



MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals*: A Justificatory Framework for an Impoverished Moral Culture

Kayla M. Morrow
Mount Saint Mary's University

Abstract

*This paper will examine the following question: "In *Dependent Rational Animals*, does Alasdair MacIntyre successfully provide a moral framework which can justify morality?" To provide an answer, I will examine his twofold justification of morality: the meta-ethical and normative levels of justifications. In order to defend MacIntyre's project, I will first demonstrate how his naturalism is viable, as charges of the "naturalistic fallacy" have been leveled against it. I will then consider the specific content of MacIntyre's naturalistic framework and how it is derived from and justified by his articulation of human nature. The next step brings the paper back to a meta-ethical level, where it will prove that, even if one disagrees with MacIntyre's content, his teleological approach provides a moral framework which can justify morality and moral claims within our contemporary emotivist culture. He provides a solution wherein people can a) provide justificatory chains of reasoning for claims and actions, b) adjudicate between moral claims, c) engage in moral inquiry and rational deliberation about how one ought to act and d) justify or reject any virtue or vice suggested. Ultimately, MacIntyre's philosophical project is a successful, desirable solution which can be reached through natural reason alone.*

When asked, "What makes someone a 'good' human being?" it seems obvious that one must first define what a human being *is*. Alasdair MacIntyre, in modification of his earlier philosophical thought in *After Virtue*, saw the ethical necessity of accounting for what human nature essentially is. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, he takes an Aristotelian naturalistic approach, deriving an account of morality from observable facts about the human species. While critics of ethical naturalism maintain the "No-Ought-From-Is"¹ theory and claim that ethical accounts cannot be derived from natural facts, MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals* not only justifies a naturalistic ethical theory but demonstrates

1. The "No-Ought-From-Is" theory maintains that one cannot arrive at prescriptive statements (about what "ought" to be the case or what one "ought" to do) from descriptive positive statements (about what factually "is" the case or about what we can observe about the world).

its desirability as a philosophical basis for morality. He successfully articulates an account which combats what he sees as the contemporary state of moral decay, i.e. emotivism, by providing a way to adjudicate between moral claims, justify and evaluate human actions, and encourage rational deliberation regarding virtues/vices. MacIntyre's moral framework ultimately provides both a meta-ethical defense of morality and a substantive account of human flourishing—a universally applicable, biologically anchored solution for a secular contemporary world.

In order to defend MacIntyre's project, we must first examine the philosophical and historical circumstances to which it reacts and ultimately attempts to counter. In Chapter 5 of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre describes what he sees as the problem of contemporary morality: our world has gradually slipped into a state of moral decay, or emotivism,² which was sparked by the gradual breakdown of Aristotelian moral language. MacIntyre provides a helpful historical narrative to illustrate this scheme of contemporary moral decay, how it originated, what it encompasses, and how it is manifested in our world.

According to MacIntyre, our inherited moral language was, at one time, in good working order in a threefold Aristotelian picture wherein there is a) untutored human nature or human beings as they happen to be, b) human nature as it could be if it realized its *telos*³, and c) the moral precepts to get from A to B, which enjoin virtues, prohibit vices, and guide humans in achieving their perfected nature. In this scheme and within ethics more generally, steps A and C are meant to be necessarily disparate: there is a discrepancy between human nature as it is and human nature as it could/should be insofar as human nature needs the instruction of moral precepts to transform itself and realize its *telos*. Moral precepts are thus understood as a way to get from A to B. However, if there is no *teleological* idea of human flourishing, only a description of untutored human nature, then there is no justification for the moral precepts which allow us to actualize our capacities and arrive at this state of flourishing. In other words, the moral precepts which provide us with virtues/vices and allow us to make universal moral judgments are necessarily dependent upon the notion of human flourishing, and are only justified when there is such a notion.

