

Articles

Independence and the Virtuous Community

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1. Introduction

In 1999 Alasdair MacIntyre altered the philosophical landscape and largely for the better, I think, with the publication of his *Dependent Rational Animals (DRA)*. In this work he puts front and center the overlooked senses of dependence, disability, and vulnerability that, in varying degrees but always in some measure, make up the human condition and one's animal identity in the course of a lifetime.¹ Drawing out the implications of those senses, he presents a stirring defense of the virtues of giving and receiving as a realistic alternative to social thought that, by taking its bearings from sympathy or rational choice, prompts the illusion of assimilating the state to the family or vice versa (pp. 116-17 and 132). Ever aware of the real-life stakes of his topics, MacIntyre never tires of reminding us that, when we talk about practical knowledge, we are talking about something acquired and exercised not through theory or theoretical instruction, but through shared activities and practices (pp. 135-36). Challenging the traditional dichotomy of justice and benevolence as well as a misguided notion of self-sufficiency, MacIntyre champions virtues of acknowledged dependence and just generosity, virtues that must inform networks of giving and receiving. At the same time, his analysis displays a healthy wariness of these dual aspects of social life, pervaded not only by such networks constitutive of human flourishing, but also no less by hierarchical instruments of domination and deprivation, that come with the unequal distribution of power in society (pp. 102-3). While Aristotle reminds us that the level of justice in a society is relative to the kinds of friendship that prevail in it, MacIntyre reminds us that this friendship, this foundation for a just and generous politics, must extend to

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), p. 130. All numbers within parentheses in the body of this article refer to page numbers of *Dependent Rational Animals*.

able and disabled alike (p. 139). In a certain respect, MacIntyre's work can be read as a powerful attempt to demonstrate the utter reasonableness and secular import of the theological virtue of charity (pp. 124-25).

Yet, despite these genuine achievements, *DRA* is problematic in at least two ways that I would like to address in this article. One problem concerns the meaning of "independence" in his account of independent practical reasoning (IPR), and the other concerns restrictions he places on the relation between the virtuous community and the state. The aim of my following remarks is to show how both difficulties emerge from MacIntyre's argument and why they are substantive, calling for considerable clarification, amplification, or even revision of his argument.

2. IPR and the Virtue of Authenticity

In a book with the title "Dependent Rational Animals" and with the aim of stressing the human animal's vulnerability and dependence on others, it is perhaps understandable that MacIntyre recognizes the need to focus on the topic of "independent practical reasoning" (IPR) at some length. He addresses the topic of practical reasoning in chapter 7, which is devoted to discussing "flourishing" and "goods." In this chapter, he begins with the general distinction between goods so-called because they are the objects of certain directed activities and desires, and goods so-called because they contribute to and are constitutive of flourishing (pp. 63-64). He then proceeds to distinguish four senses of "good" (pp. 65-68):

- pleasurable goods (when something is good because it is pleasurable, i.e., because it satisfies felt bodily wants or felt wants generally);
- instrumental goods (when something is good merely as means to some other good);
- non-instrumental, practice-intrinsic goods (when something is good in the sense of being intrinsic to a particular practice); and
- individual and communal human goods (when something is good because it is something that an individual person qua human being or society qua human should make a place for in its life).

Answers to the question why I should do one thing rather than another can always be put in question and, when they are, MacIntyre notes, they can only be answered by reflection on the practical reasoning that issued in or was presupposed by my actions. What distinguishes human beings from other animals is precisely their "need to learn to understand themselves as practical reasoners about goods" (p. 67). Thus, MacIntyre contends that practical reason is necessary for the sort of flourishing that is distinctively human.

Using his own taxonomy, we might say that practical reasoning is a human good and, indeed, one of the pre-eminent human goods.

While recognizing that humans, no less than dolphins, can only flourish through the right sorts of social relationships, MacIntyre notes that humans face a particular threat to developing practical reason. That threat is the human, all-too-human tendency to identify all goods with desires. Practical reason involves separating ourselves from our desires in the light of the recognition of goods that may or may not be in keeping with those desires—though importantly this recognition does not rule out the possibility that those goods become objects of desire themselves. Practical reason thus supposes a capacity to recognize goods different in kind from pleasurable goods and, in effect, a capacity to distinguish expressions of desire from evaluations.² But, of course, practical reason is more than a capacity to recognize and distinguish. We say that someone possesses practical reason when she is capable of explaining or justifying her reasons for acting one way rather than another—in short, when she indicates that she has “a good reason” for acting in the way that she does or did.

