

DISSERTATIONES
SERIES PHILOSOPHICA - LX

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITAS SANCTAE CRUCIS
FACULTAS PHILOSOPHIAE

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ALASDAIR MACINTYRE'S CRITIQUE OF
CONTEMPORARY HUMAN RIGHTS THEORIES

*Thesis ad Doctoratum in Philosophia
totaliter edita*

ROMAE 2023

Vidimus et adprobavimus ad normam statutorum

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Imprimi potest

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Secretarius Generalis Universitatis

Roma, 17-X-2023

Prot. n° 1084/2023

Imprimatur

Vicariato di Roma

24 ottobre 2023

© 2023 - Edizioni Santa Croce s.r.l.
Via Sabotino 2/ A 00195 Roma
0645493637 - info@edusc.it
www.edizionisantacroce.it

ISBN 979-12-5482-197-8

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I take this opportunity to thank everyone who inspired and helped me to bring this work to light. I have been privileged to have Prof. Antonio Petagine as my Ph.D. director. I sincerely thank him for guiding me throughout this work with his efforts, corrections, creative suggestions, and motivating accompaniment. I thankfully remember Prof. Robert Gahl, the co-director, for his scholarly corrections and guidance. I also thank Prof. Jose Lombo for his observations and valuable comments.

I remain grateful to Archbishop Mar Andrews Thazhath and Mar Tony Neelankavil, the bishops of Trichur Archdiocese, for their apostolic blessings and paternal care. My special thanks go to the Rector, the Dean, the Doctoral Commission, the Coordinator, the Staff and the Secretary of the Faculty of Philosophy, and the librarians of Santa Croce University for their guidance and assistance.

I express my gratitude towards *Collegio Sacerdotale* Tiberino, Msgr. Gualtiero Issachi, the Archbishop of Monreale, Msgr. Michele Pennisi, the Archbishop Emeritus of Monreale, Don Angelo Inzerillo, the Parish Priest of the Parish *San Giuseppe alla Stazione*, Carini, for their assistance and giving me accommodation during these years, and I gratefully remember the parishioners as well for their love and prayers.

I sincerely thank Dr. Mark Retter (University of Cambridge) for providing me with important resources. I thankfully remember Fr. Libin Joseph and Fr. Jiso Kuttikkat for correcting the work and Fr. Sergio Tapia, Fr. Taison Mandumpal, Fr. Jomon Ponthekkan, Sig.ra Eleonora Censoplano and Sig.ra Milena Censoplano for their technical assistance. I remain grateful to all my fellow priests, friends, and sisters in Italy and India for their encouragement throughout this endeavor. I gratefully remember my parents, family members, *Conferenza Episcopale Italiana*, and benefactors for their constant prayerful support and assistance. Above all, with a thankful heart, I bow down before the Almighty God for his loving providence and the Blessed Virgin Mary for her intercession.

ABBREVIATIONS

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
Cf.	Confer
Co.	Company
E.g.	<i>Exempli gratia</i> (Example)
ed./eds.	editor/editors
etc.	etcetera
i.e.	<i>id est</i> (That is)
ibid.	Ibidem
Inc.	Incorporate (A company)
Jn.	<i>The Gospel according to St. John</i>
Ltd.	Limited
p.	page
pp.	pages
Pub.	Publishing/Publication
trans.	translated by
UDHR	<i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>
vol./vols.	volume/volumes

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Philosophers have always disagreed about the foundation of the concept of human rights¹, its historical origins, and its application in society. Numerous theories have emerged throughout history asserting that human rights are based on various factors. While some find their foundation in human reason, others in human dignity, natural law, and God. Simultaneously, philosophers such as John Rawls advocate for foundationless human rights. Likewise, there are conflicting hypotheses regarding their historical origin. Some trace their origins to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, others to the medieval period, and others to the earlier periods.

Philosophers hold opposing views on human rights' nature and character (universal and absolute character) and their practical applications in moral and social life. They dispute among themselves on questions; *What are all rights considered human rights?* And *Who has the rights?* The clash of rights intensifies disputes. For instance, in the question of abortion, *which right should be given priority, the right to life or the right to liberty?* As history progresses, we also witness a transition in human rights: from natural rights and political rights to social rights and economic rights in the twentieth century.

Despite controversies and divergent philosophical discussions on the various aspects of human rights, there is a trend among public platforms to acknowledge the existence and necessity of human rights in society. They reach a consensus that human rights have existed since the dawn of humanity and that people have become aware of their moral entitlements only during various periods of history. They concur that humans have rights simply by virtue of their humanity and that these rights are natural and inalienable. In the modern period, with the emergence of various rights theories, rights entered into the life of people and now in the contemporary period, common people view it as a necessary component of their social and political existence, without which life would be difficult. The tragic consequences of twentieth-century atrocities such as the Second World War necessitated an urgent demand for a common declaration and the acceptance of human rights, which resulted in the adoption of the UDHR by the United Nations Organization in 1948. The drafters of the UDHR unanimously observed that promoting rights is necessary for safeguarding human dignity.

¹ I have used the terms 'natural rights' and 'human rights' interchangeably in this work since MacIntyre also followed the same. See for details, Chapter II, title 'MacIntyre's Critique of Human Rights'.

As a result of the UDHR, nearly all nations have already legalized and guaranteed fundamental rights to their citizens. Today, human rights are also viewed as a means of ensuring global human welfare, peace, and justice and a tool for resolving numerous international issues, such as war and governmental encroachments on individuals' freedom. In recent decades, the Catholic Church has also strengthened its stance on human rights and emphasized its importance in its moral and social teachings.

While on the one hand, human rights have already been established within society, on the other hand, it is interesting to observe the existence of a different voice: one that denies the very existence of human rights. Even though they are few, philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham, Karl Marx, and Alasdair MacIntyre explicitly deny the existence of human rights. They proposed their philosophical arguments as a reaction to different human rights movements in history. The first two philosophers, for instance, formulated their objections in response to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789².

