

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

Jan Artiček

**Etika vrlin in sodobni politični diskurz v *Po vrlini* Alasdairja
MacIntyreja**

**Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Political Debate in Alasdair
MacIntyre's *After Virtue***

Magistrsko delo

Ljubljana, 2020

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

Jan Artiček

Mentor: prof. dr. Žiga Vodovnik

Co-mentor: Dragana Cvetanović (University of Helsinki)

**Etika vrlin in sodobni politični diskurz v *Po vrlini* Alasdairja
MacIntyreja**

**Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Political Debate in Alasdair
MacIntyre's *After Virtue***

Magistrsko delo

Ljubljana, 2020

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my mentor, prof. dr. Žiga Vodovnik, for his help, guidance, and patience throughout the project.

I would also like to thank Dragana Cvetanović from the University of Helsinki for mentoring me during my exchange.

Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Political Debate in Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*

This thesis analyzes Alasdair MacIntyre's defense of virtue ethics and attempts to apply it to contemporary political debate, especially the currently contentious debate around identity politics. In MacIntyre's landmark book, *After Virtue*, virtue ethics – in particular its Aristotelian eudaimonist version – serves as a critique of modernity at large, but specifically of modern moral philosophy. The central claim is that the Enlightenment moral project has failed to produce universal standards of morality based on reason, leading instead to the contemporary state of affairs, where morality is thought to be wholly subjective. Tracing MacIntyre's argument, this thesis breaks down the key conceptual differences between virtue ethics and modern moral philosophy, namely a different understanding of human rationality and a different attitude towards teleological reasoning. Additionally, it explores how virtue ethics also serves as a critique of modern politics, especially liberalism, by emphasizing social particularity as crucial to individual identity and the notion of shared communal ends as crucial for maintaining a rational public debate. By looking at another publically prominent attempt at a similar critique, namely Jordan Peterson and the Intellectual Dark Web, the thesis hopes to determine what virtue ethics could contribute to current political discourse.

Key words: virtue ethics, Alasdair MacIntyre, teleology, rationality, Enlightenment.

Etika vrlin in sodobni politični diskurz v *Po vrlini* Alasdairja MacIntyreja

Ta magistrska naloga analizira zagovor etike vrlin Alasdair-ja MacIntyre-a in skuša ta zagovor aplicirati na sodobni politični diskurz, predvsem danes perečo tematiko identitetne politike. V MacIntyre-ovi ključni študiji, *Po vrlini*, etika vrlin – predvsem v svoji aristotelovski oziroma evdajmonični verziji – služi kot kritika moderne na splošno, a še posebej moderne moralne filozofije. Osrednja hipoteza knjige je, da je bil razsvetljenski moralni projekt neuspešen pri poskusu vzpostavitve univerzalnih moralnih standardov na podlagi razuma, kar je vodilo v sedanje stanje popolnoma subjektivne morale. Sledeč MacIntyre-ovemu argumentu, ta naloga razdela ključne konceptualne razlike med etiko vrlin in moderno moralno filozofijo, predvsem drugačne razumevanje človeške racionalnosti in drugačen odnos do teleološkega sklepanja. Poleg tega naloga raziskuje, kako etika vrlin služi kot kritika moderne politike, zlasti liberalizma, s tem ko poudarja družbeni kontekst kot ključen za identiteto posameznika in idejo o skupnih družbenih ciljih kot ključnih za vzdrževanje racionalne javne debate. Z analizo nekega že obstoječega poskusa podobne kritike, tj. kritike Jordana Petersona in t.i. intelektualnega Temnega Spleta, ta naloga skuša ugotoviti, kako bi etika vrlin lahko pripomogla k trenutnemu političnemu diskurzu.

Ključne besede: etika vrlin, Alasdair MacIntyre, teleologija, racionalnost, razsvetljenstvo.

Table of contents

1 Introduction	6
2 What is virtue ethics?	12
1.1 Virtues defined; the concept of a practice defined	12
1.2 Aristotle: <i>eudaimonia</i> , <i>telos</i> , the mean, and moral agency	14
1.3 Other forms of virtue ethics – historical and contemporary.....	16
3 Rules and reason.....	20
3.1 Rationality in modern moral philosophy.....	20
3.2 Fact/value distinction	25
3.3 Historicism and moral relativism	27
3.4 Social sciences and the unpredictability of human action.....	29
4 Virtues and purpose.....	33
4.1 <i>Telos</i> and human nature.....	33
4.2 Case study: The Intellectual Dark Web.....	37
5 Virtues and politics.....	44
5.1 Virtue ethics and liberalism.....	44
5.2 Virtue ethics and communitarianism.....	49
5.3 Identity-as-narrative in virtue ethics	51
6 Conclusion.....	55
7 Abstract in Slovene (Povzetek v slovenščini)	62
8 Bibliography.....	65

"The complexity of a human character, moved dynamically this way and that, can very seldom be resolved by deciding between simple alternatives, as our superannuated morality would have it."

- Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

"[A]nd though it be not so in the physical, yet in moral science that which cannot be understood is not always profitless. For the soul awakes, a trembling stranger, between two dim eternities – the eternal past, the eternal future. The light shines only on a small space around her; therefore, she needs must yearn towards the unknown."

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

1 Introduction

It is becoming increasingly difficult these days to discuss, let alone resolve, moral questions in public debate. From electoral politics and shouting matches on split screens of the nightly news to outrage culture on social media and college campuses worldwide, a clash between opposing points of view is sure to produce but further disagreement and entrenchment along ideological lines. In the online commentariat, there is talk of a culture war underway, ranging across various mediums that facilitate public debate; from traditional, so-called mainstream media that produce and reproduce their respective echo-chambers to social media and the internet, where the shady work of suggestion algorithms and data mining exert considerable sway over user behaviour and consequently, in the final instance, over election results. This culture war is said to be waged between the Left and the Right, between liberalism and conservatism, but the traditional dichotomy nowadays takes the form of an antagonism between globalism and nationalism. In this view, right-wing populisms that swept across Europe and the United States, but also countries like Brazil and India, are seen as national(istic) reactions to the many crises that emerge as a consequence of an increasingly globalized economy and society, most pressing the migration crisis in affluent Western nations. The electoral victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections and Great Britain's exit from the European Union that same year are arguably the most poignant exemplars of this antagonism.

Such an analysis may well be accurate, but it only serves to explain the content of contemporary politics; it can tell us what we are arguing about. It does not attempt to explain its form; the fraught nature of public debate, interminable disagreement, incommensurate premises that lead to incommensurate conclusions. It does not tell us why we are arguing the way we are. Surely it is the form of our debates, more so than their content, that is deeply dysfunctional.

Of course, the changing landscape of public fora in which debate can take place plays a significant role. This has been well analysed by, among others, Jürgen Habermas in his 1962 book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, in which he traces the history of public debate about moral and political issues from 18th century salons of the bourgeois intelligentsia to the corporate mass media of the twentieth century. Habermas shows how structural changes in the public sphere – who was able to participate, what medium was most accessible and popular, who owned media outlets, who comprised the audience, etc. – affected the nature of public debate, and surely contemporary academic fields like media studies, which

emerged from precisely this line of questioning, continue to demonstrate the relevance of such a project. Nowadays, the increasing importance of the internet and social media as sources of news and opinion platforms certainly affect the conditions of public discourse; some point to their capacity to democratize, by empowering any voice with an internet connection, while others bemoan the lack of a qualifying mechanism that would effectively bolster quality content and good arguments.

Still, a structural and historical analysis of where our public debate is conducted only goes so far in explaining the particular form it assumes. The media in which debate takes place set certain conditions and constraints, or channel certain tendencies over others. For example, debates on split screens of the evening news are designed to turn into a shouting match because conflict, rather than consensus, gets better ratings; the design of this particular medium therefore tends to amplify disagreement. However, it is not self-evident that the moral dilemmas of our age would be any better resolved without the constraints of an imperfect public sphere, or even by being able to determine beyond a reasonable doubt which of the two sides in the current political antagonism is 'right'. Indeed, it is the central proposition of this thesis that the underlying cause of the interminable disagreement that plagues our public debate lies elsewhere; namely in the flawed framework of moral reasoning whose roots lie in the Enlightenment and which has since come to define modernity.

This frames our argument as a critique of modern morality. Such a critique was most comprehensively laid out by Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his seminal book, *After Virtue* (1982), and it is my aim to first analyse his argument and then apply it to the vicissitudes of contemporary public debate. *After Virtue* is, along with Elizabeth Anscombe's essay *Modern Moral Philosophy* (1958), often credited for reviving interest in virtue ethics, a theory of normative ethics commonly associated with Aristotle and scholastic philosophy, although it should be said that this interest is limited to academic discourse in the field of moral philosophy and has certainly not received the same kind of interdisciplinary attention as, say, Habermas' structural critique. Not only that; despite its supposed revival it remains the least represented of the three theories in the field of normative ethics, too, trailing behind both deontology and consequentialism. As the entry on virtue ethics in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* tells us, "[a]lthough virtue ethics has grown remarkably in the last thirty-five years, it is still very much in the minority, particularly in the area of applied ethics" (Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2018, Ch. 4). Similarly, "[w]hether virtue ethics can be expected to grow into 'virtue politics'—i.e. to extend from moral philosophy into political philosophy—is not so clear" (ibid.). Despite

the fact that Aristotle intended his *Nicomachean Ethics* to be read alongside his *Politics*, since he considered the two fields of study complementary and co-dependent, there is relatively little work done today in trying to apply virtue-ethical principles to contemporary political problems. This is all the more curious given the modern 'ethical turn' in political theory, whereby thinkers like Michel Foucault and more recently Judith Butler are said to have grounded political theory in (presumably subjective) moral values and beliefs, rather than more neutral, rational, and practical considerations of power that have belied the field since Machiavelli and Hobbes.

But the complementary relationship between ethics and politics need not be traced back to an Aristotelian origin; MacIntyre's historical analysis of Western moral philosophy offers considerable political commentary, a lot of which relates specifically to public debate. Written in the U.S. during the 1980s, when the Cold War was still in full swing and the country's electoral politics was dominated by the neoliberal doctrine of Reaganomics, *After Virtue* analysed the central antagonism of the time as one between individualism, exemplified by Western capitalist nations, and collectivism, exemplified by the countries of the Soviet bloc. Of course, this antagonism also applied to internal political debates in the United States between left-wing Democrats and right-wing Republicans regarding distributive justice, taxation and the role of the state in society. MacIntyre shows how disagreement arises from different interpretations of a given value, in this case justice, and how the mode of discourse surrounding values and value judgments – in both academia and the wider public sphere – offers no rational grounds for a resolution of the disagreement, leading instead to polarization. That is to say, the disagreement cannot be resolved because it is established on incommensurate premises: each side affirms a different value as the operative one, inevitably leading to different solutions to the problem under discussion.

This kind of moral impasse is a consequence of emotivism; "the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character" (2007, 11-12). To put it simply, if my opinion on a certain moral issue is simply a personal preference of mine, and your opposing stance is simply a personal preference of yours, then who are you to tell me that my personal preference is any less valid than yours? In the view of emotivism, then, moral values are wholly subjective and relative, and as such unimpeachable by rational argument. As opposed to facts, which can be either true or false, values are not good or bad in any objective sense, since what is good for me may very well be bad for you. When we discuss values with these presuppositions in mind, any opposition to our stated claims is likely to make

us feel as if our personal identity, as expressed in our preference of values, is under attack. Indignation and outrage, which seem to bear heavily on contemporary public debate, appear to be likely outcomes of the emotivist doctrine.

It is not immediately clear, however, why emotivism – so clearly subjective – would emerge out of Enlightenment moral philosophy, whose central aim is precisely the opposite; namely, the construction of a universally binding and applicable moral standard grounded in reason, as opposed to faith. This is the case both with Kant's deontology and the later utilitarian theories of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, not to mention it constitutes the bedrock foundation of the modern doctrine of human rights. But as MacIntyre shows by tracing the historical development of the Enlightenment project, it is precisely the failure of devising a rational and universal moral standard that led to the assertion that there are no universal rules of conduct, and that values do not operate on rational grounds, as facts do. The latter was first proposed by the Enlightenment philosopher David Hume and has since become known as the fact/value distinction. It is often expressed with the maxim that 'one cannot derive 'is' conclusions from 'ought' premises'. By the twentieth century, as MacIntyre demonstrates, this distinction has become the norm in Western moral philosophy, and in turn the norm underlying public debate about moral issues. Thus, by employing the conceptual framework of virtue ethics and tracing MacIntyre's historical account of modern moral philosophy, this text will frame our current dysfunctional political polarization and antagonisms as a failure of the Enlightenment moral project, rather than stressing contemporary structural and institutional constraints.

MacIntyre sees these problems as emanating from the modern abandonment of the moral system of virtue ethics. This is a system that a contemporary reader may find rather foreign. Indeed, while we are all familiar with the concept of virtues and perhaps even try to cultivate them in our lives, we should note that a strict adherence to the moral precepts of Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas would sometimes lead us to counter-intuitive and even immoral judgments by modern standards. We should therefore keep in mind that virtue ethics, like any moral philosophy, is a product of its time and place and is informed by the cultural environment that gave rise to it; a cultural environment that is historically distant to us and operated on different premises than our own. For this reason it seems only fitting to begin this thesis with a brief introduction of virtue ethics, especially its Aristotelian (eudaimonist) version, which MacIntyre advocates. We will define the concept of a virtue, the purpose it serves in Aristotelian theory, and finally look at other versions of virtue ethics, both historical and contemporary.

Virtue ethics differed from the moral philosophy of modernity in several ways. In chapters 3 and 4, we will focus on two differences that arguably constitute the most fundamental shift in worldview between antiquity and modernity, namely the role each system assigns to reason and the role each system assigns to *telos*, that is to say, purpose. The categories of reason and *telos* are central to MacIntyre's argument that the Enlightenment constituted a crucial break with ancient morality as well as to his critique of modernity, including the state of public debate concerning moral issues.

In Chapter 3, we will look at the split between rationality and morality that is introduced with Hume's fact/value distinction and with the Enlightenment moral project at large, and analyse MacIntyre's opposition to the notion. Since MacIntyre is also critical of universally valid and rationally derived moral values, but also of emotivism, the role of reason in his virtue-ethical project inhabits an ambiguous space between these two extremes. Thus the rest of the chapter considers MacIntyre's evocation of historical and cultural context as determining rational judgment as well as his reluctance to accept the doctrine of cultural relativity in moral matters, despite that being a common criticism of his work.

Chapter 4 will focus on MacIntyre's charge that the Enlightenment project of rational morality broke down primarily because it lacked a so-called teleological framework, which is to say a framework of purpose that informs moral judgment and action. Abandoning both the Christian God and the Aristotelian notion of the 'highest good' as effective goals that underlie moral conduct, MacIntyre asserts the Enlightenment philosophers had nothing to offer in their stead. Since my focus is on MacIntyre's argument in *After Virtue*, where his stance is Aristotelian, rather than Christian¹, I will forego the debate about the need for God as a final end in such a teleological system, but will address the most common criticism levelled at Aristotelian teleology, namely that it relies too heavily on essentialist attitudes about human nature. MacIntyre himself rejects the biological determinism present in Aristotle's work, but does affirm some form of a fixed human nature. In the last subchapter of this section we will consider the recent emergence of the so-called Intellectual Dark Web, a small group of public intellectuals from both sides of the political spectrum who try to straddle the polarized political landscape by invoking certain virtue-ethical concepts alongside certain modern/liberal concepts, and we will analyze their respective effectiveness.

¹ This is not the case for MacIntyre's later work, where he comes to adopt a Thomist attitude.

With this conceptual foundation in mind, we should then be able to evaluate how virtue ethics could offer useful insights to the problem of polarization in public debate and to political theory more broadly. Beginning with the latter, Chapter 5 is devoted to situating virtue-ethical principles into a political context. MacIntyre's own political philosophy in particular has been characterized as communitarian, but this remains a debatable assertion, especially since MacIntyre himself disagrees with the characterization. It has also been described as conservative, since tradition does indeed play an important role in both Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, and there is some scepticism about whether both of these inclinations disqualify virtue ethics from bearing usefully on the human condition in the modern age, in which the forces of globalization, industrialization, and urbanization have all but obliterated traditional local communities that both communitarianism and conservatism tend to uphold as ideal. What is certain, however, is that MacIntyre's virtue ethics is a critique of modern liberalism; of its individualism, subjectivism, and its lack of teleology. Finally, we will look at identity politics as the latest source of political antagonism and try to apply MacIntyre's "narrative concept of selfhood" (2007, 217) to a debate that, like much modern disagreement, fluctuates between the extremes of individualism and collectivism.