Yet Enlightenment philosophy⁴ with its changing conception of reason—found in new theologies which claim that “the fall” darkened our human reason or anti-Aristotelian science which believes that rationality can only give mechanical explanations of the world—coupled with a desire for “deliverance ... from the

2. Emotivism is 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,” Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 11-12.
3. *Telos* refers to the ultimate fulfillment or perfection of an object, living thing, or activity, so the human *telos* refers to the final end, goal, or purpose for which humans exist and direct their actions towards.
4. It is certainly not the case that *all* Enlightenment philosophers were dismissive of the idea of the human *telos*. MacIntyre—focusing primarily on Kierkegaard, Kant, Diderot, Hume, and Smith—simply argues that Enlightenment philosophy, whether it intended to or not, prompted the elimination of the conception of the human *telos* in moral theory and language.

confusions of teleological modes of thought,”⁵ erroneously eliminated of any sort of human *telos* or conception of human flourishing. Thus, it left us with a notion of untutored human nature on one hand, and the moral precepts derived from an older moral picture, which allow us to actualize our capacities on the other hand. But insofar as our dominant Western culture has eliminated any conception of human *telos* or flourishing to explain why these moral precepts are justified as allowing humans to transform from an untutored state to one of flourishing, there is no way to bridge the gap between steps A and B. Without C, there is an insurmountable divide between descriptive statements about human nature and evaluative moral conclusions or precepts. Much of Enlightenment philosophy, which neglected to recognize its failure and still attempted to justify morality with only two disparate parts of an older moral picture, now leaves us with the perplexing question of how to justify our accepted and used moral precepts.

The consequence of the elimination of a conception of human flourishing is moral decay or the process of the deterioration of our moral language into the fragmented and incoherent system we see today. In examining our moral landscape’s most salient features, Alasdair MacIntyre claims that, though most moral utterance is used to express disagreement, the debates in which these disagreements take place can, interestingly, find no rational ending point.⁶ This is, in part, due to the paradoxical way in which Western culture views morality and engages in moral discourse. We believe that our moral views, intuitions, and perceptions are based upon subjective, arbitrarily chosen preferences or attitudes. When debating with others about an action, we make statements such as: “You *should not* engage in adultery, because your partner will not like it very much.” While this includes a prescriptive statement about what should/should not be done, it fails to appeal to an objective moral standard in order to condemn adultery; there is only the idea that it should not be done because it is not subjectively “pleasing” to another. Our contemporary moral arguments tend more and more towards these statements of personal feelings or preferences. Yet there is another feature of moral discourse which is fundamentally in tension with the first: our moral language presupposes external standards of right and wrong.⁷ We put forth arguments like, “You should not engage in adultery because *it is wrong*,” which do not rely on subjective attitudes but seem to make impersonal, rational appeals to objective standards of morality.

These two features of contemporary discourse—the belief that moral claims are arbitrary and subjective coupled with the use of moral language which presupposes moral claims as objective and impersonal—are obviously disparate. We have inherited moral language and precepts from the Aristotelian ethical scheme, and we seem to want to hold onto objective morality. Yet, because we have no conception of a human *telos* and thus no way to justify our moral evaluations, we tend to hold that morality is subjective. As a result, our system of

5. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 60.

6. *Ibid.*, 6.

7. *Ibid.*, 9.

argumentation is a paradoxical one, wherein the “apparent assertion of principles functions as a mask for expressions of personal preference.”⁸ This means that moral discourse is interminable, as it is impossible to secure rational agreement if our claims are subjective ideas asserted in perpetual opposition to those of another. It also makes our moral discourse fundamentally manipulative; we use seemingly objective moral language only to influence others to act in the way we wish them to act. Indeed, these observations about our moral state are supported by observing any social, religious, or political discussion on the topics MacIntyre outlines—abortion or war or social justice—which always reach a state of interminable disagreement and manipulation.

