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## MacIntyre, Thomism and the Contemporary Common Good\*

*Abstract:* Alasdair MacIntyre's criticism of contemporary politics rests in large part on the way in which the political communities of advanced modernity do not recognize common goals and practices. I shall argue that although MacIntyre explicitly recognizes the influence of Jacques Maritain on his own thought, MacIntyre's own views are incompatible not only with Maritain's attempt to develop a Thomistic theory which is compatible with liberal democracy, but also relies on a view of the individual as a part which is related to the whole in a way that is incompatible with Maritain's understanding of the spiritual individual or person.

### 0. Introduction

Alasdair MacIntyre criticizes the new natural law theory of Germain Grisez and John Finnis in part by arguing that these thinkers neglect the traditional Thomistic emphasis that human beings are naturally sociable and consequently directed by the natural law to the common good (MacIntyre 2000, 108–109). This criticism of Grisez and Finnis is standard and has been developed by several philosophers (Fortin 1982; Hittinger 1987; Dewan 1996). MacIntyre's own version of this criticism is distinctive in that he appeals to the way in which Jacques Maritain presents the Thomistic view even though Maritain is regarded by many as someone who neglects the role of the common good in Thomistic political philosophy. In this paper I shall attempt to situate MacIntyre in the context of Thomist debates over the common good and show that some of MacIntyre's own arguments for the importance of the common good draw out a weakness in Maritain's account, namely that Maritain does not sufficiently address the distinction between incomplete and complete communities. I will also argue that this weakness is present even in MacIntyre's account, although he provides the arguments whereby the weakness can be identified. Finally, I will argue that MacIntyre more clearly than Maritain recognizes the problems inherent in contemporary accounts of the common good but perhaps overemphasizes the failure of the contemporary nation-state to provide an institutional framework in which this common good can be achieved.

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## 1. MacIntyre in the Context of Earlier Thomists on the Common Good: Maritain and De Koninck

Why does MacIntyre appeal to Maritain's understanding of the common good? In the middle of the last century, Jacques Maritain attempted to develop a Thomistic political theory which would be compatible with liberal democracy (Maritain 1947; 1951). In general, MacIntyre and Maritain seem incompatible at least insofar as they give apparently incompatible accounts of the relationship between the common good and human rights (Wallace 1999). MacIntyre probably cites Maritain because of the way in which Maritain argues against the standard liberal account of the common good. Maritain attempts to support liberal democracy with an alternative understanding of the political common good which is substantive and in the Thomistic tradition. He tries to show the compatibility between the Thomistic tradition and aspects of liberal political practice by arguing that for Thomas Aquinas the individual has priority over the state. Maritain's argument partially rests on a distinction between material individuals and persons. Material individuals can be part of a whole. For example, an individual leaf is part of a tree, and a wolf is part of a pack. In both cases there is a different use of "part", but in neither case is the part a spiritual individual, or a person, whose good is superior to that of the whole. Maritain argues that human beings are such persons who are superior to every whole, including that which is the political community. Maritain (1947, 63) quotes Thomas Aquinas (Aquinas S.T., 1-2.21.4): "Man is not ordained to the body political according to all that he is and has." Unlike wolves or leaves, humans are not merely parts of the universe but instead persons who are directly ordered to God and not entirely ordered to any community. Maritain moves from the premise that humans are persons to the conclusion that each human has an individual good which is superior to that of any whole.

MacIntyre is indebted to Maritain's account, perhaps because of the way in which Maritain argues that the common good is not merely an aggregate of individual goods. MacIntyre (2000, 115) cites a passage in which Maritain (1947, 45–56) makes just this point. Moreover, his citation ends just before the passage in which Maritain (1947, 57) claims that the citizen who sacrifices himself for the political common good loves his own soul more than he loves the common good. Nevertheless, MacIntyre seems to be sympathetic to this aspect of Maritain's approach. For instance, in *Dependant Rational Animals* (1999, 109) he argues that even though there is no conflict between the individual and common good, "[...] the good of each political individual is more than the common good".

Maritain's precise understanding of the relationship between the individual and common good was never clear. But one view that can be fairly attributed to him is that the person has priority over the common good. Fr. Eschmann (1945) defended this position as that of Maritain. This view was attacked by Charles De Koninck (1943, 1945) as inconsistent with Thomas Aquinas' thought. Like Maritain, De Koninck emphasizes that the human being is a person who is directly ordered to God. But De Koninck draws our attention to the fact that for Thomas God is the common good of the universe. Consequently, De Koninck

interprets differently the text from Thomas which Maritain quotes. According to De Koninck, Thomas is saying that humans are only partially ordered to the political common good because the political common good is not the ultimate end of human beings. The ultimate end is God, who is the common good of the universe. The citizen is only partially ordered to the common good because there is a further common good. The common good of the political community is not the ultimate end of human life, but neither is it incomplete in the way that the common good of a family or trade group is. In other words, the political common good is not the best and highest because there is a higher common good, not a higher individual good.