As stated, my argument makes no claim against structural theories and institutional critiques regarding the contemporary political predicament. Rather, it serves to complement them with an account of the nature and disposition of public discourse about moral questions, and provides a historical explanation for such a disposition. I believe this to be a relevant, even necessary, complement because it demonstrates that one of the most pressing problems of contemporary democracy – that of effective, reasoned public debate – can most readily be solved at the level of individual action and requires little collective will, institutional effort or systemic change. Furthermore, my argument emphasizes the inherent co-dependence of ethics and politics. A cultivation of virtues of character is a personal project, but it has potential for broad social change; encouraging rational discourse about (moral) values, reserving judgment for dissenting positions, and acting in good faith could well be the catalyst for our political communities to (re)discover their common purpose.

2 What is virtue ethics?

1.1 Virtues defined; the concept of a practice defined

The central premise of virtue ethics is that moral action ought to arise as a consequence of noble and admirable character traits that we call virtues. Aristotle, who was the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical account of virtue ethics, defined virtues as "praiseworthy characteristics" (1962, 32) and divided them into two categories: virtues of character and intellectual virtues. The first category includes virtues such as courage, self-control, and justice², and the second category distinguishes between *sophia* (theoretical wisdom) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom, or good judgment) (ibid.; see also Aristotle 2009, 285). It is the latter which he considered to be a necessary complement to virtues of character in making good choices.

Significantly, virtues are not natural givens. Rather, they are attained through habit. "[T]he virtues are implanted in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature: we are by nature equipped with the ability to receive them, and habit brings this ability to completion and fulfillment" (Aristotle 1962, 33). The only way to become virtuous is to exercise the virtues, both those of character and intellectual. This is why the stated purpose of Aristotle's ethical theory is not "to know what virtue is, but (...) to become good, else there would be no advantage in studying it" (ibid., 35).³ As Aristotle points out, "we become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage" (ibid., 34).

A common objection may already be raised here; namely, why are certain character traits considered virtuous and not others? More to the point, why have different communities and cultures across time affirmed different character traits as virtuous? For Aristotle, courage and self-control are important virtues of character, for Thomas Aquinas it is purity and charity, while for Confucius it is humaneness (*ren*) and filial piety (*xiao*) (Confucius 2008, xxi-xxii). If no definitive list of the virtues exists, how do we know which character trait is truly admirable, and which virtues to exercise in a given situation? In trying to address this criticism, Alasdair MacIntyre provides a somewhat broader and more complex definition of the virtues. For him,

² This is not an exhaustive list, but the most common examples Aristotle chose to make his case.

³ This method applies to what Aristotle termed practical sciences, which include ethics and politics, but it is no longer embodied in the purely theoretical bent of modern political and moral philosophy.

"[a] virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods" (2007, 191).

The phrase 'acquired human quality' retains the original meaning of virtue as a character trait inculcated through habit. However, MacIntyre also explains it in a social context, by introducing the term 'practice'. By practice he means

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 (ibid., 187).

By this definition, painting, chess, football, and architecture are all practices. They all involve a community of people who engage in a practice, they all have a history and tradition that determines the ends and goods of the practice, and they all have methods for achieving these ends – the methods are what MacIntyre calls virtues. However, it is not just painting that constitutes such a cooperative human activity; the same applies generally to what we may call a cultural practice, that is to say, the culture and norms of a particular political community: people engage in the set of cultural practices in their daily lives, through their everyday decisions; the practices have ends and goods determined by the particular history and tradition of the community; and these ends are achieved through the exercise of virtues of character and intellectual virtues.

So MacIntyre's answer to the problem of differing accounts of the virtues is that this is not really a problem at all. Much like chess and architecture will pursue different ends and devise different methods for achieving those ends, so different communities will pursue different ends and uphold different virtues as paramount in achieving those ends. As he explains in Chapter 14, it is precisely this social particularity that can be considered a common core concept of the virtues: "it always requires for its application the acceptance of some prior account of certain features of social and moral life in terms of which it has to be defined and explained" (ibid., 186), whether it be the notion of a social role in Homeric myths, Aristotle's good life for man, or Benjamin Franklin's stress on utility.

We can already see the notions of ends and goods inherent in a particular practice emerge as crucial to the virtue-ethical system, and it is to these notions that we turn next.

1.2 Aristotle: *eudaimonia*, *telos*, the mean, and moral agency

The reason why we ought to act in accordance with virtue is because it is by means of virtuous behaviour that we attain a certain good. Indeed, not just a certain good, but the highest good, which in Aristotle's view is *eudaimonia*, or happiness.⁴ As he points out in his ethical treatise, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "[w]hat is always chosen as an end in itself and never as a means to something else is called final in an unqualified sense. This description seems to apply to happiness above all else" (1962, 15). Happiness, then, is the *telos* (end, purpose) of human action, and in Aristotle's words, "it is for the sake of the end that all else is done" (ibid., 14).

Aristotle here distinguishes between ends as means to other ends and ends-in-themselves, which suggests a hierarchy of ends worth pursuing when we act virtuously. For instance, when a soldier acts with courage, he hopes to secure a victory for his side and thus keep his community safe, both of which are goods, but both the victory and the safety of his community ultimately allow him to achieve *eudaimonia*, which he could not have achieved – or at least not as likely – if his community had been subjected by the enemy. Aristotle posits that *eudaimonia* is never pursued as a means to achieve some other end, thus making it the final end of human action. Virtue ethics is therefore based on a teleological (goal-oriented or purpose-driven) account of human action, and Aristotelian virtue ethics, which places *eudaimonia* as the final end, is also called eudaimonist virtue ethics.

But while very forthright on the ends of human action, as a theory of normative ethics – a field concerned with the question of how one ought to act – Aristotle's ethical system notably does not provide a clear account of right human action (see Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2018, Ch. 3). Whereas competing normative theories will be quick to prescribe correct behaviour, such as 'Do not lie' / 'Always tell the truth', virtue ethics will instead say, 'Be honest'. The latter does not prescribe any particular action, but describes an ideal character trait – the virtue of honesty – that we ought to cultivate by acting as each particular situation demands.

To explain how the possession of a certain virtue translates into moral action, Aristotle employs the concept of the mean, or right measure. When we think of individual virtues, it is not hard to assign to them corresponding vices; if courage is a virtue, cowardice is a vice. In Aristotle's view, however, "the nature of moral qualities is such that they are destroyed by defect and by

⁴ Of course, the Greek concept of *eudaimonia* is not the same as our modern concept of happiness. Aristotle understands *eudaimonia* as a sort of calm contentment stemming from a life lived well, which is to say in accordance with virtue, whereas our idea of happiness is more associated with emotional states like joy and the experience of pleasure.

excess" (ibid., 35-6), and virtue lies somewhere in between the two extremes on this axis. So while courage, for instance, is a virtue and cowardice a vice, cowardice is not, strictly speaking, the opposite of courage. Cowardice is a deficiency of courage, its opposite is an overabundance of courage – recklessness, let us say – and courage is the right measure between the two that a given situation demands. This is not to say the exact middle measure either – but whatever measure the situation demands. As we can see, this is not a clear-cut blueprint of moral action – indeed, what is the right measure in a given situation? – but it is a clear-cut blueprint of moral persons. For Aristotle and most virtue ethicists after him, the locus of morality is placed on admirable character traits that guide us toward a certain end, rather than injunctions external to the individual that prescribe what is right and wrong.

It is not surprising, then, that such a system (i.e. one that is reluctant to prescribe behaviour) puts a big emphasis on *phronesis*, good judgment, and that it insists on virtues of character working in tandem with intellectual virtues. It is a function of human rationality that we are even able to cultivate and exercise the virtues since, according to Aristotle, it is our capacity to reason that enables us to identify our ends and to establish common ends with other people, with whom we can then form communities and deliberate on the best means to achieve those ends.⁵ As MacIntyre writes, "the education of the passions into conformity with pursuit of what theoretical reasoning identifies as the *telos* and practical reasoning as the right action to do in each particular time and place is what ethics is about" (2007, 162).

Despite there being many constraints to rational action and judgment – Aristotle recognizes that humans perform many actions involuntarily and irrationally – virtue ethics affirms that the individual is a moral agent on account of possessing the capacity to reason and, as a consequence, choose an action based on good judgment and upon deliberation. Aristotle thus considers human intelligence to be a causal principle: "what we do deliberate about are things that are in our power and can be realized in action; in fact, these are the only things that remain to be considered. For in addition to nature, necessity, and chance, we regard as causal principles intelligence and anything done through human agency" (1962, 60).

Of course all theories of normative ethics are based on the notion of the individual as a rational moral agent. Because the individual is rational, he or she has agency, and agency confers moral responsibility. But while modern theories of normative ethics, namely deontology and

⁵ Hence also Aristotle's famous assertion, from *Politics*, that "man is by nature a political animal" (2009, 10). Man is naturally political because he is naturally endowed with reason.

consequentialism, attempt to define universal rules that the moral agent ought to apply – rationally derived as they may be – virtue ethics insists on character traits that the agent must first acquire before applying to his or her decisions. It could be argued that the method of virtue ethics adds an additional burden of being responsible not only for one's actions, but also for the means to perform those actions in the first place (i.e. the cultivation of virtues). At the same time it leaves one without a clear formula of moral conduct that could be applied to any contingent situation, all of which may lead the modern reader to judge the entire virtue-ethical scheme much more cumbersome than the alternatives. Nevertheless, "the agent must consider on each different occasion what the situation demands" (Aristotle 1962, 35), and intentions matter more than outcomes in determining the goodness of a certain action. It is the role of the virtues, acquired through habit, to help the rational agent act in a way that will lead towards a certain good in any situation. Aristotle summarizes it thus:

in the case of the virtues an act is not performed justly or with self-control if the act itself is of a certain kind, but only if in addition the agent has certain characteristics as he performs it: first of all, he must know what he is doing; secondly, he must choose to act the way he does, and he must choose it for its own sake; and in the third place, the act must spring from a firm and unchangeable character (ibid., 39).

MacIntyre articulates the same idea more succinctly: "[T]he exercise of the virtues requires (...) a capacity to judge and to do the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way" (2007, 150). Because rules do not take into account the contingencies of each situation, the better model for right action is the cultivation of noble character traits which, coupled with good judgment, allow us to find the right measure appropriate to any situation that may occur.

1.3 Other forms of virtue ethics – historical and contemporary

Virtue ethics is the oldest of the three major theories of normative ethics, with roots in Ancient Greece and the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, but MacIntyre points out that the virtues predate the great philosophers and the rise of the Athenian polis. They can already be found in the age of heroes that constitute the Greek mythology. In Homer, says MacIntyre, virtues are seen as identical with social roles because "morality and social structure are in fact one and the same in heroic society" (2007, 123). This means that one exhibits virtue to the extent that one performs one's assigned duty. "Identity in heroic society involves particularity and accountability. I am answerable for doing or failing to do what anyone who occupies my role owes to others and this accountability terminates only with death" (ibid., 126) – a soldier fights bravely, a king rules prudently, etc.

While Aristotle's theory substitutes the notion of the social role as one's purpose with the notion of the good life for man, namely *eudaimonia*, MacIntyre shows that aspects from the heroic age influenced moral and political life in the Athenian polis (ibid., Ch. 11), since public life in Athens took the form of the *agon*, i.e. contest, modelled on the Homeric accounts of conflict:

[a]mong the contests into which [the agon] is transformed are the debates in the assemblies and law courts of Greek democracy, the conflicts at the heart of tragedy, a piece of symbolic (and very serious) buffoonery in the plotline of comedy, and finally the dialogue form of philosophical argument. In understanding each of these as a manifestation of the agon, we ought to recognize that the categories political, dramatic, philosophical were much more intimately related in the Athenian world than in our own (ibid., 138).

Additionally, one's social role continued to play a prominent role in virtue ethics, both for Aristotle and MacIntyre. Even if it does not constitute the final end, it does influence the particular form of our final end. In other words, our social role determines what it is we ought to do in order to achieve happiness; the recipe is not a universal one. MacIntyre notes that "I am brother, cousin and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe" (ibid., 33), and I cannot conceive of what constitutes happiness outside of this web of social relationships and corresponding ends these relationships impose.

Since this thesis and its central source, *After Virtue*, both argue for an Aristotelian approach to virtue ethics, we will not analyse either the Roman Stoic ethics or the medieval scholastic philosophy of Thomas Aquinas in much detail. Stoic philosophers like the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius stress acting appropriately to one's place in a cosmic order instead of in a particular community (Marcus Aurelius 2004), which makes their virtue theory closer to Plato's (see MacIntyre 2006, 143). Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, is credited with integrating Aristotelian philosophy, including its eudaimonist virtue ethics, into Christian theology. According to MacIntyre, both of these still retained the crucial teleological nature of human action (see 2006, Ch. 5),⁶ but they both make a move from social particularity to universal validity, and in the case of Aquinas, the introduction of God as the highest good and final cause compromises the project of moral agency based in reason.

In the time of the Enlightenment, however, virtue ethics reached its zenith and gradually lost its central place in moral philosophy. The philosophers of the Enlightenment opposed the teleological framework in particular, which in their time was used almost exclusively in the

⁶ In Stoicism, the final end is depicted as a harmonious cosmic order, as exemplified by the following quote from Marcus Aurelius: "[F]or even the least of our activities ought to have some end in view – and for creatures with reason, that end is conformity with the reason and law of the primordial City and Commonwealth" (2004, 17). In Thomism, the final end is the unification of the human soul with God.

religious context provided by scholasticism. This historical transition will be discussed in more detail in the ensuing chapter, but for now it is perhaps worth explaining that the reason we focus our analysis on MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and not any of his subsequent works⁷ is because the former is the one secular critique of modernity and Enlightenment moral philosophy; in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre makes a more or less Aristotelian (eudaimonist) case for virtue ethics, whereas later in his career he came to adopt a Thomist philosophy, particularly reflected in the abandonment of the idea of social particularity of the virtues and a corresponding move toward universal ethical principles, as derived from reason. He has been criticized for this inconsistency (see, for instance, Breen 2012, 188), but it is also the case that one of the main criticisms directed at *After Virtue* was that the stress on social particularity inevitably leads to moral relativism (see Ballard 2000, 79; Stern 1994). It is likely that an attempt to course correct in light of this criticism led him towards the more universalist scholastic philosophy. In 3.3, I will argue that his account of rational discourse and affirmation of impersonal and rational standards of morality from *After Virtue* serve as a sufficient antidote to moral relativism.

Virtue ethics would again return to prominence in the second half of the twentieth century, prompted by Elizabeth Anscombe's essay *Modern Moral Philosophy*, in which she criticized the state of the field in her day for being detached from practical considerations that animated Aristotle's ethics. For the analytical moral philosophers of the twentieth century, determining how one ought to act took the form of devising thought experiments and envisioning hypothetical situations that were in fact rhetorical devices designed to show how something is either moral or immoral. As Anscombe noted, "[i]t would be a great improvement if, instead of 'morally wrong,' one always named a genus such as 'untruthful,' 'unchaste,' 'unjust.' We should no longer ask whether doing something was 'wrong,' passing directly from some description of an action to this notion; we should ask whether, e.g. it was unjust; and the answer would sometimes be clear at once" (1958, 7).

From there on, virtue ethics re-emerged as a critic of the universalizing tendencies of deontology and consequentialism on the one hand, affirming again the fact that different situations demand different kinds of action and that stable and admirable character traits are best suited to confront the contingencies of life, and the subjectivism of twentieth century ethics on the other, insisting instead on rational, albeit culture-specific, standards for moral conduct. MacIntyre's historical critique of moral philosophy in *After Virtue* presents arguably the most

⁷ The transition to Thomism occurs, more precisely, in his *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (1988) and persists in the subsequent *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990). See also Horton and Mendus (1994, 3-4).

prominent contemporary defense of virtue ethics, but since the 80s, several different forms of virtue ethics have emerged. The most common one remains the eudaimonist account developed by Aristotle (see, for instance, Kraut 1989; Hursthouse 1999), but Hursthouse and Pettigrove also provide a heterodox list of approaches:

- an exemplarist/agent-based approach, which considers the agent's motivations, rather than the achievement of *eudaimonia*, as the fundamental normative principle (2018, Ch. 2.2; see also Slote 1995; Zagzebski 1996);
- a target-centred approach, which seeks to provide a clear definition of each particular virtue, determining what field the virtue operates in and what its specific target is (2018, Ch. 2.3; see also Swanton 2003);
- Platonistic virtue ethics, which is much less concerned with social reality and more with apprehending the ideal Platonic forms that underpin reality and are considered the goods worth pursuing (2018, Ch. 2.4; see also Chappell 2007; Murdoch 1971).