According to them, particularly MacIntyre, human rights do not exist because they lack a basis in reality. Rights are solely human inventions of a specific historical period (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). They are introduced as a new version of morality to replace the traditional morality of pre-modern society. However, they contend that modernity's efforts to establish a new morality were in vain because it was established on a false foundation. In addition, they shed light on certain internal inconsistencies and flaws within human rights theories, such as excessive individualism, a lack of regard for the community and the common good, the collapse of social relationships, and a diminishing sense of duty³. MacIntyre discusses these negative consequences of human rights more profoundly than the other opponents.

Thus, on the question of human rights, there are two opposing positions. Compared to the former, the general public is less aware of the latter; the

² Bentham refers to the French Declaration of Rights as 'nonsense upon the stilts'. The concepts and the language used in it are ambiguous and nonsensical. He describes it as "[...] a perpetual vein of nonsense flowing from a perpetual abuse of words". J. BENTHAM, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: Rights, Representation and Reform: Nonsense upon stilts and other writings on the French Revolution*, P. Schofield, C. Paese-Watkin and C. Blamires (eds.), Clarendon Press, Oxford 2002, p. 321. Hereafter, BENTHAM, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham*. For instance, Declaration's statement that 'All men are born free' is an absurd nonsense. According to him, no human beings are born free; they are born into the subjection of parents and remain dependent for some years. The Declaration is far away from the realities. We will discuss Marx in Chapter II, title 'Marxian Critique of Human Rights'.

³ Bentham found in rights theory a priority of rights to duties. He, on the contrary, maintained that rights should be understood in terms of duties. Duties are more important than rights. They may not always be correlative because there can be duties in society without rights. But there will not be rights without duties. Rose Harrison states: "This is Bentham's analytical point: not that we cannot use a language of rights, or even that it is simply translatable into a language of duties, but rather that it must ultimately be understood in terms of duties". R. HARRISON, *Bentham*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London-Boston-Melbourne-Henley 1983, p. 94.

critique of human rights. Some of the above-mentioned criticisms against it make sense when we observe its consequences in society. For instance, the rights language or the rights talk made individuals think only of themselves. Rights became a means to safeguard oneself from others. The other or the government is viewed as no more than someone who endangers one's rights and who has the duty to realize one's rights. This way rights remain a challenge to social relationships. An investigation into these factors will help us objectively and critically approach human rights to arrive at the truth about them. So, taking into account human rights' acceptance in society and since the theory of human rights is an anthropologically, morally, and politically significant subject of inquiry, and since human beings themselves are its subject and object, I believe it is relevant to conduct extensive research on the arguments of human rights opponents.

MacIntyre represents contemporary opponents of human rights theories. His critique covers four centuries, from the seventeenth to the twentieth, making him the most up-to-date and comprehensive source for our discussion. Throughout his entire life, MacIntyre remains a vehement critic of liberalism and modernity. It is basically because, modernity, abandoning the old traditions and morality, attempted to introduce its own new moralities, causing moral disorder in society. He firmly believes that the theory of natural human rights is one of those moralities and so merely is the product or the invention of liberalism and the result of various Enlightenment-era shifts⁴. His criticism of liberalism and modernity remains central to his denial of human rights.

When we examine the historiography of human rights, it is easily noted that the development of human rights has a close connection with liberalism. Having been dissatisfied with old systems, the liberal ideologies proclaimed the liberation of the individual from the constraints of law, custom, tradition, and authority and created an 'individual' who prioritizes freedom, autonomy, equality, dignity, and rights. It arose primarily in two ways: as a philosophical doctrine emphasizing the individual's autonomy, liberty, and equality and as a political doctrine emphasizing limited government.

Community and its values were given priority in the ancient-medieval periods. Individuals' primary objective was to contribute to the community and its goals by playing different roles, such as father, daughter, wife, cousin,

⁴ With the advent of the Enlightenment from the fifteenth century, the social, cultural, and political lives of people throughout the world, particularly on the European continent, have undergone significant transformations. Jonathan Israel remarks: "The Enlightenment [...] was the most important and profound intellectual, social, and cultural transformation of the Western world since the Middle Ages and the most formative in shaping modernity". J.I. ISRAEL, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution and Human Rights 1750-1790*, Oxford University Press, New York 2011, p. 3. One of the basic shifts that happened was with regard to the end of human beings. According to Aristotle, the human end is determined in their nature and they by nature are teleological. Their actions are oriented towards attaining their purpose (telos). However, modernity rejected this view and maintained that human action and life are not teleological; they, with their autonomy, choose their end and organize their actions in accordance with it.

student, etc... The identity of every individual was inseparable from their social bonds and roles⁵. However, modernity made a complete break with classical and medieval ideas of community and social life. Priority was overturned and was given to humans and their interests over those of the community. All the objective forms of morality are categorically rejected, and the subject became the focal point of all morality. Autonomy and freedom were excessively attached to individuals, separating them from the community bonds⁶. One's identity is no more determined by bonds and roles, but rather by the distinctive features of autonomy and self-sufficiency.

The individualistic concept that humans are autonomous and should be allowed to exercise unrestricted autonomy has placed them in political conflict with the state or the government. In liberal ideology, the government should be vested with limited powers. The government, as its primary duty must promote the complete expression of human potential by respecting the dignity of individuals and safeguarding their rights. Individuals could exercise rights against the state in extreme circumstances, especially when the latter interferes with their freedom⁷.