It seems to me that De Koninck has the better of the argument as a historical and textual matter. But that is not the end of it. Maritain defends the contemporary liberal nation-state against totalitarian alternatives, while recognizing deficiencies within the liberal understanding of the common good as an aggregate of individual goods. Consequently, he provides an alternative account of the common good which he thinks is compatible with liberal democracy, is distinct from liberal notions of the common good, and is an alternative to totalitarian views whereby the common good of the contemporary nation-state is simply speaking superior to that of the individual. In contrast, De Koninck defends a more accurate Thomistic understanding of the common good's supremacy, but he does not so clearly recognize the problem and danger of confusing the political common good with the goals and institutions of the contemporary nation-state. De Koninck is correct to emphasize that there needs to be a complete community whose good is superior to the individual, but he does not indicate what form this complete community should take in a contemporary context.

Why is this dispute between De Koninck and Maritain important for situating MacIntyre's political thought? Even though he seems to adhere to Maritain's position about the supremacy of the individual good, MacIntyre's criticism of the contemporary nation-state provides additional reasons to reject Maritain's position, while attune to the problems which De Koninck overlooked. MacIntyre uses Maritain's account of the common good in order to provide an alternative to the account given by the new natural law theory. He similarly criticizes the contemporary nation state for failing to attend to the common good in a way that is consistent with Maritain's worries about totalitarianism. Although his discussion is similar to Maritain's in that it does not fully address the distinction between complete and incomplete communities, he argues that there must be some political forum which performs two functions which on a traditional Thomistic reading usually belong only to the complete community. First, it should order human practices to the good life as a whole. Second, it should be able to claim allegiance and even self-sacrifice from its citizens. These two issues in some way point to De Koninck's position, which is that there is a need for a complete community which can fulfill these functions because its common good is greater than the individual goods of its citizens. It seems to me that these arguments help to show both why De Koninck's view is correct and also show why it is so difficult to apply his theory to contemporary institutions.

What sort of common good is required by MacIntyre? It seems to me that

among his many criticisms of the contemporary nation-state, there are two that most clearly set conditions for a better understanding of the common good. First, MacIntyre (1996, 303; 2006, 163) argues that the contemporary nation-state requires for its survival that there be police and soldiers who are willing to die for it. Nevertheless, since the nation-state presents and justifies itself as a kind of utility company which provides material benefits for its members, this image does not present the soldier or policeman with something to die for. Consequently, unlike the contemporary nation-state, the political community must be able to justify that its citizens be willing to sacrifice themselves and even die for the common good.

Second, MacIntyre (1998, 120–135; 2006, 182–185) argues that the contemporary nation-state must put value on different kinds of practices and indeed on human life. For instance, the establishment of safety regulations entails some cost. Bureaucratic managers often set the cost and choose between different cost-benefit options. But the nation-state also claims to be neutral about the value of different ways of life and even the value of human life. Consequently, unlike the contemporary nation-state, the political community must be able to order different practices and consider their worth as constitutive of different ways of life. He does not argue that the nation-state does not attempt to justify self-sacrifice or in fact show preferences for some activities over others. The argument is that the nation-state does these activities even though by its very nature it is unsuited for them.

MacIntyre suggests that the political common good can only be achieved in different local communities which are ordered among each other as distinct social wholes (1998, 246–252; 1999, 108–109, 134–135). Such a community would be distinct from the nation-state even though it will have to use the nation-state and even at times side with it in conflicts. He is thinking of (MacIntyre 1999, 134) “[...] workplaces, schools, parishes, trade union branches, adult education classes, and the like”. He is not clear on how the different common goods and activities of these communities should be organized or the extent to which they would require self-sacrifice. He mentions that politics is the art of integrating the various practices, but he does not say much about what the political unit is or who the political authorities are.

One way of distinguishing between the different common goods is by distinguishing between the common goods of incomplete and complete communities. Although neither of MacIntyre’s claims about the political common good directly entail that the common good is simply speaking greater than the good of each political individual, Thomas’ explanation of them does. Following Aristotle (*Politics* 1.2.1252a34–1253a39), he thinks that the political unit is a complete community with a common good which is greater than that of its members (Aquinas *Sent. libri Politicorum*, A73–A80). Aristotle and Thomas contrast these complete communities with local communities which are not self-sufficient, such as households and villages. This self-sufficiency helps to create a political community which is concerned not with particular practices, but with the good life as a whole.