MacIntyre argues that the manifestation of the downfall of the older Aristotelian system is “a degeneration, a grave cultural loss”⁹ which manifests itself in emotivism. He makes a helpful distinction of emotivism as two different theories. As a *theory of meaning*, as it purports to be, emotivism asserts “that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing* but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling,” and all moral utterance thus cannot be evaluated for truth or falsity.¹⁰ Though MacIntyre rejects this understanding of emotivism as defective and indefensible, he recognizes the appeal emotivism as a *theory of use* has on Western culture: it asserts that a person uses moral judgments to express his or her preferences, attitudes, or feelings in order to influence those of another and to produce in them the same effects as in ourselves.¹¹ It is easy for Western culture to accept this theory, under a number of philosophical guises, because it has already entered into a scheme of moral decay. We have unsuccessfully attempted to sustain impersonal, objective moral judgments when the rational justification for these judgments has already broken down with the elimination of a *telos*. Now, emotivism’s main claims coincide perfectly with our society, because we have already implicitly accepted that, in practice, objectivity and impersonality are things that cannot be claimed or justified.¹² Even if all people do not theoretically agree with emotivism, it has become increasingly embedded within our philosophical language, and our culture now often thinks, talks, and argues as if it were an undisputable fact. Because of its detrimental influence, MacIntyre recognizes that his thesis “must be defined ... in terms of a confrontation of emotivism.”¹³

While MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* provided the structural importance of having the second part of the threefold Aristotelian scheme (a notion of human *telos*/flourishing) to combat emotivism and reclaim moral significance, *Dependent Rational Animals* provides a substantive, biologically grounded account of what exactly this human flourishing consists in. *Dependent Rational Animals* is a self-

8. Ibid., 19.

9. Ibid., 22.

10. Ibid., 12.

11. Ibid., 12.

12. Ibid., 19.

13. Ibid., 22.

made “correction” to MacIntyre’s earlier enquiries in *After Virtue*,¹⁴ in which he repudiated Aristotle’s metaphysical biology and attempted to articulate the virtues and the “good” in purely social terms. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre discovered that it was *impossible* to have an ethical account independent of biology. He realized, in other words, that any substantive account of the human good *must* make reference to a particular understanding of human nature which metaphysically grounds the idea of human flourishing. *Dependent Rational Animals*, under this new naturalistic framework, makes the following moves in order to articulate a substantive account of human flourishing from a purely naturalistic understanding of the human person: it considers humans as dependent, vulnerable, disabled animals; it accounts for the distinct human characteristics, capacities, and needs in light of the human species; and, it articulates the moral precepts which arise from this natural understanding of the human species.

Before we can examine whether MacIntyre’s *Dependent Rational Animals* project is successful in justifying morality, we must first examine his meta-ethical theory; if this framework does not work, his entire project is futile. Indeed, philosophers have argued that a naturalistic ethical approach such as MacIntyre’s is inherently defective. One of the classical critiques of ethical naturalism is found in G.E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*, though his main premise (the fact/value or is/ought distinction) was articulated centuries earlier by Enlightenment thinker David Hume. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume formulated an argument which has since been termed Hume’s Law or Hume’s Guillotine: it is impossible to ground normative arguments in positive arguments or, in other words, to derive a prescriptive moral “ought” statement from a descriptive factual “is” statement.¹⁵ The main idea of this argument is that the natural sciences, which tell us what “is” the case, cannot provide us with what “ought” to be the case because of the logical gap between descriptive and prescriptive statements. Suppose, for example, that we wish to figure out whether the maximization of pleasure is the correct moral principle, as utilitarianism holds. While the natural sciences allow us unlimited investigation into the physical world in which we live and can discover atoms and molecules and liquids and gases and even whether a being can feel pain, no amount of factual observation of the natural world can either confirm or deny the previously proposed moral principle. In regards to ethics, Hume and other non-naturalists believe that we must leave the natural sciences behind.