As noted in the introduction, virtue ethics remains the least represented theory of normative ethics in academic research, but nonetheless constitutes a vibrant field of enquiry. Despite the common assumption that virtue ethics cannot offer practical solutions to actual moral problems because it lacks a clear account of moral action, there has been a breadth of scholarship devoted to applying virtues to various fields, from bio-ethics and environmental ethics to education and politics (see Axtell and Olson 2012). Additionally, despite the culturally specific nature of the virtues, some researchers have begun to look across cultures to draw parallels between virtues in different traditions, most prominently between Aristotelianism and Confucianism (see Jiyuan 1998; Shenbai and Lambert 2011).

In its many guises, virtue ethics offers a teleological account of human action and, despite charges of relativism, rational standards of moral conduct. These features warranted the contemporary revival just described, in light of the devolution of Enlightenment's objective universality into modern subjective emotivism.

3 Rules and reason

3.1 Rationality in modern moral philosophy

The era of Enlightenment is typically considered a triumph of reason over faith, of the scientific method over religious dogma; hence the name 'Age of Reason'. This applies to moral philosophy as well: Enlightenment philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were concerned with providing *moral rules* that would be as universally binding as God's commandments, but whose justification would derive from logical argument, rather than divine authority. This is to say, for instance, that a 'Thou shalt not kill' commandment would be explained in terms of rational criteria, rather than simply commanded. In other words, it is the universal validity of reason that prompts us to obey moral rules, and since everyone is thought to possess the capacity to reason – on this there is agreement with Aristotle – this project aims to free the individual from moral doctrines imposed by social structures, as well as to transcend cultural incompatibility and disagreement concerning moral values. It aims to solve the problem of dogmatism in religious ethics and the problem of social particularity in the virtue ethics of antiquity.

The fact that Kantian deontology and utilitarian consequentialism, both of which are exemplars of what MacIntyre considers the Enlightenment moral project, remain the most represented theories of normative ethics to this day is indicative of how deeply rooted the principle of universal rationality and the corresponding individualistic conception of moral agency are in modernity. As MacIntyre explains,

[i]t is in [the] capacity of the self to evade any necessary identification with any particular contingent state of affairs that some modern philosophers, both analytical and existentialist, have seen as the essence of moral agency. To be a moral agent is, on this view, precisely to be able to stand back from any and every situation in which one is involved, from any and every characteristic that one may possess, and to pass judgment on it from a purely universal and abstract point of view that is totally detached from all social particularity (2007, 31-2).

This passage describes what MacIntyre sees as the modern individual. An autonomous moral agent, endowed with reason, which in turn allows for impartial judgment regardless of cultural mores governing one's life and right action regardless of one's noble and ignoble character traits. Lying, for instance, is wrong and one should be able to deduce as much,⁸ regardless of whether

⁸ Different theories, however, will affirm different criteria for such a deduction. For Kantian deontology it will be the observance of the categorical imperative: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law" (Kant 1993, 30). For utilitarians, on the other hand, it will be the

or not one possesses the virtue of honesty. The logic that proclaims the individual as having moral agency and thus moral responsibility on account of his or her rational capacity is, again, not so different from Aristotle's, but the conception of this rational capacity is radically different, moving as it does from being grounded in a particular cultural tradition to transcending any such tradition; the individual goes from being embedded in a social practice that provides him or her with certain ends to being 'autonomous'. (The loss of a teleological framework of course accompanies this modern view of the rational moral agent, but we shall return to this in the following chapter.)

For MacIntyre, the association of rationality with universality and objectivity is a crucial error in the moral philosophy of the Enlightenment, and one that inevitably led to the contemporary moral predicament, which is that of subjective emotivism. He traces the historical development from one to the other; a development which he considers a moral decline in three stages:

a first at which evaluative and especially moral theory and practice embody genuine objective and impersonal standards which provide rational justification for particular policies, actions and judgments and which themselves in turn are susceptible of rational justification; a second stage at which there are unsuccessful attempts to maintain the objectivity and impersonality of moral judgments, but during which the project of providing rational justifications both by means of and for the standards continuously breaks down; and a third stage at which theories of an emotivist kind secure wide implicit acceptance because of a general implicit recognition in practice, though not in explicit theory, that claims to objectivity and impersonality cannot be made good (ibid., 19).

Crucially, MacIntyre here acknowledges that the moral theory of the Enlightenment was at least initially successful in providing objective and impersonal standards for its precepts; the first stage in this account does not refer to the remnants of a teleological order embodied in religious doctrine of the time, but rather to the very philosophy MacIntyre aims to critique. Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy, for instance, provides such standards, but it provides them for its particular time and place; regardless of Kant's claim to universality, the standards are not universal, but a reflection of the aims and predicaments of the culture Kant was part of.

The nineteenth-century theory of utilitarianism, on the other hand, belongs to the second stage, along with the analytic philosophy of the early twentieth century (ibid., 68). According to MacIntyre, utilitarianism attempted to devise a new teleology as grounds for morality, one that posits human action ought to aim at happiness, both personal and general, which happiness the utilitarian philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill saw in terms of maximizing

principle of utility (the achievement of the most optimal consequences of our actions) that will guide us to conclude that, say, lying is wrong.

pleasure and minimizing pain. While teleological, this view of happiness is certainly not eudaimonist and this view of human action is not character-centred, but consequentialist, positing that the consequences of an action, rather than intentions of the agent, determined its rightness. As such, it ends up prescribing a supposedly universal rule to follow, not virtues of character to cultivate. But as MacIntyre points out, "different pleasures and different happinesses are to a large degree incommensurable: there are no scales of quality or quantity on which to weigh them. Consequently appeal to the criteria of pleasure will not tell me whether to drink or swim and appeal to those of happiness cannot decide for me between the life of a monk and that of a soldier" (ibid., 64). Again, he objects to the universal applicability of the principle, and cites the utilitarianism of Henry Sidgwick for pointing out

that the moral injunctions of utilitarianism could not be derived from any psychological foundations and that the precepts which enjoin us to pursue the general happiness are logically independent of and cannot be derived from any precepts enjoining the pursuit of our own happiness. (...) At the foundation of moral thinking lie beliefs in statements for the truth of which no further reason can be given (ibid., 65).

Sidgwick's intuitionism, as it is called for concluding that moral truth can be known intuitively rather than inferred from other truths, is an example of a failure to justify the Enlightenment moral project. "The history of utilitarianism thus links historically the eighteenth-century project of justifying morality and the twentieth century's decline into emotivism" (ibid., 65). In MacIntyre's view, the two main epistemological branches of twentieth century philosophy, i.e. analytic philosophy and continental (hermeneutic) philosophy, both succumb to emotivism in the realm of ethics.

Note also how MacIntyre refers to moral theory and practice as gradually becoming uncoupled along the three stages of decline. The third, emotivist, stage is described as one in which moral theory maintains the claim to objectivity and impersonality, while moral practice is bereft of both. He writes that

[t]he project of providing a rational vindication of morality had decisively failed; and from henceforward the morality of our predecessor culture – and subsequently of our own – lacked any public, shared rationale or justification. In a world of secular rationality religion could no longer provide such a shared background and foundation for moral discourse and action; and the failure of philosophy to provide what religion could no longer furnish was an important cause of philosophy losing its central cultural role and becoming a marginal, narrowly academic subject (ibid., 50).

As philosophy retreated from public debate about moral issues and instead focused its efforts on meta-ethical concerns and epistemological debates between the analytic and continental traditions, moral life had increasingly become a matter of subjective preference, leading to

interminable disagreement about moral issues, and the mode of public debate appropriate to such a state of affairs had become that of shrill protest, rather than rational dialogue. Crucially, though, these debates were – and are – still conducted using the same moral language provided by the Enlightenment philosophers, which is to say that anyone making a moral claim still asserts its "impersonal rationality" (ibid., 8), hence its universal applicability, but in reality treats it as if it were a "mere expressive assertion" (ibid., 11). As MacIntyre puts it,

hence derives one of the features of contemporary moral discourse which I noticed at the outset, the gap between the meaning of moral expression and the ways in which they are put to use. For the meaning is and remains such as would have been warranted only if at least one of the philosophical projects had been successful; but the use, the emotivist use, is precisely what one would expect if the philosophical projects had all failed (ibid., 68).

This is why MacIntyre calls emotivism a "theory of use" (ibid., 13) rather than meaning. It maintains the meaning of rational universality inherited from the Enlightenment, but it is used to pursue what an individual finds preferential in a given situation. For MacIntyre, this state of affairs stems from the conditions of life in modernity, especially the liberal-individualistic legacy of the Enlightenment, which affirmed the autonomy of the rational moral agent. The social context of emotivism is one in which the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative relations had been lost, since modernity envisions a "social world [as] nothing but a meeting place for individual wills, each with its own set of attitudes and preferences and who understand that world solely as an arena for the achievement of their own satisfaction" (ibid., 25). These individual wills are no longer seen as having a social role to fulfill or an essential *telos* to pursue and, lacking such a social structure, they alone become the arbiter of what is good and bad, right and wrong. Sartre's existentialism, which sees the world as arbitrary and meaningless and the individual as free to choose his or her own ends and goods to pursue, is in this regard an emotivist theory *par excellence*. But the real-world implementation of such a philosophy results in a society where the sovereign individual may treat other people as means to secure his or her own ends. MacIntyre writes that

[t]o treat someone else as an end is to offer them what I take to be good reasons for acting in one way rather than another, but to leave it to them to evaluate those reasons. It is to be unwilling to influence another except by reasons which that other he or she judges to be good. (...) By contrast, to treat someone else as a means is to seek to make him or her an instrument of my purposes by adducing whatever influences or considerations will in fact be effective on this or that occasion (ibid., 23).

We can see to what extent the latter approach is grounded in the form of rationality affirmed by modern moral philosophy. The standard of effectiveness of action stems from consequentialist utilitarian philosophy, which consequentialism is further grounded in the rational principle that

a moral philosophy should consist of social facts, not values – consequences of actions certainly constitute such facts, but say nothing of value-based intentions and motives of the agent performing the action. Thus one's intentions and motives do not play a part in determining an action good or bad, since our moral agency stems from one's rational judgment, which can supposedly glean universal standards. Furthermore, MacIntyre sees the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative relations being obliterated not just at the level of individual action, but in the wider social structure. The rise of bureaucracies in modern societies is a prime example. "Bureaucratic rationality is the rationality of matching means to ends economically and efficiently" (ibid., 25). People within these structures are not considered ends in themselves, as could be said of any ancient occupying a distinct social role, but as means to secure the ends of the organization as a whole. This, of course, is strange, considering the autonomy of the individual as a moral agent affirmed by moral philosophy from the Enlightenment onward. Noting this discrepancy between philosophy and reality, MacIntyre observes that

[c]ontemporary moral experience (...) has a paradoxical character. For each of us is taught to see himself or herself as an autonomous moral agent; but each of us also becomes engaged by modes of practice (...) which involve us in manipulative relationships with others. Seeking to protect the autonomy that we have learned to prize, we aspire ourselves not to be manipulated by others; seeking to incarnate our own principles and stand-point in the world of practice, we find no way open to us to do so except by directing towards others those very manipulative modes of relationship which each of us aspires to resist in our own case. The incoherence of our attitudes and our experience arises from the incoherent conceptual scheme which we have inherited (ibid., 68).

The gap between meaning and use reflects the gap between theory and practice. The Aristotelian ideal of a moral enquiry for the purpose of performing moral acts has given way to a moral enquiry for the purpose of merely establishing what might constitute a moral act; and even though the assumption of rational impersonality has gradually been undermined, the theory nonetheless operates by prescribing moral rules as if they were both rational and impersonal; as such, it need not interact with the contingencies of actual moral life. While moral practice, having at its disposal only the language of morality provided by the theories of the Enlightenment, finds itself treating moral standards as arbitrary, all the while invoking their rational and impersonal validity as justification for its action.

But how is it, one might ask, that such an emotivist moral philosophy continues to prescribe moral rules as if they were rational and universal, rather than preferential and particular? It continues to do so, in short, because it claims to build its argument on what it considers factual and seeks to remove any judgment about values from its moral system. Values, in the view of emotivism, are wholly a matter of subjective preference, as we noted in the introduction, and

modern moral philosophy from Hume and Kant to Sidgwick and Moore has promptly discarded them in an attempt to produce an objective science of morality. But values – that is to say, what we value as good or admonish as bad – continue to inform moral practice, for the simple reason that people act in pursuit of some good that the action may secure. Human action is value-based, while our moral philosophy is value-free – this creates the gap between the theory and practice MacIntyre speaks of, and between the meaning and use of our moral language. At bottom of this gap, then, lies the insistence of modern moral philosophers that values are not factual.

3.2 Fact/value distinction

It must be acknowledged that we have not paid much attention to the many differences that exist between moral theories of various modern philosophers. To be sure, there is considerable disagreement between Kant's deontology and utilitarianism as to what constitutes a universal rational principle (which already makes problematic the notion of a universal rational principle), and further disagreement arises within utilitarianism itself, as Bentham proposes a different standard of general happiness as J.S. Mill, and the Enlightenment-era theories of David Hume and Blaise Pascal likewise diverge on many issues, and so on. Nonetheless, MacIntyre's virtue-ethical critique of modern moral philosophy at large is valuable precisely in demonstrating what it is that all these theories agree on. It is only plausible that the exchange of ideas between these different approaches would focus on the points of contention, rather than common ground. But from the perspective of the long-abandoned virtue theory, the commonalities become easily apparent, and MacIntyre is thus able to identify the principle of rational universality, the notion of the autonomous agent, and the assertion that values are distinct from facts as crucial shared elements in these various philosophies.

According to MacIntyre, Pascal is an early Enlightenment thinker who already outlines a conception of rationality that distinguishes it from value judgments, which are thought to be a function of the passions. In this view,

[r]eason does not comprehend essences or transitions from potentiality to act (...). Hence anti-Aristotelian science sets strict boundaries to the powers of reason. Reason is calculative; it can assess truths of fact and mathematical relations but nothing more. In the realm of practice therefore it can speak only of means. About ends it must be silent. Reason cannot even, as Descartes believed, refute scepticism; and hence a central achievement of reason according to Pascal, is to recognize that our beliefs are ultimately founded on nature, custom and habit (ibid., 54).

But moral philosophy cannot be separated from moral practice, as Aristotle has demonstrated, for we contemplate what is good and bad in order to act accordingly. And moral practice, which is to say moral action, is inevitably done in pursuit of a certain end, in light of which one can determine appropriate means. For Enlightenment philosophers, however, these ends are not chosen rationally, which is to say by the autonomous rational individual, but rather instilled by 'nature, custom and habit'; hence reason is established as a counterweight to what are seen as irrational value judgments, imposed by tradition and reproduced through social structures and institutions. The task of philosophy then becomes to provide an account of moral action that makes no recourse to value judgments.

MacIntyre disagrees with this account and role of rationality, as well as with the notion that values are not factual. The logical principle, first articulated by David Hume, that from a set of factual premises no moral conclusion validly follows, since that would entail a conclusion with elements that do not exist in the premises, (ibid., 56-8), is a false one. In fact, MacIntyre recognizes "several types of valid argument in which some element may appear in a conclusion which is not in the premises" (ibid., 57). He goes on to provide an illustrative example of such a logical argument: from the premises "This watch is grossly inaccurate and irregular in time-keeping" and "This watch is too heavy to carry around comfortably", it follows that "This is a bad watch" (ibid., 57-8). The premises of the argument rely on what can be empirically observed about the watch, on what *is* factually true about the watch, while the conclusion relies on a value judgment of what the watch ought to do or ought not to do. The watch ought to be able to tell time accurately, and if it doesn't, we can state as a matter of fact that the watch is bad⁹.

Crucially, this example refers to a functional concept that has a particular purpose, but MacIntyre provides an analogous example that ends with the conclusion 'This is a bad farmer'. In the virtue-ethical view, people, like watches, also have a purpose and function, on the basis of which a value judgment can be said to be true or false. If the watch does not fulfil its purpose of time-keeping, it is a bad watch; if the farmer succeeds in fulfilling its purpose of harvesting crops, he or she is a good farmer. MacIntyre concludes that

if some amended version of the 'No "ought" conclusion from "is" premises' principle is to hold good, it must exclude arguments involving functional concepts from its scope. But this suggests strongly that those who have insisted that all moral arguments fall within the scope of such a principle may have been doing so, because they took it for granted that no moral arguments involve functional concepts. Yet moral arguments within the classical, Aristotelian tradition (...)

⁹ For another counter argument to the fact/value distinction, see Searle (1967).

involve at least one central functional concept, the concept of man understood as having an essential human nature and an essential purpose or function (ibid., 58).

