

Diskussion/Discussion

Kommentar zu A. MacIntyre: The Claims of 'After Virtue' (Analyse & Kritik 1/84)

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Modernity and Conflict

Abstract: In this essay, I seek to provide a plausible alternative to MacIntyre's bold and provocative conception of modernity. I contest his claim that modern social life is marked by (1) the absence of any shared paradigm of the good, tradition, and social morality; (2) rationally interminable normative conflict; (3) characteristically instrumental power-oriented social relations; and (4) the impossibility of genuine human achievement and virtue. I argue that modern conflict is rooted not in the absence of a shared paradigm of the good or the moral; but rather in a structure of social irrationality built into the modern conception of the good as the achievement of individual recognition in and through socio-economic activity. I argue that while this conception has affirmative dimensions and does permit genuine virtue, the way it is culturally interpreted and institutionally embodied in modern capitalist society reproduces destructive scarcities in human recognition and the degradation of ordinary persons' capacity for virtue. Where MacIntyre argues for a restoration of the pre-modern (Aristotelian) conception of the moral to be realized in spheres of activity external to socio-economic life, I argue for an immanent critique of modern liberal individualism which would humanize the meaning, conditions, and results of labor and livelihood.

Alasdair MacIntyre has written a fascinating book which has already found an enthusiastic audience well beyond the boundaries of professional philosophy.¹ After Virtue (AV) mounts an eloquent indictment of modernity - 'liberal individualism', which MacIntyre finds at the core of contemporary social life and philosophy. The argument of the book is that modern life suffers from a catastrophic loss of normative order which modern philosophy reproduces in theory and is thus unable to comprehend or resolve in practice.

Cut off from tradition, historical understanding, any shared conception of the good life and virtue, modern individuals stand condemned to interminable moral disagreement, manipulative social relations, a mindless instrumental rationality, and lives devoid of common ends. Modern social theories (Nietzsche, Sartre, Goffman, Weber, Rawls) present an image of

the rational self as an autonomous chooser of morality - what is to count as the good and the right. This image denies persons the only resources which might allow their moral conflicts to be rationally resolved and some semblance of a unified social life to be restored to modernity. These resources are an immersion in tradition, the recognition of concrete socio-historical identity, and a shared social conception of the good-for-man. They can only be made available to us on the basis of a revived Aristotelian conception of morality - purged of its untenable metaphysical underpinnings and elaborated in a new way. We require a conception of morality which restores pride of place to the classical notion of virtue and the good life, properly situated in the framework of social practices involving shared ideals of human excellence and achievement valued in and for themselves. In practice, such a conception does not speak to the possibility of transforming modern political and economic life - which in their very nature constitute terrains where virtue and moral relations are impossible. Rather, MacIntyre's conception is taken to imply "the construction of local forms of community" which might constitute outposts of civility and virtue in the dark ages which has otherwise descended upon the centers of social life (AV 244-5).

The resulting argument is remarkably bold in its sweep, its uncompromising negativity toward modern life and philosophy, and its positive vision of restoration. Defenders of 'liberal individualism' and modern philosophy will find gaps, silences, and distortions in MacIntyre's reasoning and in the matter of whom he chooses to discuss and how fairly he treats their views. On this basis, some may set aside the more important task of coming to grips with his largest claims about the nature of modernity. My aim is to engage these claims and in the process suggest what I take to be a more plausible picture of modern life, its rationality and irrationality.

I will understand MacIntyre's theory of modernity to turn upon the following contentions:

- (1) Ancient and medieval ('traditional') society had what modern society has lost but needs: a large measure of agreement concerning (a) 'the good for man' and (b) a conception of reason which allows shared knowledge of this good and virtue (AV 49-59, 154-168, 190-209).
- (2) Because modern society lacks any shared conception of 'the good-for-man', moral discourse degenerates into emotivist self-expression marked by rationally interminable disagreement concerning the proper ends and principles of morality (AV 6-34, 60-75).

(3) In particular, modern economic, political, and bureaucratic activity is so permeated by instrumental power relations that the distinction between manipulative and moral relations breaks down. (AV 24-6, 29-31, 70-5, 81-3)

(4) As a result, modern economic, and bureaucratic practices exclude the possibility of virtue. (AV 169-89, 210-26)

(5) The disorder of modern society can only be overcome on the basis of a neo-Aristotelian conception of morality on which the good-for-man is "the life spent in seeking for the good life for man and the virtues necessary for the seeking ..." (AV 203-5)

My own argument will advance the following theses:

(1) Given MacIntyre's wholly negative diagnosis of modern normative rationality, a certain skepticism envelops his whole project. How can he possibly maintain and/or justify a 'neo-Aristotelian' conception of the 'good-for-man' while both rejecting Aristotelian (or medieval) metaphysical and epistemological assumptions and not providing or even suggesting any surrogate for them? (Section I below)

(2) MacIntyre's contrast between traditional and modern society is implausible for two reasons. First, on evidence he provides, ancient society exhibits quite fundamental normative disagreement irresolvable by its established canons of rationality. (Section I)

(3) Secondly, on evidence I provide, modern conflicts within and between persons do not express a melange of conflicting individual wills and subjective conceptions of the good and the right. Rather they express irrational scarcities of access to the good life and the opportunity to develop significant virtues, as these are commonly defined within modern culture - in a setting where nearly everyone aspires to, competes for, and is held responsible for their achievement. Thus the normative disorders most characteristic of modern society stem not from the absence of a cultural conception of the good, but rather from a structure of social irrationality built into this cultural conception and the institutional framework informed by it. (Section I)

(4) MacIntyre misunderstands modernity because he takes the liberal political theory of writers such as Rawls and Dworkin to reveal the essential truth concerning modern culture and society. He fails to consider the possibility that modernity (liberal individualism) does not constitute the dissolution of tradition but develops its own traditions concerning the proper goals, means, and virtues underlying personal and social life. (Section II)

(5) MacIntyre is mistaken to interpret modern economic practice as a sphere of exclusively instrumental relations between the managers and the managed. The mark of modern management involves a transition from instrumental to normative rationality, though the relation between the two is subtle and dialectical. (Section III)

(6) MacIntyre's account of virtue fails to establish his view that modern economic life excludes virtue in principle. The irrationality of modern economic life consists rather in the fact that the dominant conception of virtue, taken together with established institutions, make virtue unnecessarily scarce and the forms of it available to most people, devalued and compromising. (Section IV)

(7) Finally, MacIntyre is correct to argue that the conflicts of modern life call for a reflection upon and reconstitution of our notion of the good. But contrary to his approach, this reflection requires not a return to the pre-modern paradigm, but rather an analysis and immanent critique of the aspirations and ideals underlying modern social life. Furthermore, the substantive conception of the good he suggests is no less abstract and arid than the liberal political theory he rejects. No plausible reconstitution of our conception of the good and just can detach the modern subject from his or her understanding of and concrete position within economic and political relations. (Section V)

1. Modernity and Conflict

In this section, I explain and criticize MacIntyre's contrast between traditional and modern society, and open the way onto an alternative account.

