Pluralist Response to MacIntyre's Critique of Liberalism[*]

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Summary

This paper questions Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of contemporary liberal theories and institutions. First part of the paper gives an account of MacIntrye's critique of the Enlightenment Project and its connection to the liberal project. It also introduced the distinction between monist and pluralist understanding of rationality as a means of clarifying the difference between the Enlightenment liberals and contemporary liberal pluralists. Second part deals With MacIntyre's argument about the modern notion of the self and tries to draw the difference between emotivist and liberal understanding of the self. In the third part author acknowledges that MacIntyre is right in his critique of the Enlightenment liberals' claims about the universal principles of justice. However, as liberal pluralism does not rest on the notion of the universal principles of justice, MacIntyre's critique of liberalism fails to recognize different ways of justifying liberal state.

Key words: MacIntyre, liberalism, *After Virtue*, pluralism

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MacIntyre's disquieting suggestion

In this paper I would like to explore Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of modern liberalism. My goal is to argue that his critique fails on two points.

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First, it gives a wrong account of the liberal understanding of the self by characterising it as emotivist. Second, on the issue of moral consensus on principles of justice it puts in question only those versions of liberalism, which are derived from Enlightenment and founded on the belief that these issues can be resolved by appeal to universal norms derived from reason. If this belief proves to be wrong, it does not mean that the justification of liberal institutions is not viable. I will claim that liberal pluralism as post-Enlightenment theory – in the way it is defended by such authors as Isaiah Berlin, Joseph Raz and William Galston – avoids MacIntyre's criticism and offers a convincing justification of the liberal state[1].

The main point of MacIntyre's criticism of contemporary liberalism is that it is unable to resolve moral conflicts in any kind of satisfactory way. As he puts it: "there seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture" (MacIntyre, 1981:6). When it comes to issues such as the nature of just war, abortion or the just distribution of social goods there seems to be no rational method which would ensure a consensus between the conflicting views. The resolution of such conflicting arguments should come about by an appeal to impersonal and objective standards which could convince all rational moral agents. It should not come about by an appeal to personal and arbitrary will that does not rely on the strength of argument itself, but rather on rhetorical skill, charisma and manipulative power (MacIntyre, 1981:9). The goal of the Enlightenment thinkers was to supply us exactly with this kind of impersonal and objective standard: Kant through his idea of categorical imperative or Hume through his idea of moral sentiment, just to name two most influential representatives. However, this Enlightenment Project, as MacIntyre calls it, failed because "its protagonists had never succeeded in specifying a uniquely justifiable set of moral principles to which any fully rational agent whatsoever could not fail to assent" (MacIntyre, 1981:271). The fact that it failed could suggest that so far we were just not lucky enough to have such a calibre of philosopher who would succeed in establishing moral standards universally acceptable to all rational persons. MacIntyre, however, goes one step further and claims that the project of establishing such moral standards was doomed to fail from day one. It does not matter if we talk about Kant's idea of universal reason, Hume and his notion of moral sentiments or such post-Enlightenment thinkers as Moore and his theory of intuitions. What unites all of these thinkers is an understanding that

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[1] Similar line of argument is pursued by both Barry (1991.) and Kurelić (2002.) with an important difference that Barry criticizes MacIntyre's understanding of liberal neutrality, while Kurelić argues that MacIntyre's critique of liberalism is one of "limited range" (Kurelić, 2002.:134) by being applicable only to those liberals that deny that liberalism is a tradition. Although I agree with both of these authors, this article discusses MacInytre's approach to liberalism on different grounds: that of liberal self and that of Enlightenment *versus* pluralist understanding of rationality.

"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 posses, and to pass judgments on it from a purely universal and abstract point of view that is totally detached from all social particularity" (MacIntyre, 1981:31-32).

MacIntyre claims that this understanding is based on an illusion because "morality which is no particular society's morality is to be found nowhere" (MacIntyre, 1981:265-266). We will never be able to find coherent moral argument detached from any kind of social context and presented as a purely abstract principle. This illusion lead such great thinkers as Hume, Diderot and Kant to "claim universal rational authority for what is in fact the local morality" (MacIntyre, 1981:232).