Though we can turn at this point to numerous Neo-Aristotelian naturalists¹⁶ who have thoroughly defended their theories against opponents, MacIntyre himself provides a direct response in *After Virtue* to thinkers like Hume.¹⁷ In Chapter 5, he examines the crucial idea of functional concepts and, in doing so, easily eliminates the main premise of the naturalistic fallacy: the is/ought

14. Alasdair C. MacIntyre, Preface to *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago:Open Court, 1999), X.

15. Max Black, “The Gap Between ‘Is’ and ‘Should,’” *The Philosophical Review* 73, no. 2 (1964): 165-81.

16. I have in mind here G.E.M. Anscombe, P.T. Geach, and Phillipa Foot, for example.

17. MacIntyre also responds directly to Hume in his piece, “Hume on ‘is’ and ‘Ought,’” *The Philosophical Review* 68, no. 4 (1959): 451-468.

distinction. When we make use of the term functional concept, we mean to say that a concept's natural purpose, function, or perfection—its *telos*—is regarded in its very definition. And if functional concepts are embedded within philosophical language—as they were for Aristotle—then the mention of a certain concept is simultaneously a mention of its function. Consider a watch. We may define a watch as an object which serves the function of telling time; the unique characteristics which sustain this object and enable it to fulfill its function are comfort and accuracy. Now suppose that we have a watch which is grossly inaccurate and irregular in time-keeping or too heavy to carry about comfortably. This watch becomes, by our definition of what a watch essentially is, a “bad watch” insofar as it fails to perform the function a watch exists to perform. Because the concept “good” is built into the very description of the aforementioned object, the moral evaluation that it is a “bad watch” is logically derived from the factual premise/s of what this particular watch is like. In other words, the factual observation of what a watch essentially “is” derives the standard of evaluation for what a watch “ought” or “ought not” to be and whether or not a particular watch fulfills or fails to fulfill its natural function. So, when working with functional concepts, to evaluate morally or to call an object “good” or “bad” is not merely to endorse it, but to make a *true* factual statement.¹⁸

We can apply the idea of functional concepts to living things, though the language moves from an inanimate object's function or end, to a species' *flourishing* as a complex life-force. MacIntyre defines flourishing as the actualization of a species' unique capacities; what it is for a member of a species to flourish is “to develop the distinctive powers that it possesses *qua* member of that species.”¹⁹ Because the species derives the standard for flourishing, if we articulate a particular species—its definition and its distinctive capacities—then we can evaluate whether or not an individual member of this species is flourishing as the sort of thing that it is. Consider first a nonhuman animal as an example: if all bats in virtue of their species possess certain capabilities which enable them to survive and flourish, such as echolocation or the ability to fly, then a bat which cannot fly or does not have echolocation is, by definition, a defective or “bad” bat. In other words, if a bat must have X, Y, and Z in virtue of what it is, then any bat which does not have these characteristics is necessarily defective. This process of evaluation is the same for humans, though the specific content of the life force is different. If we consider a human as a living thing in a specific environment, with a specific life cycle, and specific distinct capacities, we can use this factual content to evaluate individual humans and human actions morally against a conception of what it means to live and flourish as a human. Within the framework of functional concepts, we not only have a justified way in which to arrive at an “ought,” or a morally evaluative conclusion, from an “is,” or a factual observation, we also have a way in which to evaluate individual humans, human claims, and human actions morally.

18. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 59.

19. Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 67.

Having defended MacIntyre's ability to derive and justify a moral account from a naturalistic observation of the facts of human life—the meta-ethical justification of his moral project—we can now examine whether or not the substantive content of this naturalist framework is successful in justifying morality. This seems to be the biggest justification MacIntyre must make: while his naturalist framework may provide a way to make objective and factual moral claims, the problem is arriving at a sophisticated grasp and articulation of *what* the human species is. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre deemphasizes the distinction between human and nonhuman animals and examines the often overlooked similarities between them to formulate an understanding of human nature as an animal one which admits of vulnerability, affliction, and dependence. He observes that humans, like nonhuman animals, are beset with a wide range of “obstacles, difficulties, and dangers” to our development, including “diseases, injuries, predators, malnutrition, and starvation.”²⁰ These threatening contingencies not only plague us in infancy and old age, quintessential periods of human vulnerability, but in *all* stages of life. Humans are “disabled in different ways and degrees,” and so each and every one of us is necessarily dependent on the other members of our species to “nurse, feed, clothe, nurture, teach, restrain, and advise” us as well as “help us avoid encountering and falling victim to disabling conditions” throughout life.²¹

