of the individual’s interest. Public interest, viewed in this light, is a set of conditions that are thought to realize the individual pursuit of subjective preferences. Thus, the problem of political authority as outlined by MacIntyre is that it is not clear why an individual should subordinate his or her interest for the sake of the public’s interest.

Now, if we accept the liberal state’s conception of public interest and individual good, we end up endorsing a thin conception of the good, and an artificial form of pluralism – a pluralism that is by and large vulnerable to the unjustified exercise of economic power and material influence; and which ultimately advances a conception of flourishing that promotes the tendency towards acquisitiveness and privileges the pursuit of economic goods. MacIntyre nevertheless denies that a non-neutral state with a thick conception of the good can engender a substantive notion of the common good. Why? On MacIntyre’s view, the common good properly conceived can only be realized through participatory practical deliberation by individual members of a community.[[363]](#footnote-363) By imposing a thick conception of the good in a top-down hierarchical fashion, we end up eliminating, or at least limiting, the opportunity for ongoing practical deliberation by individual members of the community; but, this outcome is nonetheless incompatible with MacIntyre’s account of the common good.

We also observed that MacIntyre, following Aristotle, maintains that ethics properly conceived should not be divorced from politics, because politics always involves non-neutral evaluative questions that cannot be settled in a procedurally neutral way. The liberal theorist’s attempt to achieve neutrality is not only deceptive but amounts to an ideology that underhandedly restricts the discourse in a non-neutral and question-begging way, precisely on the grounds that liberalism presupposes a controversial, individualist-materialist conception of the good. This ostensible neutrality is not neutral to the corrosive influence of material interest, and more generally it is predisposed to outcomes that privilege prudence and effectiveness over excellence. This turn of events however serves to advance an empty form of pluralism, one that strengthens an overtly individualist-materialist conception of the good, at the expense of other potential conceptions of human flourishing. Thus liberal politics, although ostensibly neutral, is in fact partial towards a particular conception of the good.

What passes as a façade of neutrality in liberal politics has the consequence of insulating ethical questions from the political sphere. On the standard liberal view, all first order appeals to a substantive conception of the good are eliminated from the political sphere, since liberal politics is supposed to be neutral in deciding between various conceptions of the good. Therefore, we have to inoculate from the political arena all first-order appeals which now belong to the private moral sphere. Thus ethical questions have no place in contemporary liberal political discourse.

So where does MacIntyre’s political philosophy fit in this wider debate? Here we find a rather interesting answer, as parts of his view certainly seem to belong in the realist camp, while other elements of his view are firmly normative or moralist. MacIntyre’s account of local politics as a practice is the type of politics where a hierarchical conception of shared goods is achieved through rank-ordering of the goods of various practices. By participating in the various practices we achieve their internal goods, and in this way, we are habituated into the virtues. This view appears to be in line with an Aristotelian, normative (or moralist) conception of political philosophy. Yet on the other hand, he stands in opposition to a politics that envisions a substantive conception of the good at the state level, a position that is at least at odds with communitarians who are identified with the more normative (or moralist) political programs.

We also observed that MacIntyre rejected the idea that liberal state or politics can be neutral. Two aspects of this claim can be distinguished. First, that the practice of politics is never neutral. Second, that political philosophy or political science is not neutral. Realist political philosophers agree that politics as an activity is never neutral, and that proceduralist political philosophy best exemplified by Rawls isn’t either. They maintain that Rawls’ original position already subscribes to a substantive conception of the good, and go on to argue that Rawlsian ideal theory is only ostensibly neutral; and that the premises that ground his theory are in fact moral.

Up until this point, MacIntyre agrees with the realist critique. The realist however goes on to conclude that while politics as an activity isn’t neutral, political philosophy and political science should in fact try to be more neutral in the sense that it should be separated from moral concerns. On this view, politics is viewed as a separate discipline from ethics – one that is engaged in a comparative study of politics in different historical contexts. Here, MacIntyre agrees with the realist that the right sort of political science should concern itself with a comparative study of politics in different contexts, and that politics as an activity isn’t neutral.[[364]](#footnote-364) On the other hand, MacIntyre rejects the realist assertion that the right sort of political science can become neutral. MacIntyre argues that the study of politics and political science formulated in realist terms cannot be separated from ethical questions, because the sort of evaluative questions that generate explanations are inherently normatively-laden, which in turn impedes the formulation of a neutral political theory or political science.

“To insist that political science be value-free is to insist that we never use in our explanations such clauses as ‘because it was unjust’ or ‘because it was illegitimate’ when we explain the collapse of policy or a regime.”[[365]](#footnote-365)

Thus, while MacIntyre at times seems to believe that it would be better for the liberal state to be more neutral than it is,[[366]](#footnote-366) he also argues that this will inevitably fail because political questions are inescapably normative questions. Thus, neutrality, in principle, is not possible; hence, ethics and politics could not be but entangled.

In summary, we observe that on the one hand MacIntyre’s broader historicism seems to indicate a type of political philosophy that is firmly realist. An essential element of MacIntyre’s ideological critique of modern liberal politics – his polemic against the self-disguising nature of ideal (liberal) theory, its universalist pretensions, and its moral-cum-philosophical hegemony over other traditions – is safely within the confines of a real theorist’s critique of power and its application. On the other hand, the question of the good life is central to MacIntyre’s Neo-Aristotelian-Thomistic politics. On this view, the task of politics is the ordering and arrangement of various goods, for the purpose of generating the best outcomes, within a particular human community. Yet, realist political philosophy eschews the grand meta-narratives of the good life (like those in Plato or Aristotle) and any thick account of the good. Thus, MacIntyre’s Aristotelian inspired views appear to sit uncomfortably with the realist elements in his political philosophy.

Next, I consider whether we can read MacIntyre as an ideal theorist in a way that disarms the second tension I identified earlier.

### 2.3 MacIntyre as an Ideal Theorist

MacIntyre, following Aristotle and Plato, maintains that the central task in ethical inquiry is to understand the constitutive elements of the good life and human flourishing. On MacIntyre’s account, a substantive conception of the good grounded in human nature is a crucial aspect of generating the conditions under which human beings can flourish. On this Aristotelian view, human beings are political animals and so human flourishing understood as a whole can only be achieved if we consider the concept of flourishing as inextricably tied to the wider social-political context. In order for human beings to achieve the good life, they must participate in society and exercise their political rights as citizens. Thus, in the absence of adequate social and political activity, human beings cannot flourish, and will most likely fail in realising their characteristically human good. Human flourishing and the good life are therefore central questions in ethics; thus, should ethical inquiry remain divorced from politics, this form of inquiry would fail to genuinely concern itself with the human good. This characterization of human flourishing is a constitutive feature of Aristotle’s ethics as understood by MacIntyre.

MacIntyre follows Aristotle and so connects ethics to politics. On MacIntyre’s account, political questions are normative questions and hence non-neutral. More importantly, political decisions have ethical implications – they deal with questions such as what justice requires. Therefore, ethics separated from politics fails to achieve its ultimate aim.

We also observed that on MacIntyre’s view, the liberal principle of neutrality of public reason in contemporary politics, which separates substantive ethical questions from political question, can only amount to a façade of neutrality. The reason for this is that political decisions in the liberal state are for the most part settled by the market and its related institutions; and given that the state relies on the market and its institutions to procure its material needs, it often fails to limit the encroachment of powerful forces that are generated by the market. Recall that liberal principles that emphasize choice and autonomy of the individual are grounded in a thin materialistic conception of choice. Individual choice and autonomy are the choices we have between different goods in the market place. In fact, the liberal state has to limit, if not restrict, conceptions of the good that are not allied with, or cannot be made subordinate to, a highly individualist materialist conception of the good.[[367]](#footnote-367) Thus the liberal state, while ostensibly neutral, smuggles in an individualist conception of the good – one that privileges acquisitiveness and material consumption over other human activities. Here we should note the stark contrast with the Aristotelian view where *pleonexia* or acquisitiveness, which is implicitly part of the contemporary liberal conception of the good, is in fact a vice.

MacIntyre could perhaps then highlight this feature of his account – one that emphasizes his Aristotelian normative leanings. He could, as an Aristotelian ideal or normative political theorist, maintain that a properly MacIntyrean account of politics at the level of the state is not possible nor is it properly political. On MacIntyre’s view representative democracy in the modern state limits genuine political participation by individual agents to a form of ritual activity where every several years – depending on the particulars of the election cycle – the citizenry takes part in a more or less symbolic act of choice; yet, this kind of politics is not a genuinely participatory nor a deliberative form of activity. In such a context, rational deliberation by individual agents is often limited. It is also possible that under such conditions, information is either manipulated or excluded by actors who possess institutional powers.

Now, this set of circumstances together with an overtly materialist conception of the good engendered by economic institutions and market forces, ensures that powerful economic actors are able to exert a much greater influence than their actual vote as a citizen would suggest. Hence large-scale politics in the form of representative democracy in the liberal state fails to encourage genuine participation or authentic democracy. MacIntyre could then conclude that state level politics fails to be properly political. Hence his focus on politics at the level of local communities ought to satisfy any would-be detractors of his account, until macro socio-political structures are transformed in a way that are more amenable to the type of politics he envisions. Therefore, if we read him as an ideal Aristotelian-Thomist political theorist, MacIntyre’s appears to suggest that we should hunker down and defend local communities as best as we can, until such time that the transformation of social conditions occasions the possibility of a better kind of politics. This reading is amenable to MacIntyre’s rather ominous conclusion, at the end of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre where he states that

“What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament.”[[368]](#footnote-368)

Therefore, read as an ideal theorist of the Aristotelian variety, a MacIntyrean philosopher may have no choice but to defend small communities, communities in which intellectual and moral life can be sustained until more ideal socio-political conditions offer us a more ambitious political project.

Next, I will turn to exploring the consequences that follow from reading MacIntyre as an ideal theorist.

### 2.4 Ideal Theory and Historicism

In the above I tried to read MacIntyre as an ideal theorist. However, when we discussed the very high level outline of the debate between realism and ideal theory, we observed that MacIntyre’s views cannot be neatly classified under either of these two views. In the following I will suggest that reading MacIntyre as an ideal theorist does not sit well with the kind of historicism made explicit in much of his writings, and that read in an ideal way, MacIntyre’s account would lose too much of what makes his Neo-Aristotelian account so interesting.

First, if we read MacIntyre as an ideal theorist, it becomes painfully obvious that a consequence of this reading is an abandonment of quite a lot, if not all of the historicist thesis made explicit in his account – and so concomitantly, we’d have to relinquish the various internal commitments his historicism seems to imply. Recall that MacIntyre himself argued that Aristotle’s philosophical formulation in ethics and politics was not the formulation of an ethics or politics as such, rather it was the formulation of ethics belonging to a particular social context – that of the Aristotelian polis. Just as important is that MacIntyre’s moral contextualism and historical approach in philosophy views various philosophical arguments and theories as intellectual arguments embedded in specific historical periods and particular communities (or contexts). We also noted in Chapter Three that inquiry in ethics for MacIntyre is a particular (historical) articulation of social norms, shared language, and culture, belonging to specific communities and their histories. Accepting MacIntyre as an ideal Aristotelian theorist in the above mould renders inert much of the interesting historical-cum-philosophical approach that has been achieved by MacIntyre’s synthesis of Aristotle, Marx and more broadly, his unique historically informed analysis.

Second, we should note that MacIntyre’s work in social science in the 1960s and 1970s is grounded in a similar sort of historical thesis. The idea of tradition-guided inquiry, which is perhaps the most unique and fundamental element of MacIntyre’s philosophical account, is itself derived from MacIntyre’s fusion of his historical approach to doing philosophy, partly influenced by his early engagement with Marx, his later writings in the philosophy of science which bears the influence of Thomas Kuhn and Imre Lakatos, as well as the influence of social philosophers such as Karl Polanyi. By dispensing with much of his historicist thesis, MacIntyre read as an ideal theorist of an Aristotelian bent, would also end up abandoning to some extent the idea of traditions of moral inquiry superseding one another in history. An important feature of MacIntyre’s account of tradition-guided inquiry is however its utilisation of the historical thesis, explicit in many of these influential thinkers. By giving up the historicist thesis, the idea of historical traditions answering questions that were particular to specific context and social background makes much less sense. Therefore, the idea of tradition-guided moral-cum-political inquiry would itself lose its philosophical rigour.

Third, MacIntyre has spent much of his work criticising idealized abstract forms of theoretical inquiry in philosophy. Earlier, we saw that quite a lot of MacIntyre’s criticism against deontology, utilitarianism, and modern Rawlsian liberal theory takes just this form. He has time and again reminded us that ideal theory confines itself to generalizable principles, because it abstracts from the very real normative problems that are raised under particular non-ideal (real) circumstances.[[369]](#footnote-369) For example, ideal theory fails to appreciate that ethics as a form of inquiry is best understood as an articulation of ethical norms emerging out of particular social-historical context. Making sense of MacIntyre as an ideal theorist, even an Aristotelian one, nevertheless renders MacIntyre’s criticism of fragmentation and interminability of contemporary moral discourse in resolving ethical issues highly problematic; if only because MacIntyre’s thesis on the fragmentation of moral discourse rests on the failure of the Enlightenment thinkers to appreciate that their attempt at articulating independent generalizable moral principles were bound to fall short. Now, MacIntyre read as an ideal theorist could be subjected to a similar line of criticism. A MacIntyre who is an ideal theorist – one who ignores historical contingency and particularity – may be liable to the type of criticism MacIntyre has himself directed against enlightenment and post-enlightenment figures like Kant and Rawls.

Still, in order to strengthen the argument that MacIntyre has no other choice but to critically (and constructively) engage with the type of politics he has been loath to consider, I will explore whether there are other possible strategies available to him. In my view, there are only two more potential strategies that he could use to address the difficulty in his account. First, MacIntyre could continue his ethical project, but dispense with politics altogether. But from the outset MacIntyre’s project has always been Aristotelian in a strong sense; and unless he is willing to discard the Aristotelian view of the good life – the sort of human flourishing which is inextricably social and political – this strategy represents a radical move on MacIntyre’s part. Nonetheless, there may be a second strategy that is open to him. By utilizing this strategy, MacIntyre would go against a number of the core commitments that follow from his historicist and contextualist positions.[[370]](#footnote-370) Here, he would have to move away from some of those core commitments in favor of embracing a more or less orthodox version of Aristotelian-Thomist political philosophy. For it may turn out that Aristotelian-Thomism itself has the kinds of resources that allows MacIntyre to develop a political account that can defend local communities, and thereby deflect the criticism that I have advanced against his account. Of course this strategy will deprive MacIntyre’s account of its most interesting features; yet, it could perhaps be a plausible, albeit a costly, way of replying to the charge that his political account isn’t able to defend the sort of local politics he so cherishes.

Thus, I will consider whether MacIntyre could relinquish much of the historicist critique present in his account, and instead use the resources available in the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition to develop the sort of politics that is able to defend his local politics of the common good. I will go on to suggest that at least initially, it will appear as though MacIntyre can indeed utilise resources in Aristotelian-Thomism to formulate a positive politics which can then defend local communities within the framework of the modern state. However, it will turn out that this strategy isn’t as productive as it initially appears to be, since MacIntyre’s maintains that the type of common good envisaged in the Thomistic account is not available in the modern state. And the reason for this is that the relationship between public interest and the individual’s good in the liberal state, is fundamentally different from the relationship between common good and the individual good, in the sort of small-scale communities favoured under MacIntyre’s account.

## 3. Aristotle, Aquinas and MacIntyre’s local politics

At this point we need to answer an important question: does Aristotelian-Thomism have the type of resources to develop a positive political account – one that is able to defend MacIntyre’s local politics of the common good? Before we can answer this question we need to examine some of the political resources available to Aristotle and Aquinas. Therefore, I will briefly identify a few important elements that are constitutive of the political philosophy of Aristotle and Aquinas.

### 3.1 Aristotle and Aquinas

Aristotle’s criticism of Hellenic politics is first, that they aim too low, and second, that they aim only for a part of justice, understood as a portion of the common good. On Aristotle’s account, a type of political order that only affords a degree of security from tyranny and injustice, and a framework for mutual social intercourse can only aim at part of the common good. But the true goal of a political order is to live together in friendship, part of a more perfect fulfilling life whose central theme is noble actions beyond mere companionship.[[371]](#footnote-371) Aristotle also makes a quantitative division between political regimes. The quantitative division is between whether one, or a few, or the many, are able to exercise power. A second distinction that he makes is whether those who rule govern on behalf of private or common interest. Aristotle’s politics then identifies six political regimes: kingship, aristocracy, and constitutional government which aim at the common interest, and, despotism, oligarchy, and democracy, which aim at private interest.[[372]](#footnote-372) On Aristotle’s account, the six regimes variously emerging out of distinctive views on social-cum-political life bearing different political conceptions, each respectively aims at a portion of justice. So for example democracy takes in only a part of justice under its consideration; hence, it does not take part in all of justice conceived as a whole. Thus in this way different forms of government are manifestations of different parts of justice, some more or less than others. Aristotle ultimately thinks that the more ideal regime is a mixed government that includes elements of both democracy, which aims at equality and gives power to the many, and oligarchy, which aims at wealth.[[373]](#footnote-373) What is relevant for us is that on Aristotle’s view, this more ideal form of government aims at more complete account of justice, and this account of justice is inclusive of the common good properly conceived.

I now turn my attention to a brief review of some elements of Aquinas’ political account.[[374]](#footnote-374) When we turn our attention to Aquinas, we find that his political account is in part concerned with the issues raised by political governance, and matters concerning laws and legislations. When discussing politics, Aquinas’s primary focus is on the topic of human law: that is, natural law becomes political “by becoming human law.”[[375]](#footnote-375) For Aquinas, law and legislation in the framework of natural law is a principal mechanism for central authority to generate the type of political organization and conditions that promote the good of the community.[[376]](#footnote-376) Thomas Hibbs argues that Aquinas’ natural law offers a set of precepts that allows us to frame the structure of political life without the need to refer back to Aristotle’s politics.[[377]](#footnote-377) So for example, under Aquinas matters involving private property claims found their justification in reference to the common good, and not some antecedent individual right that is conceptually prior to civic or common good principles.[[378]](#footnote-378) Moreover, in the framework of natural law, legislation enacted by the state enjoys moral sanction insofar as it remained compatible with natural law, properly conceived. Laws were viewed as just only and insofar as they were at home in the confines of natural law; consequently, laws that transgressed those boundaries failed to be laws at all.

Aquinas also clarifies the boundaries between the types of legislation that are legitimate, and those that fail the test of legitimacy. On his view, the legitimacy of legislations enacted by a central authority rested on the degree to which legislation conformed with natural law. And in regards to the types of legislation that could subordinate customs and conventions practiced at the level of local communities, the bar for legitimacy was even higher. This is because custom itself has “the force of law, abolishes law, and is the interpreter of law.”[[379]](#footnote-379) Only in narrow and exceptional cases could the exercise of power by the central authority subordinate local customs and practices. On MacIntyre’s view, Aquinas’ defence of local customs and practices sees them as serving an important function in engendering a shared life of practices in those communities.

Thus, if we are to defend practices in local communities in ways that enable those communities to sustain the internal goods of their practices and hence achieve the virtues, we would have to demarcate the boundaries between local communities and the liberal state. So at this point it appears that we can answer an important question: does Thomistic Aristotelianism have the political resources to defend MacIntyre’s local politics of the common good against the liberal state? Having briefly reviewed some elements of the sort of politics available to that tradition, it appears that we might have a tentative positive answer to this question. I will now turn to see how the different elements in Thomistic-Aristotelian political philosophy are relevant in framing a kind of politics that can potentially defend MacIntyre’s local politics of the common good.

### 3.2 Legislation and Sovereignty

At first glance, it appears that Aquinas’ natural law precepts afford us the resources to develop a framework to discuss issues surrounding legislation, self-determination, and legal boundaries between different layers of authority. Recall that on MacIntyre’s account, local communities are political because they are involved in the ranking of various practices and communal pursuit of goods internal to the practices. Thus it seems plausible that in order for communities to protect their way of life and order the various goods derived from social practices in appropriate ways, political resources afforded in the Thomistic account are especially pertinent to our discussion, as they deal with the problem of the boundary between local communities and the state. It then appears that in their efforts to develop a shared conception of the good, a community must be committed to the issues raised by self-determination. This means that sovereignty and self-determination are central questions that ought to be carefully considered in a Thomistic account of politics; and this in turn, would help local communities engender and sustain a politics of the common good, free from the sort of malign interference that MacIntyre has identified.