The political community’s concern with living well makes it into a commu-

nity whose common good is greater than the individual or private good of its members. Thomas claims that the individual dies for this political community because he recognizes that such a community's common good is better and should be loved more than his own good (Osborne 2005, 73–94). Moreover, the political community has authority to regulate and coerce human action because it is a complete community and is not a family or a faction. In the thirteenth-century, Thomas adopted the common description of the moral virtues as “political virtues” because he shared the then widely-held belief that the life of virtue is the natural goal of the political unit (Lottin 1949, 103–115). For Aristotle, this complete community was the Greek *polis*. But, thanks to MacIntyre, we can ask: What other historical forms can such communities take? What distinctive powers does a complete community have?

## 2. Complete and Incomplete Communities

According to Aristotle and Thomas, since the goal of political life is living well, the political community has authority which does not reside in any particular community. Thomas (S. T., 1–2.90.2; 91.1) emphasizes that only the leader of the political community can make laws; other authorities, such as fathers, merely admonish. Moreover, only the political community can use deadly force. This role of the political community is interconnected with the self-sacrifice of its soldiers and public figures. Presumably Thomas had in mind kingdoms, city-states, and empires or perhaps parts of empires. What form could it take in the present day? This difficulty in identifying the political unit was addressed by Francis Vitoria, who is important for our purposes because he attempted to apply the Aristotelian and Thomistic view to the developing states of the sixteenth century.

Vitoria more or less straightforwardly follows Thomas and Aristotle by distinguishing between incomplete communities and the political community. For example, he repeats Thomas' point that the commands of fathers are not in themselves binding as laws although he adds that they can be made binding by civil law (Vitoria 1991, 43–44, 158). But recognition of the public authority depends more on the practical issue of whether an authority in fact possesses coercive force. For instance, Vitoria (1991, 18) argues that the family is not a complete community because by itself it cannot resist violent attack. Thomas and Aristotle seem to focus more on the connection between living well and the resources provided by the complete community. Nevertheless, Vitoria is correct to emphasize that no community is self-sufficient if it cannot defend itself.

The issue of defense for both Vitoria (1991, 297) and Thomas (S. T., 2.2.40.1) is connected with the use of coercive force and indeed capital punishment within the community. For instance, the argument that war may be waged justly only by a political authority is connected to the argument that the political authority can justly put someone to death. A private individual cannot wage war or punish criminals. He cannot justly intend another's death precisely because he does not have political authority. He can admonish but his admonishments, unlike laws, do not have coercive force. In contrast, the leaders of the complete community

have authority over what is necessary for a good life, and consequently they can defend it from internal and external enemies.

Vitoria (1991, 299–302) discusses more clearly than Thomas does that there can be difficulty in determining what a complete community is. He (1991, 42) states that the marks of a complete community are the possession of its own legal system, policies, and authorities. Nevertheless, a community may be dependent in some respects on a larger community and still possess the customary right to wage war. Vitoria's emphasis is mostly on custom. For instance, he (1991, 42) argues that a tyrant's laws bind because the community consents to the unjust leader. This view seems to me at least on the surface to depart from Thomas (S. T., 1.2.92.2) in that Vitoria emphasizes that those who have power are legitimate authorities. His focus on custom raises difficult questions about whether tyrants, oligarchs, and mobs can exercise legitimate political authority. Nevertheless, it also allows him to apply the earlier theory to his own political context. One interesting feature of Vitoria's theory is that he suggests that the individual complete communities can also be considered part of that commonwealth which is the whole world. Unlike Aristotle, he (1991, 40) allows for more than one complete political common good.

Is custom sufficient for identifying a complete community? In a passage cited by MacIntyre, Maritain (1947, 48–49) suggests that there may never have been any complete community as described by Aristotle and Thomas. Moreover, he notes that the contemporary nation is much less such a community than pre-modern political communities were. He seems to think that human history is moving from smaller common goods to the wider common good of human civilization. Whereas Vitoria seems to think that the whole world is a larger complete community which does not take away the completeness of the smaller communities, Maritain is unclear about how the smaller communities relate to this wider community. He does not describe what institutional forms are required for the flourishing of this wider common good. He recognizes that different societies are more connected than they were at one time, but also that there are still deep divisions between them. It seems to me that his difficulty also results from his recognition of two paradoxical facts, namely that the complete community is essential for politics and that the contemporary nation-state cannot take the place of this complete community.