So, the unavoidable failure of the Enlightenment project leads our contemporary culture into a moral *cul-de-sac* – emotivism. For an emotivist all moral judgments are nothing more then "expressions of preference" (MacIntyre, 1981:12). We are faced with a moral vacuum that "entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations" (MacIntyre, 1981:23). Emotivism understands all moral claims as being inevitably personal and arbitrary and all moral discourse as an "attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preferences and choices of another with its own" (MacIntyre, 1981:24). Through loss of social context from which different moral claims derived their authority we ended up with fragments of moral vocabulary used only to disguise allegiance to our own arbitrarily chosen moral code.

As liberalism is the most successful political child of the Enlightenment, MacIntyre suggest that if the Enlightenment project failed it follows that the liberal project failed too. Contemporary liberals are condemned either to deny the downfall of the Enlightenment project and try to convince everyone that there exists (or can exist) an impersonal universal standard by which we would evaluate competing moral claims, or to accept the emotivist view and use any means at their disposal – coercive power of the state, the mass media, academia – to manipulate others in joining their ranks. Behind the scenes of public moral debates in contemporary liberal societies we are faced with conceptual incommensurability of the rival arguments. What MacIntyre means by this is that we can present logically valid moral claims – logically valid in a sense that conclusion does indeed follow from the premises (MacIntyre, 1981:10) – while holding conflicting premises that reflect competing goals and ends. When it comes to question of ends, most of us behave like emotivists for we take a view that "questions of ends are questions of values, and on values reason is silent; conflict between rival values cannot be rationally settled" (MacIntyre, 1981:26). It follows that the

choice between different ends is never rational, but completely contingent and arbitrary.

If the choice is arbitrary or rational depends, I would claim, on our understanding of rationality. Here it would be useful to introduce Isaiah Berlin's distinction between monist and pluralist understanding of rationality (Berlin,1990:5). Two essential and interconnected elements of monist rationality are: 1) universal and eternal moral principles – belief that that justification of all valid moral claims is outside the realm of empirical, for true moral claims are abstract, timeless and universal and therefore they are not dependant on particular social circumstances; 2) the unity of moral claims – all of these claims are in mutual harmony or otherwise in hierarchical order which clearly dictates, in case of conflict, which of them should have priority. This understanding of rationality underlines the thought of most of the Enlightenment thinkers (especially Kant who can be seen as quintessential philosopher of the Enlightenment era).

Opposed to monism there is a pluralist understanding of rationality which suggests quite the opposite: 1) valid moral claims are not derived from *a priori* abstract principles, but can only have meaning in specific social context; 2) there are equally valid and sound moral claims who are in direct conflict with each other or even mutually exclusive. This might suggest that there is no difference between the pluralist understanding of rationality and relativism. This is why we have to expand the pluralist definition of rationality and say that a moral claim can be considered rational only if it is both logically coherent and empirically sound. All of these four points coincide with MacIntyre's understanding of basic rationality, but let me for now concentrate on the last two. When talking about Aristotle's practical syllogism (if X then B) he concludes that logical validity is a "necessary condition for intelligible human action" and "must hold for any recognizable human culture" (MacIntyre, 1981:161). In *Whose Justice? Which rationality?* he again agrees with Aristotle's claim that "no one who understands the laws of logic can remain rational while rejecting them" (MacIntyre, 1988:4). As far as the argument that any moral claim (although not only moral, but any kind of claim) considered to be rational has to correspond to our empirical experience, MacIntyre confirms this when he says how "in the domain of fact there are procedures for eliminating disagreement" (MacIntyre, 1981:32). Obviously these two last points give only a very limited concept of rationality – because they have to accommodate many different and often conflicting metaphysical, teleological and moral world views which we do indeed consider to be rational. This excludes the relativist idea of "anything goes" and recognizes as irrational not just those who claim that the Earth is flat and is positioned on the back of a colossal turtle, but, more importantly, the moral claims of groups such as Nazis and religious fundamentalists.