The important question with respect to sovereignty is: how are we to settle the relationship between local communities and the national government, and how should the exercise of various prerogatives best be delineated between different levels of government? If local communities are to practice MacIntyre’s politics of the common good, they ought to be capable of developing legislative processes and procedures to protect their interests. Therefore, constitutional issues dealing with the nature of the relationship between local communities and the state have to be settled. Without resolving these important difficulties, it is hard to see how a political community understood in Aristotelian-Thomist terms can be conceived, let alone constituted in practical terms. Recall that MacIntyre’s local communities, centered about small-scale social and political life because they rely on certain important goods acquired from large-scale political structures, are vulnerable to their influence; therefore, as far as it is possible, local communities ought to maintain a degree of independence from such influence, and as a result, we are compelled to consider such issues as exceedingly important. It is here that we find that Thomist natural law appears to possess resources that permit us to solve this form of problem.

Nevertheless, we ought to consider whether there are any significant obstacles for MacIntyre in employing Thomist politics to formulate a political account that can demarcate the relationship between the state and local communities, and thereby defend those communities and ultimately advance a political account defined in terms of the common good. One problem which we ought to take note of is that Aquinas maintained that common good properly conceived can only be achieved by *complete communities* – communities that are self-sufficient and possess the ability to exercise coercive power.[[380]](#footnote-380) But we also observed, in the previous chapter, that MacIntyre’s local communities are not the kinds of communities that are self-sufficient in this way. MacIntyre’s local communities remain, for the most part, dependent on the largesse of the state. What follows from this is that in order to achieve a genuinely Thomistic form of politics, we are in need of a more complete common good generated by a self-sustaining central political authority, and in the modern context this would be (a more or less) self-supporting state capable of exercising coercive power. Yet, MacIntyre also concluded that the modern state isn’t able to generate a bona fide common good which could be properly characterised as Thomist. I will turn to considering this problem in some detail.

### 3.3 The Common Good and the State

Now, MacIntyre’s formulation of the common good appears to draw from the Aristotelian-Thomist account. I suggested in the previous chapter that MacIntyre defines the common good, first as a good that is partly constituted through participation in social practices and acquiring their goods, and second, that the common good in politics is the proper arrangement of the shared goods of a diverse set of practices. However, MacIntyre still has to reconcile this with the fact that the common good of local communities are ultimately dependent on those common goods that are dispensed by the state, such as goods of peace, security and wealth. But MacIntyre also appears to reject the idea that the shared goods dispensed by the modern state are the right kind of common good definable in terms amenable to an Aristotelian-Thomist account of politics.

Recall that MacIntyre maintains that although the state at times provides local communities with important goods that are held in common, they are very different from the type of common good that is defined under a Thomistic form of politics. Why? MacIntyre suggests that the Thomistic common good isn’t available in the liberal state because the relationship between the individual good and the Thomistic common good is one that is irreducibly social. Under the Thomist account, the concept of the individual good is not defined prior to the common good; instead, the individual’s good is realised in part by the individual’s participation in a variety of social practices. That is, the individual realises his or her individual good as partly constituted in goods that are realised in various forms of social activity.

However, MacIntyre rejects the idea that public interest in the liberal state can be understood as a form of common good, precisely because the relationship between the individual good and the goods held in common is one in which the individual’s good is defined separately from, and is logically prior to, the goods that are generated by the state. On his view, the type of thin goods generated by the state – defined under the concept of ‘public interest’ – are a set of conditions that best realise the individuals’ good. Here the concept of individual good is antecedent to that of ‘public interest,’ and is defined in terms of the individual’s subjective preferences. Thus the sort of goods generated by the state are defined in terms of the aggregate of individuals’ good in the state. Here the concept of ‘public interest’ is reducible to an antecedent notion of individual good that is defined independently from, and prior to, that of ‘public interest.’ On the other hand, the individual good defined in Thomistic politics is not prior to the common good – namely, the common good of such a politics isn’t reducible to an antecedent concept of the individual good. The concept of ‘public interest’ consequently doesn’t hold the right sort of relationship with the individual’s good, whilst the common good defined under Thomism maintains an appropriate form of relationship with respect to *that* good.

In order to further clarify the distinction between on the one hand, the right sort of relationship between the individual good and the common good, and on the other hand, the wrong sort of relationship between the individual good and the goods generated by the state such as ‘public interest,’ I will turn to an example. The type of example I have in mind should show how this distinction ultimately prevents us from utilising Aquinas’ natural law resources in defense of local communities.

Consider the issue of property rights: in the modern context individual property rights – an individual good on this modern view – generally enjoy conceptual priority over public interest concerns. And this is in large part because the concept of an individual’s good, in this case the individual’s property rights, is defined in terms which to a significant degree eliminates social considerations having to do with the production, and the use of, such goods. In fact, in many early modern interpretations of this problem in politics, it was maintained that the best way for individuals to protect their individual property right was to enter into civil society.[[381]](#footnote-381) On this view, the concept of property rights is prior to the sort of goods, like that of ‘public interest,’ generated by the state. Here, at least with respect to the relationship between individual property rights and ‘public interest’ in the modern state, we could say that ‘public interest’ is a set of conditions that best protects the goods associated with individual private property rights. Thus those goods, understood as rules or laws that protect property rights, are ultimately reducible to the antecedent good derived from the individual enjoying the benefits of private ownership.

Now consider the contrast between the modern view of private property rights and the Thomist account of possessing private property. On the Thomist account, we only possess private property by constituting human laws that explain how the possession of property is to be understood, in a more universal or naturalistic sense. On the Thomist view, the laws that outline the possession of property are human additions to natural law and thus must remain consistent with that law. For Aquinas this meant that no one should have the right to possess more property than they could possibly utilise as a person.[[382]](#footnote-382) Furthermore, the possession of private property can only be justified in light of a variety of practical considerations.[[383]](#footnote-383) Hibbs states here that “whenever Aquinas addresses the issue of private property, he justifies it not in terms of rights antecedent to civil government, but in light of the common good.”[[384]](#footnote-384) Similarly, Robert Dyson argues that one of the main differences between Aquinas’s account of private property and modern accounts of property rights is that for Aquinas human laws “do not confer an unlimited right of acquisition and use. This distinction between ownership and use is effectively absent from modern doctrines of property.”[[385]](#footnote-385) On this view, the possession of private property can only be justified in light of the common good of society as a whole; hence, property rights cannot be simply defined or justified in a way that conceptualises those rights, as generally enjoying an absolute priority over the common good of the community as a whole. Hence, the goods a property potentially confers on an individual who possesses it is not infinite, and stands in close relation to the common good of the community as a whole, while the appropriate ways in which an individual exercises those rights are closely tied to the common good of the entire community.

At this point we ought to ask: how does the difference between, on the one hand, the modern property doctrine understood as individual rights that are antecedent to civil society, and on the other hand, the Thomistic understanding in which property rights are limited, impact on our ability for enacting legislation consistent with Thomistic natural law? It would appear that when we utilise resources available in Aquinas’ natural law, there is a need for balancing the possession of property against a variety of other practical considerations. This would place strict limits on how much property one can own, and the different ways that one can legitimately utilise, or otherwise enjoy, one’s property. Yet, this sort of view stands in marked contrast with the modern understanding of private property rights since on the modern view, such rights, for the most part, are not closely connected to a Thomistic understanding of the common good. For example, there are, in practical terms, no limits on how much property one can possess. In similar fashion there are very few limits on the ways in which one can dispense with one’s property. Property rights are defined in general terms of individual rights on owning, purchasing and/or transferring private property. Thus, a case seldom emerges where there is a need to balance the right of owning and dispensing with property, against other practical considerations, in the course of advancing the common good.

The general form of the problem here is that any time we would refer to Thomistic resources to write human law, we would have to consider any such law within the context of what is possible under Aquinas’ natural law; and that any such law has to be seen in light of practical considerations towards advancing the common good of the community. Since MacIntyre maintains that we lack this form of common good in the modern state, what was possible for the Thomistic natural law in the medieval past, isn’t available to us in the modern political context. And because Aristotelian-Thomistic natural law relies on a social understanding of the common good defined in theological terms – a kind of good that is nevertheless unavailable in the modern context – it fails to afford us a plausible way of using Thomistic resources to adjudicate the boundaries between the state and local communities. The upshot of this is of course the elimination of an important resource available in Thomism with which we could have potentially defended MacIntyre’s local communities, and local politics of the common good.

## 4. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I examined two possible strategies which MacIntyre can utilise to answer the objections that I raised against his political philosophy. Using the first strategy, I made an attempt to read MacIntyre’s political philosophy in the context of *ideal theory*. In order to show what this meant in conceptual terms, I considered the differences between the proponents of ideal theory as against those who endorse real theory. I then examined the various political commitments that MacIntyre appears to hold, and made an attempt to place MacIntyre’s politics in the framework of the wider debate between real and ideal political theory. I then tried to reconcile MacIntyre’s various internal commitments in his political philosophy – that constitute his overall position – within the framework of ideal theory. Nevertheless, I argued that reading him as an ideal theorist isn’t terribly productive, since it would entail abandoning many of the core tenets in his philosophical account.

Next, I considered a second strategy which MacIntyre might use, which is to revive a more *traditional* Aristotelian-Thomistic politics, without the various historicist commitments that would complicate our efforts. This approach initially appeared to be promising; namely, it appeared as though Thomism indeed contained the type of conceptual resources that could then be utilised to articulate a constructive political account – a politics that appeared capable of defending local communities.

Nevertheless, my examination of the second strategy revealed an important difficulty. Here, I argued that MacIntyre suggests that the type of common good in the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition isn’t really available under the conditions available in the modern liberal state, as the liberal state only generates a notion of public interest, and public interest is conceptually distinct from the Thomistic conception of the common good. Now, if the state doesn’t generate the right sort of public good, we seem to be in want of a plausible conception of the common good that could in turn ground a more traditional form of Aristotelian-Thomism. Yet, without an acceptable conception of the common good which would ground a traditional Thomistic account, this second strategy is no longer promising. Therefore, both of these strategies in the end are unsuccessful in devising the kind of politics that is capable of resolving MacIntyre’s difficulty.

However, all is not lost – that is, it may be possible to develop an alternative political formulation which is capable of realising the common good under MacIntyre’s definition. Put differently, it may be feasible for us to articulate a kind of common good that retains the right type of conceptual relationship with the individual’s good, under conditions present in the liberal state. Finally, this alternative positive account perhaps need not entail the abandonment of the various internal commitments which ground MacIntyre’s historicism and contextualism. To see how this might be possible, we need to turn once again to the pragmatist tradition.

# Chapter 6: An Alternative Pragmatist Politics

## 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed two possible strategies that could potentially deflect the criticisms I advanced against MacIntyre’s political philosophy. Namely that in the absence of a positive politics which could outline ways of defending local communities against the subversive influence of the state, his political project is imperilled; and on the account of the fact that MacIntyre treats ethics and politics as continuous and interdependent, in lieu of constructive political philosophy that deals with the issues I raised earlier, his overall project fails to get off the ground. We then observed that these two strategies failed to deflect the particular worries that I raised earlier. We could only read MacIntyre as an ideal theorist if he would accept dispensing with the historical and contextualist commitments that appear to be central in his overall account. And while MacIntyre’s focus on local politics appears to ignore important Thomistic resources that could be potentially utilised for formulating an orthodox Aristotelian-Thomism that could deal with the problems raised by large-scale political systems, such an approach is not as promising as it initially appears, precisely because MacIntyre believes that the Thomistic common good, which would form the basis of the second strategy, isn’t really a feasible option given the realities of large-scale political structures. Having then witnessed the failure of both strategies in addressing the various worries raised by MacIntyre’s politics, it seems that this sets the parameters for the range of problems that MacIntyre’s account must then address.

Now, the sort of politics I have in mind accepts the need for a critical, yet constructive, engagement with contemporary large-scale political structures aimed at defending small-scale participatory democratic local communities. Ultimately, our solution has to show how a politics informed by the *common good* – a common good that possesses the right sort of conceptual relationship with the individuals’ good – can be advanced in the modern social context without contradicting the chief commitments that are fundamental to MacIntyre’s overall account. We could then in principle defend local communities by settling issues involving the boundary between the state and local communities. The hope is then that our alternative politics can aid local communities so that they may enjoy a material degree of political sovereignty, which they could then utilise to better protect local conceptions of the good. The benefits of this approach over reading MacIntyre as a more traditional Aristotelian-Thomist are fourfold.

First, I will suggest that a Deweyan inspired politics can advance a kind of common good in the modern political context that is irreducibly social, and one in which the relationship between the individual good and the common good doesn’t suffer from the problem that plagues the relationship between ‘public interest’ and the individual good. Second, it might be possible for us to make sense of MacIntyre’s conception of the common good in local communities, alongside a wider notion of the common good derived from the individual’s relationship with the state. Third, we could continue to enjoy the historicist elements that are important contributions to MacIntyre’s overall account. Lastly, our alternative Deweyan account possesses the advantage of being more empirical, and hence more appropriate to a type of democratic politics that sees itself as an ongoing process of experimentation and adjustment. Therefore, our pragmatist alternative political conception could potentially offer a genuine and stable resolution to the second tension that emerges in MacIntyre’s project.

In section two, I will again restate the outlines of the worries that are generated by MacIntyre’s politics. In section three I will consider the general contours of the type of political philosophy that seeks to engage with liberal political philosophy – one that seeks to revise the standard liberal account in a way that is more or less consistent with MacIntyre’s overall aims. I will then consider some examples of the type of political philosophy that is consistent with a participatory democratic approach, in section four. In section five, I explore how the examples of political philosophy offered by Misak, Walzer, and Honneth’s Dewey, can alleviate the problems generated by MacIntyre’s politics. Finally, in section six, I consider some conceptual possibilities that can be viewed as sympathetic to the broad outlines of MacIntyre’s ethics and politics. The ultimate goal here is to formulate a viable alternative political conception, capable of advancing MacIntyre’s broader goals.

## 2. The Problem in MacIntyre’s Political Account

I emphasized earlier that MacIntyre closely connects ethics to politics; hence without a coherent political account his project as a whole is potentially imperilled. Moreover, MacIntyre argues for a defence of local communities and ways of life, because he believes that a genuine kind of common good can only be advanced within these kinds of communities. In addition, MacIntyre also argues that politics in the liberal state is not for the most part a kind of politics that advances the common good; instead, politics at the level of large-scale political system remains a form of *Realpolitik*.

Earlier, in Chapter Four, we considered MacIntyre’s major criticism against the politics of the liberal state. MacIntyre argued that public interest in the liberal state is very different from the common good, and that a politics that isn’t constitutive of the common good fails to be properly political. The common good of local communities, as defined by MacIntyre, is closely connected to the idea that our individual good is advanced through participation in a community’s social practices, and common deliberation with respect to the goods which different social practices afford. On the other hand, public interest, viewed as an aggregate of varied individual interests, is defined separately from the concept of the individual’s good. MacIntyre then argued that because of the lack of a close connection between the public interest and the individual’s good, the two concepts tend to come apart. A consequence of this is that it isn’t always obvious that sacrificing our own individual good for the sake of the public interest is something that we ought to accept. For MacIntyre, the liberal state doesn’t seem to provide us with good reasons as to why we ought to sacrifice what we take to be our individual good, for the sake of public interest; or put differently, it is not clear why we should offer our allegiance to the liberal state. Therefore, the concept of allegiance makes little sense under these conditions.

A second problem that emerged under MacIntyre’s account of politics was on account of the first of Murphy’s two criticisms. There, I utilised Murphy’s argument to show that on MacIntyre’s own account, the state seems to be a precondition for the existence of the kinds of local communities in which democratic participatory politics and deliberation about the common goods is made possible. What is significant here is that the state, at least sometimes, performs important functions. For example, MacIntyre specifically praises the Americans with disabilities act, and claims that the state “is an ineliminable feature of the contemporary landscape and they will not despise the resources that it affords;”[[386]](#footnote-386) and in *After Virtue* he states that

“This does not mean that there are not many tasks only to be performed in and through government which still require performing: the rule of law, so far as it is possible in a modern state, has to be vindicated, injustice and unwarranted suffering have to be dealt with, generosity has to be exercised, and liberty has to be defended, in ways that are sometimes only possible through the use of governmental institutions.” [[387]](#footnote-387)

Yet, even in *After Virtue* where he considers the benefits that the state offers, he concludes that no modern state can be a legitimate form of government, and ultimately his view entails the wholesale rejection of the contemporary liberal political system.[[388]](#footnote-388) Thus MacIntyre ends up altogether rejecting the modern social-political structure – root and branch. I nevertheless argued that it might be premature to condemn the state in such stark terms, especially if our relationship with the state is much more complex by MacIntyre’s own admission. Recall that only the state seems to possess the kinds of resources that local communities depend on. More importantly, the state is a vehicle for advancing important social and political policy, and there exist clear counter examples that show how the state can be seen as promoting worthwhile values.[[389]](#footnote-389)

Third, Murphy’s second criticism against MacIntyre was that his conception of politics as a second order practice appeared to be incoherent. The problem, it may be recalled, was how a practitioner of a particular practice can attain the type of resources to comparatively evaluate the goods of all practices. This is because in order for a person to understand and evaluate the goods of a practice, she must simultaneously be a practitioner in that practice. Yet it seems impossible that any one person can come to possess the type of knowledge that allows her to properly evaluate the goods of a diverse set of practices. While this second criticism that Murphy levelled against MacIntyre is somewhat easier to defend against, it still requires that MacIntyre procure the type of resources that can only be advanced within the framework of the state and its institutions.

Fourth, recall that MacIntyre tells us that local communities ought to strictly limit their dealings with the state, and its related institutions. In addition, in all transactions that deal with the state, communities have to act in ways that maximize their own interest, and in return, give up as little as possible. Putting it in another way, members of a community in dealing with each other have to act in ways to achieve their shared common good, but in all their dealings with the state must adopt an attitude of shrewd cost-benefit analysis – that is they have to more or less wear the mask of *Realpolitik*. An obvious charge here against MacIntyre is that this double attitude adopted by communities and their members, seems to at once accept some version of the emotivist thesis (specifically in the dealings between local communities and the state), while at the same time rejecting emotivism as a true account of ethical practice.[[390]](#footnote-390)

Fifth, recall that in the previous chapter we considered whether MacIntyre could be read as an Aristotelian ideal theorist. We saw that this was only possible if he relinquishes much of the historicist-contextualist content in his account. Yet, such a move isn’t really attractive since it would entail losing much of the content that makes MacIntyre’s account interesting.

Lastly, we considered whether Thomism itself has the resources to successfully defend MacIntyre’s account of local politics of the common good. As a first approximation it indeed appeared that Thomism possesses the resources to afford a defense of MacIntyre’s local communities, and their attendant politics of the common good. But a problem that emerged for MacIntyre was that he seemed to draw an equivalence between his definition of the common good best exemplified by the shared good of local communities and associations, and the common good as conceived in the writings of Aristotle and Aquinas. Osborne however argues that Aristotle and Aquinas held the position that only complete communities which are able to exercise coercive power, and possess the capacity for self-defence, can realise the common good, properly understood.[[391]](#footnote-391) Therefore, MacIntyre’s account requires a conception of the common good that is applicable to complete communities – communities that are self-sufficient, capable of self-defence, and the exercise of coercive power. Now, within the contemporary political context, only nation-states are able to simultaneously meet all of these conditions. MacIntyre has nevertheless argued that this type of common good isn’t really available within the confines of large-scale political structures, and that the liberal state doesn’t ultimately generate the conditions conducive to the formation of the common good. And this is in part because large-scale political structures limit genuine deliberative democracy, and partly owing to the fact that the type of shared (common) goods – i.e., public interest – that is available in the liberal state, does not hold the right sort of relationship with the individual’s good.

What the above suggests is that in order to defend local communities, we ought to develop a kind of politics that offers a space for a substantive conception of the good which is essential to the maintenance of cooperative social bonds, and this conception ought to be generated as part of deliberative democratic inquiry at the level of communities. Nevertheless, this solution raises important considerations as to whether it would end up violating the principle of neutrality, the bedrock of modern politics. How can we allow a space for a substantive conception of the good yet at the same time ensure that our actions do not violate essential civil liberties, which are founded upon the principle of neutrality, autonomy, and toleration, and remain deeply embedded in our social and political life?

Now, MacIntyre’s position is often viewed as close to the communitarians,[[392]](#footnote-392) even though he supports the liberal position with respect to an important debate between liberal and communitarian political theorists. While communitarians want an acknowledgment of some conception of the good by the state, liberal thinkers generally maintain that the state shouldn’t acknowledge any one conception of the good and should remain neutral. Here, MacIntyre rejects the idea that the state could constructively adopt a substantive conception of the good. In the ‘Theses on Feuerbach: A Road not Taken’ he states that “the state should not impose any one conception of the good precisely because it is not neutral and so it can’t be trusted to promote any worthwhile set of values.”[[393]](#footnote-393) Elsewhere in ‘Toleration and the Goods of Conflict’ he claims that “the contemporary state is not and cannot be evaluatively neutral, and secondly that it is just because of the ways in which the state is not evaluatively neutral that it cannot generally be trusted to promote any worthwhile set of values, including those of autonomy and liberty;” yet, he also argues that “even although that neutrality is never real, it is an important fiction, and those of us who recognize its importance as well as its fictional character will agree with liberals in upholding a certain range of civil liberties.”[[394]](#footnote-394)

This suggests that with respect to neutrality in the liberal state, MacIntyre seems to believe that while the liberal state isn’t genuinely neutral, pseudo-neutrality is an important feature of the liberal state (especially with respect to ensuring civil liberties and equal protection under the law). Here, we could accept that the state isn’t living up to the ideal of neutrality, and that as currently structured, it is unable to effectively realize this goal. Thus, MacIntyre, it seems, desires a state that affords a more authentic expression of neutrality. This I think is a fairly uncontroversial and plausible line of reasoning with one caveat, which is that MacIntyre rejects any possibility for constructively, yet incrementally, adapting and transforming the state towards the realisation of this goal.