As mentioned earlier, MacIntyre draws attention to the fact that the contemporary nation-state cannot justify its ordering of activities and its demand for the self-sacrifice of some citizens. Consequently, although the nation-state has taken on the role of the complete community with respect to coercion and war, it does not seem to be the same as a complete community in the Aristotelian or Thomistic sense. Even if custom was once a good guide for identifying complete communities, it may no longer be. MacIntyre shows the difficulty of politics in the present social order. He suggests that the common good should in some sense be reduced to the common goods of various local communities. We have seen two of his arguments for the position that the nation-state cannot fill the role which was played by the *polis*. I shall use the rest of this paper to argue that these same criticisms show that the local communities which he mentions

cannot fulfill this necessary role because they are incomplete and cannot provide the classical conception of the political common good. MacIntyre's "workplaces, schools, parishes" and the like cannot deliver the political common good because they do not order the lesser common goods to producing a greater common good and cannot justify the coercion that is necessary in the political arena.

### 3. Communities and Practices

Perhaps MacIntyre's primary criticism of the contemporary social order is that it does not provide a favorable environment for those practices which constitute a good life. In particular, he states that the nation-state claims to be neutral about practices while at the same time it privileges one set of practices over another (MacIntyre 1998, 237–239; 2006, 160–166; Murphy 2003, 160–166). On his account, the practice of politics is to order the other practices with an eye to the human good. In the contemporary context, this political practice must be done in the context of the local community. I shall argue that the local communities which he mentions are not much more fit to order diverse practices than the contemporary nation-state is.

He agrees with Aristotle that some acts are done for their own sake and may be consequently constitutive of the agent's ultimate end. Both Aristotle and MacIntyre describe intellectual enquiry and contemplation as an activity which can be done for its own sake. But there is an important distinction between MacIntyre's understanding of practices and Aristotle's account of human action. MacIntyre writes:

"By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." (1984, 187)

MacIntyre extends the notion of practice to include more activities than Aristotle would (Knight 2007, 154–159; MacIntyre 2006, 34). For instance, although MacIntyre states that bricklaying and planting are not practices, he holds that architecture and farming are. He thinks that although such productive and agricultural practices are related to goods which are external to them, they also have internal goods. For instance, there is a difference between constructing a house well and making money through home construction. Similarly, there is a difference between cultivating a piece of land and making as much money as possible from the cultivation of land.

On MacIntyre's account, what might otherwise be described as servile and merely useful activities are practices if they are constitutive of a certain kind of life. He does not argue that such practices have only internal goods. But for his account to hold, these practices must at least have internal goods. This

distinction between internal and external goods then allows one to distinguish between the product's excellence and that of the agent. The product's excellence is judged as an exterior good and the agent's excellence is judged in accordance with the internal good. These criteria are not identical. For instance, an excellent chess player may lose a game of chess, and a poor chess player may once play a brilliant game. Perhaps more interestingly, a good builder or farmer may be a failure at making money. This distinction between the two kinds of excellence is similar to Aristotle's distinction (Nicomachean Ethics, 2.4.1105a21–b5) between virtue and art, in that the former is judged by the agent's goodness whereas the latter is judged by the product. But Aristotle seems to think of artistic and virtuous activities as distinct. At least one may read him after this fashion, and it fits in with his position that certain arts are not suitable for citizens. In contrast, MacIntyre draws our attention to the different kinds of goodness which may belong to one and the same practice.

MacIntyre emphasizes that in the contemporary nation-state there is a usually masked conflict between alternative practices. For instance, the politics of the contemporary state considers family farms not as providing the basis for a way of life but rather as a means of production. Consequently, debates over farming become technocratic; but deciding policies in this fashion the nation-state implicitly assumes that farming is not a practice which should itself be valued. The liberal nation-state is ideologically incapable of considering different alternative ways of life. Similarly, different parts of the contemporary state assign different values to human life. For instance, a certain number of accidental automobile deaths is considered to be an adequate tradeoff for the use of automobiles. But in another context, juries can award large amounts of money for an individual accidental death. In still another context, a certain amount of respect is given to the family of the dead soldier or police officer. MacIntyre writes (2006, 184), “[a]nd so in each particular context in which different possible courses of action which have potentially fatal consequences for some person or set of persons are evaluated, practical reasoning and decision-making will be guided by different norms.” The respective government agencies must set some value on human life if they are to follow their model of rationality. Nevertheless, the value is arbitrary since there is no overarching goal or good by which these different values can be decided.

