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MacIntyre and Modern Era: An Anti-Critique

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Abstract

The first nine chapters of After Virtue present MacIntyrean critique of Modern Philosophy which resides on various philosophisations like emotivism as an explanation of modern moral theory, the importance of history to address the current issues, marginalization of philosophy and axial role of philosophy in society, critique of liberalism and individualism, new conception of rationality and rejection of Aristotelianism. He constructed his ethical thought while emphasizing a return to the Aristotelian conception of Virtue. MacIntyre's theory does not follow Aristotle's complete thought but adds some new conceptions in it, e.g., 'goods internal to practices', narrative unity of human life, tradition and the concept of self as a moral agent, these are presented in the last nine chapters of After Virtue. The ideologies given in first nine chapters are also given by many other thinkers like Hegel, Georges Sorel, Rousseau, Edmund Burke, Marx, Nietzsche, Charles Taylor, Ricoeur etc. Then what is the contribution of MacIntyre? To get this is the purpose of this paper. In this regard, this research focuses on the various concepts central to MacIntyre's critical approach and the contribution of other thinkers on the same concepts to bring to the surface the actual contribution of MacIntyre.

Keywords: *Self, Virtue, History of Philosophy, The Language of Morals.*

Introduction

MacIntyre offered a reasoned critique of several of the major theoretical frameworks used to examine contemporary ethics. He expresses strong opinions about contemporary society, even further asserting that morality has deteriorated in numerous endeavors of life. He contends that the language of morality as applied to contemporary living is erroneous. He thinks contemporary moral discourse is catastrophic; necessitating a paradigm shift to build a more effective means of averting global catastrophe. The theory questions the shift away from the age of philosophy that came about with the Age of Enlightenment. After Virtue, among many other publications, has some of his most potent arguments due to his deep convictions. The book contains essential philosophical arguments from historical and sociological analyses explaining the modern-day vacillation in moral issues (Higgins, 2003). The questions about the modern bureaucratic states and organizational behaviors are central for the philosopher for the existence of a moral system. It is possible to remark that MacIntyre does not stop challenging existing moral frameworks but provides alternatives to emotivism ethics. Unlike some other philosophers of virtues, such as Rousseau, MacIntyre is willing to return to the Aristotelian definition of Virtue to solve present moral dilemmas. (Dobson, 2015). MacIntyre's after virtue project resides on his critique of modern moral thought, enlightenment project, individualism and liberalism. A brief sketch of his critique is presented in preceding passages while an assessment of his critique is also given that is the genuine contribution of this paper.

MacIntyre's Critical Analysis and Understanding of The History of Philosophy

Even if moral systems have a long history and are deeply ingrained in a particular historical tradition, MacIntyre believes there is a room for justification for favoring one over another. At the same time, this can be done without disrupting any of the systems from their context and comparing just abstractions. (Garcia-Ruiz & Rodriguez, 2014).

According to MacIntyre, such is a "barren" venture. This is since ethical systems have meanings from their social backgrounds. At the same time, according to MacIntyre, the Aristotelian heritage can only be vindicated intelligibly by completing a historical and sociological investigation of the ethical system. There has been a modern-day plunge towards a new Dark Age. This is as far as the observance of the moral discourse is concerned (Angier, 2014). He believes that modern culture has failed because it has failed to offer the historical explanation that is necessary for ethical discourse to exist, leading to the demise of ethics through honest discussions that are irrationally unending. Because Modern moral thought is the product of catastrophe hence, it is unable to recognize the flaws in moral language. However, with the help of historical analysis today's moral dilemmas can be comprehended.

Critique of Modern Moral Theory: The Nature of Moral Disagreements and Emotivism

MacIntyre's argument casts doubt on the ethical theory that other philosophers may embrace. This is the prospect of establishing a moral framework that is firmly rooted in contemporary world. The After Virtue's arguments and conceptual development predicated on the notion that a compelling virtue system can explain contemporary life full of conflicts. The book's first chapter, "A Disquieting Suggestion," establishes the assumption that moral language and behavior are undergoing a cataclysm (Keating,1992). The morality language in the modern world is in a similar state of chaos as the natural science language in the fictional world. The modern world is filled with morality simulacra because actual morality is impossible, or at the very least, it cannot exist side by side with the conflicts that characterize contemporary life (Keating,1992). Aristotelian ethics can help us rediscover our understanding of morality. With no qualms, he says that modern ethical theorists like Hume, Kant, and Mill (and their disciples) have a hand in forming Nietzsche's theory of the 'will to power'. However, he believes that ethics and politics can be reconstructed by enhancing the character traits that allow moral agents to make the best decisions for them and the people to whom they belong. The modern-day self or moral agency which is destroyed can be recreated from a narrative unity of heroic Aristotelian Virtue.