The problem with MacIntyre’s conclusion is that by rejecting the possibility of the state being neutral, it succumbs to a non-empirical foundational (or essentialist) claim that seems to block some possible avenues of inquiry. Yet elements in MacIntyre’s historicism and fallibilism suggest that one should normally shy away from such wide-ranging foundational claims. On the historicist (non-foundationalist) view, there is no reason for us to think that it is impossible for the state to realize a certain level of authentic neutrality, or – to employ a more appropriate terminology – remain properly procedural (at least in some aspects) in ways that are more, rather than less, neutral.

What is significant for our discussion is that in order to advance a formulation amenable to MacIntyre’s overall aims, we are not forced to abandon all talk of neutral (or proceduralist) politics altogether. So how can we balance the need for a substantive conception of the good with the fact of pluralism and neutrality, and the realities of social life in contemporary pluralist multi-cultural societies? I would like to suggest that it may be possible to delineate a space for prioritizing certain substantive conceptions of the good in specific domains, i.e., local communities, where we can advance solutions for particular social-political problems raised in specific domains. Of course this would also mean that a substantive conception of the good ought to be grounded in a form of inquiry which is genuinely participatory deliberative and democratic with respect to the common good of the community as a whole, while simultaneously ensuring that the eventual outcome of deliberations do not violate important civil liberties, especially at the expense of marginalised minorities.

In addition, in order to offer local communities the space for a genuinely participatory politics of the common good grounded in participatory-deliberative inquiry, we need the kind of state that is more neutral than the contemporary liberal state. The type of state I have in mind would not then surreptitiously – that is indirectly through the mechanism of the market – smuggle in a materialist conception of the good, one that ends up undermining local democracy and participation under the guise of neutrality. This suggests that it may be possible to address the deficiencies of a more rigid proceduralist liberal theory. On the one hand, such an alternative model combines a procedurally flexible process of inquiry – for engendering substantive conceptions of the good – at the local level that are central to developing specific solutions for local communities. On the other hand, a more neutral state than the one offered by standard liberal theory ensures that a substantive conception of the good – one that is the outcome of a bona fide participatory democratic inquiry by local communities – is not then subverted by a state that subscribes to an excessively materialist conception of the good.

### 2.1 Some Desiderata

The above general problems and MacIntyre’s neutrality thesis provides us with some general guidelines of what an alternative critical liberal politics might amount to.

*Guidelines towards a political solution:*

1. The need for a constructive relationship between local communities and the state. Even if we accept the large set of problems that plagues the liberal state, we needn’t accept the essentialist terms in which MacIntyre frames the debate. MacIntyre’s own historicism and fallibilism suggests that we should think of these problems as contingent.
2. The possibilities of distributive justice are enhanced by a constructive dialogue and relationship between communities and the state, and in the absence of a more constructive relationship, the possibilities of distributive justice are altogether stifled (especially if communities act in a purely cost-benefit approach as MacIntyre currently suggests). (Keith Breen)
3. There is a need for concrete ways of defending deliberative democratic politics (inquiry) at the local level.
   1. Setting boundaries between the state and local communities through dialogue on legislative boundaries and self-determination. (Thomas Hibbs)
   2. The need for epistemically reflexive procedures – procedures that change based on relevant empirical data – that allows us to defend local politics of the common good, yet maintain an important role for large-scale politics and its associated structures.
   3. Inter-communal or trans-communal dialogue between local communities promotes the possibilities for distributive justice. (Keith Breen)
4. MacIntyre explicitly states that he wants to guarantee civil liberties. He nevertheless believes that the state eventually subverts the aims of local communities aiming at the common good.
   1. These two theses can be brought together through MacIntyre’s support for a more neutral state (albeit he thinks such a state isn’t possible) which leads us to think that a state which takes to heart a more meaningful conception of neutrality, and honestly considers where and when it can or cannot be neutral, might be the way forward. In this sense the state can be neutral in ways that promotes civil liberties but at the same time it accepts where its neutrality is questionable, and hence affords a certain degree of priority to local or communal conceptions of the good.
   2. Additionally, there is a need for epistemically reflexive (empirically malleable) procedures to delineate between private and public spheres of inquiry. A detailed consideration of the issue that neutrality of public reason presents means that we ought to examine the ways in which the distinction between the private and public spheres can at times limit our ability to tackle social problems; yet, at the same time, this distinction remains important if we are to avoid the slippery slope to a totalitarian end state.
5. Lastly, in order for us to meaningfully achieve some of the above suggestions and set meaningful boundaries between the state and local communities we need to engage seriously with legal/political history.
   1. At least with respect to defending local communities, it seems MacIntyre’s work has to some extent neglected the implications of historical events in legal and political history, which have undermined democratic politics at the level of communities.
   2. A brief examination of particular 19th-20th century cases in legal and political history in the United States reveals how the democratic power of local communities have been gradually eviscerated. This type of political-historical analysis can help us find ways to empower community-based participatory democratic politics.

I will now begin considering what I take to be some important constitutive elements of just such a political philosophy. In order to advance my argument, I will engage in some detail with accounts that look to remedy the standard versions of liberalism – the versions that MacIntyre finds objectionable. The hope is that the sort of honest self-conscious theory is more cognizant about the limits of neutrality in politics. This mode of engaging in politics accepts the importance of adopting neutrality or a proceduralist attitude where it is most necessary, for example, with respect to important civil liberties. At the same time whenever it is advisable, or possible, even at some cost to efficiency of bureaucracy, we should empower local democratic structures to make public decisions. It is my hope that this alternative approach to politics provides the space for local communities to promote a participatory politics of the common good in choosing freely in their evaluation of the various goods that sustain a flourishing community life, and at the same time maintain the sort of neutrality that limits the ability of local communities to frustrate the wishes of under-represented and marginalized elements of communities.­

## 3. Participatory Democracy

In order to develop the outlines of an alternative critical (liberal) politics, I will primarily consider some alternative pragmatist inclined approaches taken up by Walzer, Misak, and Honneth’s Dewey. In my view, at a deeper level, all these approaches share a common ground – that of developing a *via media* that can bridge the gap between realist non-ideal accounts of politics and the kind of accounts found more prominently in the works of Rawlsian (and other proceduralist) liberal political philosophers. Thus, at a conceptual level, the remedy to our problem – that of outlining an alternative critical liberal model for politics – lies in the ongoing debate between proceduralist (ideal) accounts and more realistic (non-ideal) accounts in politics.

First, I should say that as far as I am aware, MacIntyre doesn’t explicitly discuss pragmatism. The noted MacIntyre scholar Kelvin Knight discusses Pragmatist philosophers Robert Brandom and Jurgen Habermas in a paper.[[395]](#footnote-395) Nevertheless, in my view, Brandom and Habermas are not good examples of the kind of political pragmatism, and especially the Deweyan pragmatism, which I look to consider in this chapter. Now, should this alternative political pragmatism prove promising, its consideration potentially offers us new ways of engaging in a constructive dialogue between political pragmatists and the proponents of MacIntyre’s account.

Still, one may wonder whether there is a deeper relationship between these particular authors, and more importantly, their connection to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. So what is the common thread that connects these particular authors, and what is their connection to MacIntyre? We should also ask how the various strategies offered by these authors can help MacIntyre’s brand of politics – or more pointedly: is their brand of democratic politics immune to the various problems that seemingly plagued MacIntyre’s account? Finally, in what ways does the alternative account that may be shaped from our engagement with these authors supersede more mainstream liberal accounts; or to put differently, what are the important features of MacIntyre’s political account – features that are superior to liberal political theory – that remain valuable to us?

I will try to answer a few of these questions now, while the answers to the balance of these questions will have to wait a closer engagement with each author’s position, towards the end of this chapter. In my view, all these authors belong, without any controversy, to a strain of politics that can be characterised as both egalitarian-liberal and democratic-communitarian. What does this actually mean? We can say that their political project supports: (i) a strengthened democratic politics, that doesn’t involve the wholesale rejection of liberal premises; (ii) they view democratic participation and activity at the level of communities as a way to manage the excesses of liberal politics at the state level; and (iii) that a true participatory democracy at the local level can only be meaningful in a less hierarchical and more egalitarian social context, and so they look to advance a more democratic and egalitarian social ontology.

In addition, all of these authors more or less accept the historicist thesis in one form or another. On this thesis, broadly speaking, a liberal-egalitarian-democratic politics can be best served when augmented with a comparative analysis of political history. By admitting the historicist thesis in some form, we are simultaneously acknowledging that an overly abstract ideal theory in political philosophy is of limited use, owing to the limitations of applying abstract conceptual analysis and generalizable principles to real life situations. On this view, the social-political context is neither an unchanging static sphere of human activity, nor a homogenous ontological entity that can be neatly categorised, or classified, under conceptual schemes derived from abstract general principles.

Another important feature of the work of these authors is that they see local democratic politics as a way to limit the excesses of the liberal state, and so they look to create the appropriate space to introduce modifications to the way politics is conducted in the state and local communities. What is perhaps a most interesting feature of their work is that not only do they view democratic politics at the local level as an epistemically important contribution – one that is central to the wider aims of a dynamic liberal-democratic society – but they also view democratic politics as a reflexive process where procedures and policies (inputs) are adjusted in as part of an ongoing process, in which the consequences (outputs) of the same procedures and policies meaningfully help us revise our theories. This epistemic component of local democracy means that most individuals will in principle benefit from a genuine opportunity to contribute to the democratic process in meaningful ways, and the reflexive component will ensure that any empirical/historical knowledge gained from past experience is used to adjust various procedures or policies, in the hope of realising more desirable outcomes.

By now it may seem somewhat obvious how the above approaches connect to MacIntyre’s work. MacIntyre wants to empower democratic politics – that is his criticism isn’t against liberal democracy *per se*, rather that the real aims of liberal democracy are largely unrealized, and that liberal democratic states need to own up to their shortcomings. Furthermore, they all agree that we need a more robust democracy at the level of local communities; that local initiatives ought to be aimed at correcting the undesirable consequences of liberalism; and that genuine local democratic politics can help curb some of the more problematic consequences of large-scale (liberal) institutions. They all eschew an overly abstract approach to political theory and welcome an historical attitude towards solving socio-political problems. The epistemic approach to democratic politics taken by these authors is allied with MacIntyre’s conception of community-based deliberative democracy. Lastly, these authors and MacIntyre share a preference for viewing politics through an empirical lens – namely, that political procedures and practices need to remain responsive to changes in the social landscape, and to the experiences we gain through understanding social-political history. By engaging with these authors I therefore hope to not only highlight some of the ways they connect to, and retain, what is valuable in MacIntyre’s account, but also to show how they are able to overcome the various criticisms that we have considered during the course of our discussion in Chapters Four and Five.

The above should suggest that an alternative approach to politics, which I hope to elaborate on, is not only desirable in the sense that it is more democratic and egalitarian, but it is also more honest with respect to the limits placed on politics, and political philosophy. By eschewing generalizable principles in favour of a more empirical context-dependent approach to politics, we accept that our political procedures and practices are fallible, and therefore remain falsifiable. This is especially the case when for example we come to recognize that past political policies or procedures that were grounded in generalizable principles have contributed to engendering a social context that is highly un-egalitarian, and a political context that is for the most part unresponsive to broader democratic demands.

Such an approach suggests to us a form of politics that accepts political activity isn’t always neutral, and that a false pretence of neutrality may do more harm than good; yet, this form of politics understands the need to maintain a robust form of neutrality in some areas, especially with respect to civil liberties and other equal protection considerations. On this view, politics should be procedural insofar as this affords equal opportunity for participation in political activity, and therefore, provides a range of background conditions that empower all individuals with the opportunity to realise their potential as contributing persons in meaningful political activity. On the other hand, whenever it is clear that politics or political activity cannot be neutral, politics shouldn’t feign neutrality; instead, politics should provide well-argued reasons why it isn’t, or it can’t expect to remain neutral in some particular context or other.

Let us therefore now turn to look at this pragmatist tradition of political theory in more detail, to see whether it can offer MacIntyre a way out of his impasse – namely, that of advancing a meaningful political account suitable for the modern world.

## 4. Pragmatist Political Possibilities

Before proceeding, I should clarify some of the ways I plan to engage with these authors. For the purpose of offering a resolution to the second tension in MacIntyre’s account – and specifically in his politics – it is not my contention that all of these authors are important to the same degree, nor that all of them equally contribute to resolving our puzzle. In considering Misak, Walzer, and Honneth’s Dewey in the following sections I hope to outline a trajectory that moves from some broad or general – and hence less determinate – ways of addressing the problems involved in MacIntyre’s account, to a more determinate set of both conceptual and practical tools that can enrich MacIntyre’s politics. Placing my analysis within this trajectory is important because it will help us uncover the strengths and limitations of the various approaches in ways that will ultimately crystalize the shape of our alternative politics.

I will start now with considering some features from the political account of Cheryl Misak.

### 4.1 Cheryl Misak

On Misak’s view, Rawls’ account treats our starting point – that of a democratic society with free and equal citizens arranged around social cooperation – as substantive. Here, Rawls’ proceduralist view presupposes a substantive view of the good, namely, justice as fairness. The advantage of Misak’s pragmatist position is that while a pragmatist can agree on the contingency and significance of our starting point, she does not take it to be privileged. It is only a set of revisable backgrounds that are currently justified and susceptible to revision as inquiry progresses. [[396]](#footnote-396) But Rawls’ implicit normative claim is that they are the fundamental facts of society. Misak argues that despite Rawls’ claims to the contrary, his account of justice as fairness is grounded in a substantive conception of the good. On her view, it would be best for Rawls not to deny that justice as fairness is grounded in a substantive notion of the good. For Misak, the idea that we should abstract from our beliefs about the good is neither feasible nor attractive.[[397]](#footnote-397)

On Misak’s view, in addition to obfuscating the matter – namely, surreptitiously holding onto a substantive notion of the good, under a proceduralist veneer – the more rigid proceduralist position of across the board neutrality, potentially rules out all first-order appeals, even those that could prospectively occasion a reconfiguration of social-political policy in ways that resolve longstanding injustices. Misak uses the example of the US treatment of Native Americans to show how colour-blind laws that appear to be neutral, can in fact lead to institutionalized oppression.[[398]](#footnote-398) Misak agrees with MacIntyre and argues that the principle of strict neutrality is a convenient myth:

“Governments in pluralistic societies…cannot in fact be neutral towards ethnic and national groups within their boundaries, since just about every policy or law promotes some conception of the good. A crucial requirement for the survival of a culture, for example, is that its language is the language of the government and its institutions.”[[399]](#footnote-399)

It follows that both the liberal and the communitarian would have to agree that there is a very large space between the highly idealized proceduralist view of government as strictly neutral, and the type of totalitarian government that interferes with every action of the citizenry.[[400]](#footnote-400) Yet, public deliberation about the good in no way entails that we interfere with the activity of others.[[401]](#footnote-401)

Here, we can see that Misak’s adopts a holistic view and therefore dispenses with any hard distinction between public and private spheres. In contrast to Rawls’ proscription against public debate on substantive notions of the good, she argues that adopting a strong distinction between public and private spheres – and hence, proscribing all public deliberation about good – at best, limits our capacity to develop solutions to particular social problems, and at worst, tends to further marginalize minority views in the wider social sphere.

On Misak’s pragmatist account, it is neither necessary, nor desirable, that we converge on one answer with respect to substantive competing conceptions of the good. Her view takes into account that value pluralism is a social fact with the following two caveats: that (i) social facts are empirical and so like all empirical facts are revisable; and (ii) we needn’t deny that some judgments are more ‘truth-apt’ than others.[[402]](#footnote-402) While we can sometimes find the right answers to particular problems, it doesn’t follow from this that all, or even most, protracted differences are reconciled.

In this sense, the pragmatic account offered by Misak is allied with communitarianism, if we accept that many questions about right or wrong are better answered by those who are active participants in a particular way of life. Yet, against the communitarian, the pragmatist will argue that the participants within some tradition do not necessarily hold a monopoly with respect to the truth-value of all relevant experience afforded by that tradition. This means that it is likely that different traditions share at least some common elements with respect to their social life in ways that potentially allows the adherents of one tradition to speak intelligibly in regards to the truth-value of claims presented in another tradition. Second, because communities and traditions are dynamic entities whose boundaries are always in flux, it becomes very difficult to draw sharp divisions between cultures, communities, or even, different conceptions of the good.[[403]](#footnote-403) Misak argues that the upshot of the pragmatist position is that:

“in advance of the specific debates with their own set of historical, political, and cultural circumstances, that we must promote the flourishing minority ways of life. But we must not make the mistake, in commending difference, of thinking that any practice is good just because it belongs to a community. Well established practices are not immune to internal criticism and they are not immune to critical reasons given by outsiders.”[[404]](#footnote-404)

In this way, the pragmatist retains the liberal theorist’s proceduralist outlook, but this form of proceduralism only admits that our procedures are formulations that are currently justified; and that they ultimately derive their strength insofar as they help in advancing conceptions of the good that engender social progress and human flourishing. Thus, the procedures that we develop to arrange our democratic politics must be subjected to empirical forces which justify, or falsify, their continued (in)-adequacy in the long run.

At this point I will briefly restate the insights found in Misak’s account. We observed that her account attempts to nudge the standard liberal position characterised by Rawls towards a *via media* that balances proceduralism against more substantiveconceptions of the good. What is also relevant to our purposes is that there is a level of agreement between Misak and MacIntyre, in which both argue that the type of neutrality in the standard liberal account is not only impossible, but that any position that feigns neutrality as a principle in politics is bound to be defective. Both authors also agree that neutrality realized in this sense, only amounts to a surreptitious introduction of a particular conception of the good under the guise of neutrality, one that potentially rules out the genuine possibility for a democratic deliberative process of considering, or rejecting, different conceptions of the good. On the view I am proposing, Misak’s position stands as a *via media* between that of MacIntyre and the liberal in an important sense. While Misak appears to admit that we can indeed converge on a more or less stable set of answers, with respect to at least some ethical-political questions, we need not converge on all answers. In fact, she realizes that different conceptions of the good are not as homogenous as is often assumed, and that the boundaries dividing various conceptions of the good are contestable.

We can observe that Misak’s account offers us some of the conceptual resources to correct the various defects in the standard Rawlsian liberal account, yet, at the same time, her positions can be seen as an intermediate position between the liberal, and MacIntyre. Misak’s account is also rich in the type of conceptual resources that help us bridge important issues like problem of neutrality in the liberal state, and how we can converge meaningfully on answers in the domain of politics.

Still, what remains unanswered is a systematic consideration of the overall debate between liberals on the one hand, who would like to exclude first-order appeals from political consideration, and those thinkers like MacIntyre (and communitarians) who insist that politics free of any serious public evaluation of substantive conceptions of the good can only be self-deceiving. I will now turn my attention to Walzer to see whether his analysis can help us bridge this gap.

### 4.2 Michael Walzer

Michael Walzer advances what I also take to be a *via media* position – one that stands somewhere between a non-ideal communitarian views found in the work of Michael Sandel, and a more ideal liberal theory found in the work of Rawls and his followers. According to Walzer, the problem with the strict communitarian critique (which under his account includes those views advanced by MacIntyre), is that it advances two separate arguments that appear to contradict each other. The first argument is primarily aimed at liberal social practice, and the second against liberal theory.

The first argument claims that liberal politics accurately represents liberal social practice. On this view, individuals in a liberal society, sharing little in terms of political/religious convictions, can only tell a story about themselves as isolated atomistic individuals, free and unencumbered. The fact that individual life is described in both the language of rights and utilities means that “Men and women in liberal society no longer have access to a single moral culture within which they can learn how they ought to live.”[[405]](#footnote-405) Therefore, there is little consensus on the nature of the good, and so liberal society viewed from the communitarian standpoint, is “fragmentation in practice.”[[406]](#footnote-406)

The second argument asserts that liberal political theory seriously misrepresents real life. On this view, human beings, as social creatures, are bound by social and communal ties. Now, it is difficult to see how this (liberal) abstraction – namely, the idea of an unencumbered individual without social bonds – makes any sense when we consider the actual conditions of social life. The upshot of the second critique is that the realized structure of liberal society is in fact communitarian. Therefore, liberal theory in effect distorts this reality, and cuts us off from a more realistic understanding which admits the embedded nature of our experience.