Tellingly perhaps, MacIntyre’s account of practical reason up to this point makes no explicit mention of its being independent in one way or another.³ However, he first introduces the qualifier “independent” in the course of noting a fundamental difference between judgments about our desires and judgments about what is good for us. He notes that, while we typically, if not invariably, have a kind of privileged access to our desires, the same cannot be said for what is good for us. When it comes to goods, we have to learn from others. At this juncture, MacIntyre explicitly notes that the kind of practical reasoning that contributes to human flourishing must be independent.⁴ Before turning to what makes practical reason independent on MacIntyre’s account, let us first try to reconstruct formally what is required for practical reason. In order to become practical reasoners (on MacIntyre’s account), we must

- (a) learn from others what is good for us beyond our pleasurable goods, that is, beyond what satisfies our bodily desires;
- (b) embrace those other goods, separating ourselves from our desires in the process; and

² In this respect I take it that MacIntyre is taking aim at latter-day versions of Charles L. Stevenson’s emotivism.

³ I say “no explicit mention” since, as will be evident below, he does understand the capacity to separate oneself from one’s desires as integral to the development of IPR.

⁴ “Independence” in this context thus first means independence from one’s desires by virtue of the embrace of inherited, indoctrinated, or in some sense received ideas of goods other than the goods that satisfy one’s desires.

- (c) develop the capacity to evaluate, justify, and—if necessary—revise our reasons and actions accordingly by appeal to those goods.

In order to become *independent* practical reasoners, MacIntyre contends, we must make the transition from what our teachers taught us about goods “to making our own independent judgments about goods, judgments that we are able to justify rationally to ourselves and to others” (p. 71). He then sketches three elements of the transition, though they are all arguably—and, again, perhaps tellingly—contained in his account of practical reason generally (i.e., without the “independent” modifier). The first two elements (“the ability to distance ourselves from our present desires” and “the ability to evaluate our reasons for action”) are obviously already explicitly broached in the account of practical reason under (b) and (c) above. The third element of the transition to IPR consists, on MacIntyre’s account, in the capacity to envisage different and alternative goods as realistic possibilities in the future. This third element also arguably follows from the third feature of practical reason.

MacIntyre rounds out his gloss on IPR with a characterization of it that also mirrors his characterization of practical reason. IPR, he tells us, is the key to human flourishing, in any culture, economy, or context (pp. 76-77). So, too, the “focal uses of ‘good’” are those that apply to members of the species as such or, in the case of human beings, to those with that nature (p. 78).

This naturalistic approach is controversial, to be sure, but I mention it only in passing because it is related to the issue that I would like to consider, namely, the very meaning or possibility of *independent* practical reasoning, at least on MacIntyre’s account. The issue can be framed in the form of the question: does he provide us with the resources to explain IPR? In my exposition I flagged how his account of IPR differs little from his account of practical reasoning (PR). Now this fact about his presentation may be attributable to a stylistic or rhetorical feature of his argument. But if we assume, as MacIntyre’s account straightforwardly suggests, that there is a legitimate distinction between PR and IPR, the question presents itself as to whether he has given us the goods to identify what makes IPR different from PR. To give a homely example of my query, consider the difference between a school board and an independent school board. Once we know what a school board is, our ability to understand the latter depends upon some explanation of what is meant by calling it “independent,” presumably including some account of what it is independent of.

Let me try to frame the issue in MacIntyre’s own terms. We noted that he considers IPR a human good and that for all goods other than pleasurable goods, we have to learn them from others. Presumably, the same applies to IPR. Indeed, in its case, we cannot learn that it is a good without learning how to use it; we have to learn how to justify our reasons and actions to others. In other words, we can only learn from others that IPR is a good and we can only learn that it is a good by learning—again, from others—what

it is, that is, the very practice of exercising practical reason independently. Yet the fact that it is learned raises the question of just what is meant by labeling it “independent.”