The above-mentioned liberal shifts and principles are evident both in the classical and contemporary human rights theories. In the classical liberal period, philosophers like John Locke⁸ and Thomas Jefferson affirmed that humans

⁵ According to MacIntyre, there was no 'I' distinct from family and community. Cf. A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 2007³, p. 33. Hereafter, MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

⁶ Rhoda Howard and Jack Donnelly state: "For the liberal, the individual is not merely separable from the community and social role, but specially valued precisely as a distinctive, discrete individual [...]". R.E. HOWARD and J. DONNELLY, "Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Political Regimes", in *American Political Science Review* 80 (1986), pp. 801-817: 803. Hereafter, HOWARD AND DONNELLY, *Human Dignity, Human Rights and Political Regimes*.

⁷ Howard and Donnelly state: "In the inevitable conflicts between the individual and the state, the liberal gives prima facie priority, in the areas protected by human rights, to the individual". *Ibid.*, p. 803.

⁸ Locke is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of classical liberalism and the theory of natural rights. Even though there are ambiguities regarding the historical origin of natural human rights, it could be undisputedly argued that human rights theories witnessed rapid growth from the seventeenth century thanks to Locke's theory. J. LOCKE, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, I. Shapiro (ed.), Yale University Press, New Haven-London 2003. Hereafter, LOCKE, *Two Treatises of Government*. David Johnston states: "The idea of individuals as rights-bearers has played major and well-known role in the liberal tradition from Locke onwards". D. JOHNSTON, *The Idea of the Liberal Theory: A Critique and Reconstruction*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1994, p. 40. His account of natural rights has served as the foundation for developing numerous rights theories and articulating Constitutions. The American Declaration of Independence of 1776, The French Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the UDHR are significant examples. John Charvet and Elisa Kaczynska-nay state: "[...] we follow Locke in believing that all human beings 'need' to survive; and that, in today's world, this necessity demands (at least) a full set of human rights as promulgated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948". J. CHARVET and E. KACZYNSKA-NAY, *The Liberal Project and Human Rights: The Theory and Practice of a New World Order*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2008, p. 104. Howard and Donnelly

are naturally free and are endowed with unlimited freedom and autonomy and natural-inalienable rights. In their view, rights were viewed as a means to protect oneself from the encroachment of others and the government. The latter enjoys limited powers in the affairs of individuals and its chief end was to safeguard their rights⁹. The major human rights declarations of that time- The American Declaration of Independence, The French Declaration of the Rights of Man- accommodated the liberal ideas of these thinkers¹⁰. Contemporary liberals like Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, even though vary from classical liberalism in various facets, still consider these liberal principles as the core of their human rights theories¹¹.

These factors imply that the historical and philosophical development of human rights is inextricably linked with liberal principles and cannot be conceived of without them. And MacIntyre is convinced that human rights are characterized by liberal ideas and are the products of the seventeenth century. It began when individualistic ideas began to govern the human intellect. Most of his arguments against human rights have a liberal connection. He discusses extensively how the relationship with liberalism disfigured human rights and replaced them from their original context. For this purpose, he analyzes in his works the modern liberal human rights theories of Locke and Jefferson and

state: "The near perfect fit between liberalism and the Universal Declaration reflects a deep and essential theoretical connection". HOWARD AND DONNELLY, *Human Dignity, Human Rights and Political Regimes*, p. 805. They argue and explain with examples that almost all rights enumerated in UDHR are characterized by liberal ideologies. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 805-806.

⁹ Locke writes: The fundamental law of the government is that "[...] all the members of the society are to be preserved". LOCKE, *Two Treatises of Government*, II-VIII, 159. Human beings and their preservation trump all legislative powers and the government's superior will. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-IV, 23.

¹⁰ Jefferson is the architect of The American Declaration of Independence. He writes in the Declaration: "[...] that to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men". If the government violates the individuals' rights, they have the power to abolish the government and establish a new one that secures their rights. He writes: "[...] that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, & to institute new government". T. JEFFERSON, *An Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson 1743-1790*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York-London 1914, p. 35.

The French Declaration remarks: "[...] the aim of every political association is the protection of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man". If a single article in the Declaration is violated, it is the citizens' right and sacred duty to go for insurrection against the government. BENTHAM, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham*, p. 320.

¹¹ Cf. N.L. ROSENBLUM (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1991, p. 1. Dworkin speaks of the government's obligation to treat individual personhood with equal concern and respect. He writes: "Government must not only treat people with concern and respect, but with equal concern and respect. It must not distribute goods or opportunities unequally on the ground that some citizens are entitled to more because they are worthy of more concern. It must not constrain liberty on the ground that one citizen's conception of the good life of one group is nobler or superior to another's". R. DWORKIN, *Taking Rights Seriously*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1977-78, pp. 272-273. Hereafter, DWORKIN, *Taking Rights Seriously*. We will discuss Rawls in Chapter V.

those of Rawls and Alan Gewirth in the contemporary period. He observes that even though in the last four-five centuries liberalism and human rights have been transformed and advanced, fundamental principles such as human autonomy and freedom and priority of the individual over the community, the common good, and the state remain the same. In short, we can say that his critique of human rights comes under the larger framework of his critique of modernity and liberalism.

Even though not in length, MacIntyre discusses human rights also from the point of view of natural law theory. It is common among the twentieth-century neo-Thomists to find the basis of natural human rights in the Thomistic natural theory. Jacques Maritain and John Finnis are the major proponents of it. Maritain argues that natural rights are derived from the natural obligations dictated by natural law and since all humans share the same human nature, rights are applied universally to all human beings. Recent Catholic documents from *Rerum Novarum*¹² too join this position and highlight the religious implication of human rights than their liberal connotation. The personalists of the twentieth century especially Maritain and the Catholic documents particularly together with the Second Vatican Council also emphasize the primacy of the human person. The human person is endowed with inalienable dignity from the Creator which is required to be respected at any cost. Human dignity is the foundation of their rights and the ideal way to safeguard dignity is to promote rights. This implies that the Right-talk is still active in the twentieth century not simply in the liberal framework but also in the religious and theological discourses.