The other dimension of MacIntyre's biological observation is that which distinguishes humans from other animals, namely the unique capacity or characteristic we possess and must realize in order to flourish. He rejects the Aristotelian notion of *the* human *telos*, that there is one specific human end, and considers instead what it means for complex human beings to *flourish* or, as previously stated, “to develop the distinctive powers that it possesses *qua* member of that species.”²² According to MacIntyre, the distinctive human capacity is practical reason, which gives us the ability to make judgments about our moral reasons for action. Though animals can intentionally orient themselves towards their *teloi* and maintain justified reasons for acting in the ways that they do, even higher-order, nonhuman animals cannot make judgments about their judgments or evaluate conflicting goods and desires.²³ But a human animal, once it learns to become an independent practical reasoner, can step back and ask whether the good at which it is presently directed, by its animal nature, is a good reason for action. We can turn even the strongest desires and impulses of our animal nature into the reflective question: “Does my desire give me a good reason to act?” This capacity to reason practically about goods, to become “independent practical reasoners,” is what makes humans different from all other species. It is our unique capacity which must be actualized in order to flourish *qua* human, as the sorts of beings we are.

20. *Ibid.*, 72.

21. *Ibid.*, 73.

22. *Ibid.*, 67.

23. *Ibid.*, 70-72.

What do we need from ourselves and others to become and remain independent practical reasoners, to flourish as the sorts of beings we are? Given what is characteristic of the human species, MacIntyre derives the qualities and conditions needed to actualize our capacities and to flourish; in the threefold Aristotelian scheme this is step C, the moral precepts needed to pass from our untutored human nature to an actualized state of flourishing. MacIntyre argues that social relationships and communities are necessary for flourishing insofar as they allow us both to *become* practical reasoners and to *sustain* being practical reasoners, to promote human development and combat threats to it. These social relationships are ones of *giving and receiving*, where I acknowledge my reciprocal indebtedness to others, and they do the same. The virtues which allow these relationships to develop are ones of *acknowledged dependence*, which include virtues of giving and receiving such as “just generosity” or its subset of *miserecordia*, which allow us to attend attentively and affectionately to the needs of others in our community as if they were our own. The virtues of acknowledged dependence are absolutely necessary for human flourishing insofar as they sustain the communal relationships in which they are exercised and allow us to acknowledge the fundamental interdependence and sociability of our human nature.

MacIntyre’s general moves in *Dependent Rational Animals*, from an articulation of human nature to the unique human capacities, to human flourishing, and the conditions needed for this flourishing, enable a successful justificatory chain of moral reasoning. Suppose MacIntyre makes a judgment, indeed he does,²⁴ that we ought unconditionally to help those in urgent need. We, whether or not we agree with MacIntyre’s account, may ask *why* we must do so. The justificatory chain of reasoning for this moral judgment shows that helping others in need is required by the virtue of just generosity. We must act in accordance with just generosity, because it enables participation in relationships of giving and receiving, which relationships allow others’ and my end as practical reasoners to be realized and, thus, allow for others and me to flourish as the sort of vulnerable, dependent, rational animals that we are. Moral judgments within MacIntyre’s framework have this justificatory chain of reasoning behind them which demonstrate their sufficiency: if one attempts to put forth an unjustified moral judgment, the incomplete chain of justificatory reasoning will betray its failure.