At one level, it seems easy enough to dispose of this question. Being able to throw a slider and knowing when to throw it are things that are good for a pitcher. Indeed, they are arguably goods that form essential parts of a pitcher’s practical reasoning. They are also things that a would-be pitcher typically has to learn from others, perhaps a pitching-coach, ideally one who transmits not simply mechanics and technique, but also a feel for the pitch and how to use it. In an actual game, however, the coach can never replace the pitcher; in other words, quite independently of any mentor, the pitcher has to be able to throw and know when to throw the slider himself. The fact that the pitcher himself pitches seems to confirm the independence. In similar fashion we might argue that, even if we have to learn from others what is good for us beyond what pleases us, including separating ourselves from our desires in the light of recognizing certain goods and how to justify our actions on their basis, actually doing so is not shared.

Still, one might counter this argument with the observation that, when it comes to exercising practical reason, as a virtue of playing baseball or excelling as a human being, an agent’s irreplaceable role in constituting a unique action does not establish the independence of the agency. Indeed, it only establishes independency in the logical sense of the distinctness of one exercise of practical reason from another. It merely indicates that the practical reasoning involved is a token of a type, a type of good in each case, where the token is distinct from some other token. In this sense, one token of throwing a slider is logically independent of another token of the same type of pitch.

Of course, to suggest that MacIntyre’s conception of IPR amounts to this sort of logical independence is a poor parody of it. The logical independence of one token (be it the virtue or its exercise) from another token should not be confused with the independence that the exercise of virtue designates, that is, the disposition of the virtuous person to reason and to act on her own. Nor from the fact that the virtue has to be learned in some sense, and thus signals a dependency in the order of acquisition, can it be inferred that the independent possession and exercise of the virtue itself necessarily suffers. The possession and exercise of a language provides a helpful analogy here. Language is acquired and, indeed, not only the acquisition but also the use of it is arguably dependent upon others. Yet it would be folly to contend that this dependency rules out the independent use of language, virtuously, we might say, in the case of poetry, viciously, in the case of libel. Nonetheless, precisely because we typically understand such virtues and their exercise as forms of IPR, it would be helpful to have a robust account of IPR.

MacIntyre devotes an entire chapter of *DRA* (chapter 8) to the question: “How do we become independent practical reasoners?” Note, however, that the question supposes a concept of IPR and, indeed, in the chapter he is keen on establishing the sort of social relationships that foster it. More precisely, his aim is to demonstrate the sort of virtues that must be

possessed by those on whom a child is dependent (namely, parents and educators) in order for the child to develop those virtues required for IPR. Still, this chapter is a likely place to look for more clues to the nature of the independence in IPR, on his account. Not surprisingly, MacIntyre observes that what we need from others are

relationships necessary for fostering the ability to evaluate, modify, or reject our own practical judgments, to ask, that is, whether what we take to be good reasons for action really are sufficiently good reasons, *and* the ability to imagine realistically alternative possible futures, so as to be able to make rational choices between them, *and* the ability to stand back from our desires, so as to be able to enquire rationally what the pursuit of our good here and now requires and how our desires must be directed and, if necessary, reeducated, if we are to attain it. (p. 83)

This quotation, like many others in the chapter (see pp. 88, 91, and 96), essentially reprises the earlier accounts of the three elements of PR and IPR, though it does amplify those accounts in instructive ways. Thus, MacIntyre emphasizes the necessity, for the purposes of developing IPRers, that parents and teachers reinforce the difference between pleasurable goods and other goods, precisely by teaching the child “that it will please them, *not* by acting so as to please them, but by acting so as to achieve what is good and best, whether this pleases them or not” (p. 84). (He later adds that we needed to receive unconditional care in order to become IPRers [p. 100].)

Yet early in the chapter MacIntyre also makes the following observation that is directly relevant to our concerns: “Acknowledgement of dependence is the key to independence” (p. 85). I think that MacIntyre could have done a better job of elaborating what he means by this observation, one that draws on the work of D. W. Winnicott. But I take him to be emphasizing the important point that trust in others, a comfort zone where we know that we depend on others, provides the basis for the sort of independent exploration, the playfulness, necessary to think, judge, and act to some extent on our own. The virtues of mothering and parenting epitomize how others make this dynamic possible (pp. 89-90). MacIntyre’s gloss of this dynamic is helpful and illuminating for at least two reasons: first, it illustrates the conditions in a child’s development for imaginatively expanding the three elements of PR mentioned above and, second, it underscores that the difference between PR and IPR is a matter of degree. There is no point in the development and exercise of IPR, MacIntyre later observes, “at which we cease altogether to be dependent upon particular others” (p. 97).