For MacIntyre, the modern world is essentially characterized by a normative disagreement which is ubiquitous, ultimate, and irresolvable by reason. (AV 6-10, 231-37) These conflicts are rationally irresolvable because the engaged parties presuppose incommensurable normative concepts (e.g. freedom versus equality, rights versus utility, etc.). Typically each of these concepts derives from a different historical tradition of discourse which once held sway but now endures as a fragment of modern culture, feebly co-existing in tension with fragments of other traditions. (AV 9-10) In the resulting 'emotivist culture', while moral language continues to presuppose objective standards in practice it is used 'emotively': to express the speaker's allegiance to his/her own particular ends and to manipulate the hearer(s) into accepting these ends. (AV 11-21) But the ends of persons are hopelessly at odds. There are no rational agreements sufficient to ground the universal 'goodness' of certain ends, and thus, to

ground the identifications of one set of human qualities as 'virtues' and some set of rules as 'obligatory' or 'right'. (AV 57-9)

In sum, for MacIntyre, moral language presupposes claims to objectivity which can no longer be redeemed in the modern world. The redemption of this presupposition depended on the context of Aristotelian and later, Christian assumptions which were abandoned with the rise of modern science and social theory. (AV 49-59) On these assumptions, all human beings have a natural 'telos', a highest good which is knowable a priori by reason. Given man's 'telos' the rules of morality can be objectively grounded as those which any individual must follow in order to realize his or her true nature. To say what someone ought to do will make an objectively true or false statement, depending on its conformity with man's 'telos'. (AV 50-2, 56-7) In the medieval synthesis, this telos and the truths concerning virtue are reinterpreted as expressions of God's will, completely knowable as part of God's revelation, as well as through a priori reason. Within this framework of assumptions, moral conflicts are rationally resolvable, human beings have common ends and rules, human life exhibits a coherent normative structure in which individuals cultivate the virtues implied by the good life for man in his various roles and dimensions. (AV 32, 114-36) Modernity is the story of how this framework of assumptions lost its foundation in faith and reason without relinquishing its hold over the imagination. Thus, moral language continues to raise claims of objectivity; but without any belief in a knowable good-for-man, the question "What is it in virtue of which a particular moral judgment is true or false, reasonable or unreasonable, objective or subjective?" comes to lack any clear answer. (AV 57) Freed from teleology, religion, a priori reason, tradition, and hierarchy - modern men and women lack the basis for rational moral consensus.

The first problem I will raise involves a certain skepticism concerning MacIntyre's 'neo-Aristotelian' project. Clearly MacIntyre does not urge a return to the self-certainties of Aristotelian a priori reason, let alone the faith of the medieval world. On the other hand, on his account, the modern age lacks any notion of rationality for adjudicating between persons' incompatible conceptions of the good. In this situation, what rational force can MacIntyre's own vision of the good possibly have? On his own analysis, the world we have lost embodied a unity of metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical conceptions (AV 50-52) expressed in the doctrine of man's telos. How can MacIntyre hope to retrieve any semblance of its ethical content and force without resurrecting some surrogate of its metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions? This opens a large lacuna in his project: what he delivers - a vision of the good and virtue - is in principle unequal to his own diagnosis of what modernity has lost but needs, a conception of reason on the basis of which there could be rational consensus on the ends, virtues, and principles of social life. On

what basis can he defend his view of the good and virtue as something other than the emotive self-expression he finds everywhere else?

But beyond this methodological worry, what are we to make of MacIntyre's bold and striking contrast between ancient and modern society? An initial problem arises from his identification of the ancient world with Aristotle's interpretation of it. He nicely states the problem himself, which he never adequately resolves:

"Aristotle ... simply offers too simple and too unified a view of the complexities of human good. If we look at the realities of Athenian society, let alone of Greek society as well as the rest of the ancient world, what we in fact find is a recognition of a diversity of values, of conflict between goods, of the virtues not forming a simple, coherent, hierarchical unity. Aristotle's portrait is at best an idealization and his tendency is always ... to exaggerate moral coherence and unity." (AV 147)

At issue here is MacIntyre's central contrast between the modern world in which moral conflict is ubiquitous and rationally interminable, and the classical world in which moral consensus reigns and what normative disagreements remain, are resolvable by reason. MacIntyre seeks to show that the Aristotelian conception of the good life and virtue captures the nature of pre-modern society: individuals are born into fixed social identities and roles each of which rigidly dictates the privileges and duties, virtues and vices, proper and improper ends attached to that identity and status; e.g. as courage is a central virtue to the warrior-king and fidelity is the key virtue between kin. (AV 115-19, 126-7, 137-40) But, as MacIntyre's own account suggests, if his paradigm of consensus fits the heroic age of Homer, it breaks down with the advent of the Greek polis, and especially the commercial politicized Athenian democracy of the fifth century B.C. (AV 130-35) The normative conflicts of this period are richly expressed in Plato, Aristophanes, Sophocles, etc. where characters such as Socrates and Thrasymachus or Callicles, Antigone and Cleon, Odysseus and Philoctetes, embody rival conceptions of human nature, the good, the virtues, the proper ends of the polis, etc.

Of course Plato and Aristotle held to a conception of rationality and the good which, they argued, could resolve such conflicts. But, as they well recognized, the argument needed to be made precisely because there was no socially embodied rational discourse sufficient to resolve e.g. Socrates' debate with Thrasymachus, or for that matter, his executioners.

Of course, few will deny that in some deep sense, the modern world is marked by more and different kinds of moral disagreement and obstacles to rational consensus than what existed in ancient Athens. But MacIntyre is driven by the desire to establish an absolute contrast. So consider how he tries to save this contrast in the face of his recognition that in the world

of Sophocles there are equally rational (heroic or moral) allegiances to incompatible goods and virtues - respect for the laws of the city versus the religious duty to bury a slain brother. (AV 133) According to MacIntyre, in the pre-modern universe of Sophocles "... to choose (one) does not exempt me from the authority of the claim which I choose to go against" (AV 134). Against Kant, there are things which I ought to do that I cannot do, hence the tragedy of the human condition, for the ancients. In sum, on MacIntyre's account, even where there is normative conflict between incompatible goods or virtues in the ancient world, because both are assumed to be equally genuine and compelling, the conflict evidences "objective moral order" and underlying agreement (AV 34-6).

On the other hand, in the modern world of 'emotivist culture', such tragedy is excluded because in choosing one over another good the chooser constitutes his or her moral world and discredits the alternative. MacIntyre may be right to note that this paradigm of modern morality and the modern 'self' is embodied in philosophers such as Sartre, Weber, Nietzsche, etc. But once again it is quite another thing to read the character of the modern world off of modern philosophers - just as Aristotle's conception is no mirror image of Athenian life. Why?

The modern world has its own large share of tragic conflicts and choices between equally powerful, sacrosanct goods and virtues. The poor and unemployed who are forced to choose between the dignity of self-reliance and the obligation to feed their children - with welfare or food stamps if necessary; women (and increasingly men) torn between the obligation or good of child-rearing and the good of career or work outside the home; workers pulled between the 'good' of upward mobility (vocational or professional achievement) and loyalty or comradeship with one's class, co-workers, family, or friends; the members of the under-class of western society pulled between the good of being 'somebody' (at least among one's peers) and remaining within the minimal bounds of law and morality, if only to retain the respect and affection of one's kin; the professional or craftsman pulled between the standards internal to the profession and the wider standards of success and achievement in a possessive market society. There can be little doubt that the activities and achievements enumerated above are widely and normally assumed to constitute genuine goods in modern society - though there is of course disagreement concerning their relative importance and meaning. Nonetheless, individuals and groups forced - often by irrational social circumstance - to choose between them, experience their situation as terrible double-binds with tragic dimensions.