The objection, though, still stands – how can I show that liberal pluralists differ in significantly way from emotivists? Or to use MacIntyre's own words – how can I prove that moral pluralism leads to "an ordered dialogue of intersected view points" and not "to an unharmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments" (MacIntyre, 1981:10)? If we take pluralist arguments 1) and 2) about rationality into account it follows that we can not expect to reach a consensus by an appeal to impartial and neutral standard, for there can never be such a standard. However, it does not follow from this that we are condemned to accept emotivism as the only intelligible position. Political theorists such as Berlin and Galston suggest that there might be another option available – that of liberal pluralism. If monist understanding of rationality is wrong and we are bound to find ourselves faced with conflicting but equally valid and sound moral claims, it would be inconsistent to believe that the only rational outcome would be to establish a moral claim that would override all others. Pluralist approach to rationality assumes that a proper goal of rational enquiry in ethics or political theory is not to provide "timeless, objective and universal truths" (MacInytre, 1990: 65) and ensure their legitimacy by branding them as rational, but to investigate arguments from all the sides in the conflict and informs us what are we gaining and what are we losing by endorsing one of these sides. Therefore, if we want to rationally justify our moral claims to others we have to accept that the only way to accommodate conflicting claims is to: 1) try and reach a compromise between them or, when that is not possible, accept the fact of tragic choice; 2) ensure a realm of private sphere where each individual can achieve his understanding of good. It is to this last point that I turn to now.

Good life for man and plurality of values

For MacIntyre western moral tradition started going downhill since Enlightenment thinkers neglected the first question of moral philosophy – that of human *telos*, or to put it more precisely, the question of what is a good life for man. He introduced the following teleological scheme: we are faced with a man-as-he-happens-to-be and are trying to establish the picture of a man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-*telos*. Rational "ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter" (MacIntyre, 1981:52). When the philosophers of the Enlightenment project rejected the teleological view of human nature and substituted it with universal moral rules, what they did was to erase the latter element in the scheme and by this made rational ethics unintelligible.

It was the abandonment of Aristotelian cosmology that lead the Enlightenment philosophers to put the question of human *telos* aside (although, as MacIntyre himself suggests, not completely aside – for Kant and

Diderot both included teleological elements in their moral philosophy (Mac-Intyre, 1981:55-57)). This abandonment brought with it the realization that there is not only one universal human *telos* worth pursuing, as there are many valuable goals one can strive for and many ways in which a man can achieve a good life. What's more, some of these goals and ways of life are mutually exclusive and it was up to each individual person himself to make a choice between them – not the state, the church or some wise philosopher king. This is where both the Enlightenment and contemporary pluralist liberals agree – that one of the main tasks of liberal state is to ensure a private realm for each individual to be able to pursue his own conception of good life without interference from others.

It might come as a bit of a surprise that MacIntyre himself agrees with the existence of plurality of good lives men can pursue. For him practice of virtues is the means through which one achieves his *telos*, but considering there is more then one rational and worthwhile *telos*, there will also be more the one list of virtues. MacInytre is at his best when he explains the difference between Homeric, Aristotelian, the New Testament's, Ben Franklin's and Jane Austen's list of virtues. Not only are there different lists of virtues, often mutually exclusive – such as Aristotle's virtue of magnanimity and Christian virtue of humility – but there are also "different theories about what virtue is" (MacIntyre, 1981:183). MacIntyre does try to avoid this last problem and goes at great lengths to establish a single core concept of virtue by differentiating between external and internal goods to practices and constructing a scheme made of practices, narrative and, finally, moral tradition. This scheme certainly deserves more space, for it represents the core of MacIntyre's own theory of virtues, but as far as his criticism of liberalism goes, it does not add anything new. It can help us understand why MacInytre favours virtues advocated by Jane Austen rather then those advocated by Benjamin Franklin – but this is only because he believes there can be a single understanding of what virtue is, not because there should be a only single list of virtues or only one good life for man.

That MacIntyre is a pluralist when it comes to different ways of understanding one's *telos* is obvious from his critique of Aristotle. He says of Aristotle that he had "too simple and too unified a view of complexities of human good" (MacIntyre, 1981:157). I want to suggest that it was exactly because Aristotle had a single ideal of good life of man – that of "great-souled man" that he could be consistent in prescribing his list of virtues as universally valid. If the life of a philosopher or a citizen is to be praised above all others, then it comes as no surprise that one should obtain those virtues that are essential for leading a contemplative or a political life. For Aristotle the answer to the question "what sort of person am I to become?" can have only one answer, hence, "there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life" (MacIntyre, 1981:

142). However, we can conclude about Aristotle here the same thing that MacInytre concluded about Hume, Diderot and Kant: that he claims "universal rational authority for what is in fact the local morality" (MacIntyre, 1981:232). The crucial difference is that unlike the Enlightenment philosophers, Aristotle made this claim on the issue of the good life for man.