Despite this weighty acknowledgement or perhaps because of it, MacIntyre’s characterization of the process of the transition to IPR arguably gives dependencies the upper hand. Teachers, he remarks, have to try to

“inculcate” the habits that are virtues (p. 89).⁵ After acknowledging that “independence of mind” requires that we from time to time “defend and act on conclusions that are at variance with everyone else,” he quickly adds, “[b]ut we always require exceptionally good reasons for doing so” (p. 97). Both self-knowledge and honesty (as truthfulness about ourselves to ourselves and others) are requisites of IPR, but they are also only possible, he emphasizes, as a consequence of social relationships (p. 95). Acknowledging the Wittgensteinian inspiration of his account of the interconnectedness of self-identity and social identity, our criterion-less self-knowledge and others’ criterion-based knowledge of us, MacIntyre observes: “It is because and insofar as my judgments about myself agree with the judgments made about me by others who know me well that I can generally have confidence in them” (p. 95).

There is obviously a good deal that speaks for these claims about the dependency of PR and even IPR on others. Yet they underscore the problematic status of the independence of IPR, sketched above. Given this dependence of IPR on social relationships, is the expression ‘IPR’ not really a euphemism for ‘less dependent practical reasoning’? The prefix ‘in’ in ‘independent’ is a privative, suggesting that the unprefix root is the originary meaning, while the prefixed term is derivative, perhaps even achieved through mere negation of the root. The linguistic form thus leads to the question: Is there some positive phenomenon that IPR denotes or is it merely the substitution of one set of dependencies for another? Of course, one might insist that the pair ‘dependent’ and ‘independent’ are capable of the sort of analysis that Ludwig Wittgenstein gives of ‘composite’ and ‘simple’, where the significance of the terms depends upon the context of the language game in which they are used. But this sort of answer merely kicks the can down the road, begging the question that we are asking, namely, how do we distinguish dependent from independent rational reasoning in, to be sure, the language game at hand? What are we independent of and how are we independent of it when we are independent practical reasoners?

In chapter 9 MacIntyre appears to address this issue head on, as he writes:

By independence I mean both the ability and the willingness to evaluate the reasons for action advanced to one by others, so that one makes oneself accountable for one’s endorsements of the practical conclusions of others as well as for one’s own conclusions. One cannot then be an independent practical reasoner without being able to give to others an intelligible account of one’s reasoning. (p. 105)

⁵ Adapting Bernard Williams’s terminology for his purposes, MacIntyre characterizes the transition to IPR as a matter of internalizing external reasons. See Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons,” in Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101-13.

He then stresses the importance of the fact that this exercise hardly needs to be a theoretical account. It is important because it underscores that any rational debate must be based upon “agreement about the relevant ends” (goods) and social relationships in which one cannot pursue one’s own good without pursuing the good of all (p. 107). But here, too, his gloss on independence, the conditions of its employment, and its accountability, far from illuminating the issue, exacerbate the difficulty of saying precisely what is independent about IPR.⁶

The issue is by no means peculiar to MacIntyre’s philosophy. One finds a version of the same issue in Martin Heidegger’s existential analysis and, in particular, in his contention, influenced by Augustine’s account of temptation, that human existence is a constant struggle between the pull of the crowd and the demands of authenticity.⁷ In his analysis of authenticity, Heidegger taps into resources that MacIntyre largely ignores. (I say “largely” because MacIntyre’s account of the virtue of truthfulness bears some resemblance to what Heidegger understands as authenticity.) These resources, I suggest, at once challenge and complement MacIntyre’s account. The resources I have in mind are Heidegger’s existential analyses of the phenomena of anxiety, death, and conscience. The significance of these phenomena, as Heidegger analyzes them, lies in the way they constitute a situation where the human being is faced with coming to terms with its own individual and finite existence and, indeed, at arm’s length from the community and tradition with which it otherwise identifies itself. It deserves noting that anxiety, despite being disabling at one level, is for Heidegger a crucially enabling experience, one in which a human being experiences not its disability, but the disabling of any account of the purposiveness of the world. The human being’s resolute embrace of conscience’s silent call to project the anxiety-ridden possibility of the complete closure of one’s possibilities provides a fulcrum of the individual’s authenticity or, in MacIntyre’s terms, its existence as an IPRer.