MacIntyre is both a neo-Thomist and a Catholic believer. According to him, Aquinas did not have the idea of subjective natural rights and neither intends nor leaves the possibility of deriving natural rights from the natural law. Differently from his traditions, he contends that the Thomistic natural law theory fundamentally focuses on the community and the common good, not on rights. In addition, he maintains the concept of human dignity from a Thomistic perspective that appears to contrast Maritain and the Church: he believes that while in the Thomistic system, dignity is conditional and relative, the latter conceives it inalienable. The personalists' attempt to depict human beings with dignity and rights, resulted in the abstract understanding of 'human being' taking it off its original social nature and bonds.

Consequently, logical issues arise: *Who is more devoted to the Thomistic theories? Can MacIntyre remain a Catholic and a Thomist with his denial of the human rights theory?* This work will explore these concerns in depth and even though they seem to stand at two opposing poles, we will seek the possibility of a synthesis between them in light of MacIntyre's acceptance of certain rights grounded in justice, the common good, and virtues. Even though there are certain flaws within MacIntyre's theory, his critique of rights remains a

¹² LEO XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 15 May 1891. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html, accessed June 10, 2022. Hereafter, LEO XIII, *Rerum Novarum*.

caution against the rights language and can be used as a key to arrive at a moderate concept of human rights. Catholic church attempts to formulate a more balanced theory of human rights incorporating both liberal and religious ideas and concepts of the common good and duties. At this juncture, this work aims to give a specific proposal for a proper and more authentic comprehension of the Catholic view of human rights, applying MacIntyre's critique and the new understanding of rights as a guide.

This work's significance and scope derive from the fact that MacIntyre has challenged a deeply rooted social concept: the concept of human rights. Hence, the primary purpose of this work is to critically investigate MacIntyre's objections to human rights. He doubts human rights' existence and foundation rather than merely pointing out their flaws. Consequently, the work is also a search for the truth concerning human rights. He questions the most fundamental characteristic of human rights-natural and universal-with his concept of community-embedded morality. By emphasizing their social nature and relating them to the community's values, he presents a concept of humans who do not require human rights to flourish. He argues that the true concept of humans has been distorted by modernity, personalism, and their abstract conceptions of humans, leading to the invention of human rights theories. The investigation into the truth regarding human rights leads to the investigation into the truth regarding humans, the subject, and the object of human rights within MacIntyre's framework.

The pursuit of the true significance of humans will lead us to examine the nature of their relationship with the community. The liberal, natural law and personalistic rights theories have established the relationship between human persons and the community, prioritizing the former and their rights over the latter, despite their significant differences. The purpose of the community is to protect the rights and well-being of humans. On the contrary, MacIntyre overturns this priority and depicts humans as communal beings whose true selves are identified only through their social roles and relationships within the community. rights cannot be neither natural nor universal because the morality of human rights is contextually situated within the practices and traditions of the community. Certain social institutions and rules are presupposed in the concept of rights and are necessary for rights to exist and be intelligible. While rights theories give primacy to rights, it is obvious that MacIntyre gives it to the community. The dichotomy regarding primacy is also the focus of this work. Due to the necessity of an integral and peaceful political and social existence, the possibility of complementarity between them will also be discussed.

Since there is a global consensus on the practical application of human rights theory, human rights will certainly advance. However, although the concept of human rights has brought about significant and positive changes in our society, it remains a flawed theory. It tends towards individualism. Individuals' social lives have been negatively affected due to the inherent rights language. The concept of the other as someone who must respect and

fulfill my rights claims has become commonplace. Thus, the language of rights isolates the individual from others and diminishes the sense of obligation, duty, and the need for common participation in pursuing the common good. At this juncture, seeking a balanced perspective on human rights is crucial to preserve individuals' integrity. While analyzing MacIntyre's critique, the thesis will also consider whether or not his position can contribute to a more mature view of human rights.

The work is divided into six chapters. As an introduction, the first chapter delves into MacIntyre's intellectual background and sees how MacIntyre's philosophy has developed and matured throughout his life. This section also discusses MacIntyre's critique of the Enlightenment Project and liberalism since it is closely related to his critique of human rights.

MacIntyre's critique of human rights is discussed in the second, the most important chapter of the work. It investigates why and how he objects to and remains skeptic of the topic under consideration. As an introduction, it also discusses the Marxian critique of rights in brief since MacIntyre was initially a Marxian and their critiques have certain similarities. To better comprehend MacIntyre's evolution as a critic, we discuss his arguments in the chronological order of his published works. We also look into 'later MacIntyre', who softens his earlier stance and appears to accept the human rights concept partially.

The third chapter explores the communitarian aspects of MacIntyre's philosophy. His virtue-ethics system, which incorporates the concepts of practice, narratives, tradition, and the common good, is briefly discussed. This discussion will intensify the contrast between pre-modern and contemporary moralities and between MacIntyre's community-oriented morality and human rights theory. This chapter is important also because MacIntyre seems to offer an alternative to human rights with his community-oriented philosophy. He is convinced that reviving the practices and traditions of the past into the present world will produce a moral order in society and will enhance better social living and foster interpersonal relationships.

The fourth and fifth chapters relate MacIntyre with contemporary liberal rights theorists Gewirth and Rawls, respectively. These two chapters concisely summarize the human rights theories of these philosophers and MacIntyre's objections to them. Together with Gewirth's direct response and the contributions of other philosophers, they critically examine these objections. These discussions will demonstrate certain flaws within liberal human rights theories and various issues and ambiguities within MacIntyre's system.

The final chapter views MacIntyre from his traditions; Thomistic and Catholic. It looks at Maritain's natural law, personalistic derivation of human rights, and the concept of human rights present in recent Catholic documents and encyclicals. MacIntyre's interpretation of Thomistic natural law theory and the critique of the personalistic view of human dignity will be briefly discussed with the philosophy of Charles De Koninck, a twentieth

century neo-Thomist, in contrast to the abovementioned theories. Another basic objective of this chapter is to examine whether a synthesis is possible between MacIntyre and his traditions on human rights. For this purpose, we will expand MacIntyre's recognition of rights based on justice and the common good and see the possibilities of establishing its complementarity with the former theories.