However, Walzer argues that it is difficult to hold onto both of these criticisms and remain consistent. So how can we make sense of the two diverging charges raised by the communitarian critique of liberalism? On the one hand, liberal social and cultural practices support the view of human beings as isolated individuals unencumbered and cut off from their communities, while on the other hand, liberal theory seemingly mischaracterizes our actual lived experience, since (according to the communitarian) our lived experience is in fact socially embedded and encumbered – namely, that human life is irreducibly social (or communal). While the first claim wants to maintain that our individual social life under liberalism is cut off from the wider social (or communal) context, the second claim argues in the opposite direction and suggests that all social life can only be understood communally.[[407]](#footnote-407)

Walzer concludes that there are features in both accounts that are accurate to some degree. To advance his argument, Walzer outlines an account of what he identifies as the four mobilities: geographic, social, marital, and political mobility. On Walzer’s view, liberalism is “the theoretical endorsement and justification” of the mobility we observe across geographic spaces, social hierarchies, marital obligation, and political loyalties, which together form an important, and distinctive, feature of modern liberal society. [[408]](#footnote-408) In a sense the increased mobility of individuals in the sphere of the four mobilities is a salient fact in liberal society, and all efforts to curtail mobility will require massive and certainly an undesirable application of coercive power by the state.

The first critique correctly describes the following fact: that we find ourselves more often alone than people have generally been in earlier historical periods; and that we rely to a much lesser degree on neighbours who are close by, on relatives who live in our vicinity, or colleagues who are often in transition moving from one place to another.[[409]](#footnote-409) The second critique is also true, since human beings generally remain social creatures, and even if the four mobilities tend to increase our isolation and independence, they nonetheless do not place us so far from each other that we stop communicating altogether. If we agree with the second critique – namely, that we are situated human beings tied to our social context – then it does not make sense to say that liberalism altogether preclude us from maintaining our social bonds.

It may be that liberalism and liberal society more generally display characteristics that render them unstable in the long run, which then necessitates a degree of corrective action at different points in time; nevertheless it seems unhelpful to claim that liberal politics is completely incoherent or that it should be replaced by some pre-modern form of community.[[410]](#footnote-410) Walzer argues that it is much more plausible to describe liberalism as a “social union of social unions” that brings us together and is inclusive of a large variety of social unions. On this view, liberalism as a social union, in addition to its associative tendencies, exhibits dissociative tendencies which require a range of corrective actions at different intervals.[[411]](#footnote-411)

Now, Walzer offers the example of legislations designed to afford protection to local communities, against the closure of manufacturing plants. Here, members of the community and their way of life are temporarily protected from the vicissitudes of market forces. Yet, the state cannot in principle commit itself to, nor does it possess adequate resources for, the preservation of every community. Still, in this example we have a conception of the good – namely, the good which is advanced by retaining the way of life in a particular community – which can trump the procedural right for all communities to be treated the same.

For Walzer, politics must therefore occasion a diverse range of fully voluntary associations (dissociative tendencies); yet it cannot, simultaneously, permit all of our relationships to be subjected to frequent instability (associative tendencies). Walzer argues that insofar as liberal politics is dissociative and generates frequent instabilities, it is in need of associative (or communitarian) correction. Given the existence of the four mobilities described by Walzer, short of taking drastic anti-liberal measures and applying the coercive power of the state, there is no permanent remedy for completely removing the instability characteristic of liberal society, save and except periodic corrective action aimed at ameliorating the social instabilities that are generated in all liberal societies.[[412]](#footnote-412)

At this point, I should emphasize that Walzer’s analysis reveals to us two important claims. First, that the political debate between the communitarian and the liberal, in which many read MacIntyre as a communitarian, albeit incorrectly, is one that on the one hand exists because of the misunderstanding among communitarians about the nature of liberalism as realized in contemporary society, and on the other hand, the misunderstanding that has taken shape on both sides by the mischaracterization of their opponent’s position. Second, in order to fruitfully advance the debate, political theory should turn its attention to managing the dissociative nature of liberal politics through the adoption of particular associative remedies.

We can see that Walzer’s account bridges the gap between MacIntyre and the liberal by admitting that liberal state and society are central facts for any serious attempt at a viable political philosophy. Yet, Walzer would also chide the standard liberal view for holding fast to the principle of neutrality and refraining from any interference on behalf of one or another conception of the good. On his view, the state should enact policies to relieve the social and political problems that emerge from the dissociative nature of liberalism. Here, Walzer encourages the introduction of associative remedies that are grounded in some substantive conception of the good, which in turn enables communities to deal with the problems posed by the dissociative tendencies present in liberal society.

Walzer concludes that, “a good liberal state…enhances the possibilities for cooperative coping.”[[413]](#footnote-413) Interestingly we find just such a view of the state is provided by Dewey in *The Public and Its Problems*.

“When a state is a good state, when the officers of the public genuinely serve the public interests, this reflex effect is of great importance. It renders the desirable associations solider and more coherent; indirectly it clarifies their aims and purges their activities. It places a discount upon injurious groupings and renders their tenure of life precarious. In performing these services, it gives the individual members of valued associations greater liberty and security: it relieves them of hampering conditions which if they had to cope with personally would absorb their energies in mere negative struggle against evils. It enables individual members to count with reasonable certainty upon what others will do, and thus facilitates mutually helpful cooperations. It creates respect for others and for one's self. A measure of the goodness of a state is the degree in which it relieves individuals from the waste of negative struggle and needless conflict and confers upon him positive assurance and reenforcement in what he undertakes.”[[414]](#footnote-414)

I will now move to consider the attractiveness of Dewey’s account, because it seems to offer not only some important general conceptual tools that bridge the differences between MacIntyre and the standard liberal position (as do Misak and Walzer), but also affords us the resources to develop the type of political account that combines community-based politics with politics at the state level. Recall that in order for us to resolve the tension in MacIntyre’s politics we need to formulate the kind of alternative politics, which provides a space for both a community-based local politics, and politics dealing with large-scale political considerations normally taken up by the state. What is relevant to our ongoing discussion is that Axel Honneth’s reading of Dewey seems to possess the conceptual resource in understanding the relationship between local communities and the state, and by realising this, the individual could come to understand herself as a member of both forms of associations.

I will now consider some of the interesting possibilities present in Honneth’s reading of Dewey.

### 4.3 Honneth’s Dewey

On Honneth view, the main contenders that advance an alternative politics to standard liberal theory are republican views that focus on substantive conceptions of the good such as citizen virtues and civic duties, and those views that are more strictly procedural. He argues that Dewey’s theory of democracy offers a viable political alternative to standard liberal theory, because Dewey’s position effectively synthesizes these two approaches into a politics that is superior to both views.

Now, both republicanism and proceduralism argue that freedom is only attained in the acts of engaging in communicative relations with others, free from coercive influence. On Arendt’s and Habermas’ republicanism and proceduralism respectively, we achieve freedom by achieving agreement in language. Honneth argues that Dewey’s approach to politics is modelled on social cooperation.[[415]](#footnote-415) Here, Dewey views communicative freedom as a form of social cooperation to resolve what amounts to a distinctively practical problem.[[416]](#footnote-416)

Nevertheless, for Dewey, in contrast to proceduralist or instrumentalist conceptions of democracy, democracy is not just simply an organizational model of governance. He dispenses with an instrumentalist view of democracy and its false assumption that views individuals in society as a mass of unorganized atomistic individuals.[[417]](#footnote-417) On Dewey’s revised view, government should not be viewed as an independent entity which exercises majority decisions; the preferable outcome is one that views government as a vehicle for engendering a range of efforts that seek to implement ends pursued cooperatively.[[418]](#footnote-418) Hence, freedom is the unfettered self-realization that allows individual agents to discover their talents and capacities in ways that contribute to society and helps sustain society as a whole, based on a just division of labour. Thus, structurally speaking, the activity of un-coerced social participation under a just division of labour, with an eye towards the amelioration of social problems, epitomises the essence of democracy.[[419]](#footnote-419)

On Dewey’s view, for proceduralism to be effective it has to consider that the likelihood of intelligent solutions to emerging social problems increase whenever all involved participants are free from constraints, possess equal right to communicate, exchange information, and are able to effectively introduce their considerations on various social and political issues. Dewey’s epistemic view argues that democracy serves as a condition for increasing the propensity to develop rational solutions to social and political problems.[[420]](#footnote-420)

So how does Dewey synthesize (or reconcile) his epistemic procedural account with more substantive accounts offered in (substantive) republican views such as those of Arendt that stress citizen virtues and community-based politics?[[421]](#footnote-421) It is often the case that standard proceduralist views, especially those that are available in liberal democracies, can come into conflict with more substantive views that stress participation in local democratic politics. Dewey offers a resolution of this problem by positing the state as a forum in which problem solving is undertaken collectively. Social actions and their consequences generate the need for collective evaluation and control of those actions. Honneth argues that for Dewey, ‘the public’ is

“that sphere of social action that a social group can successfully prove to be in need of general regulation because encroaching consequences are being generated; and, accordingly, a ‘public’ consists of the circle of citizens who, on the basis of a jointly experienced concern, share the conviction that they have to turn to the rest of society for the purposes of administratively controlling the relevant interactions.”[[422]](#footnote-422)

Now, Dewey’s account presupposes an instrumental, as opposed to a more foundational (or essentialist) distinction between private and public spheres; and, the distinction between the two spheres is on the basis of the extent and the scope of consequences of social-political problems which demand regulation and control. Additionally, on Dewey’s account, the state is a “secondary form of association” in which the various interconnected ‘publics’ work jointly to advance coordinated social and political actions, for the purpose of ameliorating social-political problems. Hence, the function of the state is seen as securing the conditions whereby all participants are empowered to express their concerns as equal co-interlocutors, without the kind of interference that seeks to marginalise their contribution. Whenever these conditions are present, we are better able to undertake meaningful actions that advance the resolution of social problems; and the presence of these conditions ensure the rationality of the experimental process by which the state as a whole arrives at a set of jointly reached, and widely approved, solutions to various social problems.[[423]](#footnote-423)

Here, Dewey’s revival of democratic politics presupposes a kind of society in which all individual members of the society are actively engaged in developing and enhancing pre-political – that is, local or community-based – associations. He also argues that a just division of labour is a prerequisite for the actualization of collective social goals, since each individual must realize the value of her contribution in ways that sustains in her the knowledge that a democratic public is necessary for generating positive social outcomes – outcomes that are irreducibly connected to the realisation of her own good as an individual.[[424]](#footnote-424) Hence, the basis of political life for Dewey is the pre-political life of social cooperation under a just division of labour. Therefore, in order to revitalize the democratic public we need to consider the pre-political sphere of the division of labour, and regulate this sphere so that each individual member of society can come to understand herself as an active participant in an ongoing collaborative enterprise.[[425]](#footnote-425) Here, the jointly held *good* (or common good) that is realised through the range of collaborative activities remains inextricably tied to each participant’s active contribution in the cooperative process.[[426]](#footnote-426)

Thus, an important condition for the democratic ethical life envisioned by Dewey is a society in which all individual participants can form relationships based on a non-discriminatory division of labour. For Honneth, Dewey’s account addresses the weaknesses of the proceduralist model by connecting democratic realization to individual self-fulfilment in cooperative activity under a just division of labour. Yet, it also retains the advantages of proceduralism over a morality-heavy republicanism.[[427]](#footnote-427) Therefore, Dewey’s politics amounts to a philosophical justification of democracy as a social enterprise – one that aims at developing intelligent solutions to social problems. Democracy, understood in this sense, is the precondition for the application of intelligence towards the resolution of social problems.[[428]](#footnote-428)

It is my hope that the discussion of Dewey has made it easier for us to understand how a democratic community-based politics offers us the conceptual resources for a community-based account of politics under a just division of labour, alongside a politics realised at the level of large-scale political structures like the state. In addition, Dewey’s account helps us understand the way in which each participating person could come to view herself in relation to her local community and the larger community that constitutes the nation as a whole.

In what follows, I will outline how the above alternative (liberal) accounts we have considered thus far can help us address the general problems that are generated under MacIntyre’s account. My aim here is to outline a plausible, albeit defeasible, critical political philosophy that is in line with MacIntyre’s broader approach.

## 5. Addressing the Worries Generated by MacIntyre’s Politics

I will now consider how the political insights offered by Walzer, Honneth’s Dewey, and Misak, respectively, can offer a resolution of the problems generated under MacIntyre’s political account. Earlier, we speculated that MacIntyre is perhaps able to deflect the worry that politics as a second order practice is incoherent; yet, we still face some difficulties in defending MacIntyre against Murphy’s charge in virtue of the fact that the state remains a pre-condition for the kind of deliberative participatory politics at the level of local communities that MacIntyre envisions. It then appeared that on MacIntyre’s own historical and fallibilist views, he has to at least allow for the possibility of correcting the deficiencies of politics present in the liberal state. This issue roughly maps onto the first item (G1) I set out in the *general guideline towards a solution* I delineated towards the end of section 2.1.

In my view, Walzer’s account, seen as a *via media*, is useful in addressing this particular worry. Recall that Walzer agrees to some extent with the communitarian critique – namely, that fragmentation in politics is a result of the fact that we increasingly view ourselves as autonomous and even isolated individual who are not able to arrive at a substantive notion of the good. Yet, Walzer also argues that the first communitarian critique does not fit well with the second criticism advanced by communitarians where they argue that liberalism misrepresents human life since human beings are inherently social creatures characterised by strong social bonds. The upshot is that we can only adequately flourish as human beings within a cooperative social sphere.

Walzer goes on develop a middle position. First, he states that in western societies we are in fact more isolated and independent than at any earlier period in history. He argues that social, marital, geographical, and political mobility, as social facts, map onto the liberal conception of autonomy and choice. Put differently, these social facts have as much to do with our current predicament than anything liberal political philosophy could tell us. Therefore, liberal political philosophy is, in a certain sense, a theoretical expression of contemporary social facts.[[429]](#footnote-429) Nevertheless, this does not mean that we are completely isolated unencumbered individuals. We are still social creatures tied to our familial and communal bonds. While the contemporary westerner ought to be viewed as more independent than other individuals in earlier historical periods, her life is made meaningful through the development of a range of familial and communal (social) bonds. Therefore, individuals in liberal societies experience social phenomena in both dissociative and associative ways. Now, Walzer argues that in order for liberal politics to be effective, it has to manage the dissociative and associative tendencies of the liberal state in a way that provides for a diverse range of fully voluntary associations (dissociative), while simultaneously we ought to offset the dissociative tendencies so that we do not subject all of our relationships to frequent instability (associative).[[430]](#footnote-430)

Walzer therefore agrees with both Murphy and MacIntyre that the liberal state is inevitable; he nevertheless does not follow MacIntyre and abandon all hope for devising an alternative critical (liberal) politics. Here, we can view the dissociative tendencies to be a result of our contemporary social facts. Hence, procedural liberalism may be the best way of dealing with these facts under conditions of fairness and non-discrimination. Still, we can remedy at least some of the more negative dissociative tendencies, by prioritizing particular conceptions of the good in order to enhance associative bonds.

Before considering and then highlighting the strength of the Deweyan account for addressing the worries associated with MacIntyre’s account of politics, I will first show how Dewey’s account is able to address a principal criticism raised by MacIntyre against liberal politics. Recall that MacIntyre challenges the liberal state since he argues that the notion of public interest in such a state fails to show why a person owes her political allegiance to the state in which they happen to reside. MacIntyre argued that in liberal politics, the concepts of public interest and the individual’s good, are defined independently and therefore tend to come apart; hence, it is not clear why a person ought to prioritize public interest over her own private interests and preferences. Recall that the notion of public interest in the modern state is understood as those conditions that afford each individual the opportunity to pursue her own separate interests and desires. Here, an individual’s private interests and desires – namely, their good – is seen as separate from, and prior to, the concept of public interest. On the other hand, the common good that is found in local communities is advanced through active participation and deliberation of its members, and it is in with respect to those goods – jointly realised through the activities that make up the social life of the community – that the individual’s good is in turn advanced. This conception of the common good defines the individual’s good in terms of his or her active participation in the social and political life of the community.

This account nevertheless stands in opposition to the standard liberal model, and therefore on MacIntyre’s view, it makes little sense for the individual residing in the modern liberal state to subordinate her (private) interests to the public’s broader conception of goods and interests.[[431]](#footnote-431) Of course a rejoinder to MacIntyre’s argument here is that Rawlsian liberals do not ground political allegiance in the notion of public interest; instead they tend to appeal to the notion of justice to give substance to their argument.[[432]](#footnote-432) Notwithstanding this rejoinder, on MacIntyre’s view, Rawls’ concept of justice, because it is defined independently from any particular social context, it remains too abstract and therefore inadmissible given that it substitutes a generalised principle at the expense of an account of human life (a life that is embedded in a particular community), and appeals to a set of rules that are rationally justifiable within the social and political life of that community.[[433]](#footnote-433)

In order to express this in a meaningful way, I will contrast a standard Rawlsian conception of political allegiance, to a Deweyan understanding of this relationship between the individual and the state. On this view, Rawls maintains that we could understand our allegiance to the wider community through a shared conception of justice. This conception is more or less grounded in the ideas presented in Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, and further developed in *Political Liberalism*. On this Rawlsian view, most of us, at least in contemporary western liberal society, can uncontroversially accept an account of justice as fairness – Rawls identifies this as the overlapping consensus.[[434]](#footnote-434) The idea of an overlapping consensus can ground our premises about the priority of justice; we can then offer our allegiance to this idea. A problem that emerges for Rawls’ account is that allegiance to this conception of justice, which entails the priority of the right over the good, is that it remains somewhat abstract and underspecified. So for example, each individual person could potentially assign a different relative priority to different principles that they happen to hold.[[435]](#footnote-435)

On Dewey’s account, the individual is primarily attached in a political sense to her own community. But on the Deweyan view, local democratic activities are more effective and robust when the community is inclusive of democratic dialogue between various communities (or publics). On this view, while the individual in the first instance offers her allegiance to her own community, she understands that the political process does not end at the level of local community; and that a truly effective local democracy is sustained by engaging in a deliberative dialogue with other communities. Yet, this sort of inter-community dialogue can only be realised with the help of the state and its institutions. Dewey, therefore, argues that the state should act as a secondary form of association. Here, we are forced to connect our local participatory politics of the common good to this larger democratic sphere – namely, the state – because the problems that are generated by the presence of a large number of communities can only be settled through the mechanisms that exist in, and the resources afforded by, the state.

Therefore, the construction of the wider democratic sphere is a necessary component of political activity at the level of the local community. In addition, the individual’s good is irreducibly social. Phrased differently, Dewey defines the individual good’s as conceptually interlinked with his conception of the common good, and therefore, the individual’s good is irreducibly connected to Dewey’s notion of the common good – namely, growth. Now, Dewey conceives of growth as to an important extent realised through the active participation of individuals within the context of a deliberative democratic form of inquiry, not only as part of a resolution of social problems at the level of local communities, but also for the sake of offering a resolution to the types of problems which emerge under conditions that are characteristic of large-scale political systems (i.e., the state and its institutions). This active participatory form of democracy, once it is internalized and accepted by the individual, can be understood as a democratic conception of the good – namely, democracy as a way of life – that can form the basis of the individual’s allegiance not only to her local community, but to the larger community that comprises the state. Thus, it would seem that Dewey’s account can offer a better framework for understanding the relationship of allegiance between the state and its citizenry, precisely because growth – the Deweyan common good – is conceptually equivalent (or analogous) to MacIntyre’s definition of the common good.

With respect to the second set of criticisms raised against MacIntyre (covered broadly under items two (G2) and three (G3) in *the guidelines towards a political solution* I outlined in section 2.1), we saw that Osborne argued, rather convincingly, that MacIntyre’s politics could not be viewed as properly political from the Aristotelian-Thomist standpoint – that is, MacIntyre’s account of local communities is pre-political because Aristotelian and Thomistic politics necessitate a *complete* conception of the common good. For on a properly Aristotelian-Thomist view of politics, the common good as a whole can only be advanced in complete communities – communities that are self-sufficient, capable of exercising coercive power and act in self defense. Nevertheless, in MacIntyre’s account, an appropriate conception of the common good can only be advanced in the sort of politics undertaken by small-scale political associations and local communities, even though MacIntyre also admits that such communities are not self-sufficient nor capable of self defense. Not only does this view not sit well within the confines of an Aristotelian-Thomist politics, but it seems reasonable to think that state level politics has an important role to play in advancing the common good of local communities. We noted earlier that on MacIntyre’s view, local communities are dependent on important goods which can only be achieved within the confines of the state. Thus, by ignoring (or marginalising) the state from our political considerations, we undermine our capacity for advancing the kind of politics that is capable of defending MacIntyre’s local communities.