Indeed, it is precisely such socio-cultural double-binds that underlie a set of phenomena in modern society that are far deeper and more striking than the moral disagreement thematized by MacIntyre. I refer to the wide-spread

existence of bad conscience, depression, despair, suicide, escape into alcohol and drugs, the sense of hopelessness and failure, stressful and violent patterns of life, the emergence of scores of new therapies, religions, techniques, organizations which promise to shore up people's wrecked self-esteem. These phenomena, on my reading, reflect the presence, not the absence in modern society of moral order and of a culturally established set of goods and virtues widely assumed to constitute the core of a good life. The tragedy of modern society is the sense that many people have that in seeking or securing one good they have abandoned others no less essential to a life of dignity and moral worth. Like Sophocles' characters, they cannot do and be everything which they ought!

Thus the Sartrean self-legislating autonomous ego is as remote from the self-understanding of modern men and women, as Aristotle's paradigm of the good life is unrepresentative of the complexities and conflicts of Athenian life. As a result his contrast between modern and pre-modern society is unconvincing. The contrast cannot be between moral consensus and disagreement, reason and unreason, an agreed-upon definition of the good life and a melange of purely subjective identifications of the good. Let me suggest a more plausible first approximation of the contrast.

Modern society depends on the assumption that every human being is in principle capable of fulfilling many more and different roles, duties, and standards of goodness than were culturally and institutionally available to (a) any individual or rank within pre-modern society and especially (b) its lower rank-slaves, commoners, serfs, etc. Furthermore among these new roles those directly relating to economic life, activity, and performance take on a central function in the evaluation and recognition of persons, denied by traditional society. The explanation of the increased moral and social conflict characteristic of modernity is not the absence of a shared cultural conception of the good life or criteria of rational discourse. It is rather that modern persons seek to achieve certain commonly valued human goods and virtues connected to their underlying aspiration for the good of human recognition and respect - itself absolutely fundamental to modern life. They seek this good in a framework where the established cultural criteria and social bases of human recognition are in part irrational: mutually inconsistent and unnecessarily scarce. The result is that in many spheres of modern social life there is an ongoing struggle for scarce recognition and respect - one of whose embodiments is normative conflict over the 'proper' or 'just' distribution and allocation of the major means to and symbols of recognition and dignity. Because modern society also assumes that every person has the 'rational' capacity to 'think for oneself' and initiate moral argument, this conflict is in part embodied in arguments which challenge or defend the legitimacy of the practices which distribute the means, opportunities, and symbols of success, achievement, the good life, as these are understood in modern society.

Traditional society lacks this kind of moral disagreement for two reasons. First it lacks the particular conception of the good, the egalitarian assumptions, and the institutional pre-requisites presupposed by a universal competition for scarce goods and recognition. Secondly, it lacks the epistemological assumptions underlying modern democratic culture and rationality which make it proper for anyone to originate a moral challenge to this or that aspect of social practices.

Finally, on the conception I am suggesting, there is much less reason to suppose that modern normative conflicts are rationally irresolvable. For on my conception, modern liberal-democratic society constitutes a cultural tradition within which individuals commonly seek the good of recognition and respect for their human capacities and implicitly affirm or contest social practices and norms from this standpoint. While this tradition (like all others, AV 206-7) leaves a large scope for disagreements, it also leaves a large scope for their rational resolution. Apt examples are the great social movements in England and America during the last 150 years - movements to secure basic civil and political rights and human recognition for the wage-earning class, the poor, women, racial and ethnic minorities, the handicapped, etc. MacIntyre sees modern protest as inherently irrational: protesters "can never win an argument" or "be rationally effective" because their normative conceptions are "incommensurable" with those of others (AV 69). On the contrary, the great protest movements of our day - the black civil rights movement, the struggles for the equality of women, etc. are rationally effective precisely because they appeal to the common normative aspirations underlying liberal-democratic culture; and because they rationally undermine the assumptions which have excluded some group from the capacities, interests normative identity presupposed by the ideal of full recognition and respect.

2. Modernity and Tradition

MacIntyre's 'emotivist' picture of modernity gains initial plausibility because it is rooted in familiar examples of contemporary moral disagreement. (AV 6-8, 227-29) Opposing parties assume incompatible normative concepts and values in dialogues marked by the alleged absence of any established rational procedures for deciding between them. In one of his examples, a disagreement concerning the existence of a moral right to public education or health care actually expresses the parties' conflicting subjective attitudes towards equality of opportunity or justice, on the one side, and pure market freedom or negative liberty, on the other side. (AV 7) MacIntyre takes the prevalence of this kind of disagreement between parties neither of whom is demonstrably guilty of irrationality to support his picture of a modern 'self' and 'culture' based on emotivist self-expression.

MacIntyre is wide off the mark in holding that the parties to modern disagreements are typically expressing their allegiance to incompatible and unshared conceptions of the moral. On the contrary, these disagreements typically take place within a given historical tradition of discourse, a specific cultural horizon of shared values, mores, and assumptions. In the above example, the appeals to 'fair equality of opportunity' and 'market freedom' draw on foundational social values within liberal-democratic culture, shared in some degree by all participants in modern social life. Furthermore, while these two conceptions exhibit tension, they are both essential and interrelated components in the legitimation of modern social life. Indeed, the narrative story of modern liberal thought is in part the story of how these two principles have been rationally reinterpreted and mediated in light of new conditions, attitudes, and beliefs.

To return to MacIntyre's example, it is the story of how the liberal conception of market freedom (and human liberty in general) came to be reinterpreted so as to imply equality of opportunity - a universal right to public education. Or to contest another of MacIntyre's examples (AV 227-9), the story of the liberal-democratic tradition is one of how the market notion of just entitlement (the right to whatever you have earned and nothing more or less) came to be reinterpreted to make room for just entitlements based on need plus the inability to earn income through no fault of one's own. It is thus misleading to treat the normative concepts in MacIntyre's example as 'incommensurable' ones for which "our pluralist culture possesses no method of weighing" (AV 229). For they are interrelated components of one and the same tradition; they have been weighed and reconciled (up to a point) within its history, so that in the present period human dignity and freedom are widely understood to require a construal of marked freedom which already presupposes some measure of equality of opportunity and the legitimacy of certain sorts of welfare-rights. To be sure, the real is not yet rational! But MacIntyre has generated a spurious 'irrationality' by tearing these normative conceptions from their historical and discursive context and placing them in abstract opposition.

MacIntyre misses the core of modern liberal-democratic capitalism, because he sees modernity as lacking in its own cultural tradition(s); 'emotivist' culture represents the dissolution of tradition and culture. In his modern world, all traditions have been undermined, leaving unrelated and incommensurable conceptual fragments of past traditions: these provide the conflicting guises worn by emotive self-assertion. But modern capitalist society develops its own distinctive cultural self-understanding and tradition of discourse to replace pre-modern traditions. Of course, there are tensions and conflicts within this tradition - between its leading conceptions of market freedom, fair equality of opportunity, private property, equality before the law, basic human rights, individual dignity, economic

goods as rewards for performance, the work-ethic, consumption as the realm of true individuality, etc. But the existence of such tension, disagreement, and reinterpretations is a mark of all tradition and especially healthy ones, according to MacIntyre. (AV 206-7) The basic principles of liberal individualism, whatever the conflicts between them, are mutually interdependent parts of one and the same story through which modern capitalist society understands and justifies itself. Of course, different groups and historical agents have different versions of how the story goes and should go, not because they have different conceptions of what counts as a good happy ending, but because they want to be the ones who achieve the happy ending. They are thus drawn into struggles and disagreements over the concrete meaning of liberal moral principles in an effort to gain, improve, or protect their relative access to the scarce means and symbols of the good life.