As a result, MacIntyre argues that ethics in modern day culture is faulty and unrealistic, and corporate ethics is also of no exception (Demuijnck, 2015), simply because it also stems from modern moral thought. MacIntyre provides his audience with an alternative moral thought in this respect, which he names the Aristotelian theory. He proposes agency and Virtue as a valuable framework for understanding modern business and other decision-making situations (Hager, 2011). Thus, the said ethical system he believes more plausible to decision-making processes.

Critique of the Age of Enlightenment

With the arrival of the Enlightenment, philosophy was significantly marginalized because of the overall level of scientific development throughout this period. Moreover, the moral scheme was also fragmented and transformed in a sense that virtue-based ideas have nothing to do with overall moral discourse of the modern era. According to MacIntyre, before the Enlightenment, philosophy held a prominent position in society, but the introduction of this new science altered the status quo. Of all the issues, that MacIntyre addressed about and which are the topics of his critique, the Enlightenment enterprise is the one he focuses more. According to the argument, the project of Enlightenment leads to the mechanistic, non-rational, and managerial rules. In order to support this point, MacIntyre traces the history of the Enlightenment's efforts in the field of moral discourse, noting how new models of morality were beginning to take hold throughout

this period (Keating, 1992). From a historical perspective, the theorist examines the project's attempt to legitimize morality. MacIntyre argues that Kierkegaard, Kant, Hume, and Diderot are incapable of providing a valid moral basis. He argues that despite their efforts, these intellectuals were unable to accomplish that goal.

Critique of Philosophy of Language

MacIntyre argues that the Enlightenment project is to blame for the present-day moral muddle. Looking at it from this angle, he traces his steps back to modern times to provide a more current understanding of morality. At this point, it is reasonable to assume that he advocates a close connection between moral philosophy and thinking and moral conduct and social institutions. MacIntyre's critique of modern moral philosophy is also a tool for upending underlying social institutions.

Much of MacIntyre's work emerged during an era in which language of metaphysical, religious, and ethical discourse was relegated to the viewpoints of logical positivists. Simultaneously, moral language was restricted to the class of the senseless (Rožič, 2014). That would be the foundation for MacIntyre's critique of philosophy of language. He argues that linguistic connotation is analogical and univocal. He also establishes the importance, and possibly the necessity, of analogical connotation. In the process, he clears the way for the magnificent and normative discourse to be rehabilitated (Keating, 1992). According to the theorist, it is no longer appropriate to speak of morality as rooted in objective facts. At least, from MacIntyre's perspective, the moral statements have become infuriating and unsolvable.

MacIntyre presents a plight that has its genesis in two fundamental forces. The theorist considers the development of "emotivism" one of the factors (Kulenović, 2007). From this vantage point, he challenges the dominant moral philosophy and the continued use of moral terminology that is supposedly objective. At the same time, this is not always the case. He also contends that emotivism undermines the ability for morality's intellectual justification. According to the argument, the moral language that appears to be in use today has nothing to do with true morality. It is instead employed as a technique of communicating emotions or feelings. According to MacIntyre, the continued use of moral language is meaningless because it does not indicate any objective morality (Hauerwas, 2007). As a result, the moral utterance does not fit into modern moral discourse or practice, regardless of its application.

Critique of Philosophy of Action and Social Sciences

Throughout his early works, MacIntyre positions himself as a firm critic of determinist social sciences. This is the basis for his rejection of Marx's conception of social science as deterministic. While MacIntyre acknowledges the difficulty of discarding "Determinism" due to its success in forecasting human behaviour, he argues that it is even more challenging to analyze the justification or falsification of "Determinism." (Sikka, 2012). He goes on to question the rational justification of social sciences from the standpoint of Determinism. He criticizes social theory for neglecting to reveal the significance of human agents' ideas, intentions, and choices. One of his targets for criticism is Sigmund Freud, based on his theory's failure to consider the person's actions and reduce them to the workings of the individual's psychological condition (Cornell,1984). MacIntyre argues that the established theories should also consider the behavior of the agency.