In my view, Dewey’s account is best equipped to offer a resolution to these sorts of problems. We observed that the reading of Dewey advanced by Honneth shows how a pre-political model of social cooperation found in Dewey can act as a building block for a genuine democratic participatory form of politics that is grounded in deliberation, and one that aims at developing intelligent democratic solutions to social problems. In addition, Dewey’s model of social cooperation offers an account of ‘public’ (or community) which appears more or less allied with MacIntyre’s account of communities. On Dewey’s model of social cooperation central to his epistemic account of democracy, dialogue between various ‘publics’ affords more intelligent solutions for the resolution of social-political problems. In Dewey’s participatory democracy, social cooperation under the just division of labour provides the space in which all individuals are afforded a fair opportunity to flourish, and realize their potential as human beings. What is noteworthy here is that the model of social cooperation under the just division of labour points us to a model of joint democratic deliberation as a method of jointly solving a variety of social problems. Therefore, the realization of human capabilities in the activity of social cooperation affords the individual the necessary guidance and background to participate in generating the conditions for democratic participation for the purpose of solving social problems, as well as advancing the growth of the individual, and the community as a whole.

It seems then that Dewey’s account possesses the resources to address the type of criticism raised against MacIntyre’s account by Hibbs. What is significant in Dewey is that he, *pace* the communitarians, and in agreement with MacIntyre, believes that the primary forms of political associations are local communities, not the state. On his view the state is only a secondary form of association. In addition, Dewey’s model of social cooperation seeks to engender a kind of politics, the realization of which can intelligently generate political solutions to various social problems; and Dewey seems to offer us the kind of resources that are simply not afforded by MacIntyre’s account.

On my view, Dewey could certainly agree that there are a number of possibilities that would allow local communities to protect various substantive conceptions of the good against interference by the state, in ways that remain compatible with the procedural characteristics of the state. Indeed, Honneth[[436]](#footnote-436) contends that Dewey’s alternative epistemic procedural account is in fact a fruitful *via media* between overly proceduralist accounts that are unrealistically abstract (or ideal), and substantive republican accounts that entirely focus on the virtues of the citizenry.

Lastly, Dewey’s alternative account views the role of state government as the vehicle in which the various ‘publics’ (or communities in MacIntyrean terminology) are engaged in a joint problem solving process with the express aim of resolving various social problems.[[437]](#footnote-437) Hence Dewey’s politics, in contrast to that of MacIntyre, sees an important place for state level politics. Recall that MacIntyre’s account rejects the possibility of genuine politics at the state level. From an Aristotelian-Thomist perspective however the common good as a whole can only be advanced within the sort of communities that are to a meaningful degree self-sufficient, and therefore capable of defending themselves. Considered in this light, discussion of state level politics is a necessary constitutive element of a kind of politics that is capable of realising the common good.

Thus Dewey’s account possesses an additional advantage: it is capable of resolving the dilemma that is generated due to Osborne’s criticism of MacIntyre’s conception of the common good, as a conception that is incomplete. On Osborne’s view, MacIntyre appears to draws an equivalence between on the one hand, his own definition of the common good, and on the other, that of Aristotle and Aquinas. Osborne then argued that the Aristotelian-Thomistic common good can only be advanced in complete communities that are capable of self-defence, and are able to exercise coercive power; yet, MacIntyre’s politics of small communities and associations do not possess such powers, and therefore are unable to realise the common good as conceived by the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition.

At this point we can ask, in what way does Dewey’s account offer us a viable alternative politics – one that MacIntyre could potentially live with? It is my contention that Deweyan democracy is generally aligned with MacIntyre’s overall approach. This is because Dewey and MacIntyre both ground their politics on a model of social cooperation within communities. Dewey’s notion of the ‘publics’ in many ways nicely aligns with MacIntyre’s account of communities. Both Dewey and MacIntyre view the individual’s good as closely connected to the common good and the individual’s good is viewed as irreducibly social. In addition, they attach a non-instrumental value to participation in democratic deliberation as the nexus of inquiry. Finally, both Dewey and MacIntyre appear to frame inquiry and deliberation in the context of the social life and practices of communities. Therefore, Dewey’s account appears to afford an alternative pragmatic, yet critical, form of politics, that is better able to engage with the wider liberal discourse, and which remains steadfast in its optimism of correcting the social problems that emerge under liberal societies.

Finally, recall the problem presented under item four (G4) in *the guideline towards a political solution*: with respect to the problem of neutrality under liberalism, we need to maintain some degree of separation between public and private spheres, yet simultaneously ensure that this distinction remains instrumental, and that we are able to create the space in which important social and political problems are dealt with in a public fashion, through methods of deliberation and inquiry.

Here, we need a type of politics that as a first approximation admits the social fact of pluralism and the respect for diverse viewpoints. However, this can only be a starting point of deliberation and inquiry. Some of the social problems that we encounter are acute and hence they press upon us a demand for collective *public* action, while other problems can remain in the *private* sphere since they are not the kinds of problems that we need to converge on, in order to have a functioning society. Still, social problems emerge in every human community, and with regards to finding appropriate solutions we cannot simply accept a form of value pluralism in which any particular set of views is thought to be as reasonable as any other class of views. Such an outcome will ensure that deliberation and inquiry – with respect to social problems – remain off limits, and generate the kind of social and political gridlock that ultimately undermines the collective conviction in the mechanisms that constitute our liberal democratic arrangements. All things considered, the process of democratic inquiry should ultimately press upon us those values that afford more optimal resolutions to various social and political problems. Thus, in order to avoid the sort of gridlock that blocks inquiry and leads to the neglect of social problems, the process of deliberative democracy has to remain open to the possibility of revising the boundaries between public and private spheres, and public/private considerations of collective action.

Now, I would like to suggest that Misak’s pragmatic analysis of liberal politics furnishes us with just such an account. Recall that for Misak, convergence on all social and political answers is not only unrealistic, but it is also unhelpful. Misak’s pragmatist account admits the fact that value pluralism as a social fact – but one that is nonetheless contingent and accidental as opposed to metaphysical and sacrosanct. Here, we can admit that there are numerous possibilities for the emergence of conflict between various goods (or values), and this ought to be the starting point of inquiry. We can readily observe that on numerous occasions we are able to converge and reach agreement with respect to many of the evaluative judgments that we can make as part of our collective deliberations. Now, our main task in the sphere of cooperative collective action is to develop a range of solutions to a contingent class of social problems; yet, this does not entail that all of the various differences that separate us can be reconciled in meaningful ways. This is why Misak, in agreement with the liberal thinker, can grant the fact of pluralism; notwithstanding this agreement, she could nonetheless side with the communitarian in holding that a well functioning society, in order to remain cohesive, must first consider, and later adopt, a range of substantive first-order goods in the public arena. Of course, on my view, the pragmatist’s position is superior to the communitarian, since all substantive appeals are the outcome of widespread democratic participation in deliberative inquiry.

Now, the advantage of Misak’s pragmatic thesis is that it is effectively falsifiable and hence dynamic – that is, Misak’s pragmatic thesis takes the social fact of value pluralism as a starting assumption, yet, her account does not assign a metaphysical status to this social fact. We earlier observed that for Misak, this kind of privileging is an unfortunate characteristic of overly proceduralist liberal accounts. Misak’s pragmatist account agrees that we begin with the social fact of pluralism, and that some form of pluralism remains justified given the particular contingent facts of liberal society. On the other hand, with respect to the fact of pluralism, we cannot accept a foundational pluralist thesis. Given that new social problems tend to emerge in all human communities, we must remain cognizant of the changing nature of the social facts that arise from particular (social) conditions and (social) problematics. And looking back at social and intellectual developments from earlier historical periods, we might be inclined to argue that it is probable that in the future social facts that underwrite our procedural models will change. Therefore, our alternative pragmatist account ought to be cognizant of this fact; and when it is so, it will be in a better position to address the shortcomings of standard liberal proceduralist views, while retaining those proceduralist characteristics that make our pragmatist position superior to communitarian views.

## 6. Charting an Alternative

At this point MacIntyre might reasonably accept that the alternative politics I’ve elaborated in the above is an improvement over the standard liberal thesis, and that it represents a position that is closer to his overall aims. Still, he could utilise three different strategies to object to the various remedies I have offered.

### 6.1 MacIntyre’s Reply

First, MacIntyre could argue that what I have offered is not sufficiently realistic. He might maintain that the ideas and suggestions I have presented are utopian and therefore a sort of wishful thinking. He could hold that liberalism as a tradition, and liberal politics in particular, are beyond the pale so to speak. By utilising this strategy he could argue that the particular remedies that I have advanced in this chapter – as a resolution of the problems that emerge under his account – only seems to work because I have not grasped the magnitude of the problems that are inherent in the political activity of the liberal state. On this view, he could hold that the state, the market, and related institutions are too entrenched to be manageable in a piece-meal way; and that correcting his account with additional conceptual resources which I have offered him is still inadequate as a resolution to the numerous problems that plague the liberal state and liberalism more generally. MacIntyre could accuse me of being too naive (or utopian) in believing that we could somehow reform the liberal state in appropriate ways.

Still, I think that this kind of strategy isn’t terribly productive. Why? Because it leaves him to either fall back on a kind of tenuous rejection of the state by local communities, tenuous because these communities remain dependent on the state to a considerable extent and so must transact with it; or MacIntyre could take a more radical approach that would be more consistent with the Marxist outlook in his work.

Should he fall back on the first option, his account encounters the range of problems – problems that by now should be quite clear – generated by his politics, and so he must offer us a way of making sense how his tenuous rejection of the state is any better at advancing and defending a local politics of the common good, than the modified account which I have offered him. Why? First, because it seems that if contemporary liberal society is indeed in as bad of a shape as MacIntyre tells us it is, it seems reasonable to conclude that that the state of affairs in liberal societies are not going to get better, and perhaps more ominously the case could be made that conditions for dialogue and resolution are going to further deteriorate. Yet, the upshot of such a pessimistic conclusion cannot be a collective surrender to nihilism. It seems to me that if the problems that face the contemporary liberal state are as dire as MacIntyre suggests, we need to make a much more concerted effort in addressing and correcting them.

Second, if our situation is indeed as gloomy as MacIntyre describes, and so there isn’t much we can do to reform the liberal state and the corresponding (liberal) political order, his approach of defending local communities, by the way of limiting their interaction with the state, appears to be similarly futile, perhaps even more futile and utopian than the pragmatic version I have outlined thus far. For, if local communities are indeed to a considerable extent dependent on the state for important common goods, it seems difficult to then isolate the activities of these communities from the unsolicited influence exerted by the state and its institutions. And to this we should add the fact that nearly all if not most of the communities MacIntyre cites as examples of virtuous communities in our recent past have been largely compromised by the state – that is, these communities are no longer ordered in appropriate ways towards the realisation of the common good and therefore no longer exists as the sort of community that MacIntyre has in mind – and thus, have lost their integrity as virtuous communities.

Therefore it appears that the first option doesn’t appear to be feasible. If MacIntyre’s suggestion is correct, namely, that the state is able to easily subvert the democratic process in local communities, the idea that local communities can somehow limit their engagement with the state in order to inoculate themselves from its unsolicited and corrosive influence appears fanciful and even futile. Should he therefore fall back on the second option by rejecting any possibility of a properly democratic politics in the liberal state, he has to countenance a more radical Marxist orientation for his political project. But MacIntyre has already rejected social engineering possibilities that are potentially available to the Marxist thinker. For he has already faulted Marxism for its deterministic approach, and its commitment to the idea that a revision of society and its associated structures is possible in ways that effectively generates desirable outcomes: "Those who make the conquest of state power their aim are always in the end conquered by it.”[[438]](#footnote-438)

Still, there remains a third possibility for MacIntyre to push back against the pragmatist alternative I have offered here. MacIntyre could make a case that the alternative account I have offered in this chapter remains somewhat abstract and underspecified. Therefore, he could argue that the account I have articulated here doesn’t yet possess the type of specificity and content which his account lacks, and for which I earlier faulted him in Chapter Four. I should say that this appears to be a reasonable objection. My engagement with Misak, Walzer, and Dewey, thus far, has focused on some general conceptual possibilities that might prove useful to MacIntyre. Nevertheless, recall that the challenge I posed earlier was that MacIntyre’s account has to outline some practical ways of defending local communities. Consequently, in order to answer this sort of challenge, I ought to outline a number of practical steps which MacIntyre can utilise in the defence of local communities.

But before I can outline some definitive ways by which we reasonably defend democratic processes in local communities, I need to briefly outline a conceptual map of the kind of activities that we must undertake. I should emphasize that this task is different than my engagement with Misak, Walzer, and Dewey. Here, I will outline some the ways in which a non-ideal historically informed approach to political philosophy could proceed. Second, we need to engage with the type of political philosophy that utilises history in order to consider how social, political, and historical forces, have limited the democratic opportunity of local communities.[[439]](#footnote-439) It is only through engaging in this second task that we can specify the practical content that will form the basis for our alternative pragmatist politics.

In addition, by engaging in this activity we are able to address some of the problems I outlined earlier under general guidelines (G5). Hence, an important question that I will briefly examine in the upcoming discussion is: how and in what ways democratic opportunities were limited or otherwise restricted in the course of the political development in recent historical communities. Now, this task remains at the heart of MacIntyre’s project, since MacIntyre himself encourages a kind of moral and political inquiry that connects ethics to politics and history, as well as other areas of inquiry in the social sciences. This is of course an ambitious project, and here I cannot offer anything more than some preliminary suggestions.

### 6.2 Some Possibilities

Generally, the solution that has been on offer by the likes of Breen and Hibbs among others is that MacIntyre is operating at the wrong level, and to correct this we need to modify the state in ways that can embody important values. I don't want to go as far as they go, since I think that the kind of solution they are advancing ends up being somewhat communitarian and top-down, which in the end MacIntyre could still reject. Rather, I believe a solution might be at hand if we could potentially modify the state in a way that allows it to sustain a degree of authentic neutrality between different conceptions of the good, so that it doesn’t inevitably and systematically sneak in a materialist conception of the good (through the back door), in place of other local conceptions. So how can we advance an appropriate sort of solution? By delineating the boundary between the state and local communities in appropriate ways, we can simultaneously protect important civil liberties, while at the same time allowing a degree of local democracy through engaged inquiry and deliberation, that affords local government a meaningful degree of autonomy to pursue a class of goods that in turn empower communities to solve a range of social and political problems they might encounter.

For example, when an broad absolutist reading of civil liberties (such as the Citizens United 2010 Supreme Court case) threatens democratic procedures, an overtly procedural maximalist reading of individual (private) rights can pose a serious public danger to both local as well as large-scale democratic structures. Therefore, we have to be open to making the necessary modifications that would, in certain circumstances, limit civil liberties for the sake of preserving essential public goods. Now, in this example, we end up splitting the difference between liberals and communitarians; moreover, the state, by taking action for the protection of democratic procedures, can act in ways that displays a greater degree of neutrality. Therefore, we should consider the distinction between public and private spheres as ultimately instrumental. Whenever a public need becomes too important to ignore – for example when the protection of civil liberties ends up subverting the democratic process, and directly or indirectly, promotes a particular conception of the good at the expense of the public good – we need the sort of mechanism through which we can modify laws and conventions in defense of substantive goods (i.e., the concept of equal democratic participation).

Additionally, by proposing mechanisms that advance this form of neutrality, we could limit the influence of the market in ways that create a space for local conceptions of the good and ensure that market forces, under the cover of ostensibly neutral arguments, do not undermine the democratic process.[[440]](#footnote-440) A state that is authentically neutral, can accept that the mechanism of the market and the forces that drive it, are in fact not neutral. We then end up with the kind of state that engenders the space for local communities to have the bottom-up democratic participatory deliberative efforts, aimed at resolving social and political problems at the local level. Of course at times there are bound to be considerations of first-order goods at the state-level which potentially violate neutrality; still, my contention is not that the state must endorse neutrality as a panacea. Instead, the kind of state I am proposing here is more honest and therefore, accepts the ways it can promote a moderate or small 'n' conception of neutrality, while it simultaneously goes on to specify some of the ways where it isn't, or can’t be, neutral, and offer good reasons as to why neutrality, at least in certain circumstances, could fundamentally undermine important goods.

The kinds of boundary-setting issues I am proposing here include limitations that restrict the market’s mechanism, for example when important democratic goods are at stake. By setting strict boundaries – boundaries that are nevertheless epistemologically reflexive – we can limit market overreach. Here, we can institute regulatory processes that limit market actors, from utilising arguments that tout procedural efficiency, at the expense of important goods (or values). Still this process has to be epistemically reflexive which means that whenever we find that whatever limits we have introduced are inadequate, we can continue to correct the various input mechanisms, until we achieve the right balance. This process naturally can be reversed when the outcomes generate unintended negative consequences. So for example, if well-off communities fail to share their resources with poorer communities, we ought to use democratic processes at the level of the state, to initiate the required corrections that override the tendencies of local communities that obstruct desirable outcomes. The pragmatist approach, at its heart, is all about processes and procedures that are reflexive to the problems that emerge as part of our social and political life.

We then supplement the above processes with an ongoing inter-, or trans-community, dialogue in a way that offers different communities the ability to share resources and help each other. Without such a dialogue any account of distributive justice will suffer. Therefore, we will need an account of distributive justice that enables effective sharing of resources within a community, and between different communities. In addition, some communities, cities, and regions, produce or contribute important external goods that are important to the overall efforts of the state, yet the preponderance of these activities over time can generate undesirable outcomes.[[441]](#footnote-441) Therefore the negative burden that these outcomes pose has to be shared between different communities. In the end, the right balance has to come through publicly pursued empirical inquiry that carefully considers the effects of various policies and procedures. Here, the state is best positioned to facilitate dialogue between communities to ensure fair distribution of both resources, as well as the collective responsibility of managing sub-optimal outcomes. The above is an example of the kind of democratic processes that are essentially epistemically reflexive.

In my view, the sort of alternative politics I have outlined thus far possesses an additional advantage. In addition to relieving the various tensions inherent to MacIntyre’s account, it has the benefit of being largely in line with his overall approach. Why? Because it carves up an authentically neutral space so that first-order appeals, for (and against) substantive conceptions of the good, can be advanced within the democratic process of local communities. Moreover, the various local communities which together constitute the state are able to effectively manage a diverse class of social and political problems that emerge in all communities, and through this mechanism they are able to advance a more complete conception of the common good as a whole. Now, this wider common good is synonymous with Dewey’s secondary conception of the common good, applied to the nation as a whole; yet, *the process that generates this secondary notion of the common good is essentially constituted locally, by the way of participation in deliberative democratic procedures, at the local level*. Here local politics generates a space that empowers communities to adequately address various problems, and thereby advance important substantive goods.[[442]](#footnote-442)

Now given I argued earlier that MacIntyre believes that the liberal state ought to be more neutral than it actually is, the kind neutrality I am proposing is able to protect individual civil liberties, while at the same time allowing local communities to deal with various issues that affect them. Therefore, the sort of politics I am advocating here can help render the politics in local communities more meaningful, precisely because a state that authentically considers and negotiates concerns on neutrality, remains consciously aware that political questions, are often evaluative. Such a state will tend to be cautious and therefore refrain from smuggling in a substantive conception of the good under an ostensibly neutral disguise, which ultimately undermines its claim to legitimacy. The hope here is that a more self-aware state will try to realize a kind of institutional framework that remains authentically neutral; such as state is then better positioned to generate the kind of democratic local politics that is sensitive to important first-order appeals (as part of the political process), in certain circumstances.

Thus, substantive first-order appeals will have a distinct place in local politics in a way that is different from the standard liberal accounts; nevertheless, our pragmatist account remains broadly in line with MacIntyre’s conception of democratic politics in local communities. At the same time a more neutral politics at the state level will not necessarily presuppose an overtly materialist conception of the good. Here, the state would end up engendering a more egalitarian space for debate and discussion on the proper ordering of various substantive goods that are important to the social and political life of different communities, as well the state as a whole.

### 6.3 Political History and Practical Formulations

The importance of social and political history is by now quite obvious to the kind of inquiry that can be understood as allied with the aims of MacIntyre’s philosophy. Still, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the above conceptual map isn’t by itself enough, because we need to understand the actual history in which local democratic politics was undermined. By learning from history, we can identify how democratic politics was undermined in specific (historical) cases, and we can then discover more and less effective ways of advancing and articulating a politics that remains firmly rooted in participation at the local level. In order to be brief I will use the example of the United States and concentrate on a few examples provided in the work focused on political-economic history by Gerald Friedman.