It is important to recognize that the arbitrariness of the nation-state's decisions is not the ordinary arbitrariness which is present in nearly every determination of human law. For instance, there is usually arbitrariness whenever a particular community assigns a punishment to a crime, since the punishment could usually in reason be a little more or a little less. In general, there are often different means to the same end, and the political authority must decide in favor of one rather than another. MacIntyre's concern is that there is a deeper arbitrariness which includes not just the means but also the goals which are constituted by the practices and to which the practices are directed.

MacIntyre holds that the *polis* could integrate the various practices because there was no incompatibility between individual and civic virtue. The difficulty for his interpretation is that it is unclear how Aristotle holds together the pursuit

of moral and intellectual virtue. MacIntyre (1988, 103–104, 142–143) claims that the *polis* aims at some non-political goals, among which is contemplation. But if contemplation is non-political, how is it possible to justify the pursuit of political virtue over contemplation? At least in certain exceptional circumstances an agent would need to make this choice. For instance, in a difficult war any citizen should contribute to the war effort if possible, even if it means that he cannot develop intellectual virtue. Although Aristotle does not have difficulty in explaining how the moral virtues are subordinated to the *polis*, it is not clear how and whether the intellectual virtues can be so subordinated. In short, the conflict between the different practices remains problematic even for a political authority which recognizes a substantive common good.

Although Aristotle's position on this issue has been interpreted in many ways, Thomas Aquinas (S. T., 1–2.66.3) holds that moral virtue makes someone good simply speaking, whereas intellectual virtue makes him good only in a certain way. Consequently, the moral virtues have a certain priority in the face of a conflict. His position emphasizes the importance of the political community. Moreover, it explains why there is no conflict between the virtues themselves. The moral virtues perfect someone as a part of that whole which is a complete community. In turn, the goal of this complete community is the combined virtuous activity of its members.

It seems to me that MacIntyre's approach neglects the distinction between art and virtue and also weakens the tie between moral virtue and the complete community. For example, Thomas would regard fishing or farming as arts which can be practiced virtuously. The virtue of justice is often exercised through the performance of productive arts. The political community orders these arts and makes possible the virtuous activity of its citizens. Each art and activity is viewed in light of its participation in the complete community's common good. In contrast, although MacIntyre suggests that every individual is a part of different wholes which are ordered among themselves, he does not explain what this order is or why one common good would be preferable to another.

It is not difficult to imagine cases in which the individual's different roles conflict with each other. For example, a member of a fishing crew might win or find some money. If he does so, it may be appropriate for him to buy needed equipment for his boat. But he may also owe money to debtors or need it for military action. In addition, his parents may be poor and need money for food. In such a case the individual must possess the virtue of prudence in order to distinguish between the different incompatible acts which are available to him. Moreover, this virtue must be practiced in the context of his political community's customs and laws. Fishing well or looking after his parents contributes to his well-being only insofar as he fulfills this role as part of the complete community. The subordinate roles can be coordinated only if the individual has one wider role which includes the others.

MacIntyre uses the incommensurability of different goods and practices to argue for the inadequacy of the contemporary nation-state. But if there is no complete community then there will still be an incommensurability of practices. He (1999, 134; see also MacIntyre 1998, 248; Knight 2007, 183–186) suggests

that contemporary politics should be practiced in the context of local communities such as “workplaces, schools, parishes, sports clubs, trade union branches, adult education classes, and the like”. However, none of these local communities is concerned with the good life as a whole. Unless there is some complete community, the local community’s weakness in ordering practices is similar to that of the contemporary nation-state.

#### 4. Death and the Political Order

The concern of the complete community for living well is connected with the ability of the political community to justify that its members risk their lives for its preservation. Thomas assumes that the good citizen is willing to die for the political common good because the common good of the complete community is, simply speaking, greater than the good of an individual member. Because MacIntyre argues that the contemporary liberal nation-state cannot justify such self-sacrifice, it seems likely that his argument would be based on the inability of the liberal nation-state to use the priority of its common good as a justification. However, he does not clearly follow this approach. Although his diagnosis of the problem shows an inconsistency in the rhetoric of contemporary politics, his own solution faces similar difficulties.