According to MacIntyre's ethical perspective, the emphasis should be on analyzing the moral action rather than providing reasons for the deed. Moral behavior is not based on the application of principles to facts (WISE, 2014). In pursuing a goal, the free activity of humans or the moral behavior of humans necessitates a thoughtful decision-making process. It also requires understanding the long-term effects of activities taken by rational individuals to attain their goals. Because of this, social science should focus on how people act and how that activity affects their outcomes. When constructing the theory, one should use the "how"17 method of action. Ethics should take into consideration how the person acquires knowledge

"how." To be ethical, we must learn to act ethically in a world where language and communal expectations compromise our ability to think independently. After having analyzed several studies, he finds that morality is not a process of judging facts but instead is a process of evaluating human behaviors and enablers that influence a rational actor (Campbell, 2013).

Overview of the Historical Position of the Aristotelian Tradition

MacIntyre criticizes the ethical thoughts of previous thinkers, in his work. He was able to introduce innovative ideas after conducting a critical review of the writings of other philosophers. Generally, he was attempting to construct an ethical position applicable to the present world based on his claim that earlier moral precepts were impractical (Lutz, 2014). The postmodern world has particular relevance to MacIntyre's concept of ethics, which calls for a return to the ancient Greek approach proposed by Aristotle. The modern moral concept indicates that morality does not correspond to reality in the corporate and political sphere. The philosopher suggests a natural end to the Enlightenment philosophy, probably having have outlived its importance. (Campbell, 2013). Additionally, he implies the philosophy's failure as given by theorists such as Nietzsche. The philosopher's view of morality has no place in contemporary thought and practice. MacIntyre's work advocates for the abolition of the telos in contemporary ethics. After rejecting this notion, an ethical system based on will and power will take its place. After rejecting this notion, an ethical system based on will and power will take its place. All of this was perceived in Nietzsche's brilliance. All efforts to re-establish ethical foundations appear to have failed. Rather than that, a phony façade of meaning-laden moral rhetoric has persisted, with underlying ethics of will and preference (Thames, 2011).

Ethical, moral language is neither ethical nor descriptive but is only used to justify the arbitrary actions and decisions that politician and business MacIntyre's work advocates for the abolition people are bound to make. It is vital to create a realistic answer to bring the liberal society closer to ethicality (Mela, 2011). MacIntyre believes that the modern world must evolve. Even if this is impossible, it does not preclude a proper comprehension of what moral language conveys.

MacIntyre presents a remedy based on the recognition that the modern language of morality is unjustifiable (WISE, 2014, 5(2)). As MacIntyre suggested, it is possible to overcome the moral quagmire which characterizes modern society. His proposed answer is a return to the Aristotelian moral ideas. Virtues have a defined function in modern decision making, and they should serve as the basis for these decisions. The philosopher's task is to establish concepts of telos and virtue that are relevant to contemporary living. At this point, he makes a case for alternatives to contemporary morality, which is based on emotivism. He also advocates a return to Aristotle's and other philosophers' study of the meaning of Virtue (Horvath, 1995). We seek to replace the modern era's rejection of virtue and telos with the views held by Aristotle's adherents. This point of view presents the view that the failure of modern ethical behavior is due to failing to promote ethical decision-making or pursuing the moral good adequately (Stewart-Sicking, 2008). In order to create a more moral and ethical environment, we must revise Aristotle's ethical and political theories.

Analysis of MacIntyre's Work

MacIntyre's work has been addressed with varying degrees of criticism. Most critics, however, have failed to come up with a more effective way to resolve the ethical dilemmas that exist in today's world. The primary diagnosis of modern society is presented in MacIntyre's work (Harnish, 2010). He contributes a grasp of what is wrong with today's world and the moral systems that serve as decision-making foundations. The philosopher asserts that the modern world has devolved into a situation that he refers to as a "culture of emotivism.."(Lott, 2002), this is a state in which the language of morality is not the accurate representation of moral or ethical life. Rather the moral language is being used to manipulate people's

attitude, choices, and decisions in modern life (Sinnicks, 2014). Thus, the moral culture of the modern world is saturated with misconceptions, while objective moral discourse obscures arbitrary choices.

Even when MacIntyre offers his diagnosis, he does not end there. He proposes practical answers to the modern moral systems' shortcomings. He advocates returning to the rigorous assessment of virtue framework in order to make it relevant and applied to the modern world today (Wright, 2008). There is a need to develop practical solutions to the practical problems affecting the political and business world (Carr, 2000). Returning to Aristotelian moral principles is the most successful strategy for developing a more plausible moral language in the current world. In the presence of such framework, decisions and policies will be determined.