Historically in the United States various forms of local democracy that initially existed have over the course of time become subordinated by state and national prerogatives that treated local communities as entirely dependent on the largesse of the state/national government. For example, in the United States Dillon’s rule,[[443]](#footnote-443) has been widely used by the federal government to subordinate local democratic structures.[[444]](#footnote-444) This rule is contrasted with a different interpretation variously referred to as Home Rule (or Cooley’s Doctrine).[[445]](#footnote-445) These measures were in large part implemented to protect a sanctified (or intensive) conception of private property rights against interference by local governments.[[446]](#footnote-446) While in a myriad of different cases local governments have tried to implement measures that embody and advance important substantive goods, their efforts have largely been undermined by state or federal government, using procedural arguments that were grounded in an intensive (or sanctified) conception of property rights.[[447]](#footnote-447) This problem has historically stemmed from a conception of local governments which denied their status as public associations that could independently promote the public good. Under Dillon’s rule, in the United States, local governments are legally – and therefore to an important extent – treated as either a municipal corporation, or even unincorporated entities. By treating local democratic structures in this way, the federal government essentially rejects a public conception of local government, and by discarding such a conception, large-scale political structures act in ways that undermine local democratic structures. Therefore, the federal government in effect refuses to seriously consider that local democracy enjoys public support, and is essentially a public good through which citizens are initiated into the practice of deliberative democracy with respect to concerns that directly affects their community. The upshot of this is that any administrative measure by the state or federal government, however arbitrary, can undermine local democracy. Needless to say that by conceiving local government in this way – as not even analogous to a public corporation, because corporations do enjoy certain inviolable rights associated with personhood – we are very much removed from the type of local democracy that is envisioned by either MacIntyre or pragmatists such as Dewey.

Now, in order to protect local democratic structures, we are nonetheless forced to conceive a different – and more balanced – type of relationship between various levels of government, which would afford a meaningful degree of sovereignty to local communities. For example we might consider a more limited use of Dillon’s rule. On a practical level this can be achieved by advancing state wide ballot initiatives that returns specific powers back to local communities. Conceptually, we can utilise different kinds of arguments against encroachment by the state. This could include legal arguments that emphasize the doctrine of ‘Home Rule,’ as well as philosophical arguments that argue for a more instrumental, as opposed to an intensive (or sanctified), conception of property rights.

I will conclude my discussion here with a historical example in which an instrumental conception of property rights was successfully advanced against an absolutist conception of the same. In addition, these successes had the effect of undermining a strict distinction between public and private spheres. In the recent past, liberal defenders of property rights have used an intensive conception of property rights to undermine efforts aimed at removing discrimination by various levels of government. In the 1950s and 1960s this reading of property rights was used by some liberal theorist who were generally opposed to segregation, to make the claim that executive action by the federal government to desegregate publicly enjoyed private property (such as restaurants and hotels), amounted to an undue infringement of private property rights.[[448]](#footnote-448) Nevertheless, arguments that advanced a more instrumental conception of property rights were able to successfully defeat arguments that safeguarded an intensive conception of private property rights.[[449]](#footnote-449) The various instrumental views successfully argued that the good represented by egalitarian principles of fair treatment was in fact a greater good than the good preserved by an intensive view of private property rights which would have in effect allowed private owners to continue their discriminatory policies.

The lesson here for us is that important civil liberties, such as property rights or even freedom of speech, are instrumental and therefore limited – namely, that they should be placed against a balance of public reasons with respect to advancing the common good. We can use similar arguments for communities to achieve a level of local sovereignty in ways that allow them to promote substantive conceptions of the good. Of course, I emphasized earlier that when it comes to important civil liberties, we must ensure that we possess adequate procedures that protect individuals from selective and arbitrary discrimination. For example, it is possible to advance local initiatives that protect public health, the environment, or other similar initiatives aimed at advancing important goods. Here, we can ensure that the efforts of local communities are not stifled under various legal precedents that originated in an intensive view of property rights. For those interested in advancing MacIntyre’s conception of the common good, the work of Elizabeth Anderson offers some interesting Deweyan (pragmatist) possibilities. [[450]](#footnote-450)

In my view, a pragmatist defence of local communities forces us to (i) discuss the relationship between local and large scale political structures, including issues dealing with their legal and political boundaries; (ii) an historical analysis that illustrates the imbalance in their relationship, which could afford us some guidance on the ways which we can rectify this imbalance; (iii) a clear-eyed analysis of the boundaries between private and public spheres, in ways that enable a defence of important civil liberties from undue and arbitrary interference; and (iv) the need for a less invasive authentically neutral/procedural state that doesn’t subvert local democratic structures on behalf of an absolutist (or maximalist) conception of neutrality even when such actions risk undermining public faith in democratic liberal politics.

Ultimately, the benefit of the pragmatist political conception is that it accepts many central tenets in MacIntyre’s account – that is, it is historically sensitive, it remains fallible, and it fully accepts the necessity of an ongoing deliberative democratic form of inquiry. Moreover, this pragmatist conception partly aligns with Hibbs’ reading of Aquinas in that it is open to engaging constructively with large-scale political structures and institutions; nevertheless, it is not necessary to think of those structures in terms of natural law. Rather, it remains predisposed to solving social problems by constructively engaging large-scale political structures and institutions, through the lens of a democratic, fallible, and epistemologically reflexive experimental standpoint.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I argued for an alternative pragmatist political account, which on my view is able to address the various objections raised against MacIntyre’s political account. In addition, I proposed that the alternative pragmatist politics I considered in our discussion is able to remove the inconsistencies generated as a result of these objections, and that it is ultimately capable of advancing a resolution to the second tension in MacIntyre’s project.

First, I offered a summary of the various objections raised against MacIntyre’s political positions. Using these objections as a starting point, I offered a template for addressing each of these difficulties. Next, I articulated the broad outlines of this approach, and argued that its methodology remains grounded in a conception of democratic inquiry that stresses the need for intelligent deliberation and an egalitarian-democratic attitude where individuals are empowered to participate in the democratic process as co-equal interlocutors. I then presented a number of ideas and arguments offered by a number of pragmatist (or pragmatist aligned) thinkers – Misak, Walzer, and Dewey – which remain more or less in line with this conception of politics. I then examined the ideas of these authors and tried to show how their arguments can be utilised to articulate a pragmatist politics capable of answering MacIntyre’s difficulties.

Next, I considered a few objections against the alternative pragmatist politics I articulated in this chapter. In these challenges, I considered whether MacIntyre could accept or admit the value of the pragmatist political conception in advancing the broader goals of his project. Here, I argued that in contrast to his own account, the pragmatist conception of politics that I have outlined in this chapter appears better suited to advance MacIntyre’s political goals. Moreover, I suggested that the pragmatist account can be best understood as a *via media* position that is able to realise the more important set of objectives that are at the heart of MacIntyre’s political project. Finally, I considered a number of conceptual possibilities that would sustain the pragmatist conception of politics, and moved to explore a number of practical ways in which we can mount a defence of local small-scale political structures.

What is most crucial, and the chief advantage of our pragmatic approach, is that it doesn’t insulate itself from the broader debates in liberal politics. Therefore as an active participant in the various debates with a range of liberal views, it remains better positioned to systematically resist any (real or imagined) attempt by standard liberal orthodoxy to marginalise alternative viewpoints.

# Conclusion

This thesis was originally motivated on account of two apparently divergent themes which have emerged since the publication of *After Virtue*. MacIntyre’s philosophy appears to theoretically express a critical intuition – namely, that there is a fundamental discontinuity in the structure of contemporary social and moral discourse; yet even though this intuition is widely shared by many philosophers, the work of MacIntyre in comparison to many analytic moral philosophers suffers from what can only be described as a significant degree of neglect by mainstream (analytic) moral philosophy. Now, to be fair, some of this neglect is generated in part because of the somewhat shocking,[[451]](#footnote-451) and depressing conclusion at the end of *After Virtue*;[[452]](#footnote-452) and in part, on the account of MacIntyre’s long-held consistent refusal to constructively engage with liberalism – the dominant tradition in western liberal societies.

However, social, political, and cultural winds have more recently propelled to the forefront the now plainly obvious degree of dissonance, and fragmentation in everyday social discourse; and this has raised the awareness of ordinary people concerning the deeply problematic nature of the current socio-political situation in many western liberal societies. And while MacIntyre’s conclusions with regards to our present situation might still seem too negative, or even depressing, our present context dictates that a renewed engagement with his work may be overdue and should no longer amount to an exclusively academic concern. Nevertheless, the initial motivation that compelled me to seriously consider, and reflect on, MacIntyre’s moral and political philosophy concerned two important difficulties that arise out of different commitments that MacIntyre seems to uphold, and which have formed the focus for this thesis.

First, I argued that MacIntyre’s later endorsement of the Thomistic tradition as the best tradition thus far, appears to be incompatible with the historical narrative of traditions, in which liberalism – the dominant tradition in western societies – has seemingly marginalised and surpassed Aristotelian-Thomism. Given this apparent conflict, I argued that unless MacIntyre can decisively demonstrate, not only that Aristotelian-Thomism was displaced for the wrong reasons, but also show how we can critically, yet constructively, synthesize the insights of this tradition with the distinctive historical realities peculiar to our present-day social context epitomised in the dominant tradition – plainly a tall task – it is difficult for him to continue to hold onto the different commitments found in his work.

Second, I argued that MacIntyre’s endorsement of Aristotelian-Thomism tradition when accompanied with a Thomistic conception of politics appears to come into conflict with the internal commitments implied by his historicism and contextualism. Furthermore, MacIntyre’s singular insistence on defending a seemingly utopian small-scale communal version of Thomistic politics, alongside his forceful rejection of an ethics-cum-politics that constructively engages with contemporary socio-political structures, not only flies in the face of the various historical and contextualist commitments that form some of the chief tenets in his philosophy, but his position seems to generate additional difficulties, which completely immobilize his defence of small-scale communal politics.

In its place, I argued that there may be an alternative pragmatist approach, one that is well-suited to resolving the above difficulties. I then argued that Dewey’s pragmatist account – namely, democracy as a way of life – offers a promising possibility for the resolution, or at least, amelioration of these difficulties, in ways that are broadly sympathetic to MacIntyre’s project. In addition, I argued that Dewey’s approach is especially well suited to address the kinds of paradigmatic criticisms that led MacIntyre to abandon his social approach to formulating a virtue ethics, in favour of a metaphysically robust Aristotelian-Thomistic virtue ethics.[[453]](#footnote-453)

I offered a resolution to the first problem by accepting that on MacIntyre’s historical account of traditions, Thomism as a tradition was indeed superseded and marginalised. However, in contrast to MacIntyre, I did not argue that Aristotelian-Thomism, and more specifically its teleology, was mistakenly sidelined for bad reasons. Instead, I argued that we ought to accept that Aristotelian-Thomism was in fact superseded as a tradition, for a variety of complex socio-historical factors which were in parts social, political, intellectual, and economic. Nevertheless, I went on to argue that while the revival and defence of a Thomistic teleology isn’t possible, there is an alternative, pragmatist teleology, in Dewey that can nevertheless render MacIntyre’s account more coherent.

With respect to the second difficulty, I made the case that MacIntyre’s sole focus on a utopian politics of isolated communities is not only ahistorical and anachronistic, but also unsuccessful in defending a small-scale communal politics, because it seemingly ignores the role of played by large-scale political arrangements that generate and sustain local political structures. I concluded that MacIntyre’s political account isn’t sufficiently sensitive to our historical situation and appears to generate at least two difficulties. First, the near total dependence of local communities on the largesse afforded by large-scale political systems, and their vulnerability to the dominant forces generated by large-scale political structures, limits any potential defense of those communities; and second, whether MacIntyre’s conception of politics as a practice can remain coherent if we have abandoned our dialogue with large-scale political structures.

I then utilised Dewey, as well as a number of other pragmatists, to advance an alternative pragmatist political conception, against MacIntyre’s purely small-scale communal form of Aristotelian-Thomist politics. I argued that the Pragmatist account is sensitive to contemporary socio-historical conditions, and that it is better placed to address the second difficulty (or tension) that emerges because of MacIntyre’s various commitments.

Now, even if it turns out that Dewey’s pragmatism remains in some ways incompatible with the later Thomistic MacIntyre, I proposed that my alternative pragmatic political conception remains largely compatible with the middle MacIntyre – namely, the MacIntyre in *After Virtue*. Most significantly, our alternative Pragmatist account is able to address and therefore resolve the sort of criticisms which rendered vulnerable MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue*, even if it diverges from some of the Thomistic commitments of *Whose Justice*. Thus, my hope is that my approach has managed to at least make coherent the middle MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, by taking his trajectory from there in a pragmatist rather than Thomistic direction, thereby rendering it less prone to the objections that we have raised in the course of this thesis.

# Appendix

*(H1):* Theoretical claims are only intelligible in the context of a background social structure.

*(H2):* Emotivist theories tend to emerge under conditions of liberalism and pluralism.

*(H3):* The historical transition from the earlier Heroic period, to that of 4th-5th century BCE Athens, precipitated a change in the Hellenic social structure that undermined, dissolved, and ultimately transformed, the social bonds and practices of the earlier period.

*(H3a):* The social bonds in medieval feudal society to which Aquinas belonged were gradually dissolved through the marginalisation of the feudal social order in the historical transition that Europe experienced between the late 14th century and the 16th century.

*(H4):* Social change in the intervening period from Heroic Society to 4th-5th century BCE Athens had generated the sort of conditions where the incompatibility between the goods of excellence and goods of winning more and more become acknowledged in conceptual terms.

*(H5):* traditions of moral inquiry must be evaluated dialectically, where later traditions transcend the limitations present in earlier ones, and that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition hasn’t really been surpassed or defeated in this sense.