In at least two places (1996, 303; 2006, 163) MacIntyre compares dying for the political community with dying for the telephone company. The argument is that although the liberal nation-state may at times use the rhetoric of older political communities, in reality it justifies its authority by supplying services with the taxes which it raises. The problem is that its services may justify the payment of taxes, but they cannot justify the sacrifice of one’s own life. There are no services which could pay for such self-sacrifice. Nevertheless, in order to provide such services the nation-state must rely on police officers, firemen, and soldiers. In order to perform their jobs well, members of these professions must at times risk death and even die. Consequently, the liberal nation-state uses the rhetoric of patriotic self-sacrifice which had meaning in an earlier context. Therefore the nation-state’s rhetoric is divided between what it presents as its rational justification and what it requires for self-preservation. If the nation-state did not engage in the rhetoric, it would cease to exist. But it cannot provide a rational justification for self-sacrifice. There is therefore a built-in inconsistency in the very preservation of the contemporary nation-state (see also MacIntyre 1984, 18–20).

MacIntyre describes how this difficulty has been and can be resolved. First, he appeals to traditional communities in which there was no division between the individual good and the common good. He (2006, 163) states that in such communities, “[...] caring for the common good, even to the point of being willing to die for it, was no other than caring for what was good about oneself”. Second, he appeals to a wider conception of one’s own good which includes dependants and one’s future disabled self. In this context he writes (1999, 143), “Those who perform such tasks on behalf of the community are asked by the community to be prepared, if necessary, to risk their lives, but to ask this can

only be justified, if those who accept this risk can be confident that they, if disabled, or their dependants, if they die, will receive adequate care.” The second point develops the first insofar as it appeals to a community in which the dominant mode of rationality is not rational self-interest but instead includes the mutual giving and receiving of goods.

The strength of MacIntyre’s approach is that the model of mutual giving and receiving can be applied to a variety of local communities. Its weakness is that it does not recognize the importance of a complete community which orders and directs the practices of these communities. There seems to be a parallel in his treatment of the *polis* and his treatment of these communities. In MacIntyre’s view, it seems that self-sacrifice is similarly justified in both contexts because both kinds of communities include the individual’s good within the common good. The parallel between the two kinds of community is plausible because there are many cases in which an individual is willing to die for another member of his family, his partners in work, and even for friends. Such self-sacrifice for the good of another does not require that the other’s good be preferred to one’s own. Indeed, Thomas (S. T., 2–2.26.5) argues that self-sacrifice in this context is merely an example of having a greater love for the spiritual or perhaps even bodily good of one’s neighbor over one’s own bodily good, and that fundamentally one cannot love the spiritual good of one’s neighbor more than that of oneself. Consequently, MacIntyre’s treatment of self-sacrifice both corresponds to its existence in local communities and can be theoretically explained on Thomistic grounds without having to posit a greater love for one’s neighbor over oneself. The mere willingness to die does not by itself indicate the subordination of one’s own good to a greater good.

The weakness of MacIntyre’s account can be seen in his departure from Thomas, who argues that even self-sacrifice for another individual is ultimately explicable in terms of the subordination of both persons to a wider common good. In the case of charity, one individual can prefer another’s bodily good to his own bodily good because they both either in fact or in principle prefer God as a common good to themselves. Another person is loved through charity insofar as he is loved for the sake of God as a shared or shareable supernatural common good. Similarly, Thomas holds that self-sacrifice for the political community is justified because the individual’s good is subordinated to the common good of the political community. An individual is ordered to the political community as a part is ordered to the whole.

It seems to me that MacIntyre’s neglect of the complete community’s common good leads to a misunderstanding of practical reasoning which is also present in Maritain. Both Maritain and MacIntyre emphasize that there is no real conflict between the individual and the common good. Nevertheless, both suggest that we enter the moral life through deliberating about our own good. MacIntyre (2000, 109) writes that he is moving beyond Maritain by stating that to learn the natural law “is to inquire of ourselves and of each other ‘What is my good? What is our common good?’” In this passage and similar passages (1998, 145; 2006, 35) he may merely be placing deliberation about the individual good on par with the common good. But this view seems similar to Maritain’s position

(1942, 66–85) that the first moral movement is about what is good for me and then perhaps only implicitly proceeds to God. Lawrence Dewan (1996) has criticized Maritain for not recognizing that the very beginning of the moral life is based on a natural inclination for a good which is greater than that of the individual. Although Dewan discusses Maritain in a theological context, it seems to me that his criticism would also hold in the political realm. To begin with one's individual good already assumes too much. It is at least arguable that we first experience ourselves as parts of a wider moral order and act in the context of goods which are greater than our own. Although both Maritain and MacIntyre criticize contemporary individualism, they do not leave behind the individualistic claim that moral reasoning begins with an enquiry into one's own good.