Virtue ethics treats values as social facts rather than as irrational preferences of individuals. This is something modern moral philosophy cannot do; since it is clear that values change over time and across cultures and often clash with one another, these values are of little use to a philosophy that aims to provide universal rules of moral action. But in its reliance on reason to arrive at those rules, modern moral philosophy is forced to dismiss the real and factual history of change of values from one period to the next and from one culture to another as essentially irrelevant. Nonetheless, such a history exists in a real social world, and MacIntyre prompts us to consider it not only as factual but as more important for moral philosophy than logical abstractions and thought experiments that belie modern morality.

3.3 Historicism and moral relativism

We have already noted the emphasis virtue ethics puts on social particularity, as opposed to rational universality. This emphasis is made apparent in the very method MacIntyre employs to critique modern moral philosophy. In 3.1, we have traced the outline of his historical account of the Enlightenment moral project from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. For MacIntyre, moral philosophy never exists in a vacuum; it emerges out of the conditions of life in its time and place. While the classical tradition of virtue ethics reflects the conditions of life in Ancient Greece, as well as the common goals of the political community in question, the shared foundations of various theories forming modern moral philosophy reflect the conditions of life in modernity. MacIntyre writes that

[a] moral philosophy – and emotivism is no exception – characteristically presupposes a sociology. For every moral philosophy offers explicitly or implicitly at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions, and in so doing generally presupposes some claim that these concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real social world (ibid., 23).

In this view, the Enlightenment theories of rational universality are moral systems that accommodate the rise of large bureaucratic structures, both public and private, which came to regulate life following the processes of industrialization and urbanization, and which came to replace small-scale social structures that regulated life up to that point (e.g. family, local community). While the latter provided people with a function within a coherent hierarchy of shared values, the former merely harnessed the free and rational agents as means to achieve its own ends as efficiently as possible; in other words, the new hierarchies were value free. This

again explains the move from a deontological view of universally binding rules as grounds for assessing moral action (Enlightenment) to the consequentialist view of objective, factual consequences of action as grounds for assessing the action's morality (utilitarianism). In turn, twentieth century emotivism, with its insistence on the subjectivity of moral beliefs, is in MacIntyre's view not an objective conclusion, but merely a conclusion of academics at Cambridge University in a certain time in history.

However, this sort of historicism poses one problem for moral philosophy, especially if moral philosophy strives to be a 'science of morality'. The problem is one of *moral relativism*: presumably, by tying moral values to a particular cultural setting or historical period in which alone they can be intelligible, one forfeits their objectivity. If something is prized as good in one community and regarded as bad in another, how can the value of that thing be determined objectively? It was in trying to address this perceived flaw in the classical moral tradition that modern moral philosophy, adopting as it did the scientific method, arrived at rational universality as a remedy. The power of reason should allow one to stand back from the social context and deduce universal moral truths from first principles and social facts – in short, universality ensures objectivity. But the eventual decline of this project into emotivism, which could only objectively determine that moral truths are subjective in nature, a matter of personal preference, concluded not only that rational evaluative statements are not necessarily universally valid, but also that they are not objective.

Taking this history into account, it is actually virtue ethics that emerges as the better provider of objective and impersonal standards for morality, despite the common charge of moral relativism that is often levelled at MacIntyre's work. These standards may be culturally specific, but within their respective communities they can be objectively traced to the goals and goods the community shares. From this perspective, MacIntyre is deeply critical of the emotivist outcome of the Enlightenment project precisely on the grounds of its subjectivity, which he sees as an inevitable consequence of affirming the fact/value distinction. As he points out, "[i]n the domain of fact there are procedures for eliminating disagreement; in that of morals the ultimacy of disagreement is dignified by the title 'pluralism'" (ibid., 32). This fact/value distinction is of course manifested in the aforementioned gulf separating moral philosophy, which has claimed the domain of fact, from moral practice, where a pluralism of moral values has produced a public sphere rife with interminable disagreement. That is why an important element of MacIntyre's critique of modernity is a critique of its philosophy, science, and academic output in general. He states that

[t]here ought not to be two histories, one of political and moral action and one of political and moral theorizing, because there were not two pasts, one populated only by actions, the other only by theories. Every action is the bearer and expression of more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts; every piece of theorizing and every expression of belief is a political and moral action (ibid., 61).

This, we might add, is consistent with Aristotle's classification of ethics (as well as politics) as a practical science, rather than a theoretical one. The aim of ethics is not merely to know what is good and what is bad, but also to do good. But most importantly, we cannot know what is good or bad at all outside of a particular social context, which operates on certain shared goals, whether they are either inherited from history or articulated to meet the needs of contemporaneity. In any case, moral theory ought to have real-world applicability, and since the real world is made up of individuals and communities with motivations and intentions, a properly objective science of morality ought to take the histories of these pursuits into account.

3.4 Social sciences and the unpredictability of human action

MacIntyre shows that what we know as social sciences, which are a wholly modern phenomenon, fail to meet this requirement. In the conventional Enlightenment account, "the aim of the social sciences is to explain specifically social phenomena by supplying law-like generalizations which do not differ in their logical form from those applicable to natural phenomena in general" (ibid., 88). In other words, social sciences, as the very name suggests, try to employ the same methods as the natural sciences in order to reach equally factual and objective conclusions with the same kind of predictive power as, say, the laws of physics. But no such law-like generalizations have ever been discovered in the realm of social phenomena. Nonetheless, MacIntyre claims, the mainstream continues to rely on this philosophy of social sciences because it gives legitimacy to social scientists as managerial experts (ibid., 88-9). Social science, including moral philosophy, lends itself to the purposes of modern bureaucracies, which are based on value-free, efficient expertise and seek to achieve desired outcomes by enforcing rules and prescribing duties. Such a social science inevitably sees its object of study as a machine with constituent parts whose only function is to secure whatever the end of the organization happens to be and who cannot be considered ends in themselves. This mechanical view of society can be traced back to the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, whose focus on practical considerations of power in social relations, rather than ideas of the good life, represents the supposedly realistic and objective foundation of the modern science of politics.

Human action, once divorced from a teleological framework, becomes a matter of mechanical explanation. Kant points out the incompatibility of mechanical explanation with moral action and

[t]he notion of 'fact' with respect to human beings is thus transformed in the transition from the Aristotelian to the machinist view. On the former view human action, because it is to be explained teleologically, not only can, but must be, characterized with reference to the hierarchy of goods which provide the ends of human action. On the latter view human action not only can, but must be, characterized without any reference to such goods. (...) 'Fact' becomes value-free, 'is' becomes stranger to 'ought' and explanation, as well as evaluation, changes its character as a result of this divorce between 'is' and 'ought' (ibid., 84).

We have already noted the meagre role afforded to values and value judgments in modern moral philosophy, which is what MacIntyre is referring to here with the changing character of 'evaluation'. But he also makes a point about the changing character of 'explanation', by which he means the role of theory in science, or in our understanding of the world more broadly. As he sees it, modernity develops two different methods of explanation; empiricism on the one hand and natural science on the other. While the two may seem synonymous at first glance, for MacIntyre "[t]here is (...) something extraordinary in the coexistence of empiricism and natural science in the same culture, for they represent radically different and incompatible ways of approaching the world" (ibid., 81). Both, of course, stem from the Enlightenment, which cast away the Aristotelian interpretation of the world and confronted reality without a theoretical intermediary. "This conceit of course was, as such conceits always are, the sign of an unacknowledged and unrecognized transition from one stance of theoretical interpretation to another" (ibid., 80), namely from teleology to the dichotomy of empiricism and natural science.

But while both empiricism and natural science attempt to explain the world without evaluating it (that is to say, without theorizing), the difference between them lies in what they constitute as explanation. As MacIntyre explains, "[t]he empiricist concept of experience was a cultural invention of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century" (ibid., 80) that only focused on sensory perception in an attempt to "close the gap between seems and is, between appearance and reality" (ibid., 80). In other words, what we experience with our senses is already an objective reality – the way things seem is the way things are. "By contrast the natural scientific concepts of observation and experiment were intended to enlarge the distance between *seems* and *is*" (ibid., 80), which is to say that our immediate sensory experience may be mistaken; experiments can often show that the way things seem is not how they are – the discoveries of the atom, the DNA, quantum mechanics, etc., all rely on this assumption.

Nonetheless, however useful these methods may be in the domain of natural science, they lack a crucial component that would allow them to bear on the object of study in the social sciences. Determining how things are in relation to how they seem is a sensible approach to explaining the natural world, which knows nothing of motivations, purposes and intentions. But in the social world, we are faced with determining how things are in relation to how they ought to be, which inevitably introduces evaluative judgments, and therefore theory, into a science of human affairs. MacIntyre point out that

[e]ach of us, individually and as a member of particular social groups, seeks to embody his own plans and projects in the natural social world. A condition of achieving this is to render as much of our natural and social environment as possible predictable and the importance of both natural and social science in our lives derives at least in part (...) from their contribution to this project. At the same time each of us, individually and as a member of particular social groups, aspires to preserve his independence, his freedom, his creativity, and that inner reflection which plays so great a part in freedom and creativity, from invasion by others (ibid., 104).

Human action, in short, is not entirely predictable. This, as we have seen, is partly due to the fact that values and value judgments, while they can be objective and factual, are not universally applicable and cannot be generalized. And as the above quote shows, it is partly due to the freedom of choice afforded to humans by rational judgment, by 'that inner reflection'. This unpredictability of human action poses a problem for the social scientist and the bureaucratic manager, but MacIntyre simply argues for a balanced view. "It is necessary," he says, "if life is to be meaningful, for us to be able to engage in long-term projects, and this requires predictability; it is necessary, if life is to be meaningful, for us to be in possession of ourselves and not merely to be the creations of other people's projects, intentions and desires, and this requires unpredictability" (ibid., 104). So how do we make generalizations about this state of affairs? We cannot make law-like generalizations, but rather statements resembling "the proverbs of folk societies, the generalizations of jurists, the maxims of Machiavelli" (ibid., 105).

To summarize, there are four key points that MacIntyre makes about the role of rationality in moral philosophy. First, modern moral philosophy overestimates the capacity of reason to produce universal maxims while at the same time restricting its focus on what it considers to be factual, which eventually leads to (contemporary) emotivism. Second, reason can – despite what modern philosophers have said – evaluate values as facts, so long as those values are connected to the ends of individuals and the shared ends of a community. Third, moral philosophy ought to be historical because moral theory is not separable from moral practice, and moral practice is embodied in a particular culture. Nonetheless, rational evaluation should allow for resolution of conflicting values across time and culture, thereby avoiding the charge of relativism. Fourth,

modern social sciences cannot succeed in producing law-like generalization about human affairs because the methods of natural sciences they use lack the teleological orientation which is needed to account for motivations and intentions informing human action.

4 Virtues and purpose

4.1 *Telos* and human nature

We have already indicated that the Enlightenment's insistence on reason as an objective, universal arbiter was intimately bound up with a rejection of a teleological view of the world that had informed both classical and medieval philosophy. However, what MacIntyre shows is that it is precisely teleological reasoning that allows us to locate impersonal and objective standards in moral philosophy, found not in universal reason, but in the historical contingencies of actual political communities that lead those communities to set specific ends for their common project. As we could see in our discussion of the fact/value distinction, MacIntyre insists, against the grain of modern philosophy, that moral assertions can indeed be objective, once provided with a teleological framework, that is to say, once we can identify the ends that the practice of said moral values would meet.

In MacIntyre's view, the Enlightenment project of justifying morality, based as it was on

constructing valid arguments which will move from premises concerning human nature as they understand it to be to conclusions about the authority of moral rules and precepts, (...) was bound to fail, because of an ineradicable discrepancy between their shared conception of moral rules and precepts on the one hand and what was shared – despite much larger divergences – in their conception of human nature on the other (ibid., 52).

This discrepancy stems from the lack of a *telos*; human beings, while possessing certain natural endowments, are not bestowed with a purpose by those endowments. In other words, human nature is factual, but value-free. Consequently, the moral rules and precepts that modern philosophers devised to govern human nature do not intrinsically serve to meet certain ends of individuals and communities. To be sure, they might, but it is not the function of, say, Kant's categorical imperative to secure some good; it is simply a fact and must therefore be observed and obeyed. This leads to the "disappearance of any connection between the precepts of morality and the facts of human nature" (ibid., 56).

By contrast, virtue ethics provides a comprehensive moral system grounded in the ends of individuals and communities; ends that can be rationally determined and scrutinized, especially with reference to the historical situation that gives rise to them. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* thus describes "a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature" (ibid., 52). This framework, which posits a goal to be attained in the future, establishes a journey to be completed by human action, rather than

detached contemplation to be practiced by the powers of reason. It works comprehensively as a triadic structure, providing the lost connection between the two discrepant elements retained in modern moral philosophy. "We thus have a threefold scheme in which human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be (human nature in its untutored state) is initially discrepant and discordant with the principles of ethics and needs to be transformed by the instruction of practical reason and experience into human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*" (ibid., 53).

This insight allows us to define the discrepancy of modern moral philosophy more clearly: even the rationally-minded Enlightenment philosophers are forced to acknowledge the presence in human nature of irrational drives, passions, desires, and these inclinations do not always prompt action that would square with the universal moral rules proposed by these philosophers. But whereas virtue ethics sees its purpose in instructing and guiding the untutored human nature to move, through experience and action, towards its true *telos*, where the moral norms will align with human nature, modern moral philosophy provides no such journey; instead, moral rules are imposed on human beings who are naturally ill-equipped to comply or even make sense of them, but must, since the rules are universally valid, not unlike divine commandments. MacIntyre points out that all Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophers, from Pascal, Hume, Kant, Diderot, Smith, Kierkegaard, "reject any teleological view of human nature, any view of man as having an essence which defines his true end" (ibid., 54). As we have already indicated, this rejection is mainly connected to the fact/value distinction; more precisely, however, it has to do with the realization that allowing for motivations and passions that govern human ends to enter the science of morality jeopardize what they saw as the objectivity of their project, namely the ability to provide law-like generalizations. As MacIntyre explains,

[f]or although each of the writers (...) attempted in his positive arguments to base morality on human nature, each in his negative arguments moved toward a more and more unrestricted version of the claim that no valid argument can move from entirely factual premises to any moral or evaluative conclusion – to a principle, that is, which once it is accepted, constitutes an epitaph to their entire project (ibid., 56).

The disappearance of teleology from the philosophical framework meant the loss of coherence in modern morality, opening the possibility of a gradual devolution to emotivism and creating a chasm between philosophy as an abstract academic preoccupation and actual moral life. The old Aristotelian commitment of ethics to human self-improvement, implicit in the definition of the field as a practical science aimed at acting virtuously, gave way to a conception of ethics as a theoretical science that no longer strived for human self-improvement (there being no particular end to achieve) but demanding obedience of rules, because those rules were right.

Significantly, noble character traits expressed in action are in the classical tradition aimed at a certain good which justifies them, whereas the moral rules of modern philosophy are justified in their being right, according to the supposed capacity of reason for objectivity and ability to generalize. This dichotomy between 'right' and 'good' remains a crucial conceptual difference between virtue ethicists and their deontological or utilitarian counterparts, and as we can see, it emerges directly out of the loss of teleology in Enlightenment moral philosophy. As MacIntyre summarizes,

[s]ince the whole point of ethics (...) is to enable man to pass from his present state to his true end, the elimination of any notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of any notion of a *telos* leaves behind a moral scheme composed of two remaining elements whose relationship becomes quite unclear. (...) Hence the eighteenth-century moral philosophers engaged in what was an inevitably unsuccessful project; for they did indeed attempt to find a rational basis for their moral beliefs in a particular understanding of human nature, while inheriting a set of moral injunctions on the one hand and a conception of human nature on the other which had been expressly designed to be discrepant with each other (ibid., 55).

It had once been the goal of ethics to guide human action towards a certain end, and it was in light of this end that certain actions, and certain character traits, could be judged good or bad. For Aristotle, the ultimate and natural end of human life was *eudaimonia*, or happiness; the cultivation of virtues and the avoidance of vices enabled one to achieve this end, starting as one does from an untutored state of human nature. The prescriptions of virtue ethics are then not aligned with human nature, but they share the same end; ethics guides nature to achieve the common goal. But the prescriptions of modern moral philosophy, which impose rules rather than promote virtues, have no analogous end in view that the observance of rules would secure. Consequently, no journey is implicit in the progression from an untutored human nature to a properly moral existence, and the moral rules themselves do not have rational, objective grounds for being observed – they may prescribe logically right action, but they can say nothing of good action that fulfills a purpose. The loss of this teleological connection between moral rules on the one hand and ideas about human nature on the other explains why the modern moral scheme devolved into emotivism: both human nature and moral injunctions were subject to scientific inquiry that established facts about them, but no longer identified any purposes to either. Eventually, the realm of human nature was made as subjective as we had already established the realm of moral standards to be – the existentialists already proclaimed man to be his own creation, free to set his own rules, and contemporary social science continued the project of subjectivizing these two elements of human experience by proclaiming human nature virtually non-existent, and individual identity a social construct. This insight, too, has roots in the Enlightenment moral project. As MacIntyre states,

[w]hat I have described in terms of a loss of traditional structure and content was seen by the most articulate of their philosophical spokesmen as the achievement by the self of its proper autonomy. The self had been liberated from all those outmoded forms of social organization which had imprisoned it simultaneously within a belief in a theistic and teleological world order and within those hierarchical structures which attempted to legitimate themselves as part of such a world order (ibid., 60).