Though it has been shown to justify morality, we can still ask whether or not MacIntyre’s philosophical project succeeds in providing *us* with some sort of ethical framework to wade out of the emotivist swamp that is our moral landscape. Suppose we say “no” to this question insofar as we disagree with MacIntyre’s account in *Dependent Rational Animals* of human nature, human flourishing, or the specific virtues and vices put forth. We might not believe that humans are dependent but that they are independent and self-sufficient and thus do not need to rely on one another. Similarly, we may disagree that the characteristic human excellence is independent practical reason and think that it is instead happiness

24. Ibid., 124-126.

or pleasure. In the same way, we can dispute the idea that certain virtues like just generosity are actually crucial for human flourishing. It seems to be the case that if we do not agree with MacIntyre's specific formulation of human nature, we will not agree with anything else derived from it, yet we might still accept his account as successful.

The specific articulation of human nature, along with the conception of human flourishing derived from this nature, is not static. This is to say that a naturalistic ethical approach does not necessitate an arrival at MacIntyre's specific conclusion. As seen in the development of his account from *After Virtue* to *Dependent Rational Animals*, there is a gap between the framework with which one works and the specific content one places into this framework. Even if we disagree with *Dependent Rational Animals'* content, we can agree that MacIntyre successfully provides an adequate, justified moral framework which can triumph over our impoverished moral culture.

Let us see how this justificatory moral framework works in practice. Imagine the following scenario. When discussing a mutual friend whose husband is a secret adulterer, a woman named Monica confidently asserts that in this situation "one ought to tell the truth," to which her friend Eric claims that that "telling the truth is not morally required of us." The moral language of "ought" or "is not" seems to appeal to objective standards. Indeed, Eric and Monica both cite sources and arguments which seem to refute the other's position and objectively justify their own. But when their moral views conflict with one another in an irreconcilable way, the discussion reaches a stalemate where no further justification for these claims can be given. Where do they go from here? Can any sort of agreement or deliberation be secured? Can they appeal to an objective standard to justify their claims? In an emotivist culture, the answers to such questions are "no." As discussed previously, emotivism provides no way to solve this disagreement and to adjudicate between moral claims, because they are perceived as mere opinions chosen in accordance with the subjective preferences of those who select them. Because there is no authoritative, objective standard of evaluation to adjudicate between claims or even engage in discussion, both parties are doomed to argue in an increasingly frustrated way with no rational end in sight.

However, if Eric and Monica presuppose a conception of human flourishing, they can rationally discuss how an action like telling the truth either leads to or obstructs flourishing. In MacIntyre's account, truthfulness is morally justified in the following way: it is required by the virtue of honesty, which must be exercised in order accurately to judge our own natural and social characteristics and thus to imagine realistic alternate possibilities for our actions and futures, which is needed to develop practical reason, the actualization of which is required for us to flourish *qua* human. But suppose Eric and Monica want to evaluate honesty against their own ideas of human nature and flourishing. Monica believes that living a good human life consists in actualizing our human capacity for reason, while Eric believes that it consists in the utilitarian maximization of pleasure and

minimization of pain. Monica may justify her claim that “we *ought* to tell the truth,” insofar as telling the truth is consistent with the recognition of all humans as rational and as capable of rationally handling any unfortunate truth they may be dealt. Eric may justify his claim that “we *ought not* to tell the truth” insofar as telling the truth in this situation would lead to great harm and displeasure on the part of his friend. Though both parties hold a differing conception of human flourishing and thus disagree about the specific action at hand, they can provide a justificatory answer to the question of “why” this particular action is moral or immoral, one which does not fall back upon mere opinion or personal preference.

Suppose, further, that Eric decides to tell the friend in question about her cheating husband. When Monica asks why he did so, he may claim that the action and his reason for performing it were consistent with and conducive to his notion of human flourishing. This justificatory framework is applicable to *any* given action or claim, which can be rationally evaluated against an understanding of human nature and flourishing. In this way, teleological statements (regardless of content) serve as a solid, factual basis for evaluations of the good. The first step in overcoming emotivism and rationally deliberating about moral claims/actions is to provide content to the naturalistic framework, which will provide the standard of evaluation for whether or not a specific human and its action allows it to flourish as the type of being that it is.