Chapter I

THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF MACINTYRE

Alasdair MacIntyre¹, a British American philosopher, is one of the most influential living philosophers and an “[...] eminent contemporary representative of Aristotelian ethics”². He is known for his virtue ethics theory which he developed from the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. He has established himself as a leading contemporary moral philosopher within six decades. He has extended his genius to other branches of philosophy, such as the history of philosophy, political philosophy, philosophy of human sciences, philosophy of religion, and outside the platform of philosophy like business, economics, management, literary imagination, sociology, and psychoanalysis³.

MacIntyre is an ardent seeker of the truth. The quest for the truth took him to pass through various intellectual struggles and doubts which compelled him to embrace different and even opposing schools of thought. F. O’Rourke states: “MacIntyre’s enquiry has led him to visit various schools of thought, framing different periods of his career: analytic, Marxist, Christian, atheist, Aristotelian, Augustinian Christian, and Thomist. These stages are unified by his perennial honesty and deep humanism”⁴. MacIntyre describes himself as an “Augustinian Christian”⁵, a “Thomistic

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1929 and later moved to London. He did the Master’s in Philosophy at the University of Manchester and remained there as a lecturer from 1951 to 1957. Then, he moved to Leeds in 1957 as a professor of ethics. In 1970, he moved to the US and was permanently settled there. He has been a professor of philosophy at many eminent universities in the US including Boston University, Vanderbilt University, University of Notre Dame, and Duke University. Cf. T.D. D’ANDREA, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Ashgate, Aldershot, UK 2006, pp. xvi-xviii. Hereafter, D’ANDREA, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*.

² R. AUDI (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, New York City 2015³, p. 621.

³ Cf. D’ANDREA, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*, p. xiv.

⁴ F. O’ROURKE, *On Having Survived the Academic Moral Philosophy of the Twentieth Century*, University College Dublin Lecture, 10 February 2009. http://www.ucd.ie/news/2009/03FEB09/110309_macintyre.html, accessed June 12, 2020.

⁵ A. MACINTYRE, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1988, p. 10. Hereafter, MACINTYRE, *Whose Justice*.

Aristotelian”⁶, and a “Thomist”⁷. MacIntyre developed his philosophical inquiry through a critical reading of history and from the early period itself, he grew himself as a critic of various modern and contemporary moral theories⁸. The major Western philosophical schools he criticized most are Locke’s social contract theory, Emmanuel Kant’s categorical imperative, and utilitarianism. Cornwell states: “He rejected utilitarianism and its greatest happiness calculation because it appeared to provide no place for genuinely unconditional commitments, and Kantianism because, while recognizing that some actions are morally required or prohibited, it offers no motivation based on our desires”⁹. He has never been alone in his search for the truth. Thinkers like Elizabeth Anscombe, who maintain almost the same line of his thinking, have been companions in his intellectual voyage¹⁰.

1. THREE STAGES OF MACINTYRE’S LIFE

MacIntyre classifies his academic life into three different periods: from 1949 to 1971, from 1971 to 1977, and from 1977 onwards. He writes:

So my life as an academic philosopher falls into three parts. The twenty-two years from 1949, when I became a graduate student of philosophy at Manchester University, until 1971 were a period, as it now appears retrospectively, of heterogeneous, badly organized, sometimes fragmented and often frustrating and messy enquiries, from which nonetheless in the end I learned a lot. From 1971, shortly after I emigrated to the United States, until 1977 was an interim period of sometimes painfully self-critical reflection, strengthened by coming to critical terms with such very different perspectives on moral philosophy as those afforded by Davidson in one way and by Gadamer in quite another. From

⁶ A. MACINTYRE, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Open Court Publishing, Chicago 1999, p. xi. Hereafter, MACINTYRE, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

⁷ A. MACINTYRE, “Theories of Natural Law in the Culture of Advanced Modernity”, in *Common Truths: New Perspectives on Natural Law*, E.B. McLean (ed.), DE: ISI Books, Wilmington 2000, pp. 91-115: 93-94.

⁸ MacIntyre is well-known for his critique of modernity and liberalism. His famous virtue ethics theory and other notions of community, practice, the common good, and tradition are linked with his critical approach to the history of philosophy, particularly modernity, and liberalism. His critique of modernity will be discussed later in this chapter. John Cornwell remarks: “Blending ideas from ancient Greece and medieval Christendom (with an admixture of Marxism), MacIntyre writes and lectures on the failings and discontents of «advanced modernity»”. J. CORNWELL, “MacIntyre on Money”, in *Prospect Magazine*, October 2010. <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2010/10/aldasair-macintyre-on-money/>, accessed June16, 2020. Hereafter, CORNWELL, *MacIntyre on Money*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cornwell states: “He can claim connections with a trio of 20th-century intellectual heavyweights: the late Elizabeth Anscombe, her surviving husband, Peter Geach, and the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, winner in 2007 of the Templeton Prize. What all four have in common is their Catholic faith, enthusiasm for Aristotle’s telos (life goals), and promotion of Thomism, the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas who married Christianity and Aristotle”. *Ibid.*

1977 onwards I have been engaged in a single project to which *After Virtue, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame University Press: Notre Dame, 1988) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame University Press: Notre Dame, 1990) are central, a project described by one of my colleagues as that of writing *An Interminably Long History of Ethics*¹¹.

Even though they are three different periods, they cannot be seen as separate because of certain themes that remained central throughout MacIntyre's career¹². They could be seen as three different stages in the same process of intellectual maturity. We can see a more mature MacIntyre when he arrives in the third stage. The major philosophers who influenced him in these three periods are Marx, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas respectively. To better understand MacIntyre's intellectual growth, we make a threefold division here: 1) Marxism, 2) Aristotelianism, and 3) Thomism.