Is authenticity ever complete and entire for Heidegger? That would no more be conceivable in his eyes than an earthly life without temptation is in Augustine’s. Yet precisely therein lies one of the ways Heidegger’s account may complement MacIntyre’s. But, of course, the existential analysis eschews any reliance upon final causes or natural law and herein undoubtedly lies part of its challenge to MacIntyre’s account of IPR. Let us

⁶ In the penultimate chapter of *DRA*, MacIntyre asserts that we learn how to be able to speak for others by learning how to speak for ourselves, adding that it is “something more complex and more difficult than it is often taken to be” (p. 147). This context is yet another place in which he flags the issue that I am trying to raise.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962).

put the challenge in the form of a question: In what sense, if at all, can authenticity be a virtue, for MacIntyre and, indeed, a virtue that is constitutive of IPR?

3. The Virtuous Community and the Making of the State

The second aspect of MacIntyre's analysis that I would like to call into question is his contention that recognition of IPR and human beings' intrinsic interdependency together with the practice of just generosity fall outside of the family and the state. More precisely, he contends that those whose relationships embody that dual recognition of independence and dependency must share a common good that cannot be realized in either the contemporary family or the modern state (p. 131). Instead, the common good is constitutive of a network of giving and receiving, forms of local community that embody the virtue of just generosity. This network must be composed of institutionalized forms of deliberating and decision-making by IPRers as well as those who speak for others with limited or no capacity for practical reason. Though distinct from the state, this network is "political" in the sense that requires the sort of shared deliberation and decision-making entailed by the attitudes of recognition and respect toward able and disabled alike (pp. 140-41). For brevity's sake, in what follows I usually refer to this political network, embodying the virtue of just generosity, simply as "the virtuous community."

While MacIntyre thus gives a clear account of the make-up of this network in abstract terms, he refrains from specifying it in a more detailed and concrete way. Nonetheless, he gives a few lists of the sorts of associations he has in mind, each of which contains references to workplaces, schools, parishes, and clubs (pp. 134-35 and 145). Clearly, he has no intention of specifying all that falls under such a network, and it would probably be inappropriate to demand that he do so. He is largely content to refer to this network as the "social environment" or, more often, "local community" or "some form of the local community" (pp. 134-35 and 142). It is perhaps telling that, while MacIntyre adds temporal qualifiers to the relevant conceptions of the family and the state, he characterizes the network in spatial terms ("local" and "environment"). Whether this difference in mode of characterization is deliberate or not, it is at once consistent and ironic that MacIntyre observes that some standards of the community, by virtue of being non-competitive, are "Utopian." While the actual realization of a virtuous community in the various forms of local community is always imperfect and flawed, it is not Utopian, MacIntyre adds, to try to live by Utopian standards (p. 145).

This observation is central, I think, and I return to it below. But first, in fairness to MacIntyre's contention, let us briefly review his reasons for excluding the family and the state from this sphere of just generosity. First of all, it should be emphasized that MacIntyre regards families as "key and indispensable constituents of local community" and, indeed, a paradigmatic locus of the virtues of acknowledged dependence (p. 135). Nonetheless,

according to MacIntyre, the family, considered as a nuclear unit—the so-called “nuclear family” (p. 131) or the family as “a distinct and social unit” (pp. 134-35)—lacks the “self-sufficiency” required for a network of giving and receiving (p. 134). We might label this the “it takes a village” argument since it amounts to the argument that the family flourishes, that is, achieves its common good, only in the course of achieving the common goods of its local community.⁸ As a matter of fact, if we consider such common goods as basic as adequate sources of nourishment and educational opportunities, this argument appears quite sound. Providing for sufficient supplies of food and water and for adequate schooling, for example, is typically a responsibility of a local community, not least because it lies beyond the reach and competence of the average family. There is another, obvious reason for the family’s lack of self-sufficiency, though MacIntyre does not himself exploit it, namely, the discrepancy in parents’ and children’s capacities for IPR at various stages of the latter’s development. Particularly for young children IPR is necessarily nascent, requiring a level of paternalism that must be overcome in a virtuous community (a local community based upon the virtue of just generosity).