What is the story told by modern liberal individualism? Every individual, regardless of position and status at birth is supposed to be equally free and able to rise to and succeed in any social position and status whatsoever, depending only on his or her will, character, talent, ambition, and luck. Moreover such achievement is supposed to be possible without violating the established standards of law and morality, on the one hand, and those implicit in the life of family, friendship, and community, on the other. Everyone is supposed to be able to live a life of dignity, respect, and some measure of individual achievement. This is the point of equality before the law, democratic rights, equality of opportunity, private property and market freedom, civil liberties, public education, etc. Each individual can legitimately aspire to a life of substantial achievement, or at least, conscientious performance in the basic areas of modern life - economy and the sphere of personal relations - family, friends, lovers, etc. At the very least, one hopes to enter into economic life, hold a decent, secure, respectable job, and emerge with enough to support oneself and one's family 'properly'. At most, one hopes to attain a position involving significant activity, challenge, influence, skill, authority, stature, and social value, which puts one and one's family in a position to enjoy 'the finer things of life'. Of course not everyone can succeed at this level; but everyone can at least attain the more modest level of a minimally decent and respectable life through honest toil. Some individuals will fail: there are temptations, obstacles, set-backs; bad luck and personal misfortune; injustice and villains; human weakness, imprudence, vice. Nonetheless, it is clear to all what counts as a happy ending and what counts as a tragic ending; what counts as success, failure or a tolerable, minimally respectable form of life; who counts as a somebody, who counts as a nobody. The issue is not whether MacIntyre finds this to be an edifying or degrading vision of human life. It defines the dominant cultural self-understanding of modernity, the most basic normative content of liberal individualism. It is a closed book to MacIntyre.

MacIntyre is seriously misled by taking liberal political theorists such as Dworkin and Rawls to reveal the truth about modern society. In their conception of the legitimate state, he discovers the core of modernity: "the thesis that questions about the good life for man or the ends of human life are to be regarded from the public standpoint as systematically unsettlable" (AV 12). As far as the state is concerned, "a community is simply an arena in which individuals each pursue their own self-chosen conception of the good life" (AV 182). By this route, MacIntyre confuses (1) the emergence of the modern separation between state and civil society, the public and private spheres with (2) the absence of normative order, an underlying conception of the good, common cultural ideals within civil society. Clearly just because the modern state is not supposed to legally impose a conception of the good on individuals as private agents, it does not follow that their wider social and economic relations do not embody and sustain a shared conception of the good, success, achievement, etc.

Worse, MacIntyre apparently succumbs to the liberal political fiction of a disembodied state, equally compatible with all logically possible aims and values its citizens might choose. But the particularity of the modern state - its laws, policies, functions, constituencies, and representatives - only make sense given its location within the larger framework of modern institutions and culture. Even though the modern state does not legally enforce a given conception of the good life, it does enforce a set of institutional arrangements in which certain goods are available on certain terms and others are not. To take the obvious example, the modern state is more hospitable to a conception of the good in which private property is essential than to a medieval conception in which it is a corruption and hindrance.

The emergence of modern civil society, the private sphere, may create the illusion that there is no common cultural conception of the good underlying modern society. Echoing Mill's ideal in On Liberty, civil society is seen as a sphere of individuation in which persons cultivate a variety of diverse forms of life and incompatible conceptions of the good. In the contemporary world of the mass market, consumerism, alternative life-styles, diverse forms of entertainment, etc., MacIntyre's picture of an emotivist culture seems entirely at home. As the car bumper stickers in California publically announce, the good life is by turns, sailing, skiing, sex, family, camping, etc., or simply "whatever turns you on".

I interpret this as an expression of a shared cultural notion that the good life is increasingly a life in which one has the resources - the time, money, energy, possessions, and virtues - required to cultivate a life of leisure beyond the provision of the necessities of a decent standard of living for oneself and/or one's family. One must earn the right to a life of leisure as a sign of and reward for hard work, professional accomplish-

ment, successful business, prudent planning or saving, etc. Furthermore, a life of leisure must not be bought at the price of deprivation of the necessities of a decent standard of living - ample housing, clothing for oneself and family, adequate health care, etc. Thus leisure activities possess a cultural meaning entirely apart from what they reveal concerning personal tastes and ideals. Persons' engagement in the sphere of leisure activity reveals that they have attained some measure of individuality: they are not mere beasts of burden chained to the law of economic necessity. They have a life of their own, a private life in which their individuality and values can be affirmed. Different life-styles, forms of consumption, and leisure activity signify one's degree of freedom from economic necessity, the level of economic or professional achievement which allows one to attain this or that good among 'the finer things of life'.

Independently of how we evaluate modern forms and meanings of consumption (leisure, etc.), individuation in a private sphere represents one of the affirmative dimensions of modernity. For all MacIntyre's negativity towards the modern conception of the state he does not favor an abolition of the private sphere, the state-civil society duality. For all his negativity towards modern self-expression, it is inconceivable that he rejects the legitimacy of divergent personal preferences and normative judgments concerning the relative goodness of different human activities and social practices in his sense (e.g. football, chess, physics, music, etc., AV 175).

In any case, my main points are these. Even if one were to reject the goodness of modern forms of consumption or leisure, the affirmative character of modern individuation in a private sphere would not thereby be undermined. Secondly, even if one can regard this private sphere as exhibiting conflicting conceptions of the good (poetry vs. pushpin), such disagreements in the modern context presuppose a more fundamental agreement: that it is good-in-itself to have such a choice within leisure, if one has earned it and otherwise achieved a secure and respectable standard of living. The very choice itself embodies a measure of success and recognition that is good-in-itself, quite apart from what in particular one chooses to do or be in leisure. Apart from how one evaluates the particular criteria of success and recognition operative in modern bourgeois consumption, the root notion that freedom from economic necessity, self-determination beyond work in a realm of leisure, is a good-in-itself, a mark of successful individuation, constitutes an affirmative dimension of modernity.

The social irrationality implicit in modern society consists not in the existence of a private sphere nor even in the increasing role of consumption in modern forms of individuation. Rather it stems from the scarcities in individuation imposed by the dominant cultural criteria of success and re-

cognition reproduced in bourgeois society. In order for some classes to be free to appropriate the power, wealth, privilege, and standard of life associated with scarce success, respect, and recognition, others must end up without the minimal prerequisites of modern individuation, in its affirmative dimensions: the opportunity to perform socially valued work, to achieve a humanly adequate, respectable standard of living (on existing cultural standards), and to exercise those major cultural options which could be available to all and are pre-conditions for a wide range of human activities and virtues (public parks, libraries, transportation, theaters, recreational facilities, museums, etc.).

In this section, I have argued against MacIntyre that modern liberal society constitutes its own cultural tradition, implicitly based on a foundational conception of the good as the achievement of recognition and respect.² I have maintained that the major social bases of recognition relate directly and indirectly to economic agency - one's relative position, power, autonomy, independence, status, etc. in the hierarchical worlds of work, market exchange, and leisure. These dimensions of modern recognition define distinct criteria of achievement and respect - which can come into conflict and in any case, justify scarcities of access to this fundamental good. As a result, there are normative conflicts over the importance of one sort of good as against another - e.g. self-employment over income, home-ownership over the freedom of travel, autonomous work over professional status, etc. Nonetheless all of these goods are commonly valued as widely recognized signs of or means to human accomplishment and respect in the modern sense. Such normative conflicts reflect tensions and irrationalities within the modern paradigm of the good, not conflicting subjective conceptions of the good itself.