The contemporary individual is now freer and more autonomous than ever, yet uncertain about what he or she is, or how he or she ought to act. This is because the admission that there is such a thing as an essential human nature on the one hand and the elaboration of a fixed purpose to human life on the other would impose restrictions on this autonomy and freedom. At the same time, the individual has at his or her disposal the language of modern science, which allows – prompts even – one to speak of human nature and morality with all the certainty of universal truth, despite depriving both of a purpose that would endow the facts of human nature and morality with meaning.

Perhaps observing some troubling effects of such a trend in our subjectivist culture, there are nowadays tentative attempts at reviving the triadic conceptual scheme in moral philosophy. To mention but one such project, Borut Ošljaj's work on the concept of 'world ethos' and his elaboration of a 'post-secular philosophy' takes as its starting point the medieval metaphysical triad of Man, World, and God (2015, 6-14), which correspond roughly to our categories of human nature, moral standards, and *telos*, respectively. The problem with this triad, of course, is the metaphysical nature of the God-category, which hardly lends itself to scientific scrutiny and maintains all the connotations of religious obfuscation that modern science has made it its historical mission to dispel. Sensing, then, that the term is no longer applicable to modern life, Ošljaj does not do away with the category altogether, as the Enlightenment philosophers did, but replaces it with a different teleology; that of a world ethos, which rests on a cosmopolitan awareness of the interconnectedness of human beings and humanity with the planet itself, positing a natural and social world held in a precarious balance that depends on human action (ibid., 98-103). The maintenance of these inter-personal and environmental bonds becomes the end of good action and confers moral responsibility on individuals acting in the world.

However, this project, as many other attempts at course-correcting the Enlightenment moral project on its slide toward subjectivism, ends up affirming rational universality as the only conceivable remedy. In Ošljaj's case, the 'post-secular' aim of his theory demands that God be replaced by 'world ethos', but both categories effectively prescribe universal rules to follow, which we have already identified, in Chapter 3, as one of the main problematic assumptions of modern moral philosophy; namely, that there is an authority, be it God or reason, that can

legitimately affirm a moral value outside of time and place, outside of the ends of a particular group of people for whom the value is meaningful. So while it is noteworthy that there are philosophical projects that seek to restore teleological reasoning to morality by emphasizing the importance of the question, "what sort of person am I to become" (MacIntyre 2007, 118), as opposed to the question of which rules should I follow, these nonetheless tend to either hold the same view of human rationality as proposed by the Enlightenment, or look for alternatives in the Enlightenment's immediate historical predecessor, Christian theology. The latter is even true of the later works of our central source, Alasdair MacIntyre, which is precisely why we have focused in our inquiry exclusively on his argument in *After Virtue*, which remains one of the few, and perhaps most comprehensive, secular defenses of virtue ethics and teleological reasoning in modern philosophy.

4.2 Case study: The Intellectual Dark Web

For the above reason, the argument of *After Virtue* can offer useful insight into many aspects of contemporary public debate. Most notably, it lends itself to explaining the nature of what has been termed 'a culture war', that is, an ideological conflict about social issues raging between liberal leftists and right-wing conservatives, or alternatively by what has been called the 'alt-right', a loose-knit community of neo-Nazis, white-nationalists and anti-feminists. The issues are numerous, including gay rights, transgender rights, gender equality, abortion, racism, to list but the most often discussed. This conflict is arguably most prominent in online spaces – social media platforms, content-sharing platforms, etc. – but it extends to non-virtual arenas, too, from grassroots movements that organize protests on college campuses or march down city streets to traditional media debate shows and opinion columns.

But the more or less global proliferation of the conflict, enabled by the ubiquity of the internet, appears to have also given rise to various attempts at balancing the polarized debate spaces and breaking through each side's respective echo chambers.

One of these attempts in particular has received a great deal of media attention, but only after it garnered a sizeable following online. Dubbed the 'Intellectual Dark Web' (IDW) by one of its members, mathematician Eric Weinstein, it is a group of academics and public intellectuals from both sides of the political spectrum. The group consists of Eric and Bret Weinstein, the latter a professor of biology who came to public attention with his opposition to a proposed Day of Absence mandated for Caucasian people at his place of employment, Evergreen State

College; Ben Shapiro, a conservative media personality; Joe Rogan, a stand-up comedian and popular podcast host; Sam Harris, neuroscientist and prominent critic of religion; and Jordan Peterson, Canadian psychologist who entered the public conversation by opposing Bill C-16, a piece of legislation that mandated the use of one's preferred pronouns, intending to protect the rights of transgender people by means of what Peterson claimed amounted to 'compelled speech', an antithesis of the democratic norm of free speech.

Our analysis will focus on the last two names on the list, Sam Harris and Jordan Peterson, as these two are the ones who touch upon matters of moral philosophy the most, or most convincingly at any rate. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning how the group as a whole positions itself in the public sphere of non-mainstream media from which it emerged. The reason for the group's existence, the common interest that connects the varied political allegiances of its individual members, is an opposition to the ideology of identity politics, which the IDW sees as pervading institutions of learning, mainstream media, corporate culture and institutional politics. Each member in his own right has also been accused of some form of oppressive speech or action – either racism, sexism, islamophobia, or transphobia – for expressing opinions at odds with the perceived narrative of identity politics. Jordan Peterson describes identity politics as

a collectivist narrative, (...) and its fundamental claim is that (...) you're not essentially an individual, you're essentially a member of a group. And that group might be your ethnicity or it might be your sex or it might be your race or it might be any of the endless number of potential groups that you belong to, because you belong to many of them. And that you should be essentially categorized along with those who are like you on that dimension in that group; that's proposition number one. Proposition number two is that the proper way to view the world is as a battleground between groups of different power. So you define the groups first, and then you (...) view the individual from the group context, you view the battle between groups from the group context, and you view history itself as a consequence of nothing but the power maneuvers between different groups. That eliminates the consideration of the individual at a very fundamental level (Peterson 2018b).

In this view, identity politics reduces individual freedom and moral responsibility to group identity, that is, to belonging to a certain social group, which groups are classified based on the categories of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation, most prominently, and arranged into a hierarchy of power within each category. Thus, to be a white, Anglo-Saxon, straight, cis-gendered man would amount to the height of privilege, whereas being a female person of colour, or a transgender person, or homosexual, etc., confers upon one the status of victim (of structural violence). While the scheme is devised in order to identify historically inherited biases and power relations inherent in social institutions and thus be able to rectify injustices suffered by marginalized groups, the critique from Peterson and the IDW is that privilege and victimhood

are not so transparently distributed among designated social groups, and that at any rate the abolition of hierarchies among groups does not constitute an atonement for historical injustices, and that not all hierarchies can be ascribed to unequal power relations between groups. Significantly, the critique extends as much to left-wing identity politics, which takes the form of political correctness, as it does to right-wing identitarians (e.g. white supremacists, alt-right supporters), although mainstream media is quick to apply the alt-right label to Peterson and the rest of the IDW. This is because, while the movement could at least nominally be considered to occupy an in-between space between the left-right divide in the 'culture war', the bulk of its critique is aimed at left-wing identity politics, which, unlike right-wing identity politics, is seen by the IDW as a hegemonic discourse in public debate and social institutions.

Peterson's and IDW's criticism of identity politics has two features that could well have been lessons of virtue ethics to modern moral philosophy, but both features also fall short of the kind of secular (Aristotelian) virtue ethics that MacIntyre advocates for in *After Virtue*. The first virtue-ethical aspect of Peterson's critique is teleological reasoning. In his appeals for a more individualistic, rather than collectivist, conception of identity, he often speaks about the need for individuals to find meaning in their lives, which he defines as assuming responsibility in one's social relations and interactions, which in turn gives one's life purpose, *telos*. In his account, the words 'meaning' and 'purpose' seem practically interchangeable. Such a message is perhaps not out of character for a clinical psychologist, and following his rise to infamy with his opposition to Bill C-16, Peterson has gone on to articulate the message in the form of a self-help book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (2018a), which became a global bestseller. While many of his political opponents met his success with warnings about the danger of his transphobic and misogynist views becoming mainstream, it can be argued that his wide commercial appeal is due not so much to his criticism of feminism and LGBTQ theory, his brand of biological determinism when it comes to gender, or his distinction between equality of outcome and equality of opportunity; rather, his appeal lies in addressing the common malaise of the modern age, also identified by MacIntyre – the fact that individuals, once liberated from the pressures of fulfilling a social role or obeying religious dogma, find themselves hard-pressed to locate any fixed purpose to their lives. Telling young men with no fixed purpose in life to go clean their rooms (*ibid.*) is a more resonant statement than arguing against the gender wage gap.

Peterson himself sees this as not only his core message, but the most resonant aspect of his philosophy. Speaking at PragerU Summit, a religious Christian event, he relates his

observations about audience response during his many speaking engagements on his global book-promotion tour, and finds that the point people relate to the most is the following:

I never tell someone that they're okay the way they are. There's this idea that came up in the 60s that you're okay the way you are. And I don't like that idea very much, and I think it's a bad idea, especially when you're talking to young people who are lost and nihilistic and depressed and suffering and aimless and ideologically possessed and prematurely cynical. Because they're not okay the way they are. (...) You've got sixty years to put yourself together, and you better be better at the end of that than you were at the beginning, or something has gone seriously wrong. So it's not an optimistic thing to tell people they're okay the way they are; it's a pessimistic thing because what you do is denigrate what they could be for what they are. And I know that's a terrible idea technically speaking, from a psychological perspective, because it's who you could be that imbues your life with meaning [emphasis added] (Peterson 2019).

This is a good description of the same teleological framework MacIntyre identifies in virtue ethics; namely a framework in which the individual is supposed to progress, through instruction and habituation, from man-in-his-untutored-state to man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos*. Additionally, Peterson notes the consequences of teaching a purpose-less morality to young people; one in which their present state is affirmed regardless of its suitability, since there are no rational standards to which its suitability can be referred. MacIntyre would likely agree with these consequences, except his sweeping argument would apply not just to the teaching of youth, but to the adults doing the teaching – and to modernity at large.

In any case, there could very well be some political utility in recognizing this as the core tenet of Jordan Peterson's philosophy. If the reason for his popularity is not so much his rhetorical domination of Social Justice Warriors (SJWs), as many Youtube clips, internet memes, and mainstream media representations would have us believe, but instead his appeal to a teleological moral framework that has been missing in modern moral philosophy, then the many headlines and protest placards about a misogynist backlash against gender-equality gains, the persistence of white male hegemony, and similar interpretations of the Peterson phenomenon are perhaps somewhat too apocalyptic, and miss the central point. Instead, perhaps Peterson's success is primarily a symptom of the inability of modern life to provide an individual with a *telos*, and more significantly, proof of a profound need human beings have for a *telos*.

That being said, there is a crucial difference between Peterson's and MacIntyre's respective teleological frameworks; a difference that betrays Peterson's modern bias, so to speak. Peterson's distinction between 'meaning' and 'happiness' as two possible goals of human life (Peterson 2018c) – of which he prefers the former – is a direct consequence of the modern loss of the conceptual framework of virtue ethics, namely its understanding of *eudaimonia*. Instead, Peterson operates within the limits of modern moral philosophy and modern life, where

happiness is reduced to pleasure, plain and simple, while meaning becomes a separate category, associated with hardship and carrying the burden of responsibility, which are codified into the literary structure of the mythical hero's journey – a reference point Peterson employs quite often. However, as both Aristotle and MacIntyre make clear, happiness as *eudaimonia* has very little to do with pleasure and is in fact much closer to Peterson's category of meaning; one can be considered happy when one lives in accordance with virtue. That is to say, a happy person and a good person coincide in the virtue-ethical scheme, whereas Peterson's distinction between happiness and meaning – which admittedly is not simply his distinction, but a ubiquitously modern one – inevitably draws a distinction between a good person and a happy person.

The second virtue-ethical aspect of Peterson's discourse, and the discourse of IDW in general in this case, is its critique of identity politics as an emotivist doctrine, and a corresponding appeal to rational moral standards and scientific fact against what is perceived as subjectivism and moral relativism. In this matter, however, the divergences with virtue ethics are more profound; while the object of criticism is the same, the conceptual framework is wholly incompatible.

The most prominent critic here is probably Sam Harris with his book *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Moral Values* (2011), which emerged from his PhD thesis of a similar title. As the title suggests, Harris argues that what makes for a 'good life' and what generates human welfare can be determined quite objectively, with universal applicability. On this objective basis, one can then determine values, prescribe behaviours, etc., that promote and enable this version of the good life (Harris 2011, 1-26). The scheme is meant to serve as a remedy for the confusion and logical inconsistencies of a predominantly liberal public discourse in Western societies, which in the name of cultural sensitivity and multicultural predilections preaches tolerance for often conflicting norms and values. This discourse, in a word, is emotivist; it is based on the assumption that, values being subjective, their relative rightness or wrongness cannot be established. Values are simply preferences and we must learn to respect them when they differ from ours. According to Harris, however, there should be – and are – objective standards we can discern which would help resolve the normative conflicts that inevitably arise in a globalized, culturally heterogeneous world.

His theory is teleological, since it presupposes a *telos*, namely the idea of human welfare, in relation to which all kinds of values can be scrutinized. He opens his book with a discussion of the vendetta tradition in Albania, which embroils families into multi-generational blood feuds and places young men into lifelong isolation and hiding, fearing for their lives (ibid., 1-2).

Obviously, Harris points out, these young men have a limited capacity for happiness and flourishing, therefore the cultural norm of vendetta is less conducive to human welfare than a norm that doesn't place young men under life-long house arrest. Harris' propositions can be viewed as a contemporary reiteration of utilitarianism, in particular on account of his insistence on universal applicability and objectivity of his teleological standard, with the notion of 'human welfare' serving as a somehow even broader parallel of 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'. Of course, the shared point of virtue ethics and utilitarianism is precisely their teleological nature, whereas they differ with regard to what constitutes a rational, objective standard in the realm of values: for virtue ethicists, *telos* is intimately bound up with the cultural context, in relation to which it can be made intelligible. For Harris, neuroscience can measure psychological states that correspond to the idea of human welfare, or states that correspond to human misery, and these measurements transcend cultural contexts to produce objective *facts* about what constitutes human happiness.

Having thus used empirical science to argue against the fact/value distinction (ibid., Ch. 1), to argue that one can make 'ought' conclusions from 'is' premises, Harris hopes to dispel the moral-relativistic arguments of the age, countering contemporary moral philosophy with the scientific method, as well as the ever-present religious arguments, countering the role of God as giver of moral law with much the same logic as the early Enlightenment thinkers, although potentially with more elaborate empirical data sets.

Known as an atheist and a critic of religion (see Harris 2005; 2011, Ch. 4), Harris' secularism is another point of contact with the argument MacIntyre puts forth in *After Virtue*, as well as a considerable point of disagreement between him and Peterson, whose own brand of virtue ethics is steeped in Christian theology. Like MacIntyre, they push against the emotivist tendencies of the day, but while they both approach the subject matter from different standpoints – opposing even – they are both universalists when it comes to morality. The commonality betrays a bias towards modern moral philosophy in attempts to critique the products of this very same philosophy. As universalist doctrines tend to, Harris' and Peterson's attempts at course-correcting the emotivist downward spiral function ahistorically, devising ideal systems from pure reason. Nonetheless, their criticism resonates and attracts a wide audience, and this is in part due to the object of their criticism (emotivism of contemporary morality), which seems to disturb everyone, and perhaps in part due to the virtue-ethical elements of their solutions (Peterson's focus on habit and teleology, Harris' secularism).

However, MacIntyre's account of virtue ethics provides a much more elaborate argument against the same object of criticism as the proponents of the Intellectual Dark Web, albeit one that at the same time reveals the latter's own solutions as part of the problem. It does so, as we have shown in previous chapters, by means of a historical account of modern moral philosophy, which shows, contra Peterson and Harris, that Enlightenment-era faith in science is not so much a remedy for emotivism, but its historical source. At the same time, MacIntyre's understanding of practical rationality and his contextual teleology may even serve a kind of mediating role between the embattled rhetoric of universalists and emotivists. As such, virtue ethics could and should have a more prominent role in contemporary political debate, particularly in the so-called 'culture wars' fought online, where extreme polarization is the norm. Our final chapter, then, focuses on how MacIntyre's virtue ethics translates to politics generally, and what it can contribute to contemporary political debates surrounding identity politics in particular.