So far, so good. There are good reasons (economic and generational) to exclude the family from the virtuous community (the potential network of giving and receiving based upon just generosity). But are there also good reasons to insist, as MacIntyre does, on excluding the state or, more precisely, the modern state, from the virtuous community? MacIntyre appears to have two reasons for this insistence: the economics and the size of the modern state. The modern state is dominated by money and the interests it serves in such a manner that “the distribution of goods by government in no way reflects a common mind arrived at through widespread shared deliberation by norms of rational enquiry” (p. 131). He then quickly adds that the size of modern states precludes such a means of determining the distribution of goods. MacIntyre also acknowledges that a state can only operate under the constraint of assuring most citizens some share in such “public goods” as security (pp. 131-32). Yet he also insists that the shared public goods of the modern state are not to be confused with the common goods of the community. The confusion is of one cloth with a citizenry’s misconception of itself as a *Volk*—a commonplace, by the way, of contemporary political claims of adhering to the will of the “American people” (pp. 132-33).

MacIntyre thus presumes that adhering to the norms of rational enquiry would yield a virtuous distribution of goods, that is, a distribution in keeping with the demands of just generosity, and that there is some size threshold for such adherence on a social level. These are weighty presumptions and, in particular, the second presumption that size matters to the modern state’s prospects of being part of a virtuous community is in need

⁸ At times MacIntyre has in mind “the common good,” other times “common goods.” Some work of sorting this difference, along with possible “public goods,” would be helpful. In what sense is security a public good? A common good?

of more argument than MacIntyre provides. But regardless of whether these considerable presumptions hold up under scrutiny or not, he is making the independent observation that the modern state is essentially constituted in such a way that the power to determine its policies can be or, more precisely, has to be purchased and that this purchasing power—the power to purchase the power to determine public policy—is not itself a common good, but a limited good for which the members of the state compete and, indeed, compete in a way driven by capitalist market mechanisms and forces, where the competing members of the state are not on the same footing. Given this competition for a limited good and, indeed, within an inegalitarian framework, there are always winners and losers and, in fact, far more losers than winners whose interests hold sway over others. As a matter of historical record, that is, as a matter of registering the nature of the state operating under the “economic goals of advanced capitalism” (p. 145), this observation is undoubtedly accurate.

As in his discussion of the family, MacIntyre does not want to diminish or understate the continued importance of the state. He recognizes that the public good of security provided by the state is a necessary condition for the community’s achievement of common goods. Citing the Americans with Disabilities Act, he notes that the state can provide resources for removing obstacles to the achievement of the common good; he also acknowledges that “numerous crucial needs of the local community . . . can only be met” through the intervention of state agencies (p. 142). Nonetheless, he insists that it is the politics of local communities—and not the state—that are crucial for defining the needs in question and seeing to it that they are met. Not only, in MacIntyre’s view, is the modern state, given its constitution, unable to be the political framework for a just society, it is, he adds, a “communitarian mistake” to attempt to infuse the politics of the state with the values of the local community (p. 142).

MacIntyre thus appears to have trenchant reasons for denying the state as well as the family the capacity to be communities embodying the virtue of just generosity.⁹ But his trichotomy in one respect underestimates the prerogatives of the state and in another respect underestimates the potential political force and responsibility of the network he envisions. In regard to the first point, if we look at the actual forms of local community identified by MacIntyre, we are hard pressed to find a form that is not beholden to the state. Certainly, the workplace supposes economic policies

⁹ In passing, it is perhaps useful to note that MacIntyre’s trichotomy here bears a superficial resemblance to the three stages of objective spirit in G. W. F. Hegel’s philosophy of right. It should be obvious, from the gloss of the virtuous community just given, that it is a far cry from the civil society or *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* that, in Hegel’s theory, mediates between the family and the state. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

underwritten by the state, even private schools must abide by state regulations, and a tax-exempt status is hardly incidental to parishes in the U.S. To be sure, these aspects of the local community are not the aspects that would necessarily instantiate the virtuous community touted by MacIntyre, and he is clear that there is nothing good about local community as such. But as concrete matters of historical fact, the above examples of state involvement in forms of local community, the very forms that, in MacIntyre's view, have the potential for realizing the virtue of just generosity, raise at least two questions about his trichotomy: first, the question of the concrete possibility of isolating the local community or, more precisely, its relevant forms from the state and, second, the question of its advisability.