1.1. MACINTYRE AND MARXISM

Marx was the first philosopher who influenced MacIntyre's philosophical life. Marxian ideologies were introduced to him when he was still young. Even though he did not formulate any direct criticism of natural human rights during this period, his collaboration with Marxism has been an influential factor later in developing the critique. His basic arguments against them are derived from his critique of modern liberalism. And he became a vehement critic of modern liberalism thanks to his engagement with Marxism¹³. His engagement with Marxism lasted from years 1949 to 1971. This period can be divided into three stages: 1) MacIntyre's attempt to reconcile Marxism and

¹¹ A. MACINTYRE, "An Interview with Alasdair MacIntyre", in *Cogito* 5 (1991), pp. 67-73: 68. Hereafter, MACINTYRE, *An Interview with Alasdair MacIntyre*.

John Gregson in his work *Marxism, Ethics and Politics* shares the same opinion: "MacIntyre himself suggests he has traversed through three intellectual periods in his life. Firstly, the period prior to 1971 (nearly twenty years of work), MacIntyre says, is an essentially fragmented and messy period of enquiry in his intellectual history. Secondly, from 1971 to 1977 he describes as a period of 'sometimes painfully self-critical reflection' and, thirdly, from 1977, the contemporary project that he continues to develop". J. GREGSON, *Marxism, Ethics and Politics: The Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds: West Yorkshire (UK) 2019, p. 5. Hereafter, GREGSON, *Marxism, Ethics and Politics*.

D'Andrea also suggests the triple division: "[...] a first in which he is groping for a systematic standpoint from which to address questions in ethics and in the philosophy of human sciences generally; a second, corresponding to the writing of *After Virtue*, which aims at a sketch of such a standpoint; and, a third which seeks to fill in that sketch and respond by accommodation and rejoinder to criticisms of its central tenets and historical claims". D'ANDREA, *Tradition Rationality and Virtue*, p. xiv.

Christopher Lutz, instead, classifies MacIntyre's life into four phases: 1) cultural inheritance, 2) organizing knowledge and experience, 3) epistemological crisis, and 4) traditional development. Cf. C.S. LUTZ, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism, and Philosophy*, Lexington Books, Lanham: MD 2009, p. 172.

¹² Cf. GREGSON, *Marxism, Ethics and Politics*, p. 5. It will be discussed shortly.

¹³ Gregson notes: "One cannot adequately comprehend MacIntyre's contemporary politics without understanding this engagement with Marxism". *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Christianity, 2) a wholly non-religious version of heterodox Trotskyism, and 3) the rejection of Marxism¹⁴.

During his university studies in Manchester, MacIntyre was associated with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). During this period, communism slowly began to be rooted in Britain's political ambience in the background of the Cold War. He was also affiliated with the New Left¹⁵. During his association with the New Left, he published several scholarly articles and essays favouring Marxism¹⁶. Later being dissatisfied, he left the party. However, he continued his interest in Marxism and joined Trotskyism¹⁷ in 1963. In 1959, together with other activists, MacIntyre joined the Socialist Labour League (SLL), a Trotskyist organization in Britain, although he resigned from the organization the following year¹⁸. However, he did not completely leave his affiliation with Trotskyism. He later joined International Socialism (IS)¹⁹.

One of his initial aims was to reconcile Marxism with Christianity. As years passed, the intellectual transition led him to doubt the relationship between these two. Initially, he thought both would be compatible in nature and decided to follow both. However later, he realized that their relationship was ambiguous. He writes: "[...] but later was convinced that for both Party and Church the relationship of belief to organization has become much more ambiguous"²⁰. The association with communism has never been a break from his alliance with Christianity²¹. At the same time, even though he was dissatisfied with some of the Marxian ideologies²², he preferred to be a Marxian than

¹⁴ Cf. P. BLACKLEDGE and N. DAVIDSON, "Introduction: An Unknown MacIntyre", in *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings 1953-1974*, P. Blackledge and N. Davidson (eds.), Brill, Leiden: Boston 2008, pp. xiii-I: xx. Hereafter, BLACKLEDGE AND DAVIDSON, *Introduction*.

Even though there exists such a division, here we do not intend to work on this division. Instead, we examine his engagement with Marxism in general.

¹⁵ The New Left, rooted especially in the Western world, is a political movement. It advocated for social and political reforms and fought for social issues such as justice, rights, and gender equality.

¹⁶ Cf. BLACKLEDGE AND DAVIDSON, *Introduction*, p. xxii.

¹⁷ Trotskyism is a Marxian theory advocated by Leon Trotsky, a Russian revolutionary. It was critical of Stalinism and considered as 'left' within Marxism.

¹⁸ Cf. BLACKLEDGE AND DAVIDSON, *Introduction*, p. xxvii.

¹⁹ Blackledge and Davidson state: "MacIntyre's shift from the SLL to the IS is best conceptualised as a moment in the process through which he deepened his understanding of the concrete implications of his radicalism: first, after his break with the CPGB he moved to the New Left, then towards a form of Trotskyism, and then towards a more vibrant interpretation of Marxism". *Ibid.*, p. xxxv.

²⁰ A. MACINTYRE, *Marxism and Christianity*, Schocken Books, New York 1968, p. viii. Hereafter, MACINTYRE, *Marxism and Christianity*.

²¹ During the engagement with the New Left, MacIntyre was a communicant with the Church of England (CE). Cf. BLACKLEDGE AND DAVIDSON, *Introduction*, p. xxi.

²² MacIntyre found certain religious dimensions within Marxism such as ecclesiology of the party and eschatological doctrines. Cf. P. BLACKLEDGE AND N. DAVIDSON, "Marxists

a Christian because he was convinced that Marxism is more likely to bring radical transformations within society than Christianity.