This leads us back to the question of the difference between liberal and emotivist understanding of the self. MacIntyre himself never makes this distinction, which is probably the weakest point of his criticism of contemporary liberal societies. As far as emotivist self goes, MacIntyre describes him very vividly as

"lacking any ultimate criteria… that whatever criteria or principle the emotivist self may profess, they are to be constructed as expressions of attitudes, preferences and choices which are themselves not governed by criterion, principle of value… from this it follows that the emotivist self can have no rational history in its transition from one state of moral commitment to another" (MacIntyre, 1981:33).

This description brings into mind Nietzsche's *Übermensch* or one of Sartre's existentialist characters, but has little connection to the liberal understanding of the self. There are indeed people who go around re-inventing themselves without being able to give any valid reason – one day religious, next day agnostic, one day cosmopolitan, next day nationalist. However, we would hardly think of these people as personifying the liberal ideal of self. In fact, this Sartrean/Nietzschean individual would be easier to find in the pages of existentialist novels, than walking the streets of liberal society. It should not come us a surprise that there are not many (if any) consistent liberal thinkers who think of Nietzsche or Sartre as their heroes.

When MacInyre talks about "the modern self with its criterionless choices" (MacIntyre, 1981:202) it is a far cry from what liberals think when they talk about modern self. First, liberals would disagree with MacIntyre that it is Sartre's theory of the self "which captures so well the spirit of modernity" (MacIntyre, 1981:214). As I have pointed out earlier, what liberals deny is that there is only one valid *telos* men should pursue, not that there are no valid goals which we should try to accomplish or that these goals should be creations of our will completely detached from any kind of social context. When MacIntyre says that we are not isolated individuals and that our lives have a "moral starting point" (MacIntyre, 1981:220), his thought is strikingly similar to that of John Rawls when he says in *A Theory of Justice* that "in drawing up our plan of life we do not start *de novo*" (John Rawls, 1971:563), but rely on existing cultural forms. Also, in liberal societies virtues still play a large role in people's lives, even if they do not refer to them as virtues. This is a point that William Galston makes in his criticism of MacIntyre in *Liberal Purposes*: "the virtues are by no means dead in liberal

society. Courage, justice, self-restraint, prudence, and many others are widely prized… that they are more prized than practiced is not a problem confined to our own historical moment" (Galston, 1991:71).

Why then does MacIntyre think that liberals have a notion of the self completely cut off from its social embodiments? It seems that he makes a mistake by failing to differentiate between Nietzsche's understanding of individuality through self-assertion and the liberal understanding of individuality through reflection and autonomy. Nietzsche's vision of *Übermensch* is that of a "man who transcends, finds his good nowhere in social world… only in that which him himself dictates" (MacIntyre, 1981:257). This might lead us to think that Nitzschean super-man fulfils the Kantian requirement of autonomy, which dictates that person is autonomous only when he acts based on self-prescribed and universal moral imperative. Nothing could be further from the truth. The core idea of Kant's moral philosophy was to show that as moral agents we are able to establish universal moral rules that would be the same for all rational persons irrespectively of the time and place. However, to be truly moral it is not enough only to follow these moral rules out of a fear of punishment or prospect of gain, we have to genuinely will to do what is morally right. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, this idea was absurd, for there are no such universal moral rules. His "genuine insight", as MacInytre calls it, was to see that "what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will" (MacIntyre, 1981:113). Concluding that there are no universally valid moral imperatives, Nietzsche deleted the distinction between arbitrary will and rational argument.

If Kant failed in his moral philosophy (and not only Nietzsche and MacIntyre, but also most contemporary liberals and of liberal pluralists believe he did) it does not mean that we are left only with the emotivist notion of autonomy understood as self-assertion through arbitrariness of one's will. As Joseph Raz puts it: the understanding of autonomy that requires "a perfect existentialist with no fixed biological or social nature who creates himself as he goes along" is "an incoherent dream" (Raz, 1986:155). The same line of thought can be found in Caney's argument in which he states that liberals do not foster an atomistic understanding of the self which would define moral vocabulary outside any social context and he backs up this claim with quotations from leading liberal philosophers such as J.S. Mill, T.H. Green, Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls (Caney, 1992).