A resolution of this issue would require more work in moral psychology. We would have to ask: What good can we will? What does it mean to will another's good? What does it mean to will another's good more than one's own? It seems to me that many contemporary discussions are influenced by theories of the will which have their roots in late medieval and contemporary philosophy, and which are themselves highly unlikely. But for the purposes of this paper we need only indicate that both Maritain and MacIntyre use parts of Thomas' political philosophy and yet do not appeal to his theory that there is a natural inclination to will the common good more than one's own individual good.

The difficulties which MacIntyre raises involve self-sacrifice, but an equally serious and related set of difficulties involve coercion and the willingness to punish and even kill others for the common good. This latter difficulty brings into sharper relief the difference between complete and incomplete communities. In our impoverished contemporary context, it may be hard to explain but it is still not difficult to understand how a parent may be willing to die for the well-being of her child, or that a soldier may choose death for the preservation of the nation-state. But suppose that someone murders the child. Who can exact justice? Both Thomas and Vitoria hold that the individual has no coercive authority over another individual. If a parent kills his child's murderer, then the killing is vengeance, whereas if the representative of the community does so, then the killing is an act of justice.

MacIntyre discusses several kinds of local communities, but none of them obviously should have coercive force. For instance, if two fishing crews are in conflict, they should both submit to the authority of the judge. Otherwise justice would belong to the more ruthless and stronger fishing crew. If two families disagree over a property line, there must be some higher authority to resolve the issue. Otherwise, the disagreement may be settled through a feud. It seems to me that MacIntyre's view makes it difficult to distinguish between revenge and justice. But this distinction appears to be a natural part of human political life, since it is based on the distinction between the just exercise of authority and violence. At any rate, the distinction is made in very diverse political contexts by Aristotle, Thomas, and Vitoria.

The justification of coercive force within a community is connected to the justification of such force in the relations between communities. MacIntyre does

recognize that members of local communities will have to participate in conflicts between nation-states, but he does not indicate how this participation would occur. Should an individual fishing crew decide whether to sign up in a war against totalitarian aggression? Should such deliberation be assigned to a sports club or the members of a factory?

Thomas and Vitoria use the fact that the public authority can legitimately execute criminals to argue that the public authority can legitimately use deadly force against external enemies. An individual citizen may be injured by another complete community, but this injury does not justify a private war against that community. Moreover, a complete community must be able to force its citizens to engage in war on its behalf. Self-sacrifice for the common good is something that can be required of individuals by the community. Except in exceptional circumstances, it is hard to imagine how MacIntyre's local communities could justify such coercion. Each of his local communities is concerned with a particular set of practices. In contrast, because the complete community is concerned with the good life as a whole, it would have the authority to regulate and even coerce its members' activities.

Although MacIntyre is correct that the liberal nation-state cannot justify self-sacrifice on the part of its soldiers and police, it seems to me that it similarly cannot justify the coercive practices of these public officials. Contemporary debates over capital punishment nicely indicate this problem. In general, capital punishment is criticized or defended as a kind of vengeance on the part of the victims rather than as an exercise of justice by the public authority. Different positions on capital punishment in this context are based on different positions concerning whether revenge is justified (Long 1999). The distinction between private vengeance and public justice is blurred precisely because the liberal nation-state can pretend to be indifferent on many moral issues. Although capital punishment highlights the problem, there is a similar difficulty with every exercise of coercive force. No community can exist unless someone is willing to capture and even kill others for its preservation. The police could not exercise their authority if at some point there were not the threat of deadly force at least in the apprehension of criminals. The liberal nation-state claims such authority even though it cannot justify it.

Although MacIntyre is correct to indicate that the liberal nation-state cannot justify the sacrifice of its member's lives, he does not draw out the problems inherent in justifying coercion. But such coercion is equally necessary and provides another example of how the liberal nation-state for its very preservation must rely on rhetoric which it cannot justify. More importantly, although he emphasizes how individual local communities can instantiate a common good, he does not state why these local communities can have coercive force. He consequently does not indicate how the practice of politics can be instantiated in such communities. The difficulty is that he does not recognize that a complete community has an authority which can never be possessed by the local communities which he mentions. The difference is between practices of different groups within a community and living a good life as a whole. The issue of self-

sacrifice belongs to the more important distinction between the common goods of incomplete communities and that of a complete community.

## 5. Concluding Remarks: Just How Bad Are Incoherent Nation-States?

To the best of my knowledge, the application of the Aristotelian and Thomistic understanding of the complete community to a contemporary context has not been successfully carried out in any detail. To their credit, both Maritain and MacIntyre raise difficulties which shed light on this problem. Both recognize the historical character of political institutions, and both refuse to identify the complete community with the boundaries of the contemporary nation-state.