To prevent confusion, I am not claiming that the major goods for which people strive in modern society are valued exclusively or self-consciously as means to individual achievement and recognition. On the other hand, I would insist that in the modern setting, one's capacity to 'intrinsically' enjoy these goods - including the process of achieving, sharing, and using them with others - presupposes the firm conviction that in one degree or another they signify human accomplishment in one's culture. By implication from what he says in criticism of utilitarianism (but elsewhere forgets) MacIntyre would appear to agree with my thesis: "... what we find generally pleasant and useful will depend on what virtues are generally possessed and cultivated in our community ... man without culture is a myth." (AV 150)

Up to this point, I have contested MacIntyre's contention that modernity is distinguished by the absence of any shared standard(s) concerning the good. Nevertheless, the existence of a shared cultural conception of the good life, especially where its means and symbols are scarce, does not

imply a shared cultural conception of law, morality, and virtue. If everyone is primarily concerned to maximize his or her own share of the scarce means and symbols of individual success, what room is left for any common understanding of morality or virtue? On MacIntyre's picture of economic life - the core terrain of modernity - the answer is 'None!'. MacIntyre's emotivist picture may be correct for morality even if it is inadequate for the good. In the following section, I take up this question.

3. Modernity and Normative Rationality

In this section, I will criticize MacIntyre's view that modern economic life is essentially based on instrumental not normative or communicative rationality. For MacIntyre, modern economic life is essentially a domain of conflict, not consensus. The central character in modern life is the manager whose "bureaucratic authority is nothing other than successful power" (AV 25). The manager uses moral discourse (if and when it is used at all) solely in order to manipulate employees' behavior on behalf of managerial ends - maximal efficiency, profit, growth, etc. (AV 22-6) Presumably, employees have their own ends - security of employment, the wage-package, tolerable conditions of work, etc. - on behalf of which they seek to manipulate management when and if they can. The social relations of production are shaped exclusively by the balance of power, not by the justification, legitimation, or shared recognition of the ends of either party or the authority of management.

The first problem with this familiar view is that it obscures the historically given moral limitations upon the pursuit of self-interest commonly presupposed by economic actors and the very possibility of any viable order of market relations. As Durkheim stressed, orderly bourgeois market relations presuppose a morality of contractual obligation, voluntary exchange, private property, prohibitions against force or fraud, etc. Put differently, the recourse to instrumental rationality only counts as 'rational' - in the larger normative sense - within certain established moral boundaries and spheres of social life. In contemporary life, a resort to physical intimidation, firing without cause or on the basis of racial or sexist bias, child-labor, etc. are commonly regarded as illegitimate in employee-employer relations (which is not to imply that they are not done). Furthermore legitimate forms of instrumental behavior in the economic sphere are commonly perceived as inappropriate in the relations between friends, students and teachers, parents and children, political leaders and their constituencies, lovers etc. Despite the penetration of the commodity-form into broader areas of social life, there remain things which are illegitimate to buy and sell - persons, votes, national monuments, child-labor, civil or political rights, immunities from the duties of

citizenship, etc. While some of these reflect contemporary moral developments, others are presupposed by the very possibility of modern market relations in a liberal-democratic framework.

MacIntyre's exclusive focus on explicit normative disagreement and conflicts of interest masks the silent but ever-present horizon of shared moral assumptions which bound these disagreements. These moral assumptions are rarely self-conscious or subject to scrutiny. One reason they are not challenged in ordinary life derives from the fact that they are supported by relations of force and intimidation, as well as by deep-seated assumptions concerning what is possible and necessary in social life. Finally, the stability of this normative framework undoubtedly depends on the ability of most people to act within the framework and yet achieve at least some of the things associated with the good life or their self-interest. Nonetheless, to recognize these sorts of connections between the dominant normative framework of bourgeois society and the dialectic of power and self-interest is not to reduce or dissolve the former into the latter.

Above all, this normative framework is not an object of that individualist self-legislation or emotivist de-legitimation which MacIntyre finds everywhere in modern society. Modern persons do not announce to themselves or others, explicitly or implicitly, that it is legitimate to hire, buy, or sell children, to kill uncooperative employers or employees, to buy votes, etc. Some try to accomplish such things in secret. But if and when they are discovered, either they try to convince everyone - including themselves - that the deed never occurred or was never intended, or they suffer guilt, remorse, embarrassment, public disgrace, professional humiliation.

MacIntyre's picture of modern society falls into an uncritical affirmation of the conventional 'either-or' dichotomies of the classical sociological tradition: modern society must rest either on conflict or consensus, power or legitimacy, self-interest or morality, blind self-assertion or historical tradition. Clearly, the problem is to comprehend how the two sides shape one another, under a variety of historical conditions, without imagining that either side ever is or could be entirely reduced to the other. Following Habermas, I would argue that all (human) social life is mediated by a consensually shared framework of normative meanings and rules however much this framework is conditioned and distorted by relations of domination. Its logic is shown in the fact that it shapes behavior and discourse in many specific contexts of ordinary life independently of instrumental calculation, the immediate threat of force, or manipulation.

But suppose we set aside the moral framework which bounds economic rationality. Is it then plausible to picture the internal relations of economic enterprises as purely instrumental? To be sure, modern employer-employee relations are fraught with conflict because capital and labor, as well as

various middle strata (technical experts, professionals, etc.) bring distinct and in many contexts, antagonistic, demands to the labor process. But these demands cannot be understood as the rational mask worn by emotivist self-expression. For many of the demands brought to the labor process receive a large measure of legitimacy from the broader framework of modern bourgeois-democratic culture. If it is legitimate for management to seek 'within certain limits' maximum productivity and profit (what else is business for?); it is equally legitimate for employees to seek 'within certain limits' security of employment, a decent wage package, tolerable working conditions, fair treatment in matters relating to promotion, over-time, vacation, etc. Of course precisely which ends are legitimate for labor to bring to the labor process, as well as what count as the reasonable limits upon the pursuit of profit represents the results of great historical struggles and debates, and profound cultural transformations in the normative framework of bourgeois society. But once again, it is important to remember that MacIntyre sees such internal stresses and strains, challenges and transformations, as part of any living cultural tradition. (AV 206-7)

In any case, because the ends of management and those of labor exhibit a greater or lesser degree of antagonism, depending on particular conditions, there is a need to sustain some coordination between them if the enterprise is to function at all. In historical fact, capital takes the route of coercion and manipulation, and employees resist with their own strategic initiatives where they can. Capital seeks ever more effective ways to exercise control over the way wage-earners work - the place, time, pace, precise manner, and quality of work; among their devices - simple supervision, technical control (where a continuous process technology controls the pace and manner of work), and bureaucratic control (where an elaborate order of rules, gradation of rank, periodic evaluation of individual job performance, etc. control work). In response to this historical process, wage-earners have sought ever more subtle and overt ways to circumvent management control, act beyond its confines, or to conquer greater control for itself; among their devices - informal limits on production, soldiering, sabotage, absenteeism, working-to-rule, games, jokes, strikes, slowdowns, walk-outs, shut-downs, etc.

Let us begin with MacIntyre's quintessential manager who is simply out to get employees to work his will for the firm's ends. At the outset, he assumes that its goals of profit and productivity are wholly legitimate and that employees have an obligation to serve them, as he defines them. He has no need to convince them of it - because if they fail to perform, they can be fired. Besides, their alternatives may be prison, the work-house, or starvation. Or, they may interpret their legitimate needs in a way such that the firm can meet these needs without compromising its own drive for profit and productivity.