How can these forms of local community establish themselves as independent of the state? Can we imagine today forms of virtuous community, for example, in the workplace and in schools, that can dispense with the state's prerogatives of protecting citizens, enforcing laws, and providing for security? Does not the state, in its role of maintaining security and perhaps in part because of its impersonality, serve as a check on aspects of local community that, as MacIntyre rightly notes, can conflict with the demands of virtue? What I am suggesting is that MacIntyre's trichotomy is false or at least misleading in pretending that the demands of giving and receiving can be isolated from concerns for security, the only good identified by him as a legitimate matter of the state, or, for that matter, the need for enforcement of the decisions reached by IPRers in a virtuous community. To presume that a virtuous community is physically and morally powerless to enjoin and back up injunctions, that it can dispense with such power, or that its deliberating process will render such injunctions superfluous is Utopian. As the original Greek makes clear, there is no place for it and the pursuit of it is, at best, a blueprint for disappointment, and at its worst, a recipe for escapism.

This last remark introduces the second issue flagged above and it concerns the potential for quietism lurking in MacIntyre's trichotomy, given once again the supposed independence of the virtuous community. How can the ideals of giving and receiving, of just generosity, not be sources of radical protest and struggle against the state, as MacIntyre portrays it? After recognizing, as noted above, that everyone necessarily has "a significant interest" in his or her relationship to the nation-state, MacIntyre cautions that we "weigh any benefits to be derived from it with the costs of entanglement" (p. 132). Here we see a practical directive, supposedly flowing from the independence of the virtuous community from the state (and vice versa), suggesting that we can focus on the network of giving and receiving while holding our relationship to the big, bad state at arm's length.

One is reminded here at once of both Hegel's account of the beautiful soul and Karl Marx's criticism of Hegel's manner of distinguishing civil society from the state.¹⁰ For Marx, the distinction between a capitalist civil

¹⁰ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, sec. 13, p. 47; and Karl Marx, *Critique*

or, better, bourgeois society and the modern state is ultimately a dissembling bit of ideology. What Marx understood and MacIntyre endorses as justice in a socialist society demands, according to Marx, a lengthy and arduous struggle against both the economic relations of capitalism and the political forces that guard them. Nor can this struggle be a merely local one. There cannot be just generosity in the workplace in Bochum or Detroit without the same in Bangladesh or Hanoi. If forms of local community are to exemplify just generosity, they cannot remain local and they cannot pursue their proper activities and ends—in the workplace, in schools, in parishes, in clubs, and the like—without, at the same time, challenging the current political order that makes them possible in an unjust world.

Now it is certainly possible that these remarks are tendentious and that MacIntyre would agree with my inference about the obligatory, *subverting* political role of the virtuous community *within* the capitalist state. His central interest, after all, lies not in specifying that relationship but in identifying what sorts of political associations allow for such a community. As noted above, MacIntyre reiterates that the fact that he rules out the state in this regard by no means entails a denial of the continuing importance of the state. Still, as also noted above, while recognizing the necessity of the state to meet certain crucial needs, he contends that the politics of local community are crucial for determining those needs and seeing that they are met. But then I am led to ask, how can it see that those “crucial needs” are met without engaging in and contesting the politics of the modern capitalist state? If, as MacIntyre contends, relatively small inequalities of wealth or income are required for a virtuous community (p. 144), how in the present concrete situation does one go about establishing a virtuous community without actively contesting the policies of the modern state? Again, if, as MacIntyre observes, striving to achieve a community infused by the virtue of just generosity demands a “rejection of the economics of advanced capitalism,” how can this striving avoid challenging the state-level policies that make those economics possible?¹¹ It is illusory to think that we can go about the business

of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, ed. Joseph O'Malley, trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970 [1843-44]).

¹¹ One can read MacIntyre's sketch of the virtuous community as an answer to the question of what society would be like if the state, whose rationale is tied to capitalist economics, “withers away,” in Friedrich Engels's memorable phrase. MacIntyre's advice to compare different forms of local communities echoes Marx's more sober recommendation that the future constitution of the state within a socialist economic structure cannot be determined *a priori* (and certainly not from some assimilation of *Volk* with *Staat*) but only through scientific investigation; see Marx's “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” part IV, accessed online at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch04.htm>. Yet, Marx is talking about the continuing nature of the state and, hence, MacIntyre's views would seem closer to Engels than Marx on this score. However, for an argument that Marx

of establishing virtuous forms of local community independently of addressing such matters as legal enforcement, power, and security that are traditionally prerogatives of a state.

and Engels are in accord, see V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution*, chap. 5, accessed online at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch05.htm#s1>.