The experiences with the New Left helped MacIntyre to search for the compatibility between Marxist theory and social practice²³. One of the central ideas of Marxism is that theory and action must be complementary²⁴. What Marx dreamed of is a balanced composition of theory and practice. A systematic theory is necessary prior to action since what humans want and achieve and what they actually get and achieve are contradictory²⁵. But it is not possible under capitalism because the working-class people lose their life in capitalism, and their lives become “something ‘alien’ to them”²⁶. The abolition of capitalism is the only way to resolve these issues, and thereby a society can be created where human lives, activity, and work are respected. It is through class struggle that the capitalist culture is abolished. To bring about a politically self-conscious working class, intellectuals and workers played an important role²⁷. MacIntyre later developed his ideas of social practice from the Marxian idea of practice²⁸.

MacIntyre’s early Marxist essays are stamped with an unmistakable political optimism. Nevertheless, within a few years, a growing pessimism was evident in his works²⁹. As years passed, MacIntyre got dissatisfied with the entire Marxism. By the mid of 1960s, he left Marxism and all other theories of human nature that act as a humanist basis for revolutionary politics³⁰. Although in the early years, he considered Marxism superior and more satisfactory secular worldview than any other of that time³¹, later he turned against Marxism. He realized that Marxism is also another set of incommensurable

and Christians”, in *Alasdair MacIntyre’s Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings 1953-1974*, P. Blackledge and N. Davidson (eds.), Brill, Leiden: Boston 2008, pp. 179-186: 185. He wanted, instead, a kind of free-Church disciple of Marx. D’ANDREA, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*, p. 109.

²³ Cf. BLACKLEDGE AND DAVIDSON, *Introduction*, p. xxii.

²⁴ MacIntyre states: “[...] theory which does not issue in action is mere talk; and that action which is not guided by theory is in the end always condemned to failure”. A. MACINTYRE, “What Is Marxist Theory For?”, in *Alasdair MacIntyre’s Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings 1953-1974*, P. Blackledge and N. Davidson (eds.), Brill, Leiden: Boston 2008, p. 95. Originally published in Newsletter, v. 3, n. 121, 10 October 1959, p. 289; Newsletter, v. 3, n. 122, 17 October 1959, pp. 293-294; Newsletter, v. 3, n. 123, 24 October 1959, pp. 299-300; and Newsletter, v. 3, n. 124, 31 October 1959, p. 309. Reprinted as a Newsletter pamphlet, London 1960.

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 97, 99.

²⁸ See for details, Chapter III, title ‘Practice’.

²⁹ Cf. GREGSON, *Marxism, Ethics and Politics*, p. 3.

³⁰ Cf. BLACKLEDGE AND DAVIDSON, *Introduction*, p. xlv.

³¹ Cf. D’ANDREA, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*, p. 88.

preferences³². Blackledge and Davidson state: “Indeed, by the late 1960s, it appeared that he had ceased to view Marxism as either a science or a guide to action, but rather as just one competing worldview amongst many others”³³. Later, he resigned from the editorial board of *IS* in 1968³⁴.

MacIntyre’s arguments against Marxism are several. Even though he believed that Marxism could bring about solutions to many modern problems, later, he was convinced that orthodox Marxism could not even satisfactorily solve the problems of the working class which it pretended to provide. The cries of the working-class people for freedom are still heard in society. He remarks: “[...] it [Marxism] still leaves the question of a working-class political growth obscure”³⁵. Marxist ideology could not sufficiently theorize the problem of revolutionary practice. Their fragmented practices, instead, restricted the desires of workers³⁶. Ideological inadequacies within Marxism, such as political atrocities of Marxist regimes, unwarranted Marxian atheism, and the Marxian restricted notion of rationality, have been other reasons for his dissatisfaction and rejection³⁷.

Another criticism towards Marxism was that even though he believed that Marxian historical materialism could be used as an alternative to liberal individualism³⁸, later, he realized that Marxian ideologies and reformative methods were inadequate to root out the evils of capitalism and liberal individualism from society. As a theory of history, it failed to bring an ethical alternative to liberalism. He writes: “Marxism itself has suffered from the grave and harm-engendering moral impoverishment as much because of what it has inherited from liberal individualism as because of its departures from liberalism”³⁹.

³² Cf. BLACKLEDGE AND DAVIDSON, *Introduction*, p. xiii.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. xIv.

³⁴ Blackledge and Davidson remark: “Alasdair MacIntyre has resigned from the Editorial Board of *IS*. He offers no extended account of why he is resigning now, rather than earlier or later, nor has he accepted our invitations to lay out his criticisms of the journal in our columns. But resign he has”. BLACKLEDGE AND DAVIDSON, *Introduction*, p. xIv. ‘Letter to Readers’, *International Socialism*, First Series 33 (1968), p. 17.

³⁵ A. MACINTYRE, “Marx”, in *Alasdair MacIntyre’s Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings 1953-1974*, P. Blackledge and N. Davidson (eds.), Brill, Leiden: Boston 2008, pp. 291-298: p. 297. Originally published in M. Cranston (ed.), *Western Political Philosophers: A Background Book*, Bodley Head, London 1964, pp. 99-108.

³⁶ Cf. BLACKLEDGE AND DAVIDSON, *Introduction*, pp. xIiii-xIvi.

³⁷ Cf. D’ANDREA, *Tradition Rationality and Virtue*, pp. 87-88.

³⁸ Cf. MACINTYRE, “What Is Marxist Theory For”, in *Alasdair MacIntyre’s Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings 1953-1974*, P. Blackledge and N. Davidson (eds.), Brill, Leiden: Boston 2008, pp. 95-104: 98.

³⁹ A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 2007³, p. xviii. Hereafter, MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*.