5 Virtues and politics

5.1 Virtue ethics and liberalism

Since the past is not neatly divided into a history of ideas and a history of action (as we have quoted MacIntyre saying in 3.3), but is instead an interweaving of contemplative philosophy and active politics, it should come as no surprise that MacIntyre parallels his account of the history of modern moral philosophy with a sociological analysis of modernity; a political and economic history which gave shape to and was in turn shaped by the currents of moral thought we have so far discussed.

For MacIntyre, this is a history of what he termed "bureaucratic individualism" (2007, 71). Invoking Weber, MacIntyre sees modernity in terms of bureaucratic structures and organizations, whether states or private corporations, comprised of free-floating individuals; individuals who have the freedom to make of their life what they will, to subscribe to whatever moral code they choose, no longer bound by tradition and religion, so long as they also function as means to the very practical ends of the bureaucracies they find themselves part of. Of course, the rigorous focus on achieving these practical ends makes the bureaucracies seem antithetical to the kind of emotivist morality that MacIntyre has thus far decried in modernity, one wherein each individual may choose his or her own ends. But MacIntyre sees this as the crucial division of modern life. As he puts it,

[t]he bifurcation of the contemporary social world into a realm of the organizational in which ends are taken to be given and are not available for rational scrutiny and a realm of the personal in which judgment and debate about values are central factors, but in which no rational social resolution of issues is available, finds its internalization (...) in the relation of the individual self to the roles and characters of social life (ibid., 34).

MacIntyre introduces the notion of characters as "moral representatives of their culture" (ibid., 28), and he proposes that the culture of modernity has put forth the character of 'manager' as its epitome; a character with the skill to organize a (social) structure into an efficient and functional mechanism. The description, again, extends as much to the factory owners of the 19th century and corporate CEOs of today as it does to the many policy experts and politicians, the technocrats who fulfill very much the same function at the level of state power.

Accordingly, MacIntyre identifies Weber, who first described modernity in terms of this bureaucratic aspect, as an emotivist thinker (ibid., 25). He believed values to be non-rational and therefore of no utility in the public sphere, where one was concerned with the complex

problem of engineering societies so as to run as smoothly as machines. The emotivist doctrine which underpins the liberal value of individual freedom is therefore a necessary complement, not an antagonist, to the bureaucratic nature of modern life. The 'bifurcation', then, ideally occurs on the public-private axis; the public sphere becomes the domain of "bureaucratic rationality" (ibid., 25), and the private sphere becomes the domain of individual freedom where, however, one is hard-pressed to discover worthwhile ends to pursue, since the role community and society at large once played in furnishing such ends has been done away with – and ends to human life are, in the view of virtue ethics at least, always socially negotiated and determined.

But despite this supposed symbiosis, modern political debate appears to us as interminably fraught; the public sphere is far from consensual, even if evaluative judgments have indeed been relegated to the personal realm. In contemporary politics, the fundamental division appears to be one between individualism and collectivism, or, as MacIntyre puts it, "the culture of bureaucratic individualism results in their characteristic overt political debates between an individualism which makes its claims in terms of rights and forms of bureaucratic organization which make their claims in terms of utility" (ibid., 71). In this view, both leading moral philosophies – Kantian deontology and utilitarianism – have a practical application within the liberal ethos, one within the universalist tendencies of human rights legislation and the other in the offices of social engineers and policy experts. Neither, however, is able to provide the free modern individual with a compelling *telos*, for reasons discussed in the previous two chapters, and both only end up prescribing rules rather than elaborating a purpose to said rules. This, says MacIntyre, is the fundamental problem with liberalism:

Ronald Dworkin has recently argued that the central doctrine of modern liberalism is 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 unsetttable. On these individuals are free to agree or to disagree. The rules of morality and law hence are not to be derived from or justified in terms of some more fundamental conception of the good life for man. In arguing thus Dworkin has, I believe, identified a stance characteristic not just of liberalism, but of modernity. Rules become the primary concept of the moral life. Qualities of character then generally come to be prized only because they will lead us to follow the right set of rules (ibid., 119).

It should by now, in light of our historical analysis of modern moral philosophy, be clear how the liberal paradigm of individual freedom, emotivist in nature, is a direct consequence of the Enlightenment project of justifying morality on rational grounds, divorced from the particularities of culture and especially the evaluative nature of teleology, which one's community used to provide. Instead, the universalism of Enlightenment morality finds its particular method in the aforementioned bureaucratic rationality, that is to say, in the form of externally mandated rules. MacIntyre proposes a reversal of the modern logic: "Suppose

however that in articulating the problems of morality the ordering of evaluative concepts has been misconceived by the spokesmen of modernity and more particularly of liberalism; suppose that we need to attend to virtues in the first place in order to understand the function and authority of rules" (ibid., 119). The idea is that the moral rules we follow are not grounded in any shared goals of communities, as virtues are and as the laws of, say, the Greek polis were. Lacking any such authority, these rules lead to interminable disagreement about their validity; and as much as liberalism would prefer to declare rules unimpeachable and our sentiments about them as subjective value judgment best kept private, political debate is inevitably a negotiation about shared goals, and evaluative questions are bound to arise in the public sphere, which is at present ill-equipped to resolve them. As MacIntyre goes on to explain, contemporary political debates are

often staged in terms of a supposed opposition between individualism and collectivism (...). But in fact what is crucial is that on which the contending parties agree, namely that there are only two alternative modes of social life open to us, one in which the free and arbitrary choices of individuals are sovereign and one in which the bureaucracy is sovereign, precisely so that it may limit the free and arbitrary choices of individuals. Given this deep cultural agreement, it is unsurprising that the politics of modern societies oscillate between a freedom which is nothing but a lack of regulation of individual behavior and forms of collectivist control designed only to limit the anarchy of self-interest (ibid., 34-5).

Again MacIntyre demonstrates that what appears on the surface as a politics of disagreement and a perennial speaking-at-cross-purposes is in fact grounded in a fundamental agreement about the tenets of modern moral philosophy, the Enlightenment moral project; it only manifests as disagreement for lack of any shared ends to the tenets. This, incidentally, is quite in keeping with the generally held view that casts liberalism as the modern paradigm *par excellence* due to its mediating role between conservatism and progressivism, which especially in America of the 1980s, when MacIntyre wrote *After Virtue*, stood for a libertarian defense of individual freedom and a collectivist idea of a welfare state, respectively. Liberalism in the form of a social democracy is a kind of compromise between the two forces, but one that successfully fuses the modern tenets of individualism in the form of a subjectivist plurality of values and utilitarian bureaucratic rationality in the form of a robust state.

MacIntyre, as we have already noted, sees Weber as the foremost modern thinker whose work embodies the doctrine of subjectivism which underlies liberalism and modernity. Weber's significance in this regard, as well as notable twentieth century criticisms of his philosophy, are the subject of Keith Breen's book, *Under Weber's Shadow* (2012), in which he analyses the works of Alasdair MacIntyre, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas as the most prominent critics of Weber's vision for modernity. What joins the three otherwise disparate thinkers, in

Breen's view, is an "intersubjective constitution of the subject" (2012, 177), in opposition to Weber's subjectivism; in other words, these philosophers contend that individuals are a product of the social web of interactions that surrounds them, rather than isolated and self-contained units of universal reason; MacIntyre, for instance, claims modern society consists of "agents as if detached altogether from any conception of or perception of the good or goods" (MacIntyre in Knight 1998, 129)¹⁰, looking only to realize their preferences, while their rationality is measured only in respect to how much they succeed in this. "For 'the individual' in modern society is the name of a status and a role. 'The individual' is the name of a piece of social fabrication, of a social role created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to abstract human beings from certain aspects of their beliefs and circumstances" (ibid., 129-30). And Breen says of MacIntyre in particular that his "significance for contemporary political theory consists in his recovery of ethics as the central category of a non-subjectivist politics that does not conclude with authoritarianism or conventionalism" (2012, 187). That is to say, his revival of virtue ethics counters both the emotivist bent of contemporary public debate and the narrowly rationalistic, bureaucratic culture in which it takes place.

It is worth mentioning that while Hannah Arendt, who is broadly considered a liberal political theorist, finds in modernity much the same faults as MacIntyre, from Weber's subjectivism to the rise of bureaucracies, and also often directs her historical methodology (see King 2008, 251-2) to Greek antiquity for answers, certain differences emerge between the two which further position MacIntyre as a critic of liberalism. Let us mention but two crucial ones. First, MacIntyre and Arendt present somewhat different historical accounts of the public and private realms. To be sure, while Arendt was the one to define the concept and used it more explicitly (see Arendt 1959, Part II.), MacIntyre is certainly cognizant that the notions of privacy and publicity changed in the modern age. However, while Arendt maintains that modernity all but abolished the private realm and socialized all aspects of human life, including work and labour, which were previously contained within the private realm, MacIntyre proposes that modernity relegated human action (to use the Arendtian term for political activity, the central category of public life) to the private realm, while indeed socializing the economic aspects of human existence, i.e. work and labour. The difference is one of emphasis: for Arendt, the admittance of work and labour into the public sphere was detrimental to action, to our political agency, and she is mainly concerned with the loss of a private realm, while MacIntyre is more concerned

¹⁰ MacIntyre, Alasdair. (1987). Practical Rationalities as Forms of Social Structure. *Irish Philosophical Journal*, 4(1-2), 3-19.

with how ethical concerns which presumably articulate the ends of our public action were actively removed from the public sphere as mere subjective values, leaving our political agency in a pluralistic democracy more or less intact, but aimless.

Second, while both thinkers in their affinity for Ancient Greek philosophy and culture consider *phronesis*, or good judgment, to be crucial for our political and moral agency, they nonetheless have a different view of human rationality which informs this agency. Arendt's notion of practical rationality involves the subject being able to step outside of their immediate surroundings and assess things objectively and dispassionately. Thus in order to be an active participant in the public realm, in political deliberation, one must first be a passive spectator. MacIntyre, on the other hand, argues that

to be able to think at all one must be located within a polity or community, and this necessary location means that reflection takes its leave primarily from our role as participants, not spectators. Distance is required for practical understanding, yet because temporally rooted and dependent on our embodiment in real communities, this distance is never wholly autonomous, but rather a heteronomous achievement heavily dependent on theoretical and practical resources originating in others (Breen 2012, 180-1).

Yet again, MacIntyre's affirmation of social context as constitutive of our rationality serves as a counter-argument against the Enlightenment notion of universal rationality that is the centrepiece of liberal ideology and to which Arendt subscribes as well. When MacIntyre talks about the importance of *phronesis* in political deliberation, he is pointing out that problems in politics are open-ended and do not allow for maxims to be applied (ibid., 183), so we should be wary of making universal generalizations.

But Breen in his book goes beyond just outlining MacIntyre's, Habermas', and Arendt's account of modernity and liberalism; he also points out certain flaws in their arguments, and often does so by referring back to Weber. Contra MacIntyre, he argues that deliberative politics cannot be divorced from instrumental strategy (ibid., 204-5) affirming Weber's bureaucratism. In his words,

politics is not philosophy. There are (...) temporally urgent moments when actors are unsure as to the coherence of their views and have not achieved consensus but nonetheless must act. Underplaying these moments, MacIntyre's politics appears motivated by a quest for perfect legitimacy where actors' determination of the common good (...) can occur without remainder, without enduring dissent and hostility. (...) The politics of local community transcends the cut and thrust of liberal politics at the cost of generating a myth of ideal coherence (ibid., 206).

At issue here is MacIntyre's supposed characterization of modern politics as conflictual and his glorification of antiquity as consensual (ibid., 188). Presumably, the Ancient Greek polis was in agreement on first principles, by which is meant the ends that the community pursues, while

modern societies are not in agreement on first principles, making modern liberal politics precisely the forum where these common ends are negotiated, causing endless conflict.

However, we can see from already quoted passages from *After Virtue* that consensus and conflict are not so transparently distributed along the temporal axis in MacIntyre's view. In fact, it is precisely liberalism which provides consensus in modern politics, by means of fusing bureaucratic rationality with emotivist morality and individualism – a symbiosis around which MacIntyre sees a relative modern consensus. It is in its capacity as a consensual paradigm that liberalism has also presented itself in so many different historical incarnations, from a traditionally bourgeois voice for free markets and private property, through social democracy, to contemporary identity politics, which shifts focus from economic to cultural concerns. That is why in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre actually opposes the liberal politics of consensus (see Ballard 2000, 23) as much as he opposes the fundamental disagreement about common ends that belies such politics. At the same time, MacIntyre points out that antiquity, despite a presumed agreement on common ends of its communities, was not necessarily consensual in its public debate. What is more, he praises antiquity for this, referring to the concept of *agon*, or contest, which in Ancient Athens extended not only to sports or the arts, but also in "the debates in the assemblies and law courts of Greek democracy" (MacIntyre 2007, 138). MacIntyre, then does not see antiquity as consensual, but conflictual; the fact that its communities were able to elaborate common ends simply means that the conflicts could be resolved. Conversely, he does not see modernity as conflictual, but consensual; the fact that its communities are unable to elaborate common ends simply means that a utilitarian consensus will disguise an underlying and interminable disagreement.

5.2 Virtue ethics and communitarianism

The charge of glorifying consensus over conflict – which is somewhat misleading and reductive – is actually part and parcel of a more general criticism that Breen aims at MacIntyre: that of nostalgia for the past and a corresponding hostility towards modernity (2012, 176). Breen argues that MacIntyre is a communitarian, and indeed MacIntyre is often included in a list of philosophers who criticize liberalism from a communitarian standpoint, alongside Charles Taylor, for instance. A communitarian critique of liberalism essentially means making an argument for "small-scale" societies (ibid., 248) in which people can deliberate about shared goals, in opposition to sprawling bureaucracies that must rely on managerial practicality to

function. Such bureaucracies, which include the modern nation state, are in the communitarian view oppressive. "What is always oppressive is any form of social relationship that denies to those who participate in it the possibility of the kind of learning from each other about the nature of their common good that can issue in socially-transformative action" (ibid., 250). Indeed, in large political communities, this kind of public debate is hard to achieve, as we have discussed in the introduction. Breen therefore sees MacIntyre's pro-community argument as tantamount to anti-statism, saying that "the political order he commends [local communities] appears incapable of addressing the crises detected in modern politics. His ideal of local community points instead to a politics of withdrawal" (ibid., 176). This charge, however, is not entirely fair either; after all, the Greek polis is a kind of state power, too. MacIntyre simply claims that the modern liberal state is not able to function as an ethical community due to conditions of life in modernity (size, socialized economy, rise of bureaucracies, etc.), and he is not making a mere theoretical generalization, as Breen assumes (see ibid., 196).

Additionally, MacIntyre is somewhat reluctant to self-apply the communitarian label (MacIntyre in Knight 1998, 235)¹¹, pointing out that communitarianism is not a rejection of liberalism, but a "diagnosis of certain [of its] weaknesses" (ibid., 244). MacIntyre argues that the modern liberal state enforces and adopts communitarian ideas and notions just as much as liberal ones, whenever occasion calls for it, regardless of philosophical inconsistencies. When commitments clash, there is no higher principle to adjudicate, leaving the outcome to contingent coalitions of interest and power (ibid., 244-5). MacIntyre is a virtue-ethicist first and foremost, and communitarian mostly by circumstance. Of course, his preference for small-scale communities is evident, but that is not to say that he preaches withdrawal from contemporary politics; rather, he hopes that contemporary politics can learn from the past and implement aspects of communal politics, namely creating a public space wherein common ends can be rationally discussed and ultimately agreed upon. Breen, on the other hand, considers this a problematic, utopian understanding of the political: "a coherent, ideally ordered politics, each good finding its place in a stable hierarchy, and that there need not be fundamental conflict between genuine human goods" (Breen 2012, 176).

It would appear that Breen, much like the rest of us, cannot imagine a political community outside the realm of a modern, Weberian state; a state, that is, fraught with interminable disagreement about values and an ideology that maintains consensus by affirming precisely the

¹¹ MacIntyre, Alasdair. (1998). *Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good*. First published in English in Kelvin Knight (ed.), *The MacIntyre Reader* (pp. 235–55). Cornwall: Polity Press.

interminability of the disagreement. Since evaluative judgments cannot be resolved, let us agree to disagree and carry on doing what is most practicable. MacIntyre, however, offers a different way. But crucially, he is not saying that there need not be a fundamental conflict between goods; he is saying that if a community is able to have a reasoned public debate about different goods worth pursuing, rather than subjectivizing them, there can indeed be such a thing as an agreement about them, and consequently a coherent, ordered politics.