Maritain's treatment of this issue may be undermined by his concern to develop a philosophy which is opposed to twentieth-century totalitarianisms. Although he recognizes the inadequacy of contemporary accounts of the common good, he does not provide a successful alternative account. Instead, he limits the common good to the temporal realm and in contrast to the Thomistic tradition he argues that human beings are not fully parts of that whole which is the political community. More helpfully, he recognizes that there is a historical problem in that even the Greek *polis* probably could not fulfill the function which Aristotle wishes to assign to the complete community. Moreover, he shows that philosophers should be concerned to some extent with the community of all persons on not just particular political or ethnic communities. Nevertheless, he seems to think of the nation-state as not being inherently problematic, but rather as providing a partial instantiation of those institutions which further the common good.

According to MacIntyre, there is an inherent flaw in contemporary political institutions as such. On account of its size, the contemporary nation-state cannot allow for the communal decision-making and training in virtue which is required for a successful local community. Moreover, he points to an inconsistency between contemporary political rhetoric and practice. The liberal nation-state cannot order practices and justify self-sacrifice precisely because it presents itself as being in large part neutral with respect to competing ways of life. This putative neutrality has its roots in modern political philosophy and contemporary bureaucratic practice. At least part of the difference between MacIntyre and Maritain may result from the different theories to which the two figures are opposed. Maritain is concerned with providing a philosophical foundation for liberal democracy as opposed to totalitarianism, whereas MacIntyre wishes to unmask the pretensions of liberal democracies.

I have argued that MacIntyre in part points to a difficulty which is caused by a contemporary failure to distinguish between complete and incomplete communities. In particular, MacIntyre's critique of liberal democracy shows that there is a need for a complete community which has the authority to order practices and justify self-sacrifice. Although Maritain recognizes that the concept of a complete community is important to political thought, he does not see how it is problematic. He avoids the problems by in part adopting contemporary in-

dividualism and arguing that historically speaking the complete community has taken many forms. In contrast, MacIntyre appeals to the Greek *polis* and tries to assign its function to a variety of local communities such as trade unions, schools, and sports clubs. It seems to me that although he correctly sees the need for a complete community such as the *polis*, these local communities cannot now fulfill its directive and coercive functions. The inability of such local communities to do so is not a feature of local communities as such, but it does seem to be a feature of the way that they must exist in the culture of advanced modernity. Consequently, it may be impossible to reconstitute local politics and even to establish republican governments which allow for significant political participation by the citizens. I am not denying that small republics provide a better environment for human flourishing. But in the culture of advanced modernity we may have to settle for an impoverished political context.

Even though MacIntyre (MacIntyre 1998, 237) may be largely correct that “Politically the societies of advanced Western modernity are oligarchies disguised as liberal democracies”, it could be that MacIntyre’s republican and at times seemingly utopian views blind him to the importance of the contemporary nation-state and its institutions. We should note that the present liberal democracies are not instances in which bad regimes are disguised as good ones, but those in which bad regimes are disguised as incoherent ones. Moreover, as MacIntyre recognizes, states in Western modernity are difficult to characterize because there is an arbitrariness in the very possession and exercise of power. The oligarchs are not entirely in control because there is a sense in which no one has control (MacIntyre 1970, 79–81). Unlike Maritain, MacIntyre describes this problem well by noting the incoherence in the very idea of the liberal nation-state and the relationship between rational justification and its exercise of power. But his recognition of the disparity between contemporary political practice and rhetoric may lead to a too easy dismissal of contemporary institutions.

Does the contemporary nation-state perform functions which indicate that it is a defective but complete community? Vitoria’s identification of the complete community as one which exercises coercive authority does not allow us to recognize which institutions are just and legitimate. Nevertheless, he brings out the fact that, regardless of the rhetoric, each large community needs such institutions. Although these institutions may not express the true justification for their functions and may contain inherent inconsistencies, their role in administering justice and preserving some order may in fact fulfill many roles of the complete community and consequently deserve their citizens’ allegiance. MacIntyre’s criticism of the liberal nation-state shows the need for further conceptual and empirical work in political philosophy. First, what role do our political institutions in fact play? We cannot answer this question merely by appealing to contemporary political rhetoric, but we need both to look at how these institutions operate and to compare them to their historical counterparts. Second, to what extent can injustice be compatible with a just regime, and if a regime is unjust, to what extent may it have authority and deserve allegiance? These two questions need to be addressed if we are to give an adequate account of what is

right or wrong with contemporary institutions, and if we are to decide whether and how we can repair or replace them.

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