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1. In After Virtue MacIntyre defines Enlightenment Project as a borad term that captures the various attempts by a number of enlightenment thinkers to formulate an independent rational justification for morality, which did not rest on theological or teleological premises. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sacha Mounk, "The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect," *The Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 5-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair Macintyre," *First Things* October (2007): 35-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Contextualism is the doctrine that attaches great significance to the context of action, expression, and utterance, and that the truth (or meaning) of a particular action or expression is dependent, to an important extent, on the particular context in which, an action takes place, or, a claim is advanced. Historicism here does not refer to the idea that history has immutable laws and that we ought to try to discover them. Instead, historicism is a concept related to contextualism, and it places a great import on the situated and contingent (or circumstantial) background – identifiable in terms of particular geographical, history, language, culture, and social developments – that colours social practices, actions, expressions, and more generally, the set of claims that the participants in a debate adhere to, or advance. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See John Haldane, "Macintyre’s Thomist Revival: What Next?," in *After Macintyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair Macintyre*, ed. and Mendus Horton J., S. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 91-107. In a similar vein, Marcus Otte argues that the various contextualist and historicist claims in MacIntyre’s work are best understood in the context of MacIntyre’s prioritization of epistemology over metaphysics; nevertheless, Otte also argues that viewed in this way, MacIntyre’s account is ultimately at odds with Thomistic philosophy. See Marcus S. Otte, "A Thomistic Critique of the Ethics of Alasdair Macintyre" (University of Central Florida, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. MacIntyre’s historical narrative in *Whose Justice* clearly shows that changes in material conditions that undermined the role played by the polis ultimately undermines the essential role of the polis in Aristotle’s ethics, as an essential organizing force that motivates normative claims in that context. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), chapters 8 & 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Here, I am referring to MacIntyre’s threefold conception of the virtues (i) social practice; (ii) narrative unity of an individual human being directed towards the good; (iii) and the idea of the individual human being who is embedded within a tradition of moral inquiry. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre does not yet identify liberalism as a tradition. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue : A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good," in *The Macintyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 235-252. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. As part of a resolution of the problems I intend to cover in this thesis, I will make use of the arguments offered by other pragmatist philosophers including Hilary Putnam, Cheryl Misak, and Michael Walzer. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Stanley Hauerwas claims that MacIntyre in effect characterises his work in *After Virtue* as socially grounded, but MacIntyre moves away from the social approach to a metaphysically robust account available in Thomism. See Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair Macintyre," 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Instrumentalism is the view that theories ought to be viewed as tools (or instruments) to be utilised in identifying the relationship between means and ends, for the sake of advancing or formulating a resolution to such problems. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Now, MacIntyre’s account of fragmentation of contemporary moral discourse is (by his own admission) indebted to the account which Anscombe articulates in her seminal paper ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 53. Cora Diamond in the article ‘Losing Your Concepts’ makes a similar claim. In this paper, Diamond cites the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Cavell, and Iris Murdoch, as different examples of the loss of conceptual schemes. See Cora Diamond, "Losing Your Concepts," *Ethics* 98, no. 2: 255-277. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Stanley Hauerwas claims that MacIntyre has privately – and I assume privately since Hauerwas doesn’t provide any references – told him that the inadequacy of his social account in *After Virtue* led him to seek out a more metaphysically robust way of grounding his philosophy. See Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair Macintyre," 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Later in this chapter I will present the major claims that MacIntyre puts forward as hypotheses in order to show how they raise some important problems. For a complete list of these hypotheses see the Appendix to this thesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Here, MacIntyre presupposes a distinction between a type of utterance that expresses some personal preferences such as: “it is good to perform some action X because you can make the largest amount of money”; and a second type of utterance that expresses an impersonal criteria such as “Do such and such because it would bring happiness to the largest number of people”, or “because it would reduce the suffering of the largest number of people”. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. C.S. Stevenson, A.J. Ayer, J. L. Austin, and F. Ramsay were influenced by G.E. Moore but came to accept some version of emotivism. It is accurate to say that emotivism was in large part a response to Moore’s Principia Ethica. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 16-18. MacIntyre believes that it is no coincidence that most of Moore’s pupil ultimately endorsed some version of emotivisim. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid., 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Here I am using ‘phenomenal’ as relating to phenomena as being cognizable by the senses. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 31-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. I should note that MacIntyre’s reading of Kierkegaard is controversial and isn’t widely accepted by Kierkegaard scholars: see *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative and Virtue*, edited by John J Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Open Court, 2001); nevertheless, for my purposes MacIntyre’s reading can be accepted since I am using MacIntyre’s version of Kierkegaard to advance his historical reconstruction that explains the failure of the Enlightenment Project. Even if MacIntyre’s account of Kierkegaard is controversial, a more widely accepted reading of Kierkegaard is unable to, and indeed does not make, an attempt to save what MacIntyre defines as the ‘Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., 54-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., 58-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid., 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid., 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See Timothy Chappell, "Utopias and the Art of the Possible," *Analyse & Kritik* 30, no. 1 (2008): 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 132-135, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 49-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 132. also see MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 131-132. I should say that on the standard depiction of the Homeric (bronze age) view, anyone who isn’t one’s kin is potentially, and likely to be, one’s enemy. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *Dikē* (δίκη) is defined as the established order of the universe. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid., 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid., 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid., 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Tradition in the work of MacIntyre has several meanings. Here, it refers to a diachronic practical (or normative) form of inquiry that intellectually articulates a set of social norms and rules governing discourse, which are embodied in everyday social practice. This concept of tradition can be understood as analogous to scientific inquiry; it can be understood in the context of a rule-governed inquiry that aims to advance our ethical life; or as a rule-governed social practice represented in a particular craft (or trade); and it could be understood in the context of the intellectual evolution in a rule-based natural language game. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. By social teleology I refer to MacIntyre’s three-fold account of the virtues. MacIntyre's three-fold conception of the virtue is not embedded in a metaphysical framework; rather, it remains social and historical. MacIntyre’s first concept of the virtues is defined as (social) practices and their internal goods–goods that are irreducibly social. The second concept of the virtues connects the goods derived from social practices to a narrative of a single unified human life; and the third concept, places that individual life as a participant in a particular tradition, and traditions emerge out of a complex social-historical process. With respect to this social conception of the MacIntyre before his Thomistic turn, see Stanley Hauerwas' "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre." [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid., 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid., 202-203. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid., 207-208. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ibid., 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid., 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid., 221-222. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid., 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. J. B. Schneewind, "Moral Crisis and the History of Ethics," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy,* 8, no. 1 (1983): 525-539. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Bernstein argues that practices can be viewed as morally wrong and offers spying as a paradigmatic example of such a practice; see Richard J. Bernstein, "Nietzsche or Aristotle?: Reflections on Alasdair Macintyre's "after Virtue"," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 67, no. 1 (1984): 6-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. MacIntyre explicitly argues later that his earlier rejection of Aristotle’s metaphysical biology, or at least important elements of it, turned out to be a mistake. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals : Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, *The Paul Carus Lecture Series* (Chicago, Illinois: Open Court, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. This occurs at some point in or after 1985. Now, as a point of emphasis we should consider that MacIntyre's support for Aristotelian-Thomism is well after the criticisms published by Schneewind in 1982 and 1983, as well that of Bernstein published in 1984. See Kelvin Knight, *The Macintyre Reader* (Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), 257. See Christopher S. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair Macintyre* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004), 7-29. See Alex Bavister-Gould, "The Uniqueness of after Virtue (or 'against Hindsight')," *Analyse & Kritik* 30, no. 1 (2008): 55-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. I should say that MacIntyre in a more abbreviated form begins the first task in *After Virtue*, but he makes a more determined effort in later work. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ibid., 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid., 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid., 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Agōn (ἀγών) is defined as a formal rule governed contests where participants compete in some activity; see ibid., 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Here, MacIntyre is referring to the period that spans the heroic society as depicted by Homer’s epics, and the classical Athens of 4th-5th century BCE. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. See footnote 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *dikaios* (δίκαιος) is a person who acts in alignment with the *dikē* (δίκη) [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. *Agathós* (ἀγαθὸς) specifically refers to moral excellence. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *Ἀrête* (ἀρετή) is a more general term and can refer to excellence of any kind, but more often refers to excellence *qua* achievement. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ibid., 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ibid., 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ibid., 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ibid., 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The history that MacIntyre is referring to describes an ascendant Athens that gradually comes to be the dominant Hellenic city-state within the Delian league, a league that was initially formed as a counter to Persian expansion. Athens utilises the league as a blunt instrument for advancing its own ambitions, often at the expense of the more vulnerable members of the league; ibid., 52-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Ibid., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See footnote 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 65-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Ibid., 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Plato’s dialogue in Gorgias and the Republic should be understood as a rejection of this Thucydidean view. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. *archē* (ἀρχή) Approximately translates as “beginning,” “origin,” or “source of action.” [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid., 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Ibid., 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. See footnote 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Ibid., 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Ibid., 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Ibid., 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Ibid., 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Ibid., 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Tanakh (תנ״ך) is the Hebrew Bible which is corresponds to the Christian Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 149-150. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Ibid., 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Ibid., 154-155. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Ibid., 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Ibid., 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Ibid., 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Ibid., 166-167. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Ibid., 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Ibid., 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Ibid., 184-187. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Ibid., 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Ibid., 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Ibid., 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Ibid., 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Ibid., 335-336. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Ibid., 336-339. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Ibid., 343-344. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Ibid., 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. MacIntyre says claims that the conception of human being as a functional concept predated Aristotle’s work by quite some time; see *After Virtue*, pp. 58-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 147-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Alasdair MacIntyre, "First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues," in *The Macintyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), Section V. MacIntyre accepts that Aristotelian-Thomism, and especially, the teleology associated with that tradition, was indeed displaced or otherwise marginalised. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. The prominent example that MacIntyre offers in *After Virtue* is Aristotle’s ethics. Aristotle was able to formulate an ethics that on MacIntyre’s view offered a resolution to the radical disagreement between the various rival and incompatible views, advanced by the 4th-5th century Greek tragedians and philosophers. Also recall that these disagreements emerged owing to the difficulties in reconciling Homeric ethics within the new social context of 4th-5th century Athens. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. I should note that in *Secularisation and Moral Change*, in considering the changes experienced by English society, MacIntyre argues in fact that substantive changes to material conditionals can in fact usher in social change, and later changes to a society’s moral framework. Here MacIntyre seems to argue that a moral framework can change as a result of material-social change as opposed to rational/intellectual progress which problematizes an earlier moral framework (or tradition). See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Secularisation and Moral Change* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). Also see Alasdair MacIntyre, "Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?," in *Faith and the Philosophers*, ed. John Hick (London Palgrave Macmillan, 1964), 115-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. I should say that MacIntyre can offer an initial response. MacIntyre could claim that Aristotelian-Thomism possesses Augustinian resources to offer a conception of flourishing for humanity as such and not just humanity within a particular context, for examples the polis. Nevertheless, I think that this kind of response isn’t ultimately enough. First, it is my contention that such a move will weaken MacIntyre’s historicism and contextualism to such a degree where it is not entirely clear how we can tie together his various commitments that are underwritten by his historicist-contextualist thesis. Second, if debates within modern morality, for example those between Kantians and the Utilitarians, are caught up in a whole range of problems precisely because these positions for the most part ignore the historical and contextualist aspects of normative phenomena, it is not clear how MacIntyre can consistently maintain his criticism against those positions, while simultaneously reading Aristotelian-Thomism in this strong sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair Macintyre," 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. For example, in the context of new and productive modes of inquiry, perhaps a number of intellectual problems emerged when it came to reconciling the metaphysical aspects of Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics with these new modes. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. The transformation of European society could have generated new a number of social/normative problems. Moreover, on MacIntyre’s view, moral inquiry always takes place in the background of particular social context and particular social practices. It is perhaps plausible to argue that the social transformation of European societies raised a new set of problems, and that Aristotelian-Thomism was perhaps ill equipped to offer a satisfactory resolution to them. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Part of MacIntyre’s effort in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice* can be construed as a demonstration of a number of historical contingencies surrounding the loss of certain modes of thinking with respect to ethics. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. In Chapter One I presented five hypotheses which I attributed to MacIntyre. Those hypotheses were (H1): ‘we can only make sense of theoretical claims within the context of some background social structure or context’; (H2): ‘emotivist theories emerge under conditions of liberalism and pluralism’; (H3): ‘the change in the Hellenic social structure from the earlier Heroic period, to that of 4th-5th century BCE Athens, was precipitated by the historical transition which gradually dissolved and transformed the social bonds and practices of the earlier period’; (H4): ‘that social change in the intervening period from Heroic Society to 4th-5th century BCE Athens had generated the sort of conditions where the incompatibility between the goods of excellence and goods of winning more and more become acknowledged in conceptual terms.’; (H5): ‘traditions of moral inquiry must be evaluated dialectically, where later traditions transcend the limitations present in earlier ones, and that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition hasn’t really been surpassed or defeated in this sense’. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. See Chapter One where I quote MacIntyre’s definition of ‘the Good’. MacIntyre closely connects social practices to the virtues via the internal goods of practices. This ensures a close connection between particular social-cum-historical practices and the internal ethical goods from which the virtues emerge. In addition, MacIntyre argues for an historical-contextualist position such as when he suggests that the good of the Athenian general is different than the good of the 17th century farmer. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. See the Appendix or Chapter One: hypothesis (H1). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Bernstein argues that MacIntyre needs a metaphysical biology with a substantive account of human nature and the human good available in the Aristotelian tradition. See Bernstein, "Nietzsche or Aristotle?: Reflections on Alasdair Macintyre's "after Virtue"." [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. This worry is generated in part due to the potential for conflict between on the one hand MacIntyre’s third and fourth hypotheses H3/H4, and on the other, his fifth hypothesis H5. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. An example of this sort of scenario is offered in MacIntyre’s account of Aristotle’s ethics. MacIntyre identifies Aristotle within the same tradition more or less that goes all the way back to Homer; see *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice*. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. An example of this is the Augustinian tradition when the breakdown of the polis renders Aristotle’s account defective; see my account of Whose Justice in Chapter One. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. This aspect of progress is captured in MacIntyre’s fifth hypothesis H5. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. MacIntyre in his work in the philosophy of science has used examples from science; there, the influence of Thomas Kuhn amongst others is identifiable in his work. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. In a recent paper Tom Angier argues that MacIntyre’s account of tradition is best understood if it is situated in the Kuhnian framework. See Tom Angier, "Alasdair Macintyre's Analysis of Tradition," *European Journal of Philosophy* 22, no. 4 (2011): 540-572. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. For the sake of simplicity in this example I will use scientific tradition instead of Kuhn’s term scientific paradigm used in his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Robert Stern, "Macintyre and Historicism," in *After Macintyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair Macintyre*, ed. and Mendus Horton J., S. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Chapter 8. Stern, in this paper outlines how we can understand Macintyre’s parallel between moral inquiry and science, and how we can come to conceive moral inquiry as progressive. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Ibid., In fact in this paper Stern argues that MacIntyre along with other prominent Historicists such as Taylor and Sandel, although they have accepted the central Hegelian conception of rationality as historically conditioned, they have dropped Hegel’s more controversial idea on the inevitability of historical rational progress. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. This aspect of progress is captured in MacIntyre’s third and fourth hypothesis H3 and H4. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Material aspect of progress, I should note, captures changes generated by the influence of power and changes in relationships defined by power. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. MacIntyre, "Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good," 250, 252. Also see *After Virtue*, 196. In both places MacIntyre appears to suggest that the degree of material progress that has been realised under the conditions of modern capitalism is incompatible with the kind of society in which a genuine form of morality is capable of sustaining itself; and Keith Breen who is generally sympathetic to MacIntyre’s account, cites this as a flaw in his work. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. One reason why MacIntyre will have difficulty maintaining this distinction is that, it is not entirely clear that all of the historical facts that could be potentially classed under rational/intellectual aspect of progress are in fact disentangled from other non-intellectual facts or considerations. Nevertheless, I cannot expand on this in greater detail since it would be an altogether separate thesis on its own. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. I would like to maintain that MacIntyre does not necessarily discount the story of science in its broad outlines. Rather, I aim to argue that MacIntyre is looking to offer a more nuanced or sophisticated story that more or less accepts the story of science in its broad outlines; he nevertheless wants to argue that where it not for a number of mistakes by his intellectual predecessors, Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics could have potentially endured. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Just as important is the fact that there are perhaps other stories that we could tell, for example the influence power plays in advancing intellectual and scientific progress. I take it that when we do take a larger view of events, it could reasonably argue that advances in rational or scientific thinking certainly at times originated in the interplay of power, and relationships involving power. Even a tradition of inquiry, can advance intellectually not simply on the account of purely rational/intellectual considerations, but because of certain considerations that can be best understood in terms of power. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. MacIntyre doesn’t endorse Thomism in *After Virtue*, and although Aquinas is mentioned, his treatment is rather brief and dismissive. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. While MacIntyre declares himself an adherent of Thomism in *Whose Justice* and defends it as a tradition, he doesn’t explicitly discuss the historical processes which precipitated the marginalisation of Aristotelian-Thomism. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Interestingly this development was itself related to the fact that during the high Middle Ages many more manuscripts were acquired through trade and various degrees of exchange with the Islamic world. In addition, many more manuscripts were brought over from the Byzantine Empire, which was in a precipitous state of decline in the 14th and early 15th century, before the ultimate fall of Constantinople in 1453. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. I should say that MacIntyre, in *God, Philosophy, Universities*, offers an historical account of the development of the Catholic philosophical tradition in European universities that spans this period, but he doesn’t appear to posit the sort of historical narrative I have presented here. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. See Chapter One where I consider MacIntyre’s argument for the loss of the Aristotelian concept of nature/essence and the corresponding concept of teleology where human beings are thought to possess a specific nature. Here ethics is supposed to guide human beings from an initial state in which their nature is unrealised, moving to a state where human nature is then fully realized. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. ‘The treating of final causes in physics has driven out the inquiry of physical ones, and made men rest in specious and shadowy causes, without ever searching in earnest after such as are real and truly physical’ (*Advancement of Learning*, iii.4, p. 141). [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. ‘*That we must not inquire into the final, but only the efficient causes of created things*. Finally we shall not seek for the reason of natural things from the end which god or nature has set before him in the creation.’ (*Principles of Philosophy* I.28). [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. See Appendix to *Ethics* I. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. See Richard Taylor, "Causation, Determinism, and Voluntarism," in *The Encylopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), Vol II, 56. There, Richard Taylor claims that ‘The concepts of material and formal causes are archaic and now have little significance outside aesthetics. Final causes have likewise been expurgated from physics…Partly because of the rise of physical science and the accompanying demise of Aristotelian modes of thought, the concept of cause is now generally that of an efficient cause.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. I will again refer to the *philosophy-science* distinction. By this distinction, I am highlighting the fact that philosophy and science had not yet come to be viewed as strictly separate disciplines at the outset of the modern period. So for example, Galileo, Descartes and Newton are all in an important sense philosopher-scientists. MacIntyre himself in his 1982 paper ‘Philosophy and Its History’ implicitly acknowledges the emergence of this distinction, and faults it for generating a kind of philosophical inquiry that slowly becomes more and more disconnected and detached from other disciplines; see Alasdair MacIntyre, "Philosophy and Its History," *Analyse & Kritik* 4, no. 1 (1982): 102-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. See Haldane, "Macintyre’s Thomist Revival: What Next?." Also see *After Virtue*. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. We can view the various options available between no teleology whatsoever and a strong form of teleology in the work of Aristotle. So for example (i) there is perhaps a particular standard view of science that would deny teleology altogether; (ii) we can also have a weak or moderate teleology that would rest on empirical grounds or perhaps on some conceptual ground that is supported by evidence; and finally (iii) stronger forms of teleology associated with Aristotle and Aquinas. Note the loss of teleology is very much relevant to our earlier discussion in Chapter One where MacIntyre blames the loss of teleology for what he describes as the present-day state of moral fragmentation and disorder. Part of MacIntyre’s effort in *After Virtue* is aimed at developing a new teleology within his tripartite account of the virtues; yet, recall that MacIntyre’s account is vulnerable to the criticisms advanced by Bernstein and Schneewind, because it appears as though the arguments in *After Virtue* in effect validate and reinforces emotivism. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. MacIntyre, "First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues," Section V, 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Ibid., 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Ibid., 199. I should note that in Chapter 7 of *Three Rival Version of Moral Inquiry* (1990) – originally presented as the (1987) Gifford lectures – MacIntyre appears to offer a not entirely compelling argument that the decline of Aristotelian-Thomism was on the account of a number of intellectual struggles, internal to Medieval European universities in the period spanning the 14th century. However, approximately three years later, MacIntyre moves in a different direction when in the (1990) Aquinas lecture, published as *First Principle, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues* (1991) he appears to suggest that Aristotelian-Thomism was ultimately rejected at the threshold of the modern period (late 16th early 17th century). Just as important is that MacIntyre, in two separate papers, ‘Rival Aristotle’s: Aristotle Against Some Renaissance Aristotelians’ (1998) and ‘John Case: An Example of Aristotelianism’s Self-Subversion’ (1999) offers Francesco Piccolomini and John Case, respectively, as two paradigmatic cases where Renaissance Aristotelians contributed to the decline of Aristotelian-Thomistic moral and political philosophy. The first of these two texts will be discussed in detail below. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Ibid., 198-199. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Ibid., 194-200. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, xi, 162-163,196. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Rival Aristotle’s: Aristotle against Some Renaissance Aristotelians," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). This paper was originally presented as part of the (1997/1998) Brian O’Neill Memorial Lecture Series. MacIntyre makes a similar argument in ‘John Case: An Example of Aristotelianism’s Self-Subversion’. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "John Case: An Example of Aristotelianism's Self-Subversion?," in *Recovering Nature: Essays in Natural Philosophy, Ethics, and Metaphysics in Honor of Ralph Mcinerny*, ed. Thomas Hibbs John P. O’Callaghan (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 71-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas," in *Ethics and Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre does discuss the fact/value distinction, but the discussion in that work does not amount to a successful and forceful challenge that can undermine this distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Of course if we are to successfully reconstitute a functional account of human nature, such an account cannot be framed in terms of Aristotle’s metaphysics; instead, it ought to be structured in terms of an historically sensitive and empirically informed, sociological-psychological account of human beings. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. MacIntyre, "Rival Aristotle’s: Aristotle against Some Renaissance Aristotelians," 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Ibid., 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Ibid., 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Ibid., 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. The Greek word phronēsis approximately translates to the word prudence. However this definition is more of a mistranslation since the meaning of Aristotle’s phronēsis is very much different than the modern conception of the word prudence. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Ibid., 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Ibid., 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Ibid., 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. For example, in ‘John Case: An Example of Aristotelianism’s Self-Subversion,’ MacIntyre makes precisely the same point, with respect to Case’s deviation from the Aristotelian account of education. I take it that MacIntyre wants to suggest that Renaissance Aristotelians, taken together as a whole, more or less made the mistake of revising Aristotle in ways that undermined Aristotelian ethics altogether. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Leonardo Bruni taught in the early 15th century; John Case was a teacher at Oxford in the late 16th century. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. MacIntyre, "Rival Aristotle’s: Aristotle against Some Renaissance Aristotelians," 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Ibid., 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Ibid., 21. Also see MacIntyre, "John Case: An Example of Aristotelianism's Self-Subversion?," 71, 81. MacIntyre states: “There is certainly no single answer, but sometimes at least it seems to have been the case that moral and political Aristotelianism has been self-subverting, that it has been its protagonists who brought about its downfall.” And “even if the scientific, theological, and social climate of Western Europe of the early seventeenth century had not been in these ways inhospitable to Aristotle’s moral philosophy, that moral philosophy would still have fallen into disfavour and deservedly so…Because it would have been discredited by the unfounded claims made for it by some of its sixteenth-century teachers.” [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. MacIntyre, "Rival Aristotle’s: Aristotle against Some Renaissance Aristotelians," 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. MacIntyre, "Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas." Also see MacIntyre, "First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues." [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. MacIntyre, "Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas." [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. When referring to Christian morality the paradigmatic case that I have in mind here is St. Augustine. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 95, 2 (as cited in MacIntyre, "Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas," 48.). [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Ibid., 47-48. Here I accept MacIntyre’s reading of Aquinas’ natural law and natural reason; nevertheless, there are other views such as those represented by J.B. Schneewind and Suarez, both of whom maintained that adequate intellectual education and reasoning is a prerequisite to understanding Aquinas’ fundamental precepts of natural law. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Ibid., 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. See ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. For example, they include a commitment to shared deliberation, promise keeping, or even the commitment by a leader to do whatever is necessary to protect his or her subjects. See MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*, 89-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Tobias Hoffmann, "Conscience and Synderesis," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Chapter 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. J. B. Schneewind, "The Misfortunes of Virtue," *Ethics* 101, no. 1 (1990): 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*, *Princeton Monographs in Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), chapter 1. Mulhall and others have alluded to the sharp divide between Aristotelian and Christian cosmology. The ideal of ethical improvement within the Aristotelian framework emphasizes the developmental nature of human beings. Now the contrast with the Augustinian view of moral excellence is clear. For Augustine, the conception of original sin and mankind’s wretchedness does not then lead him to emphasise moral habituation, and ongoing exercise of the virtues; rather moral excellence is wholly dependent on God’s grace, namely, a transcendental concept which is intrinsically beyond mere habituation realised through the exercise of the virtues. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. MacIntyre, "First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues," Section V. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Recall that we need to address the sort of objections advanced by Bernstein and Schneewind, precisely because MacIntyre’s social teleology–his three-fold account of the virtues–is not substantive enough to successfully order the heterogeneous set of goods, which is generated by his account in *After Virtue*. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. John Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, the Middle Works, the Later Works, 1882-1953*, 37 vols. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969-1991), MW 4:4-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. John Dewey, "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy," in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1910), Section IV. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, the Middle Works, the Later Works, 1882-1953*, MW 12:186. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. I won’t consider MacIntyre’s Thomistic good because I have already showed that Thomistic teleology and the Thomistic tradition clash with important elements of MacIntyre’s overall account. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. James Lenman, "The Saucer of Mud, the Kudzu Vine and the Uxorious Cheetah: Against Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism in Metaethics," *European Journal of Applied Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (2005): 37-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, the Middle Works, the Later Works, 1882-1953*, LW 2:325. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Ibid., EW 1:229-231. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. John Stuhr, "Dewey's Social and Political Philosophy," in *Reading Dewey*, ed. Larry Hickman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, the Middle Works, the Later Works, 1882-1953*, LW 14:226, cited in Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Ibid., LW 2:325. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Ibid., LW 2:327-328. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. James Campbell, "Dewey's Conception of Community," in *Reading Dewey*, ed. Larry Hickman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Stuhr, "Dewey's Social and Political Philosophy," 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Ibid., 93-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Ibid., 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, the Middle Works, the Later Works, 1882-1953*, LW 3:100-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Stuhr, "Dewey's Social and Political Philosophy," 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. I have shown above that MacIntyre’s later Thomistic turn creates additional difficulties for his position, and that his social teleology in *After Virtue* isn’t sufficient because his definition of the good in that work is much too ambiguous and abstract to be viable. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. I am using the adjectives substantive and non-instrumental interchangeably, in large part because it is used in ethical debates in the same way. However, I do prefer the term non-instrumental because I do not wish to get bogged down on issues relating to metaphysics, and more specifically, the metaphysical questions concerning substance. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. By non-instrumental in the appropriate sense, I mean to say that Dewey’s account is moderately non-instrumental – or if you prefer weakly instrumental; but, I do not intend to convey that his account affords a strong version of non–instrumentality. By moderate non-instrumentalism I mean to say that Dewey’s non-instrumental (or substantive) conception of the good isn’t unconditional; nor is Dewey’s ‘good’ a sort of ‘good’ that is good in itself in a completely non-relational sense. However, moderate non-instrumentalism still means that Dewey’s conception of human good is a good not on the account of purely subjective reasons; rather we can broadly define the human good precisely because human beings are a specific sort of creatures living in particular environmental conditions which circumscribe the ways in which they can flourish. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Specifically, my claim is that Dewey’s commitment here, and thus his definition of the good, is more substantive than the one MacIntyre posits in *After Virtue*. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Robert Talisse, "Fairwell to Deweyan Democracy," *Political Studies* 59 (2011): 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, the Middle Works, the Later Works, 1882-1953*, MW 12:192. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Talisse, "Fairwell to Deweyan Democracy," 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, the Middle Works, the Later Works, 1882-1953*, MW 10:404. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Talisse, "Fairwell to Deweyan Democracy," 511. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Ibid., 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Talisse, "Fairwell to Deweyan Democracy," 512. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Dewey’s view of education is connected to Dewey’s politics and democracy as a way of life. On this view, initially it is the role of education to prepare us for democracy as a way of life. Here, the right kind of education helps us to form the correct habits, attitudes, and patterns of thinking. Needless to say, Dewey’s education is political, and therefore, controversial by liberal standards since it violates requirement for neutrality. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. The principle of neutrality upholds the distinction between public and private spheres of social life. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, the Middle Works, the Later Works, 1882-1953*, MW 12:186; (as cited in Talisse, 2011, 'Fairwell to Deweyan Democracy'). [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. See Talisse, "Fairwell to Deweyan Democracy," 511, 518, 523. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. In our discussion of liberalism and neutrality, I have been narrowly considering Rawlsian liberalism, since this form of liberalism is the more standard and therefore dominant interpretation of contemporary liberalism. Other forms of liberalism – i.e., Mills’ classical account, or Raz’s perfectionism – do not claim to be neutral. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 205-223. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Richard J. Bernstein, "Creative Democracy – the Task Still before Us," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, 21, no. 3 (2000): 215-228. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Faith is term that Dewey uses to describe why he believes in cooperative human activity, and the potential that cooperative inquiry holds for an intelligent engagement with (social) problem. For reference see the next note. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, the Middle Works, the Later Works, 1882-1953*, LW 9:57-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Campbell, "Dewey's Conception of Community," 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Ibid., 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Find source of reference p. 186 [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. By inquiry I am referring to Dewey’s pragmatist version of inquiry; see Larry Hickman, "Dewey's Theory of Inquiry," in *Reading Dewey*, ed. Larry Hickman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianapolis University Press, 1998), 166-186. Also see Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Some have argued that MacIntyre was committed to a metaphysics before his Thomistic turn; see Marian Kuna, "Macintyre's Search for a Defensible Aristotelian Ethics and the Role of Metaphysics," *Res Publica*, 11, no. 3 (2005): 251-273. Still, others have argued that MacIntyre’s metaphysical turn and adoption of Thomism were more or less simultaneous; see Bavister-Gould, "The Uniqueness of after Virtue (or 'against Hindsight')." [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. I should say that MacIntyre in *Dependent Rational Animals* seems to offer a non-metaphysical biology, or at least a *descriptive* sort of metaphysical biology, which highlights the extent to which we are dependent on others for our care. However, the sort of biology that MacIntyre argues for in that work is very much the kind of biology that would be welcomed by the Deweyan Pragmatist; in fact, the Deweyan claims that I have mentioned – i.e., the fact that human beings are social animals, and they are problem-solvers – essentially fits comfortably within the *descriptive* framework that MacIntyre articulates in *Dependent Rational Animals*. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Both Bernstein and Schneewind argue that MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue* strengthens, as opposed to weakens, the case for emotivism. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. The synthetic-analytic distinction was first formulated by Kant; nevertheless, the synthetic-analytic was anticipated in Hume’s distinction between matters of fact vs. relations of ideas, and Leibniz's distinction between truths of fact vs. truths of reason. Both of these earlier prototypes more or less map onto the synthetic-analytic distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Willard V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Philosophical Review*, 60, no. 1 (1951): 20-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Elijah Millgram, "Hume on Practical Reasoning (Treatise 463—469)." *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 46 (1997): 235-265. Also see Millgram’s "Was Hume a Humean?," *Hume Studies*, 21, no. 1 (1995): 73-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Rudolph Carnap, "Testability and Meaning," *Philosophy of Science* 3, no. 4 (1936): 419-471, cited in Putnam, (2002), The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Rudolph Carnap, "Testability and Meaning--Continued," *Philosophy of Science* 4, no. 1 (1937): 1-40, cited in Putnam, (2002), The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Rudolph Carnap, "The Foundations of Logic and Mathematics," in *International Encylopedia of Unified Science* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1938), §24, 207, cited in Putnam, (2002), The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Duhem first articulated this idea; see Pierre Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 185, 199-200, 216-218. Also see Pierre Duhem, *To Save the Phenomena, an Essay on the Idea of Physical Theory from Plato to Galileo* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press., 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Here, I am specifically referring to semantic theory-ladenness where an observation term is partially determined by theoretical presuppositions. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Ibid., 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Ibid., 136-137. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. [emphasis in the original] [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Vivian Walsh, "Philosophy and Economics," in *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, ed. J. Eatwell, Milgate, M., and Newman, P. (London: Macmillan, 1987), cited in Putnam, 2002, 2030. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, 30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. John McDowell makes the same point; see John McDowell, "Reason, Value and Reality," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), Chapter 7. Also see Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Putnam is here referring to arguments advanced by Iris Murdoch, John McDowell, and Phillipa Foot, against a strong fact-value distinction since thick concepts are often entangled in ways that undermine the argument that thick terms are always factorable. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Hilary Putnam, "Objectivity and the Science-Ethics Distinction," in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, 40-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Putnam further expands on this position in his book *Ethics Without Ontology* and defines it as conceptual pluralism; see Hilary Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Putnam, "Objectivity and the Science-Ethics Distinction," 149-150. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. We have already seen, in Chapter One, the historicist-contextualist character of MacIntyre’s first four hypotheses: H1 to H4. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Earlier in our discussion of Talisse and Dewey in Chapter Three, we discussed the idea of the continuity between ethics and politics. Here, I will expand on this idea and show why it is central to MacIntyre’s philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. See Appendix H1 to H4. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. See MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*; Bernard Williams makes a similar argument which while distinct from MacIntyre’s particular claim here, it can be viewed as sort of parallel claim. Williams argues that modern moral debates relevant to contemporary conditions are in fact political problems; and the kind of ethics that remains relevant to us in the present-day, is an ethics that deals with political problems: see Raymond Geuss, "Did Williams Do Ethics?," in *A World without Why* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 175-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. In section 3 I will discuss these points in greater detail. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. In Chapter One of *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, MacIntyre extends his original criticism of emotivism to expressivism. MacIntyre’s roughly argues in Chapter One of this book that while expressivism does hold a certain appeal, it retains an important flaw. Namely, that it ends up ignoring the purposeful intentional (or teleological) character of our practical, social and normative activities; and that, we miss something crucial about social and normative phenomena if we understand our preferences and desires simply as expressions of a particular range or class of these concepts, rather than as a historical and narrative outcome of purposive activities in which we arrange our short-term intentions and activities in terms of medium and long-term goals and purposes. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Of course earlier in the thesis I argued that MacIntyre’s three-fold account is inadequate; nevertheless, this inadequacy aside, it doesn’t take away from the fact that MacIntyre’s ethical account in *After Virtue* makes a genuine attempt at a positive account, alongside his negative critique of contemporary ethical positions, chief among them emotivism. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. The concerns are here with respect to the second tension (or difficulty) for MacIntyre’s project. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Kelvin Knight, "Alasdair Macintyre's Revisionary Aristotelianism: Pragmatism Opposed, Marxism Outmoded, Thomism Transformed," in *What Happened in and to Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Philosophical Essays in Honor of Alasdair Macintyre*, ed. Fran O'Rourke (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Ibid., 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. See *After Virtue*, especially chapter 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. See the earlier discussion in Chapter One of hypotheses H1 to H4. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. MacIntyre, "Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good." [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Knight, "Alasdair Macintyre's Revisionary Aristotelianism: Pragmatism Opposed, Marxism Outmoded, Thomism Transformed," 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. ‘State-market’ is a term used by MacIntyre to refer to both the apparatus of the liberal nation-state and the capitalist institutions of the market. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Knight, "Alasdair Macintyre's Revisionary Aristotelianism: Pragmatism Opposed, Marxism Outmoded, Thomism Transformed," 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Most of MacIntyre’s examples are either remote historical communities in our past, or more recent local communities that have recently succumbed to the forces of the state, or communities that otherwise are under severe pressure from those same forces. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. MacIntyre, "Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good," 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Natural Law against the Nation-State: Or the Possibility of the Common Good against the Actuality of the Public Interest," in *Laws, Goods, and Virtues: Medieval Resources for Modern Conflicts* (Unpublished lectures part of the Agnes Cuming Lectures in Philosophy: University College, Dublin, 1994), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. MacIntyre tells us that a fishing crew is a good example of a practice (or craft). When we engage in this practice we learn to work with each other, to be honest with each other, and show courage in helping each other in different circumstances. Hence in this way we achieve the internal goods (internal goods or goods of virtue such as honesty, courage, etc. and are distinct to external goods such as monetary reward, honour, fame, etc.) of virtue in this particular practice. MacIntyre notes that the internal goods of various practices can often overlap. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Mark C. Murphy, "Macintyre's Political Philosophy," in *Alasdair Macintyre*, ed. Mark C. Murphy, *Contemporary Philosophy in Focus* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. With respect to the relationship between common good and individual good, Charles Taylor holds similar views to those of MacIntyre; see Charles Taylor, "Irreducibly Social Goods," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 100-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. The notion of ‘public interest’ in the liberal state is supposed to be analogous to the notion of common good. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Murphy, "Macintyre's Political Philosophy," 160-161. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. By ‘various goods’ I refer to both internal and external goods, as defined by MacIntyre’ account in *After Virtue*. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. I should note here that there are other potential conceptual problems with the standard liberal definition of public interest (for example that it doesn’t adequately account for the way individual goods are in many ways shared goods, or that it fails to appreciate that individual goods are the outcome of irreducibly social processes embedded in shared meaning). Nevertheless, I will consider MacIntyre’s own line of attack against the concept of public interest in the liberal state. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Examples here are the type of tasks performed by military personnel, police, fire fighters, and emergency medical personnel. See MacIntyre’s “Is Patriotism a Virtue?” [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Murphy, "Macintyre's Political Philosophy," 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Ibid., 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Ibid., 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. See MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict." Also see Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Privatization of Good: An Inaugural Lecture," *The Review of Politics* 52, no. 03 (1990): 344-361. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. We discussed the neutrality principle in our discussion of Talisse in Chapter Three. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. MacIntyre has an Aristotelian conception of justice based on desert; see Chapter 17 of *After Virtue*. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. MacIntyre, "Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good," 248-249. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Murphy, "Macintyre's Political Philosophy," 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Murphy, "Macintyre's Political Philosophy," 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Ibid., 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. In MacIntyre’s account, goods of effectiveness are the external goods of practices, and are the goods which institutions aim at. On the other hand, goods of excellence are goods internal to a practice, from which virtues derive. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict," 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Knight, *The Macintyre Reader*, 235-265. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "I'm Not a Communitarian, But..." *The Responsive Community* 1, no. 3 (1991): 91-92. Also see Alasdair MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to My Critics," in *After Macintyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair Macintyre*, ed. Horton and Mendus (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Chapter 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals : Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Murphy, "Macintyre's Political Philosophy," 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Ibid., 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. See Keith Breen, "The State, Compartmentalization and the Turn to Local Community: A Critique of the Political Thought of Alasdair Macintyre," *The European Legacy* 10, no. 5 (2005): 485-501. And Keith Breen, "Alasdair Macintyre and the Hope for a Politics of Virtuous Acknowledged Dependence," *Contemporary Political Theory* 1, no. 2 (2002): 181-201. Also see MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict," 147-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals : Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, 132-133. Also see MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to My Critics," 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Breen, "The State, Compartmentalization and the Turn to Local Community: A Critique of the Political Thought of Alasdair Macintyre," 495. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Ibid., 497. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Murphy, "Macintyre's Political Philosophy," 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. See MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Murphy, "Macintyre's Political Philosophy." [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Ibid., 173-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Social Structures and Their Threats to Moral Agency," *Philosophy* 74, no. 03 (1999): 311-329. Also see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority," in *Through the Looking Glass: Epistemology and the Conduct of Enquiry*, ed. M.J. Falco (University Press of America, 1979), 42-58. Also see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Chapters 3, 6, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. I should emphasize that MacIntyre’s latest book – *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* – doesn’t really affect my line of arguments, namely, that MacIntyre’s lack of a coherent politics that critically, yet constructively, engages with liberal politics and its associated structures. See MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Practice is here meant as a term of art in the way that is utilized by MacIntyre. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. For my purposes I will use ideal, normative, and moralists interchangeably, even though there are differences. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. See Paul Kelly, "Rescuing Political Theory from the Tyranny of History," in *Political Philosophy Versus History? Contextualism and Real Politics in Contemporary Political Thought*, ed. Jonathan Floyd and Marc Stears (Cambridge: Cambridge Univesity Press, 2011), 13-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. William A. Galston, "Realism in Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (2010): 385-411. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Ibid., 392. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Ibid., 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. While this is widely understood to be a feature of political realism, it should be noted that Raymond Geuss reads Bernard Williams, a political realist, in a different way. On Geuss’ view, Williams thought that a properly formulated politics would displace ethics altogether. On this view, politics and political philosophy could be the sort of activity where the heavy lifting in ethics is actually performed. See Geuss, "Did Williams Do Ethics?." [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. The boundaries between at least some of them do sometimes overlap. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. I should note that many of the scholars who are broadly considered moralist are also engaged in a number of conflicts with each other, e.g., Rawlsian ideal theorist are often in conflict with communitarians. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Communitarians who are moralists do not subscribe to this view. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Kelly, "Rescuing Political Theory from the Tyranny of History." [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Galston, "Realism in Political Theory," 386-387. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. The common good in Athens insofar as it was realised was constituted in the democratic deliberation of Athenian male citizens (which excluded women and slaves). [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Is a Science of Comparative Politics Possible?," in *Against the Self-Images of the Age* ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 260-279. Also see Alasdair MacIntyre, "Predictability and Explanation in the Social Sciences," *Philosophic Exchange* 3, no. 1 (1972): 5-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. MacIntyre, "Is a Science of Comparative Politics Possible?," 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict," 213-214. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. J. L. A. West, "Impartiality and Conceptions of the Good: Brian Barry or Alasdair Macintyre?," *The Philosophical Forum* 31, no. 1 (2000): 29-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. See MacIntyre, "Predictability and Explanation in the Social Sciences." Also see MacIntyre, "Is a Science of Comparative Politics Possible?." Also see Alasdair Macintyre, "Causality and History," in *Essays on Explanation and Understanding*, ed. Juha Manninen and Raimo Tuomela, *Synthese Library* (Springer Netherlands, 1976), 137-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. In the Introduction and Chapter One of this thesis, I considered in detail why MacIntyre’s Thomism appears to be inconsistent with his contextualist-historicist commitments. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Galston, "Realism in Political Theory." [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 6th ed., 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Politics, 1279a1217-1279b1210. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Mary Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle’s Politics* (Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. I am using Thomas Hibbs’ account of Aquinas’ politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Thomas S. Hibbs, "Macintyre, Aquinas, and Politics," *The Review of Politics* 66, no. 3 (2004): 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Ibid., 378. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Ibid., 379. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Thomas M. Osborne Jr, "Macintyre, Thomism, and the Contemporary Common Good," *Analyse & Kritik* 2008, no. 1 (2008): 382-397. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Aquinas adopts Aristotle’s view on possessing private property and being able to practically make use of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas: Political Writings by Thomas Aquinas*, trans. R. W. Dyson, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xxx. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Hibbs, "Macintyre, Aquinas, and Politics," 379. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Aquinas, *Aquinas: Political Writings by Thomas Aquinas*, xxxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals : Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. pp. 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. pp. 254-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. MacIntyre seems to praise some of the action of the state (such as the ‘Americans with disabilities’ act). There are other clear examples such as the provision of civil liberties, a universal health care system, and actions providing for equal treatment of LGBT community. All of these actions that a state seems to be capable of not only imply, but also embody, a substantive conception of the good. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Breen, "The State, Compartmentalization and the Turn to Local Community: A Critique of the Political Thought of Alasdair Macintyre." [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Osborne Jr, "Macintyre, Thomism, and the Contemporary Common Good." [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Several scholars have argued that MacIntyre’s negative critique is broadly within the communitarian confines; nevertheless, MacIntyre has rejected this contrast. See “I’m not a communitarian, But…,” in Robert E. Goodin, "Making Communities More Responsive " *The Responsive Community*, 9, no. 1 (1998): 91-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Knight, *The Macintyre Reader*, 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict," 213-214. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Knight, "Alasdair Macintyre's Revisionary Aristotelianism: Pragmatism Opposed, Marxism Outmoded, Thomism Transformed." [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. C. J. Misak, *Truth, Politics, Morality : Pragmatism and Deliberation* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000), 25-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Ibid., 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Ibid., 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. Ibid., 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Ibid., 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. Ibid., 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Ibid., 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Ibid., 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Ibid., 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 18, no. 1 (1990): 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Ibid., 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Ibid., 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Ibid., 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. Ibid., 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Ibid., 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Ibid., 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Ibid., 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Ibid., 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens: Swallow Press, 1991), 71-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Axel Honneth, "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today," *Political Theory* 26, no. 6 (1998): 765. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Ibid., 766. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Ibid., 767. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Ibid., 768. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Ibid., 769. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Ibid., 773. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Ibid., 774. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Ibid., 775. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Ibid., 776. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Ibid., 777. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Ibid., 778. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. Ibid., 780. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Hilary Putnam, "A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy," in *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 180-200. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. This idea is most famously outlined by Hegel: “The Owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.” See G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H B Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," 6-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. I should note that on the liberal account, political allegiance is usually defended by appealing to the priority of right over the good – that is, by appealing to some account of justice. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Murphy, "Macintyre's Political Philosophy," 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Chapter 4 & 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Overlapping consensus is a particular account of justice that grounds the institutions of a political community, i.e., autonomy, liberty, in a participatory democratic society. The consensus is itself grounded in a set of core commitments that are morally significant. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. MacIntyre’s point here is that abstract general principles that are not grounded in the participatory social life of a community do not generate the right type of motivation, while those ideas shaped through participating in social practices have a greater hold on us, according to the Aristotelian picture he presents. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Honneth, "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today," 763-783. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. See Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Elizabeth Anderson is an example of the type of work in political philosophy that utilises such an approach; see Elizabeth Anderson, "Equality and Freedom in the Workplace: Recovering Republican Insights," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 31, no. 2 (2015): 48-69. Also see Elizabeth Anderson, "A World Turned Upside Down: Social Hierarchies and a New History of Egalitarianism," *Juncture* 20, no. 4 (2014): 258-267. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. For example see the case of the water company in Oxford Massachusetts Aquarion. Due to poor service and rising costs, the locals voted to raise the funds to purchase the company. Aquarion was able to use a number of delaying tactics and procedural mechanisms to undermine the democratic decision undertaken by the residents of Oxford. See Yascha Mounk, "America Is Not a Democracy," *The Atlantic* March (2018) https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/03/america-is-not-a-democracy/550931/, Mar-2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. The example of industrial mining communities is the type of case I have in mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. The particular example I have in mind involves various transactions between local communities and utility companies and other large companies. [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Dillon’s rule: this was a rule first articulated by federal justice John Forrest Dillon. In an 1868 case Dillon stated that "Municipal corporations owe their origin to, and derive their powers and rights wholly from, the legislature. It breathes into them the breath of life, without which they cannot exist. As it creates, so may it destroy. If it may destroy, it may abridge and control." *City of Clinton V. Cedar Rapids and the Missouri River Railroad*, (24 Iowa 455; 1868). [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Simon Davis-Cohen, "Democracy at Every Level," *The Jacobin* 2016, Sept, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/09/local-democracy-dillons-rule-commerce-clause-minimum-wage/, Sept-2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. Cooley’s doctrine is named after the chief justice of the Michigan Supreme Court. The Cooley Doctrine proposed a legal theory of an inherent but constitutionally-permitted right to local self-determination. In a concurring opinion, Cooley, J., wrote “local government is [a] matter of absolute right; and the state cannot [as to the case referenced in the main opinion, People v. Hurlbut] take it away.”, *The People V. Hurlbut*, (24 Mich. 44, 108 (1871)). [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. Davis-Cohen, "Democracy at Every Level." Also see Gerald Friedman, "The Sanctity of Property Rights in American History," in *Working Paper Series* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusettes, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. William P. Jones, "The Sanctity of Private Property: The Civil Rights Act and the Limitations of American Liberalism," *New Labor Forum*, 24, no. 1 (2015): 62-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Friedman, "The Sanctity of Property Rights in American History." [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. In her work Elizabeth Anderson has argued on behalf of the value of democratic case studies as part of a resolution of social and economic problems, in which Dewey’s reflexive epistemological democratic approach to inquiry are utilised with promising results; see Elizabeth Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* 3, no. 1 (2006): 8-22.

     In other places Anderson’s demonstrates the value of historical studies on social, economic, and political policy, utilised for articulating interesting practical egalitarian possibilities that correct power asymmetry in the social and economic spaces; see Anderson, "Equality and Freedom in the Workplace: Recovering Republican Insights." and "A World Turned Upside Down: Social Hierarchies and a New History of Egalitarianism." [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. I say ‘somewhat’ because I think given recent social/political conflict, the shock is now more tenuous. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. I should qualify this somewhat and say that some of those depressing conclusions have been moderated by MacIntyre in his latest work *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*. [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. Here, I am referring to the kinds of criticisms advanced by Schneewind and Bernstein. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)