This misinterpretation of liberal self leads MacIntyre to give a distorted picture of liberal expectations of acceptable behaviour in public realm. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* he argues that in "public realms of the market and of liberal individualist politics… that people in general have such and such preferences is held to provide by itself a sufficient reason for

acting so as to satisfy them" (MacIntyre, 1988:339). Anyone who, involved in the debate on a socially controversial issue (abortion, gay marriages, euthanasia, etc.), opts for arguing her case by stating "that's my preference" and refusing to offer any further justification of valid reasons for advocating her position, would not be taken seriously and would, quite rightly, quickly be disqualified from participating in the public debate. Dedicated Nietzschean could argue that offering arguments and rational justifications for one's moral position is anyway nothing more than masking of our personal preferences under a cloak of general principles. However, that is an argument no true liberal would ascribe to, a fact that in itself proves an important difference between the ideal of liberal self and emotivist self.

The reason why liberals insist on individualism and autonomy is not because they have Sartrean or Nietzschean understanding of the self, but because they think it is important for every person to have a chance to criticize and even leave one's own moral community. This is something that MacIntyre also finds important for although "one has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities" this "does not entail that the self has to accept the moral limitations of the particularity of those forms of community" (MacIntyre, 1981:221). He continues by saying that one can not question her moral community by escaping to "a realm of entirely universal maxims which belong to man as such" (MacIntyre, 1981:221). He obviously thinks of Kant here, but fails to see that post-Enlightenment liberals completely agree with him on this point**.** Autonomy and reflection for them do not mean that we have to or even can transcendent any given social context but that we are able to use moral arguments already supplied by our own moral tradition (internal consistency) or by a different moral tradition to question our own cultural forms (external criticism). As moral agents we are able to break away from the limits of our own social context and the dogmas of our own moral community through critical insight. It is the ability Vico called *entrare* and Herder called *Einfühlen*, an ability which Mill thought Bentham lacked and which Michael Ignatieff thought Berlin possessed more than any other liberal philosopher of his age. It is through this kind of critical insight and power of reflection that we are able to conclude that there was a value in the *telos* of warrior's life in ancient heroic societies, while there is no value in the *telos* of life of a gang member in today's LA, although there is little difference in their core virtues – loyalty to one's kin or fellow gang member, destruction of one's enemies.

This brings us to one more important point: although liberals argue that there are numerous incompatible ways of life worth pursuing, this does not mean that in liberal societies there is no rational consensus on ways of life that have little or no value at all – such as that of a compulsive gambler, skinhead thug or drug addict. This idea was pointed out clearly by John Gray when he said in his essay "Toleration: a post-liberal perspective" how it is

not possible to say which is the better conception of good – one embodied in the Samaritan life of Mother Theresa or one embodied in the dandyish life of Oscar Wilde, but we can still say that the life of a crack addict is bad (Gray, 1997:29). If liberals sometimes seem reluctant to criticize and condemn these kinds of lifestyles it is only because they have a well-founded fear of the possibility that some social group might abuse the power of the state to impose their own conception of good life to everybody else in the political community.

Justice and Conflict

MacIntyre's criticism of liberalism does not only deal with the understanding of modern self, but also with the inability of liberalism to give a rational and universally acceptable account of the principles of justice. Indeed, we find conflicting moral claims not only on the issue of good life for man, but also on issues that directly affect the lives of all members of political community. It is on this second issue that liberal pluralists differ substantially from Kantian liberals, who are convinced that it is possible to establish neutral principles of justice which could be accepted by people with different and even opposing conceptions of good life and which would not favour any one conception of good above all others. This is exactly what Rawls tried to achieve in his *A Theory of Justice* and what Dworkin meant by neutrality of the state. However, if all moral claims are inevitably tied to a specific moral tradition and there is no, to use Thomas Nagle's phrase, "view from nowhere" then what follows is that in resolving a conflict between two competing values best we can do is take both of them into account and hope to achieve a compromise between them. When that is not possible we will have to accept the sacrificing one of these values for the benefit of the other. This is why Berlin ("an arch-liberal" as Galston rightly notices (Galston, 1991: 72)) says that "if, as I believe, the ends of men are many and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict – and of tragedy – can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social" (Berlin, 1969:169).