Gregson comments on MacIntyre’s critique of Marxism as it fails to break from liberal theories: “Broadly, MacIntyre’s argument is that Marxism fails to break from the inadequate

MacIntyre continues to argue that Marxism fell back into Kantianism and Utilitarianism. It is because it embodies the *ethos* of modern liberal individualism, i.e., a certain radical individualism is concealed within it. Marx envisaged a community of free individuals who freely agreed to common ownership of means of production. But he did not speak of the basis on which individual associates with others. According to MacIntyre, the utility and abstract moral principles are the basis of this association⁴⁰. Kelvin Knight also thinks the same way. He states: "His deepest charge against Marxism has long been that it failed to sustain any alternative, so that Marxist ethics always succumbed to ideas of either utility or rights"⁴¹.

Although MacIntyre is well aware of the inadequacies of Marxism, to an extent, he accepts the Marxian critique of modern politics, capitalism, and individualism. According to him, Marxist socialism, at its core, is deeply optimistic. For, however thoroughgoing its criticism of capitalist and bourgeois institutions may be, it is committed to asserting that within the society constituted by those institutions, all the human and material preconditions of a better future are being accumulated⁴². He also recognizes that a genuine moral consensus, with different and opposing theories, is difficult in modern politics. Marx identified this social issue. He states: "Marx was fundamentally right in seeing conflict and not consensus at the heart of modern social structure"⁴³. Marxism also keeps individuals within the circle of community without any individualistic entitlements. By saving individuals from the false notion of individualistic human autonomy, it tried to reproduce true human nature and its status in the community without any form of alienation⁴⁴. Together with these, MacIntyre retains some of Marxian social and philosophical ideals, such as the emphasis on social practice, practical reasoning, and the concept of the common good. He remarks:

moral frameworks of liberal modernity, both in theory and practice therefore, like liberal modernity itself, is unable to be morally coherent or politically relevant. Marxism, despite its best efforts suggests MacIntyre, tends to slip into inadequate modes of moral reasoning that are Kantian or utilitarian in form. Due to the conditions of what MacIntyre calls 'moral impoverishment', Marxism is unable to provide any justification as to how people might come to desire socialism [...] In such conditions of moral impoverishment, Marxism is apt to reproduce the manipulative social relations that MacIntyre argues characterizes all moral reasoning within modernity. As Marxists move toward power, argues MacIntyre, they necessarily become Weberian and find nothing but the Nietzschean will to power at their moral foundations". GREGSON, *Marxism, Ethics and Politics*, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Cf. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, p. 261.

⁴¹ K. KNIGHT, "A Radical's Critique of Rights", in *Politics and Poetics, A Journal for Humane Philosophy* (2018), pp. 1-24: 9.

⁴² Cf. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, p. 253.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁴⁴ He writes: "[...] by means of Marxism the notion of human autonomy can be rescued from its original individualist formulations and restored within the context of an appeal to a possible form of community in which alienation has been overcome, false consciousness abolished and the values of equality and fraternity realized". *Ibid.*, p. 261.

There are two points in which I remain very much at one with the Marxist tradition of thought. The first of these is in general wanting to understand reasoning, especially practical reasoning, as giving expression to forms of social practice. It seems to me that in general philosophers when they discuss practical reasoning tend to treat the object of their study as abstract and disembodied, instead of beginning from forms of practice, and understanding how one of the crucial differences between different forms of practices is in the type of practical reasoning which is involved. Secondly, I think that Marxists have much that was relevant to say about the nature and function of the nation-state, and the Marxist critique of the function of the nation-state as a form of government is one which I accept, though in fact I have to think that the Marxist critique is insufficiently radical. What I agree with the Marxists about is that the nation-state is never, and cannot ever be, an embodiment of the common good and that any form of government which was an embodiment of the common good would therefore be in crucial respects different from the nation-state⁴⁵.

1.2. MACINTYRE AND ARISTOTELIANISM

MacIntyre's engagement with Aristotelianism is the second phase in his intellectual life (1971-1984). After leaving Marxism, MacIntyre was searching for a moral system that could offer a more satisfying answer to modern society's problems and he finally found it in Aristotelianism⁴⁶. As discussed earlier, MacIntyre left most of the Marxian ideologies while retaining certain other aspects. Change and continuity have been central themes of MacIntyre's account of Marxism⁴⁷. In the early period (Marxism), MacIntyre was slowly developing his philosophical ideas in his works, but the Aristotelian relation made his works more powerful and illuminating. "The earlier MacIntyre' asks questions while 'the later MacIntyre' answers the questions"⁴⁸. He remarks: "What I now understand much better than I did twenty-five years ago is the nature of the relevant Aristotelian commitments"⁴⁹.

His Aristotelian connection began after leaving Britain for the United States in 1971. During this period, he published his most famous work, *After Virtue*,

⁴⁵ A. MACINTYRE, "Interview with Alasdair MacIntyre", Interview with Thomas D. Pearson, in *Kinesis*, 20 (1994), pp. 34-47: 35.

⁴⁶ He states: "I set out to rethink the problems of ethics in a systematic way, taking seriously for the first time the possibility that the history both of modern morality and of modern moral philosophy could only be written adequately from an Aristotelian point of view". MACINTYRE, *An Interview with Alasdair MacIntyre*, p. 68.

⁴⁷ Cf. GREGSON, *Marxism, Ethics and Politics*, p. 7.

Knight comments on the relation between MacIntyre's Marxism and Aristotelianism: "Both his commitment towards certain aspects of Marxism and rejection of other aspects have been influential in shaping his 'revolutionary Aristotelianism'". *Ibid.*, p. 7. Originally in K. KNIGHT, *Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre*, Polity, Cambridge 2007.

⁴⁸ Cf. K. KNIGHT (ed.), "Introduction", in *The MacIntyre Reader*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1998, pp. 1-27: 1. Hereafter, KNIGHT, *Introduction*.

⁴⁹ MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, p. x.