In these circumstances, where wage-earners do not possess the power, the articulation of needs, or the cultural self-understanding which generate a pattern of effective resistance to the goals of capital, the labor problems to which modern management is the intended antidote fail to arise. In these circumstances (which still exist in the so-called secondary labor markets characterized by a low level of wages, status, skill, organization, job-security, etc.) there are foremen, gang-bosses, supervisors, but not managers in MacIntyre's sense. Modern management is born with the hope (need, desire, project) of being able to motivate employees to do of their own accord what the threat of firing, the imperatives of machinery or technology, bureaucratic rules, direct supervision, etc. by themselves are insufficient to get them to do. Of course, in my view, these modes of control never functioned autonomously, that is, independently of the background normative framework of private property, market exchange, the operative assumptions concerning the legitimate ends of owners and wage-earners. But modern management begins with the additional effort to exercise control by directly introducing a moral tone and outlook into the environment of work which is credible to employees and justifies the specific policies, aims, product, or self-image of the firm to them.

This moral tone is embodied in the so-called 'philosophy' of the company and is a feature of the largest most modern firms such as IBM, Kodak, etc. It involves a specific way of fostering among employees a knowledge of and identification with the ethos of the company. While such conceptions vary in some degree from firm to firm, common themes abound such as superlative technical efficiency, a high-quality product, the value of teamwork, the national importance of the product or firm, the fairness or concern of the firm towards employees, the opportunities for internal upward mobility, respect for the opinion of employees, a democratic style of management, a commitment to reward productivity-gains with across-the-board bonuses or pay-hikes, etc.

Following MacIntyre, let us assume that management engages in such normative 'image-building' solely in order to augment its ability to achieve its ends. Nevertheless, again following out a Habermasian insight, whatever the original motivation, normative communication has its own logic and dynamic which draws the participants into a nexus of mutual expectations which transcends the framework of strategic interaction. For example, if management justifies corporate policy by appealing to the good of employees, it has to be 'convincing'. It has to demonstrate its 'concern' and 'delivere'. If it merely 'simulates' concern and respect for the interests of employees, or shows it only if and when it stands to make an immediate gain, then it fails to be 'genuine' concern and respect. It is, most likely, 'counter-productive'. The manager continues to want, above all, the compliance of employees with company policy. Nevertheless, by communicating a normative picture of the company or his own management 'style' to

employees, he becomes implicated in the conviction that they also stand to benefit; furthermore, that his politics can and should be justified to them. Thus to do his or her job well the modern manager needs the recognition of employees: not just recognition of his authority, but recognition of the reasonableness of management policies. To gain and preserve this recognition, he must ultimately come to value goods and judgments other than those of management, however equivocal, ambiguous, or confused his consciousness may be in this respect. Through the use of moral language or the implicit communication of a normative standpoint, one invests himself or herself in a web of legitimate expectations and demands which mediate the aim or self-interest which may have motivated one in the first place.

In this process, management may acknowledge the legitimacy of some of the demands already pressed by employees. The attempts of wage-earners to resist, circumvent, or appropriate management control also involves normative communication, against the background of a contest for power. The willingness and ability of wage-earners to enforce their own production-goals against management rests in part on some working notion of what is and is not a fair and reasonable pace of work. The communication of such normative standpoints to management is typically blocked by the threat of sanctions against uncooperative employees. But normative communication among wage-earners allows the emergence of those patterns of informal resistance to management control which draw management into normative communication with employees to overcome the management-deficit of mere supervision, technical control, and bureaucratic control. On the other hand, labor's formal moral challenges to capital or management - strikes, work-stoppages, job-actions, boycotts, slowdowns, etc. - always involves an exercise of power and a normative message. The exercise of power minimizes the risks and harms to individual wage-earners which might otherwise attend the articulation of grievances or normative demands. Beyond that, it places management in the position where it pays for them to enter into a normative communication, given the costs of the alternatives.

I am suggesting that there is a logic to the interaction between instrumental and normative rationality implicit in the struggles and communications between management and labor. It is not reasonable for either side to engage in open normative communication with the other, if it clearly stands to lose what is most essential to its survival - jobs in the case of labor, and the power (or right) to manage, in the case of management. Of course, there are always some risks on both sides. It is (instrumentally) reasonable for one or both sides to enter into a normative communication, not just where each side is confident that it will thereby maximize its self-interest - rarely the case in labor-management dealings. It is also reasonable - at least not (instrumentally) unreasonable - where the risks to each side are evenly enough divided so that (1) neither side runs the serious

risk of being essentially crushed - losing what is most essential to its survival - by entering into a normative communication and (2) both sides stand to gain something valuable from it they may otherwise lose. Given the superior power of management in the context of private property in the means of production, wage-earners must have developed certain levels of organization and power before it is reasonable to issue a normative challenge to management.

In sum, the most basic maxims of instrumental rationality provide boundary conditions upon the rationality of entering into a genuine normative communication; even though once it is entered into under these conditions its logic, the standards implicit in normative discourse, entail that each side typically develops some independent interest in a meeting of the minds, a shared recognition of the various goods or claims at stake, as well as the vindication of its own particular interests in the process. When it is reasonable in the instrumental sense or at least not unreasonable in this sense to enter into normative communication, then there is also a pre-sumption that the outcome of the communication represents what is most reasonable, in the normative sense, and not an unequal balance of force, intimidation, or threat-advantage implicit in the situation. On the other hand when parties of greatly unequal power otherwise enter into a normative communication, there is always a presumption that the result is not genuine normative communication and reflects the initial balance of force, rather than 'the force of the better argument' (to use Habermas' apt term). Thus the ability and power of both sides to enter into normative communications without disregard for the most basic maxim of instrumental rationality generates one criterion for determining whether the communication is genuinely normative and whether whatever consensus emerges represents the force of normative rationality and not mere power or fear. Of course all such historically developed spheres of reciprocal normative understanding leave open other spheres where struggle for power, manipulation, and a purely strategic interaction between management and labor continues to occur. Furthermore, these spheres of reciprocal normative understanding represent historical achievements which can always come undone, if and when the balance of power between management and labor which allowed a genuine normative communication to arise radically alters.

I began this section by arguing, against MacIntyre, that modern economic or instrumental rationality implicitly presupposes a shared moral framework which provides its normative boundaries, limits, and social preconditions. Turning to the specific relations of persons within modern firms, I have now argued, against MacIntyre, that the dialectic of strategic interactions makes it reasonable for both management and labor to enter into various forms of normative communication; furthermore that this communication can provide and continue to provide a mutually acknowledged normative basis to some of their relations, assuming the stability of the framework of

relations of power and interest which first made a reasonable and free normative communication possible for such parties.

As I see it, this is the condition in one degree or another of 'modern' firms involving 'modern' management and an organized work force. Of course there remain areas or sectors of economic life (farming with migrant workers, secondary labor markets involving small under-capitalized firms, etc.) in which modern management is unnecessary and normative communication between owners and employees is virtually non-existent. Yet even in these contexts, normative communication between workers typically goes on. In their power to pass judgment on the kind of work or conditions imposed upon them, workers achieve some shared sense of dignity and community. Their relation to one another are not exclusively 'instrumental'; their judgments are not isolated acts of emotivist self-expression. Rather, their judgments of the conditions of their work are based on the achieved normative standards of better organized and more advanced sectors of the working class, as well as deeper liberal-democratic standards of human worth and social justice.