MacIntyre discusses the issue of distributive justice and rightly concludes that neither Rawls' egalitarian argument nor Nozick's libertarian argument can give us a decisive answer. Rawls suggests that material goods in a just society should be distributed on the principle of need and that one's talents should play no part in the distributive scheme, as we were in no way instrumental in acquiring them. Nozick argues that we should be guided by the principle of entitlement and that considering we own our talents we are entitled to any goods that we obtained through the use of these talents. If we take that both of these lines of argument are logically coherent, we have to accept that they are incommensurable – there is no overriding principle which could

help us decide between Rawls or Nozick. MacIntyre says that this is because "our pluralist culture possesses no method of weighing, no rational criterion for deciding between claims based on legitimate entitlement against claims based on need" (MacIntyre, 1981:246).

Liberal pluralists suggest that we do possess a rational criterion – we take them both to be legitimate and valid, but because of the moral complexity of the world not all valid principles go hand in hand. We just have to accept that there are no easy answers. However, in most cases compromise can still be achieved. This is what Berlin suggests:

> "What is to be done? How do we choose between possibilities? What and how much do we sacrifice to what? There is, it seems to me, no clear reply. But collisions, even if they cannot be avoided, can be softened. Claims can be balanced, compromises can be reached…" (Berlin, 1990:17).

This kind of pluralist approach does not only apply to the subject of distributive justice. MacInytre talks about the *Bakke* case, in which the US Supreme Court had to make a decision on the discriminatory policy of the affirmative action that kept better qualified white students from entering top medical schools. MacInytre's complaint is that the Supreme Court had to make a compromise between two conflicting claims because it could not invoke our "shared moral first principles" considering that "our society as a whole has none" (MacInytre, 1981:253). From a pluralist point of view, we might not have shared moral first principles but that does not mean we cannot find other people's moral principles intelligible and equally rational. In the *Bakke* case both the principle of admitting most qualified candidates to medical schools and the principle of the positive discrimination of the members of previously underprivileged group seem to be intelligible and rational. It is a fact of our complex moral world that they are not compatible. Therefore, choosing one while completely disregarding the other does seem less just then trying to take both principles into account and achieving a compromise.

As I mentioned earlier, there will be cases where a compromise between two rational but conflicting claims is not possible. Here we are faced with what Berlin called a tragic choice – we are forced to sacrifice one important good for the sake of another. Abortion seems to be one such case: either we side with the woman's right to choose or with the embryo's right to live. Even in this case it makes a difference how we treat the other side in the debate – do we accuse them of violating basic human rights and, as Rawls did in *Political Liberalism* (Rawls, 1993:243-244), call them unreasonable or do we acknowledge that their argument is valid and should be taken seriously. As Galston observes: "the anguished tone of recent public debate [on abortion] testifies to the widespread recognition that every course of action nec-

essarily surrenders some significant good" (Galston, 1991: 73). Compromise still might not be possible and we will be faced with loosing a certain social good while achieving another. We would, however, avoid declaring societies such as Ireland unjust (or the other way around, from the Catholic point of view) and we might define our public policies quite differently. For example, Switzerland does not ban abortion, but does require of pregnant women thinking about abortion to go through counselling where other options (such as adoption) are presented to them.

Conclusion

Given all that was said we can see why MacIntyre has little sympathy for Kant, authors of the Ninth Edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or early Rawls, Dworkin or Gewirth but it is surprising that he is so hostile to contemporary liberalism as such. As I have suggested, there is no real truth in his claim that liberals have a sort of Sartrean or Nietzschean emotivist understanding of the self. When MacIntyre praises Vico because he was the first to stress

> "the importance of the undeniable fact… that the subject matters of moral philosophy at least… are nowhere to be found except as embodied in the historical lives of particular social groups and so possessing the distinctive characteristics of historical existence" (MacInytre, 1981:265)

He neglects to acknowledge that one of Berlin's main heroes was Vico and that it was the acceptance of Vico's argument that lead Berlin to leave analytical philosophy for the history of ideas. When MacIntyre gives us his account of the good life "the life spent in seeking for the good life for man" (MacInytre, 1981:219) it would not be far fetched to imagine that the same sentence could have been written by liberal pluralist philosopher such as Joseph Raz.