5.3 Identity-as-narrative in virtue ethics

The modern descent into emotivism that MacIntyre traces from the Enlightenment moral project, whose rules lack a teleological justification, to contemporary liberal politics, where moral values are thought to be mere personal preferences, now manifests itself in the form of a polarized public debate around the concept of identity politics. As we have seen in a quote from Jordan Peterson in 4.2, this debate also oscillates between individualism and collectivism, as MacIntyre prognosticates; identitarians on both sides of the political spectrum affirm the significance of a particular group identity in defining an individual, while the classical liberal view (adopted by Peterson and the rest of the IDW) is to affirm the significance of the individual in its atomistic Enlightenment sense, against what is seen as an increasingly collectivist mainstream. The polarized attitude regarding identity, or personhood, is somewhat symbolically reflected even in the dictionary definition of the word. Merriam-Webster defines 'identity' first as "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual" and then straight after as "the condition of being the same with something described or asserted." Similarly, Collins Dictionary distinguishes between a British and American meaning; the first entry of the British meaning of identity is "the state of having unique identifying characteristics held by no other person or thing", while the first entry of the American meaning is "the condition or fact of being the same or exactly alike; sameness." Identity, clearly, is the curious state of being either unique or the same as others; an individual or a member of a group.

This choice seems to cause much confusion for the modern mind, which is used to understanding individuals as autonomous rational beings free to define themselves, and it is precisely on the basis of this underlying agreement that political opposition can arise, as different groups of people affirm different categories as crucial to their chosen identity; right-wing identitarians might favour nationality, left-wing identitarians might favour gender identity, and all the while both will agree with the liberal compromise that they are unique

individuals regardless of group allegiance. However, in MacIntyre's theory, the double meaning of identity is not a choice between opposites at all. As he explains,

[i]ndividuals inherit a particular space within an interlocking set of social relationships; lacking that space, they are nobody, or at best a stranger or an outcast. To know oneself as such a social person is however not to occupy a static and fixed position. It is to find oneself placed at a certain point on a journey with set goals [emphasis added]; to move through life is to make progress – or to fail to make progress – toward a given end. Thus a completed and fulfilled life is an achievement and death is the point at which someone can be judged happy or unhappy (2007, 33-4).

This passage contains two important points. First, social relationships and environment – over which I have little choice at birth – define my identity. They do so because these relationships entail social roles with specific responsibilities. This stands in contrast to the modern conception of identity, which I am free to mould as I please, because no social role or responsibility is attached to it, there being no universal validity or utility in evaluative concepts. This is also why modern identity is associated with rights, designed to protect the precarious nature of a self-styled personhood. Jordan Peterson as a kind of contemporary spokesperson for personal responsibility and critic of rights at least in part addresses this problem, but stops short at affirming social context as constitutive of personal identity, falling back on modern individualism instead. Thus, he ends up affirming precisely what maintains the discourse of rights that he finds so self-indulgent and entitled in contemporary society. The only thing that unties the paradox is a conception of an individual who is defined by his or her social relations; in other words, an intersubjective subject.

Second, and most importantly, MacIntyre elaborates how to theorize such a subject; to this end, he introduces the concepts of narrativity and unity of a human life. He claims there are two contemporary obstacles – one philosophical, one social – to understanding the unity of a human life; the social obstacle being that modernity partitions human life into segments in terms of which we are taught to think, and the philosophical obstacle being an analytic tendency to think atomistically about human action and an existential tendency, following Sartre, to separate the individual from his or her social roles (ibid., 204-5). Against these obstacles, he defines selfhood in virtue-ethical terms as "a concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end" (ibid., 205). In terms of a contemporary debate on identity politics, the notion of a unity of a single human life can cut through the myriad group identities that one is able to adopt, which may serve to position one in some sort social hierarchy, but do little to provide the individual with a *telos*. Furthermore, since all of us are likely to belong to many groups at the same time, as Peterson

is sure to point out, the unity of a single human life is partitioned among these different identities, and the individual's sense of self as a consequence becomes less coherent. But seeing life as a narrative with a clearly distinguishable beginning, middle, and end reinforces what amounts to a coherent and autonomous subjectivity and individuality; precisely what the latter-day Enlightenment advocates like Peterson hope to preserve, not realizing it was the very atomism and insistence on universal rationality that caused the fracture of the self in the first place.

Understanding the unity of life as a narrative is a function of teleology; the elaboration of a certain goal presupposes the journey MacIntyre speaks of above. Human life is an unpredictable and teleological narrative (ibid., 215-6). "Unpredictability and teleology (...) coexist as part of our lives; like characters in a fictional narrative we do not know what will happen next, but nonetheless our lives have a certain form which projects itself towards our future' (ibid., 216). This teleology, as we have already discussed, is always a matter of social particularity; our actions as individuals are not those of self-contained units interacting with other self-contained units, all of us as by magic endowed with the same kind of rationality despite our atomistic state. Rather,

[w]e place the agent's intentions (...) in causal and temporal order with reference to their role in his or her history; and we also place them with reference to their role in the history of the setting or settings to which they belong. In doing this, in determining what causal efficacy the agent's intentions had in one or more directions, and how his short-term intentions succeeded or failed to be constitutive of long-term intentions, we ourselves write a further part of these histories. Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human action (ibid., 208).

In other words, the narrative of our lives is only intelligible within a wider social narrative, which provides us with a history. This goes against the paradigmatically modern existentialism of Sartre, for instance, who believed an imposition of a narrative on human action always falsifies it; narrative, according to him, is not truth, which is why human action to existentialism is pointless and arbitrary. However, it is a narrative – i.e., a story set a particular time and place and involving particular people – that makes human action intelligible. "[A]ction itself has a basically historical character. It is because we live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told – except in the case of fiction" (ibid., 212).

MacIntyre identifies two requirements of the "narrative concept of selfhood" (ibid., 217): first, that "I am the subject of a history that is my own and no one else's, that has its own peculiar

meaning" (ibid.). People who claim their life is meaningless have lost their *telos*; again, this is something that Peterson clearly detects as a contemporary problem and consequently urges people to assume personal responsibilities in their most immediate social roles. Unfortunately, he misses the importance of social particularity in defining one's identity and one's *telos*, since to be a subject of a history is what makes one accountable for actions, by making actions intelligible in light of shared ends. And second, the larger history of which my story is part of ensures that not only am I accountable, but so is everyone else. "I am part of their story, as they are part of mine" (ibid).

Thus, the idea of unity of a human life and its narrative nature can combine both meanings of identity simultaneously: a single life contained between birth and death is a canvas for a history that is no one else's but your own, meeting the criterion of individuality; that life being made intelligible by the shared ends of one's community and its history makes our striving irrevocably tied to those around us, meeting the criterion of sameness. Crucial for MacIntyre's conception of such a life are the principles of teleology and social particularity. As Aristotle had already maintained, "no one would choose to have all good things all by himself, for man is a social and political being and his natural condition is to live with others. Consequently, even a happy man needs society" (2009, 264). In our modern age, however, happiness means a maximization of pleasure, and society is but a collection of individuals to be used as means, not treated as ends; there are no shared ends between us, only shared rules that apply with arbitrary universality. In MacIntyre's words, "[a] compartmentalized society imposes a fragmented ethics" (1998, 236). No wonder, then, that even as a culture so obsessed with progress and the future, we are yet unable to imagine what it is we would want to become, because we keep arguing about what makes us who we are.

6 Conclusion

Virtue ethics, as we have tried to show, could be of greater use to contemporary political theory than is currently acknowledged, namely because it offers a conceptual framework to critique certain aspects of modernity that invariably escape the perspective of modern moral and political philosophy. In particular, Alasdair MacIntyre's defense of virtue ethics and a corresponding critique of modernity presented in *After Virtue* is a crucial contribution to the field, since it provides a secular, rather than religious, foundation for the virtues and a historical, rather than rationalist or analytic, argument against modern moral philosophy. We have therefore employed MacIntyre's virtue-ethical framework to highlight how Enlightenment moral philosophy and its historical devolution into emotivism has rendered our public debate about moral issues incoherent, independently of contemporary institutional factors that are commonly cited as causes of our dysfunctional public sphere.

Since MacIntyre makes his case for an Aristotelian version of virtue ethics, we began our inquiry by looking at Aristotle's moral theory and how MacIntyre elaborated on it. We established that virtue ethics emphasizes noble character traits as essential to moral action, which distinguishes it sharply from modern moral philosophy, which favours externally mandated rules. These character traits, called virtues, are divided into virtues of character and intellectual virtues, the latter further divided into *phronesis*, or good judgment, and *sophia*, or (theoretical) wisdom. All virtues, furthermore, must be cultivated, rather than being naturally given, marking another contrast with modern moral philosophy, where moral goodness is achieved by obedience to rules rather than cultivation of character traits. Most importantly perhaps, virtue ethics is teleological, meaning that we cultivate virtues in order to secure a certain end; Aristotle distinguishes between ends and ends-in-themselves, the latter being those that are not pursued with some other end in view. The highest end-in-itself for Aristotle is eudaimonia, or happiness, and both Aristotle's and MacIntyre's virtue ethics is therefore called eudaimonist virtue ethics, to distinguish it from other (historical and contemporary) forms of virtue ethics. As we also mentioned, MacIntyre adds to this conceptual framework the notion of 'a practice', a social context with specific ends and conditions, within which certain virtues and practices are made intelligible. Chess, architecture, painting are all practices, but so is politics, and the cultural life of a political community at large.

As a moral theory of character traits, virtue ethics can be charged with being somewhat more vague than its modern counterparts in terms of its normative aspect, that is, in telling people how they ought to act. In other words, rules, due to their universal nature, can provide more detailed instructions for how to act in a given situation, while the cultivation of virtues rather tells you what kind of person you should be, not how you should act. For this reason, the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* is a crucial element of Aristotle's moral system, and he additionally introduces the principle of the mean, or right measure, which mandates that the virtuous and phronetic individual will in any given situation find the right measure of a virtue that applies to it. The right measure lies somewhere on the spectrum between two extremes; these extremes are vices, and virtue is whatever measure in between the two that the situation demands. This, in virtue-ethical terms, is as good as it gets in terms of prescribing moral action, counting instead on the fact that moral persons (i.e. virtuous persons) would not require too detailed a blueprint in practice, and at the same time acknowledging that right action depends on the context of the situation.

In our historical overview, we also noted how virtue ethics, after being the predominant moral theory throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, lost its standing following the Enlightenment, and that its revival, academic as it may have been, came in mid-to-late twentieth century, with Elizabeth Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre. Nonetheless, it remains the least represented theory of normative ethics, even though it convincingly points out many flaws in modern moral philosophy with the aid of its unique conceptual framework. The crucial conceptual differences between the two that also underlie the virtue-ethical critique of modernity formed the bulk of our present analysis.

In Chapter 3, we looked at different accounts of rationality in virtue ethics and modern ethics. MacIntyre develops a detailed historical account of what he called the Enlightenment moral project, whose central aim was to break with the religious Christian ethics of the time and in place of God's commandments provide rationally-derived moral rules that would nonetheless have the same kind of universal validity. Deontology and consequentialism, which to this day are the most widespread theories of normative ethics, both emerge within this historical project. However, MacIntyre shows that the project, for all its noble intentions, concluded in the twentieth century in what he calls emotivism; a moral theory according to which values are simply personal preferences and no rational conclusions can be reached about them. Emotivism is a crucial feature and cause of our contemporary predicament. It has created an atomistic society of individuals who are no longer defined by their social context, since their rationality

enables them to step outside any contingent state of affairs. It has also uncoupled moral theory from moral practice, so that morality acts as impersonal rationality but is treated as mere expressive assertion of preference. This directly negates Aristotle's definition of ethics (as well as politics) as a practical science. As he said, "in matters of action the end is not to study and attain knowledge of the particular things to be done, but rather to do them" (1962, 295).

MacIntyre traces this historical development to its philosophical source, namely Hume's famous fact/value distinction, which states that from a set of factual premises no evaluative conclusions can logically follow, or what is commonly known as the 'no ought from is' principle. The principle is meant to demonstrate, to put it simply, that values are not factual. Yet MacIntyre shows that evaluative conclusions can indeed follow from factual premises, as long as these evaluative conclusions are what he calls functional concepts, which essentially means that they serve a discernible function. A watch serves a function, and based on how well it serves it, we can conclude whether it is a good or a bad watch. MacIntyre argues that human beings are likewise a functional, that is to say teleological, concept in this regard.

Our function, or purpose, stems from our specific social context; the social bonds and social roles relegated to us by our community. The assertion that moral values are inevitably particular to a certain time and place, a certain community, is a crucial distinction between virtue ethics and modern moral philosophy, and arguably one of the main reasons why virtue ethics has fallen by the wayside in an age of universal rationality; a contextual morality invites the charge of moral relativism. Nonetheless, MacIntyre demonstrates that a culturally-specific morality does not have to succumb to moral relativism, as long as it is understood in a teleological framework. The shared ends that a value is meant to secure within a certain community provide the reference point for rational debate when values clash. Consequently, a teleological virtue ethics proves to be less subjective than a non-teleological emotivist morality, despite being socially and historically particular.

Because MacIntyre affirms social context as constitutive of morality, his critique takes the form of a historical, more so than analytic, argument. At the same time, contextuality is his main counter-argument to contemporary social science, which in his view attempts to derive law-like generalizations about society and human beings, as per Enlightenment goals to construct a science of morality. MacIntyre, however, asserts that there are no such generalizations available in social sciences, like there are in natural sciences. Crucial in this regard is the status afforded to explanation, or theory. In MacIntyre's view, modern science aims to explain the world without evaluating it, a principle embodied in both explanatory methods at the scientist's

disposal, namely natural science and empiricism. However, explaining the social world without evaluating it is useless, because the social world is largely concerned not only with how things are, but how they ought to be. This teleological and evaluative feature makes human life unpredictable and not susceptible to law-like generalizations.

Teleology, then, is at the centre of MacIntyre's critique of modern moral philosophy, which is why in Chapter 4 we looked at the function of teleology in virtue ethics, the effects of its lack in modernity, and attempts at its reintroduction. Teleology is problematic from the point of view of individualist and liberal modernity because (a) it tends to assign social functions and purposes to individuals based on what are perceived as arbitrary traditions of one's respective community; and because (b) it presupposes an essential human nature, which contradicts the radical autonomy of the self that underlies modern philosophy. The latter charge, essentialism, is thought to be unscientific; the ancients have also ascribed purposes to nature and inanimate objects, but modern science has clearly refuted those. But as Taylor writes, "[t]he notion that human beings have something like a *telos* qua human can be separated from the thesis that everything in nature belongs to some class or other, whose behavior is explained by some Form or Idea. Because we no longer explain the movements of stars and stones teleologically does not mean that we cannot explain humans in these terms" (1994, 17). He adds, "[t]he progress of science may have refuted Aristotle's physics and his biology, but it does not rule out thinking of ethics in terms of tele, or other similar concepts" (ibid., 20).

MacIntyre does indeed assume human beings have an essential human nature, but it is not simply given. He sees an individual as initially in an untutored state, *man-as-he-happens-to-be*. But through instruction, habituation, and experience he or she may realize his or her essential nature, which is life in accordance with virtue, which in turn makes one happy, or *eudaimon*. Because modernity has turned its back on teleology, explains MacIntyre, our morality has lost coherence and severed the link between the two points of the journey from *tabula rasa* to realizing our nature. Instead, ethics is concerned with providing external rules to a flawed, untutored nature in hope of producing 'right action'. MacIntyre says we should rather seek to teach people how to be good people, cultivating virtues, and right action will follow of its own accord. Another concern of modern moral philosophy is that an admission of a human nature would limit the supposed freedom and autonomy of the individual, which is a central liberal value. But what if in his or her freedom, the individual is bereft of purpose, not knowing how to act?

We also pointed to contemporary attempts to remedy this state of affairs. First, we mentioned Ošlaj's cosmopolitan and post-secular theory which introduces teleological reasoning, but in a universalist instead of socially-specific manner, merely substituting the category of God for that of a World Ethos, a kind of cosmopolitan sense of responsibility. This universalism indeed proved to be a theme, as we could see in our case study of the Intellectual Dark Web, a group of public intellectuals who address the problem of interminable debate about issues surrounding identity politics. Jordan Peterson and Sam Harris in particular presented two at times opposing critiques of modern emotivist morality, although both seem to agree about the necessity of a telos, as well as about the universality of moral values. For Harris, this amounts to a new iteration of scientific utilitarianism, with the concept of human welfare serving as the telos of human action. Peterson approaches virtue ethics more closely, affirming a teleological morality, but also arguing for a cultivation of virtues through habituation and taking on responsibility in one's personal domain. Nonetheless, in his opposition to what he perceives as a collectivist ideology of identity politics, he ends up at a classical liberal position of an autonomous individual and the standard Enlightenment affirmation of universal rationality. Virtue ethics would be a welcome addition to these debates, since its conceptual framework would reveal even these proposed solutions as part of the problem.