MacIntyre’s naturalistic framework not only allows us to adjudicate between specific moral claims but also allows us to evaluate the virtues/vices which allow us to live well as the sorts of beings that we are. Suppose we want to know whether magnanimity is a virtue; indeed, MacIntyre gives specific attention to this quality in *Dependent Rational Animals*. Aristotle’s magnanimous man “is forgetful of what he has received, but remembers what he has given, and is not pleased to be reminded of the former, but hears the latter recalled with pleasure.”²⁵ Thus magnanimity, which ignores human affliction and creates a false sense of self-sufficiency, is not a virtue in MacIntyre’s ethical framework because it fails to recognize the necessary dependency which enables a proper human self-understanding and cultivates relationships of giving and receiving necessary for flourishing. But we may also consider magnanimity’s moral status from a clean slate, a naturalistic framework with no content. If we provide a description of human nature, we can hold magnanimity up to this description and determine whether it allows us to flourish *qua* human. We may determine that it does or does not, but the point is that we can perform this process of rational deliberation for *any* virtue proposed. MacIntyre’s framework thus does not only give us a way to derive virtues by examining our naturalistic content; it also gives us a way to scrutinize and justify/reject *any* virtue/vice imaginable.

This specific framework of moral justification is desirable for our contemporary society for several reasons. With it, we can avoid a dogmatic conception of the moral qualities (virtues/vices) needed in our lives. We do not

25. Ibid., 7.

merely put forth a complex list of virtues and vices and moral rules to follow without justification; rather, we determine the success of virtues/vices for ourselves in light of a biologically informed conception of human flourishing. This is a framework which does not dogmatically churn out unexamined, widely accepted virtues/vices but necessitates that they are formulated through a process of scrutiny and evaluation. This process of scrutiny includes not only moral judgments and virtues/vices; it extends even into our “relationships and institutions,” which are always susceptible to communal “criticism, revision, or even rejection” in accordance with our naturalistic understanding.²⁶ This means that our very communities are *always* protected against unchecked dogmatism or widely held assumptions.

Arguably the most desirable aspect of MacIntyre’s naturalistic framework from a contemporary standpoint is its reliance on natural reason rather than revelation. Our dominant Western culture is secular and scientifically oriented and, as MacIntyre outlines, is in a state of moral deterioration. We should not expect such a culture to accept a moral theory based upon anything but observable facts. MacIntyre’s natural reason furnishes us with an ethics which does not mandate religious belief, yet it does not rely upon a transient foundation of cultural norms or, worse, personal feelings. His account undeniably provides what Western culture lacks: a way to justify actions through chains of moral reasoning, adjudicate between moral claims as true or false, engage in a process of moral inquiry and rational discussion about how one ought to act, deliberate upon the virtues and vices, and consistently challenge our moral assumptions in light of the human person. Given the moral decay MacIntyre outlines and confronts, for what more could we ask as a solution?

26. *Ibid.*, 157.

Bibliography

- Black, Max. "The Gap Between 'Is' and 'Should.'" *The Philosophical Review* 73, no. 2 (1964): 165-81.
- Bruening, William H. "Moore and 'Is-Ought.'" *Ethics* 81, no. 2 (1971): 143-49.
- Cohon, Rachel. "Hume's Moral Philosophy." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2010. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/hume-moral>.
- Foot, Philippa. *Natural Goodness*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.
- Geach, P. T. *The Virtues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. *On Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair.C. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *Dependent Rational Animals*. Chicago: Open Court, 1999.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *A Short History of Ethics*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1998.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought.'" *The Philosophical Review* 68, no. 4 (1959): 451-468.
- Moore, G.E. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Stevenson, Charles Leslie. "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms." *Mind* 46, no. 181 (1937): 14-31.