

MacIntyre—‘Modern Moral Philosophy, Virtue, and Pluralism: MacIntyre and the Quest for the Human *Telos*’

Alasdair MacIntyre (no relation) is best known for his critique of modern rationalist moral philosophy and his attempted resuscitation of the Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics. Of course, he is not alone in promoting a revitalization of Aristotle (and St. Thomas Aquinas), but he has offered the most well-known critique of the shallowness and ultimate vacuity of the two most prevalent forms of modern moral philosophy, utilitarianism and deontology. I propose to offer a sympathetic account of his critique of modern moral rationalism, while also suggesting that his critique owes as much to other modern critics of moral rationalism, like Hegel and Collingwood, as it does to Aristotle and Aquinas. I will also suggest that the primary weakness of MacIntyre’s version of virtue ethics is that it does not adequately answer the challenges posed by modern moral pluralism to a unified conception of the human *telos*. I will focus the essay, for the most part, on *After Virtue*, but will also address *A Short History of Ethics*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*.

Section I—MacIntyre and Modern Moral Philosophy

- Discussion of MacIntyre’s critique of modern moral philosophy, especially deontology and utilitarianism—rejection of rationalism of both approaches
- The centrality of moral disagreement in MacIntyre’s critique—why emotivist and subjectivist sentiments are the result of the breakdown of deontology and utilitarianism

Section II—MacIntyre and Enlightenment Epistemology

- The critique of social science and the rejection of the relevance of epistemological scientism to an understanding of human activity
- The importance of Aristotle and Hegel—Aristotle’s conception of practical reason as alternative to Enlightenment epistemology, and Hegel’s critique of modern rationalism
- Epistemological Traditionalism—questions of participation in the tradition and translations between traditions

Section III—Virtue Ethics and Moral Pluralism

- Traditions and plural purposes—the problem with teleological ethics; the problem with teleological epistemology
- Plural virtues and epistemological pluralism