

Anti-Enlightenment Politics:

Alasdair MacIntyre and Contemporary Communitarianism

Some Definitions

Practice:

“Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that activity are realized.” From *After Virtue* (1982), pp. 187-88.

Virtue:

“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.” *After Virtue*, p 191.

Virtues embedded in practices

“It belongs to the concept of a practice as I have outlined it—and as we are all familiar with it in our actual lives, whether we are painters or physicists or quarterbacks or indeed just lovers of good painting or first rate experiments or a well-thrown pass—that its goods can only be achieved by subordinating ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners. We have to learn to recognize what is due to whom; we have to be prepared to take whatever self-endangering risks are demanded along the way; and we have to listen carefully to what we are told about our own inadequacies and to reply with the same carefulness for the facts.”

After Virtue , p. 191.

The Primacy of the Individual vs. the Group

“I think, therefore I am.”

-*Rene Descartes*
(1596-1650)

**Ubuntu alternative: “I am
because we are, and since
we are, therefore I am.”**

-*John S. Mbiti, 2001*

Aristotle's Teleological Scheme

“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 precepts 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*. Each of the three elements of the scheme—the conception of untutored human nature, the conception of the precepts of rational ethics and the conception of human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*—requires reference to the other two if its status and function are to be intelligible.” *After Virtue*, pp. 52-3.

The Hopelessness of the Enlightenment Project

“Since the moral injunctions were originally at home in a scheme in which their purpose was to correct, improve and educate that human nature, they are clearly not going to be such as could be deduced from true statements about human nature or justified in some other way by appealing to its characteristics. The injunctions of morality, thus understood, are likely to be ones that human nature, thus understood, has strong tendencies to disobey. 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...They inherited incoherent fragments of a once coherent scheme of thought and action and, since they did not recognize their own peculiar historical and cultural situation, they could not recognize the impossible and quixotic character of their self-appointed task.” *After Virtue*, p. 55.

MacIntyre's Prescription

“What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict.” *After Virtue*, p. 263.