4. Modernity and Virtue

MacIntyre's most serious criticism of modern society is that it undermines the possibility of genuine human excellence and virtue. I agree with MacIntyre that the opportunity to achieve human excellence and virtue, properly understood, constitutes the major standard for evaluating the goodness or rationality of modern society and its philosophical understanding(s). On the other hand, I will argue that he is mistaken in arguing that modern life excludes the very possibility of virtue.

I begin by arguing that MacIntyre's analysis of the nature of genuine virtue does not justify his conclusion that modern society excludes its very possibility. On his analysis, genuine virtues are primarily acquired human qualities which enable persons to live up to standards of excellence in human activity built into established social practices and necessarily presupposed by the participants in these practices (AV 174-79). He refers to the achievement of this sort of excellence as an "internal" good (AV 176-7). But if I read him correctly, the achievement of this sort of excellence only counts as an "internal" good if the participants recognize, cultivate, and value the achievement "without regard to consequences" (AV 185); that is independently of whether the achievement brings worldly success, in particular "external goods" such as 'money, power, status, prestige' (AV 176). MacIntyre restricts his normative notion of a social practice involving the prospect of genuine virtue to those and only those forms of cooperative activity which involve internal goods in his sense (AV 175). In

a nutshell, he seems to be saying that genuine virtue must be regarded as its own reward (a good-in-itself) by participants in the practice in which the relevant standards of virtue are embedded.

On the resulting view, 'internal' goods are differentiated from 'external' goods as follows. Genuine virtue and internal goods (1) require for their identification and recognition participation in some given social practice or kind of social practice (AV 176) and (2) constitute a good for the whole community who participate in the practice (AV 178). On the other hand, external goods (money, power, status, etc.) (1) are not exclusively obtainable and recognizable by those engaging in some kind of social practice and (2) when obtained, typically are the possession of particular individuals to the detriment of others. MacIntyre's case against the possibility of modern virtue is based on his contention that "the concept of a practice with goods internal to itself ...is... removed to the margins of our lives" (AV 211). Given the "dominance of markets, factories, and finally bureaucracies over individuals", modern work "cannot be understood (as) a practice with goods internal to itself" (AV 211). Rather it is a nexus of instrumental relationships aimed at external goods and passive consumerism. The basic problem with MacIntyre's argument is this: his battery of distinctions - internal vs. external goods, a social practice, genuine virtue, etc. - does not ground his central thesis that modern capitalist society is without virtue or "After Virtue". Here we must keep in mind that in his account the virtues "are not defined in terms of good or right practices, but of practices" (AV 187). Is there any plausibility to his contention that modern capitalist society does not involve or is not itself a social practice(s) with internal goods, excellences of some sort, and various human qualities which count as 'virtues', in MacIntyre's sense? I doubt it, for the following reasons.

First of all, MacIntyre seriously misreads the meaning and role of 'money, power, status, and prestige' within modern capitalist society. He does not deny that these are goods (AV 181); but he assumes that they are 'external' to social practices, standards of achievement, and virtue. This is a mistake. For in modern liberal culture, 'money, status, power, and prestige' are normally taken to be the visible evidence of individual achievement and often, the 'natural' rewards for excellence and virtues. What one owns or the social position one occupies embodies what one has earned 'on one's own', what one has managed to make of oneself. These goods are understood to signify the underlying good of individual achievement on the assumption that in a wide range of cases they embody not the outcome of mere luck, good fortune, dishonesty, a happy inheritance, criminal activity, or moral corruption - but rather, the outcome of a person's virtues: diligence, ingenuity, self-discipline, intelligence, steadfastness of purpose, as well as MacIntyre's paradigmatic virtues of 'truthfulness, justice, and courage' (AV 179-80).

MacIntyre classifies 'money, power, status, prestige' as external goods whose existence does not involve genuine virtue for several reasons, which seem mistaken. First they are related 'externally and contingently' to a social practice: "their achievement is never to be had only by engaging in some particular kind of practice" (AV 176). But by the standards of modern culture, there is all the difference in the world between the money or status a person just happens to gain by birth or accident (an 'external good') and that which he or she has earned (an 'internal good'). If I possess the income, authority, and status of a doctor, a businessman, an engineer, a self-employed carpenter, etc., then I necessarily have engaged in a particular kind of practice: namely the modern economic practice of capitalist society with its various standards of success, failure, and modest respectability.

Does MacIntyre have any further reasons to deny that modern economic life constitutes a social practice in his sense? It is certainly "a coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity" with its own "standards of excellence" (AV 175). But, for him, in order to count as a social practice, modern economic life will have to exhibit internal goods - achievements recognized and valued for their own sake. Yet, on my reading, 'money, status, power, prestige' when seen as legitimately earned, are recognized and valued for their own sake as expressions of achievement, apart from what they can be used to buy or gain in the realm of consumption. A 'successful' businessman or manager is no less successful if he or she gives most of his or her income to charity, or burns it for amusement.

In addition, genuine virtues must be practices "without regard to consequences", that is "irrespective of whether in any particular set of contingent circumstances they will produce ... goods or not" (AV 185). This poses no problem for modern virtues. People certainly practice the virtues of self-discipline, prudence, ingenuity, consistency of purpose, etc. independently of knowing whether or not these will bring success in some specific circumstances; and, they are admired even where they fail to lead to tangible achievements. Nevertheless these cases rest on the general social assumption that there is normally a connection between the virtues and economic, social, or professional achievement - in the long-run, with a little luck, under more advantageous circumstances, etc. But this conforms to MacIntyre's analysis which identifies virtue as "just those qualities which tend to lead to the achievement of a certain class of goods" (AV 185).

Finally, MacIntyre holds that internal goods (genuine virtues) are a good for the whole community engaged in the practice while external goods belong to some at the expense of others. But this idea is insufficiently developed to serve as a criterion for differentiating the two. On the one

hand, he holds that internal goods (virtues) are "the outcome of a competition to excel" so that if I 'win' the achievement and virtue is 'mine' whether I achieve an innovation in seascape painting (MacIntyre's example, AV 178) or a scarce socio-economic status (my example). On the other hand, if others benefit from Turner's innovation in seascape painting, it is arguable that others also benefit from my professional or economic achievements - consumers, co-workers, those I employ, etc. MacIntyre treats both internal and external goods as necessarily scarce (AV 178); and he has no criterion of 'benefit to the community' adequate to distinguish the two.