Recognizing this, we devoted our last chapter to the question of what implications and insights virtue ethics has for politics and political theory. As the preceding discussion made clear, MacIntyre is critical of liberalism as the leading modern ideology. He uses the term 'bureaucratic individualism' to describe how this ideology functions, referring to Max Weber, who analysed modernity in its aspect of erecting sprawling bureaucracies and who considered values to be subjective, and therefore of no use to those in charge of organizing such bureaucracies, which include modern states. Modern life, then, is divided into the organizational realm and the personal realm, the latter being the place where values have been relegated. (MacIntyre rightly categorizes Weber as an emotivist thinker.) As a consequence, the public sphere, or the political realm, becomes ill-equipped to resolve evaluative disputes. Trapped as it is between the organizational realm and the personal realm, public debate according to MacIntyre inevitably takes the form of a conflict between individualism, which affirms the sovereignty of individuals, and collectivism, which affirms the sovereignty of bureaucracies. Yet what appears as a division, says MacIntyre, is actually founded on an agreement about the facts that morality is subjective, that individuals are free in their rational capacity, but must also function as means to the practical ends of bureaucracies.

We looked at Breen's comprehensive study of philosophical responses to Weber's account of modernity, which included an analysis of MacIntyre's critique, alongside Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas. According to Breen, what unites the three twentieth century philosophers in opposition to Weber is "an intersubjective constitution of the subject", which is another way of saying they all affirm social context as crucial to individual identity. Nonetheless, in a comparison between Arendt and MacIntyre, we could see that the two differ in their conception of rationality, with Arendt believing good judgment depends on our ability to step outside of our immediate social context and scrutinize it from a standpoint of universal rationality, so to speak, while MacIntyre asserts that our rationality is inevitably tied to the shared ends of our communities, which alone give meaning to our values and beliefs.

Breen also provides ample criticism of MacIntyre's political engagements, and in the course of our analysis we tried to address this criticism. First, Breen claims that MacIntyre favours a consensual antiquity over conflictual modernity; presumably, the former is marked by agreement on shared ends, while the latter lacks such agreement. However, we argued that this distinction is somewhat superficial: modernity is actually somewhat consensual, precisely because it cannot agree on first principles – liberalism as the politics of consensus absorbs the clash of values; antiquity, on the other hand, is somewhat conflictual, as MacIntyre demonstrates with the notion of the *agon*, or contest, as crucial in politics of Ancient Athens. The fact that there are shared ends does not eliminate conflict; it simply means conflict can be resolved.

In a similar vein, Breen charges MacIntyre with nostalgia for the past, a hankering for communal politics, and a corresponding anti-statism, which strikes Breen as removed from pertinent problems in modern politics. MacIntyre is thus classified as a communitarian critic of liberalism, which role he seems to accept, albeit with some reluctance. However, it is not so clear that MacIntyre advocates for a withdrawal from liberal politics of nation states and transnational capital in order to fashion small-scale communities of old; rather, he hopes that modernity can learn from antiquity, especially by adopting teleological reasoning, and thus find a way to have a coherent political debate.

Finally, we circled back to the issue of individual identity, which at present seems to disturb public debate the most. We proposed that MacIntyre's virtue ethics might offer a helpful conceptual framework for understanding identity, which even at the level of dictionary definitions seems split between 'individuality' and 'sameness'. The framework, again, is one of social particularity, or intersubjective subjectivity: the idea that our social context is constitutive

of our identity. MacIntyre further theorizes that what defines us as individuals is a narrative unity of a single human life; the fact that there is a story to be told stretching from birth to death. Because it is marked by a beginning and an end, our identity within these confines is coherent and our actions given weight; we are accountable. This narrative concept of selfhood is not only socially and historically particular, but also teleological, since it is the goal which presupposes the journey and the story. It also combines both (seemingly contradictory) contemporary meanings of identity.

What our inquiry, and especially our case study of identity politics and the Intellectual Dark Web, has hopefully demonstrated is that the interminable divisions that mark contemporary political debate can, through the prism of virtue ethics, actually be resolved, and that there is in fact more agreement and consensus than enters our modern field of vision. The admittance of virtue ethics in this debate would present us with an antagonism of a wholly different kind. As MacIntyre puts it,

[i]t is (...) after all the case that the crucial moral opposition is between liberal individualism in some version or other and Aristotelian tradition in some version or other. (...) The differences between the two run very deep. They extend beyond ethics and morality to the understanding of human action, so that rival conceptions of the social sciences, of their limits and their possibilities, are intimately bound up with the antagonistic confrontation of these two alternative ways of viewing the human world (2007, 259).

It has been the aim of this thesis to present MacIntyre's virtue ethics as a compelling critique of modernity and liberal individualism. Due to the modest presence of virtue ethics even in academic discourse, let alone wider public debate, which required an extensive contextualization and presentation of key concepts and arguments, this could only have been a preliminary venture into the field. But there are endless possibilities for further research and theory in applying virtue ethics to contemporary political problems; MacIntyre himself offers interesting insights on the function and form of protests in our time, for example, and he delivers a notable critique of the liberal-libertarian debate about distributive justice. Additionally, technological progress and the so-called fourth industrial revolution are presenting humanity with new ethical challenges, from biases of AI algorithms, the choices of self-driving cars, etc., and the virtue-ethical stress on habituation, moral persons over right action, and teleological reasoning could very well have practical application. Or, if nothing else, virtue ethics can remind us humans that on our march towards progress "the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man" (MacIntyre 2007, 219).

7 Abstract in Slovene (Povzetek v slovenščini)

Ni skrivnost, da je javni diskurz o političnih in moralnih temah dandanes izjemno polariziran in da soočenje nasprotujočih si argumentov pogosteje vodi v nadaljnjo polarizacijo kot v razrešitev problema. Zvrok za to stanje je mogoče iskati v nepopolni medijski sferi, v kateri se javna debata praviloma odvija, bodisi na tradicionalnih medijskih platformah ali na vse bolj prisotnem internetu. Toda ta magistrska naloga vzrok za neskončno in nerazrešljivo polarizacijo javne sfere išče v osnovnih filozofskih predpostavkah, ki oblikujejo stanje duha v sodobnem in modernem času, in raziskuje, kako je specifičen zgodovinski razvoj moderne moralne filozofije neizogibno vodil v trenutno stanje stvari.

Konceptualni okvir za tovrstno kritiko moderne moralne filozofije ponuja etika vrlin, vodilna etična teorija v antičnih in srednjeveških časih, najbolj prepoznavna v Aristotelovi različici. Čeprav je izgubila na veljavi v času razsvetljenstva, se je v dvajsetem stoletju ponovno vrnila kot legitimna normativna etična teorija. Med najbolj zaslužnimi za to vrnitev je škotski filozof Alasdair MacIntyre oziroma njegovo delo *Po vrlini (After Virtue, 2007)*, osrednji vir te naloge, v katerem avtor s stališča etike vrlin kritizira "razsvetljenski moralni projekt" (ibid.). Zanj trdi, da je bil pri poskusu vzpostavitve univerzalnih moralnih standardov na podlagi razuma neuspešen, kar je sčasoma vodilo v sedanje stanje popolnoma subjektivne morale.

To stanje, pravi MacIntyre, temelji na konceptu emotivizma, tj. ideji, da moralne vrednote niso objektivna dejstva, ampak zgolj izraz osebnih preferenc in prepričanj; ta ideja sega vse do razsvetljenskih časov, natančneje do Davida Huma in njegovega razločka med dejstvom in vrednostjo (*fact/value distinction*), v zgodnjem dvajsetem stoletju pa je postala ključni element moralne filozofije. Subjektivizacija vrednot, ki je inherentna emotivizmu, posledično vodi v nezmožnost reševanja moralnih in političnih (tj. vrednostnih) nestrinjanj, saj so vrednote kot stvar preferenc posameznika vprašljive, racionalni standard, v luči katerega bi lahko sodili nasprotujoče si vrednote, pa umanjka – četudi so razsvetljenski filozofi stremeli prav k njegovi vzpostavitvi.

Ta magistrska naloga tako najprej predstavi glavne postavke etike vrlin, ki jo MacIntyre šteje za legitimno alternativo modernim moralnim teorijam; predvsem se osredotoči na aristotelovsko različico etike vrlin, saj jo v svoji knjigi zagovarja tudi MacIntyre, a jo obenem postavi v kontekst vseh zgodovinskih in sodobnih različic teorije vrlin.

Naslednji dve poglavji se posvečata ključnim konceptualnim razlikam med etiko vrlin in moderno moralno filozofijo, in sicer: različnemu razumevanju človeške racionalnosti (tretje poglavje) ter izgubi teleološkega sklepanja s prehodom v moderno (četrto poglavje). MacIntyre skozi svojo zgodovinsko analizo razvoja moralne filozofije pokaže, da je moderno pojmovanje človeške racionalnosti kot neke univerzalne kategorije, ki presega družbeni kontekst in ki lahko torej predpiše obče veljavna in objektivna moralna pravila, pravzaprav podlaga za kasnejšo subjektivizacijo morale. Ker so razsvetljenski filozofi obenem zavrgli tudi teleološko sklepanje, s katerim je etika vrlin svoje postulate legitimirala v okviru ciljev in *telosa*, h kateremu ljudje kot posamezniki ali kot skupnost stremimo, moderne moralne vrednote nenadoma niso bile več vezane na neke specifične skupne cilje. S tem so izgubile referenčni okvir, znotraj katerega bi služile nekemu namenu in znotraj katerega bi jih bilo možno presojsati v primeru konflikta med nasprotujočimi si vrednotami.

Nasprotno MacIntyre predstavi etiko vrlin kot utemeljeno v specifičnem družbenem kontekstu neke skupnosti, ki ima svoje cilje in v kateri imajo posamezniki nek *telos*, zaradi česar je njen vrednotni sistem razumljiv članom skupnosti in omogoča racionalno razrešitev konflikta med vrednotami v luči *telosa*. Ker MacIntyre afirmira družbeni kontekst kot ključni element koherentnega moralnega sistema, ni presenetljivo, da kritizira abstraktno logiko in analitične tendence moderne moralne filozofije, njegova metoda pa sestoji iz zgodovinske analize, s katero tudi vsako posamezno moralno tradicijo vedno znova postavi v ustrezen zgodovinski kontekst. Tako ponovno vpelje Aristotelovo pojmovanje etike kot praktične vede, katere namen ni ugotavljati, kaj je prav in kaj ne, ampak dejansko delovati prav v vsakdanjem življenju.

Kot praktična veda ima etika precej skupnega s politiko; že Aristotel ju je razumel kot sorodni vedi, čeprav danes soobstajata razmeroma ločeno. Toda iz MacIntyrejevega argumenta je razvidno, da ima razvoj moderne moralne filozofije tako politične vzroke kot politične implikacije. V zadnjem poglavju osrednjega te naloge tako predstavimo etiko vrlin kot kritiko liberalizma, ki s svojim individualizmom predstavlja utelešenje razsvetljenske moralne teorije, obenem pa problematiziramo oceno, da MacIntyrejeva misel sovпада s komunitarizmom, kar je pogosta karakterizacija njegove filozofije predvsem zaradi afirmacije manjših političnih skupnosti in kritike sodobnega individualizma.

Naloga vsebuje tudi študijo primera sodobne javne debate, in sicer študijo polarizacije okrog koncepta identitetne politike ter vloge Jordana Petersona in t.i. intelektualnega temnega spleta (*Intellectual Dark Web* - IDW) v tej debati. Peterson in ostali pripadniki IDW kritizirajo gibanje

identitetne politike kot emotivističen oz. moralno-relativističen diskurz. Po drugi strani pa rešitev za sodobni moralni relativizem v večji meri vidijo v nekakšni vrnitvi k univerzalizmu razsvetljenskega moralnega projekta. Tu je uvid etike vrlin, predvsem MacIntyreja, ključen, saj pokaže, da je predlagana rešitev dejansko vir problema. Tako je ena izmed ugotovitev te naloge, da bi etika vrlin lahko pripomogla k javni debati o moralnih vrednotah in manjši polarizaciji okrog le-teh. Obenem pa ugotavljamo, da je za vzpostavitev racionalnega dialoga o vrednotah treba afirmirati teleološki okvir in družbeni kontekst, v katerem vrednote obstajajo, ter konceptualizirati etiko in politiko kot praktični vede, ki sta neločljivo prepleteni in katerih namen je izboljšati dejansko delovanje v svetu, ne zgolj teoretizirati.

8 Bibliography

1. Anscombe, E. (1958). Modern Moral Philosophy. *Philosophy*, 33(124), 1-19.
2. Arendt, H. (1959). *The Human Condition*. Garden City: Doubleday.
3. Aristotle. (1962). *Nichomachean Ethics*. Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company.
4. Aristotle. (2009). *Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
5. Axtell, G. and Olson, P. (2012). Recent Work in Applied Virtue Ethics. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 49(3), 183-203.
6. Ballard, B. W. (2000). *Understanding MacIntyre*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.
7. Beecher Stowe, H. (2011). *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. London: Harper Collins Press.
8. Breen, K. (2012). *Under Weber's Shadow: Modernity, Subjectivity and Politics in Habermas, Arendt and MacIntyre*. Burlington: Ashgate.
9. Chappell, T. (2007). *Values and Virtues: Aristotelianism in Contemporary Ethics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
10. Confucius. (2008). *The Analects*. New York: Oxford University Press.
11. Freud, S. (2008). *The Interpretation of Dreams*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
12. Habermas, J. (1999). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Oxford: Polity Press.
13. Harris, S. (2005). *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. New York, London: W. W. Norton.
14. Harris, S. (2011). *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Moral Values*. New York: Free Press.
15. Horton, J. and Mendus, S. (1994). Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue and After. In J. Horton and S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (pp. 1–16). Cambridge: Polity Press.
16. Hursthouse, R. and Pettigrove, G. (2018). Virtue Ethics. In E. N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>
17. Jiyuan, Y. (1998). Virtue: Confucius and Aristotle. *Philosophy East and West*, 48(2): 323-47.

18. Kant, I. (1993) [1785]. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* [3rd edition]. N/A: Hackett.
19. King, R. H. (2008). Conclusion: Arendt Between Past and Future. In R. King and D. Stone (eds.), *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History* (pp. 250–62). Oxford: Berghahn Books.
20. Knight, K. (1998). *The MacIntyre Reader*. Cornwall: Polity Press.
21. Kraut, R. (1989). *Aristotle on the Human Good*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
22. MacIntyre, A. (1988). *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
23. MacIntyre, A. (1990). *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. London: Duckworth.
24. MacIntyre, A. (2007). *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* [3rd edition]. London: Duckworth.
25. Marcus Aurelius. (2004). *Meditations*. London: Penguin Books.
26. Murdoch, I. (1971). *The Sovereignty of Good*. London: Routledge.
27. Ošljaj, B. (2015). *The Human Being, the World and Ethos – Studies on Post-Secular Philosophy and World Ethos [Človek, svet in etos: študije o postsekularni filozofiji in svetovnem etosu]*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani.
28. Peterson, J. B. (2018a). *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. Toronto: Penguin Random House Canada.
29. Peterson, J. B. (2018b). *Munk Debates: Political Correctness* [video]. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxYimeaoea0>
30. Peterson, J. B. (interviewee) and Lott, T. (interviewer). (2018c). The pursuit of happiness is a pointless goal. *The Guardian*. Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2018/jan/21/jordan-peterson-self-help-author-12-steps-interview>
31. Peterson, J. B. (2019). *Speech at the 2019 PragerU Summit* [video]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avInTfCd92Q>
32. Searle, J. R. (1967). How to Derive 'Ought' From 'Is'. In Philippa Foot (ed.), *Theories of Ethics* (pp. 101-14). London: Oxford University Press.
33. Shenbai, L. and Lambert, A. (2011). The Subjectivity and Universality of Virtues – An Investigation Based on Confucius' and Aristotle's Views. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, 6(2): 217-38.
34. Slote, M. (1995). *From Morality to Virtue*. New York: Oxford University Press.

35. Stern, R. (1994). MacIntyre and Historicism. In J. Horton and S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (pp. 146–61). Cambridge: Polity Press.
36. Swanton, C. (2003). *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
37. Taylor, C. (1994). Justice After Virtue. In J. Horton and S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (pp. 16–44). Cambridge: Polity Press.
38. Zagzebski, L. (1996). *Virtues of the Mind*. New York: Cambridge University Press.