The same can be said about MacInytre's claim that "the notion of the political community as a common project is alien to the modern liberal individualist world" (MacInytre, 1981:156). This is of course true if we think of a common project as an Aristotelian *polis* where there is only way of life – that of "great-souled man" – worth pursuing and, hence, good community is the one that promotes this way of life. Given that the pluralist argument about incommensurability of competing ways of life, conflicting values and principles of justice is correct, this kind of common project would be not only absurd, but also dangerous. MacIntyre in his discussion of Sophocles' tragedies reveals that he find this pluralist argument to be correct. Plato and Aristotle might be wrong in their monist understanding of the good life for man and its corresponding virtues, but their conclusion that moral conflict,

either in personal or public life, is the greatest evil and that every conflict is "a result either of flaws of character in individuals or of unintelligent political arrangements" is consistent with their starting premises (MacInytre, 1981:157). MacIntyre is less consistent when he says it is "through conflict and sometimes only through conflict that we learn what our ends and purposes are" (MacInytre, 1981:164) and that "traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict" (MacInytre, 1981:223), but still maintains that modern politics is "civil war carried on by other means" (MacInytre, 1981:253). We do not need to go deep into the analysis of the character of different types of conflict to see that there is an obvious difference between cooperative disagreement (to use MacItyre's own phrase from his essay "Tolerations and the Goods of Conflict" (MacInytre, 1999:134-135)) of conflicting views and going out to the street and bashing the head of everyone who disagrees with us.

In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* MacIntyre maintains that "it was a tenet of Enlightenment cultures that every point of view, whatever its source, could be brought into rational debate with every other, this tenet had as its counterpart a belief that such rational debate could always, if adequately conducted, have a conclusive outcome" and therefore "what would be required… for a conclusive termination of rational debate would be appeal to a standard or set of standards such that no adequately rational person could fail to acknowledge its authority" (MacInytre, 1990: 172). Although he correctly recognizes the authors of the Ninth Edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as late 19th century advocates of Enlightenment cultures, he also acknowledge that "nobody now shares the standpoint of the Ninth Edition" (MacInytre, 1990: 170) (except that its "ghosts still haunt the contemporary academia"). It would be fair to assume that contemporary liberal thinkers and liberal institutions do not rely on standpoints that nobody shares, but rather that they evolve from Enlightenment mould to a more pluralist one. In that sense, liberalism shows the same ability of redefining itself as a tradition that MacInytre ascribes to Thomism: "Aquinas strategy… was to enable Augustinians to understand how, by their own standards, they confronted problems for the adequate treatment of which, so long as they remained within the confines of their own system, they lacked the necessary resources" (MacInytre, 1990: 173). One needs only to substitute Aquinas with pluralists and Augustinians with Enlightenment liberals.

Similarly, in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* he argues that in liberal societies "no overall theory of the human good is to be regarded as justified" which leads a debate on social justice to be "necessarily barren" (MacIntyre, 1988.: 343). Accusing pluralist liberals of not being able to produce an overall theory of the human good is like accusing impressionist painter of using visible brush strokes. For post-Enlightenment liberals would not agree that

no theory of human good is to be regarded as justified, but rather that *many* of them (although not *any* of them) can be justified.

Further, a plurality of conflicting or incompatible theories of human good does not inevitably result in inability to reach any level of consensus in modern liberal societies. Here I would side with Galston's claim that MacIntyre is "oblivious to the underlying agreement in [liberal] societies, an agreement that permits most conflict to be waged and resolved peaceably" (Galston, 1991:75). For when MacIntyre argues that "our society cannot hope to achieve moral consensus" (MacInytre, 1981:253) or condemns "pluralist political rhetoric whose function is to conceal the depth of our conflicts" (MacInytre, 1981:253) or argues that "debate on human good in general is… necessarily barren of substantive agreed conclusions in liberal social order" (MacIntyre,1988.: 343), he fails to take into account that in the last decades it was the liberal pluralists who were the most vocal in emphasizing the importance of moral and political conflict in modern societies, while at the same time insisting on preserving an existing consensus on basic human rights.

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