In sum, MacIntyre's own framework of concepts turns out to be fully compatible with the recognition that modern economic life is a social practice in his sense with standards of achievement, internal goods, and genuine virtues. A little additional argument would reveal that the same conclusion holds for the economic or administrative life of particular business, bureaucratic organisations, or civil services. It is really quite obvious that large numbers of modern women and men recognize and try to cultivate virtues such as punctuality, reliability, prudence, intelligence, persistence, self-discipline, sociability, etc. in the hope that they will thereby be able to achieve some measure of 'success' or at least, a tolerable status of respectable performance, both in social life as a whole, as well as within the workplace. On the other hand, in the degree to which many persons do not fully recognize, cultivate, or even respect such virtues, it is not for the reasons MacIntyre provides. Rather it stems from a despair, cynicism, bitterness, and hostility rooted in their awareness that the forms of virtue accessible to people in their positions are inferior and defective in the following ways: (1) insufficiently challenging; (2) culturally devalued; (3) at their best, not a basis for full or equal human recognition and respect; (4) failing, even in the normal case, to lead to the rewards legitimately associated with these virtues; and (5) undermining of other virtues no less essential to self-respect and a good life. Thus the irrationality of modern society is not that it renders genuine virtue impossible. Its irrationality derives from other sources. First, the fact that the virtues, achievements, and excellences most valued in modern society are culturally interpreted and socially embodied in a form which renders human achievement and recognition unnecessarily scarce - for the most part, the prerogative of capitalists, managerial and technical personnel in the upper echelons of corporate or bureaucratic organizations, independent professionals, high officials in political or administrative organs of the state, etc. The more pedestrian forms of virtue and goodness available to the great bulk of modern populations - wage-earners, unpaid homemakers, the under-employed and unemployed, the 'handicapped', etc. - are generally undervalued - even degraded in modern society. They rarely lead to a stable or full sense of achievement and recognition, and under-employment, even erode, modern persons' rational capacity for excellence and virtue. Modern capitalist society generates its own genuine virtues - but in

a class-structured antagonistic form which degrades the form(s) of virtue commonly available to 'ordinary people' and blocks their access to 'higher' virtues and forms of excellence.

Beyond this, the connection between such devalued virtues and even the most minimal levels of success and achievement promised by our culture in return for them is a fragile connection, and for many, one that is either broken or never existed in the first place. Good workers and managers lose their jobs and often their skills, vocations, or careers. Punctual and responsible youth find themselves trapped in stultifying dead-end jobs with inadequate pay, status, autonomy, or opportunity for 'significant' achievement. Good mothers and homemakers find that they lack recognition and respect because their 'work' is unpaid, invisible, and privatized. Successful managers, professionals, sales people, technicians, etc. find that they are too depleted from the stress of work to maintain good relationships with children, spouses, lovers, friends, neighbors, etc. Many victims of long-standing patterns of racist or sexist discrimination never bother to cultivate the dominant virtues because for people 'of their kind' there was never any believable connection between 'virtue' and achievement, recognition, or respect. For them, different virtues were required and developed: resignation, resiliency of the spirit or in some cases, 'street-smarts' - the cunning and toughness that enable those with no hope of conventional resources to survive on the street.

5. Modernity and Normative Reconstruction

I agree with MacIntyre that the critique of modern social life requires a critical analysis of the moral assumptions on which it is based. I also agree that this critique should focus in the first instance upon its underlying assumptions concerning the good, and only secondarily, upon its derivative assumptions concerning the right and just. But against MacIntyre I have argued that the irrationality and conflict in modern society stem not from the absence of a shared conception of the good; but rather from the presence of just such a shared cultural conception with destructive irrationalities and antagonistic scarcities built into it, along side of its affirmative aspects.

On my analysis, the task for a critical social philosophy today is to develop a plausible reconstruction of the bases of human achievement, recognition, and respect. The aim is to 'democratize' our very conception of virtue: to anticipate a vision of society in which all persons are able to work, live, and act under social conditions which affirm their capacities and allow them achievements worthy of recognition and respect. In practice, such a vision of the good speaks to a transformation in the

hierarchical organization of the professions, mental vs. manual work, knowledge and skill, economic and political authority, standards of living and culture, characteristic of class societies of East and West. Such a 'humanization' of labor for all would provide not simply the basis for recognition within economic life, but constitute an indispensable pre-condition for the achievement of 'good' relations and respect within family, neighborhood, and civil society in general.³

MacIntyre's analysis of modernity leads to a vision of normative reconstruction which I find much less plausible and attractive. On his analysis, human virtue and achievement are necessarily scarce, arising from the "competition to excel" (AV 178). From this perspective, the problem with modern society concerns the absence of practice and standards which allow the few to excel. I agree that in the nature of the case, even in the best of societies, virtues are qualities which individuals must develop, inevitably to different degrees. But MacIntyre's formulations mask a basic problem of social justice which arises from modern practices and any alternative conception of the good: in what degree does a given conception of the good and social practice open up or close off a normal access for everyone to realize the good and practice the relevant virtues? This problem of social justice is internal to MacIntyre's project of defending a rational conception of the good.

His analysis masks this problem of social justice because his notion of virtue is in principle removed from the terrain of daily economic and social relations - which are for him irretrievably "governed" by "the barbarians" (AV 245). Virtue is to be restored through "the construction of local forms of community" within which appropriate standards of virtue and practice can be sustained (AV 245). What sorts of practices and communities are involved here? MacIntyre recognizes the paucity of this vision because he observes that "the claims of one practice (or community) may be incompatible with another" leading to conflicting or incommensurable identifications of the good and virtue (AV 187-89). Thus his analysis requires "an overriding conception of the telos of a whole human life" (AV 188-9) in order to evaluate and order (rival) practices and virtues. He advances a conception on which "the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man" (AV 204). The virtues are those qualities necessary for this "philosophical enquiry" and the kinds of "households" and "political communities" conducive to it (AV 204).

In its abstractness and neutrality with respect to most social conflicts, this view of the good life is oddly akin in spirit to the very liberalism which MacIntyre is so anxious to reject. In any case, how could this conception offer any antidote whatsoever to the 'rationally interminable' normative conflicts that constitute the curse of modernity for MacIntyre? For those with conflicting notions of the ends and principles of social life,

MacIntyre's remedy is to cultivate those virtues and practices which will allow their 'dialogue' to continue. But if the dialogue is as irrational as MacIntyre says it is, why should its reification as the 'good-for-man' promise any transformation in modernity? The dialogue might become a 'philosophical enquiry'. But he does not present any model of this enquiry which might resolve the substance of modern conflict as he pictures it.

To my mind, philosophical enquiry into the good in and of itself is simply too abstract and unmediated an ideal to be even remotely capable of rational justification as 'the' good for modern persons. MacIntyre is far closer to the truth when he suggests that "the individual's search for his or her good is ... conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual's life is a part, and this is true both of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life" (AV 207). In this vein, he argues that "... all reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought" and "... a tradition is in good order (when) it is partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose" (AV 206).

Nevertheless, if my analysis is correct, MacIntyre fails to follow his own methodological emphasis upon tradition in his approach to and argument with modernity. He generally fails to comprehend the modern liberal cultural tradition with its own distinctive search for the good, reasoning, and arguments about the good. Thus his own philosophical reasoning does not speak convincingly to the individuals, arguments, and tensions within this tradition. To modern men and women reasonably involved in a daily struggle for recognition and respect on the terrain of work, livelihood, and personal life, MacIntyre's vision lacks rational credibility. To those who must continue to work or somehow get by without the hope of recognition or respect, his prognosis is cold comfort. Upon closer analysis, the 'barbarians' to whom MacIntyre refers (AV 244-5) turn out to be not just 'them' (those who govern us) but you and I. We deserve a better account of our aspirations and a more promising alternative to the irrationalities built into our tradition and institutions.

Nonetheless, it is the great merit of MacIntyre's work - rare among contemporary philosophers - to speak to the largest social questions and develop so bold, uncompromising, learned, and provocative an analysis as he has provided. His achievement is to make the rest of us uncomfortable and rightfully anxious to develop an understanding of modernity no less stimulating than his.

Notes

- 1) MacIntyre 1981. All references will be given in the text and abbreviated in the form AV, page ____.
- 2) For a more systematic elaboration and defense of this standpoint see Doppelt 1981 and 1984.
- 3) For an elaboration of what I mean here by the 'humanization of work' and the 'democratization' of virtue, see Doppelt 1984.

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