An Assessment of MacIntyre's Critical argument

William Frankena dislikes MacIntyre's approach that history should be used as a guide. If Frankena says, "… I can, if I have the right conceptual equipment, understand what the view is without seeing it as the result of historical development; and, so far as I can see, I can also assess its status as true or false or rational to believe without seeing it as such an outcome." (Frankena,1983). MacIntyre quickly refuted this approach, as the very meaning of the terms and the significance of the problems under considerations are created historically. Nonetheless, this criticism retains its force when no historical evidence supports this imprecise and abstract thesis (MacIntyre, 2007). MacIntyre's emphasis on the historical investigation is not a new phenomenon. Thinkers such as E. H. Carr: a historian, acknowledges the value of history as a guide to comprehend the present." The historian's role is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from it, but to master and understand it as the key to understanding the present," he writes. Additionally, MacIntyre adheres to Hegelian conceptions of philosophy's history because Hegel is the pioneer who placed a premium on the history of philosophy. "The study of history of philosophy is the study of philosophy itself," he argues at the beginning of his *lectures on The History of Philosophy*. Thus, the Hegelian conception and emphasis on history of philosophy serve as the starting point for comprehending origin of philosophy. The examination of history reintroduces the genuine study of philosophy to the fore.

Stephen MacIntyre disregards knowledge of authentic and compassionate philosophy of Hellenistic era. Many contemporary historians also refuse to acknowledge the essential intellectual contributions of the said era, which they label as a "declined thought." MacIntyre neglects it as well. Instead, it may be said that the achievements of Hellenistic intellectuals were significant in the sphere of ethics. As history is full of moral theories with substantial meta-ethical grounds, Stoicism is one of the ethical views in history with solid meta-ethical grounds particularly in comparison with deontology and utilitarianism. Stoic's approach to moral philosophy has a middle position on the nature of virtue and rules of conduct. Historically, there has been a transitional period between classical views of morality that emphasise on virtue development and new ideas that stress standards of behaviour in the forms of rules. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre agrees that the stoicism is most refined ethical approach. However, why did he not go into the details of Hellenistic ethical traditions while doing historical analysis?

MacIntyre emphasizes on the active role of philosophy in society in order to resolve all societal issues as it was practised in Greek era. But, this activist conception of philosophy is also credited to Karl Marx before MacIntyre. For Marx, philosophy's function as a rational entrepreneur should be to bring about change in the world as well as gaining a better understanding of it (Schroeder, 2005). Philosophy can achieve this mission by integrating historical, economic, and sociological perspectives already proposed by Hegel with a psycho-sociological investigation (Schroeder, 2005). Leo Strauss, another eminent thinker, also contributed along similar lines to MacIntyre. Strauss, for example, criticises contemporary philosophy and the breakdown of rationalism in the modern era and advocates for the revival of Aristotelian ideas, which was integral to pre-modern philosophy. According to him, historical analysis is necessary for philosophy's task of knowing natural reality; he also emphasises philosophy's central role in resolving societal and

intellectual issues; according to him, human reason can be the sole source of philosophical activity, for which the subsequent outcomes are self-effacing and subject to revision (Pinkoski, 2020).

Nietzsche's criticism of the Enlightenment project is nearly identical to the one presented by MacIntyre. While arguing against present moral norms, Nietzsche put forward the objective of obtaining complete self-realisation by combining philosophical vision and methodical investigation (Pinkoski, 2020). He rejected modernity's assumptions in science and philosophy, which are regarded as advancements in human reason, and pronounced them to be mediocre. He believed advancement in wisdom was an obstacle to the human greatness that he suggested as the only cure to modernity's decay. To elevate human beings to more noble and elevated status, he created a new concept of selfhood and agency through an awareness of their instincts, desires, culturally inherited habits, and the obstacles and vicissitudes of life. He demonstrated how human nature might be conveyed through heroic virtues (Pinkoski, 2020). Though Nietzsche did not return to an Aristotelian theory like MacIntyre to reach human excellence, his conception of human excellence had significant similarities to Aristotelian thought. Nevertheless, Phillipa Foot used the Aristotelian concept of virtue in her ethical theory as well.

MacIntyre's Contribution

The goal of the debate and assessment of MacIntyre's critical argument was to evaluate how professor MacIntyre formed his Virtue-centered approach to ethics. Without a doubt, the way MacIntyre described the entire tale of the growth and crises of modern moral philosophy is rational and appealing to the reader. However, his work is equally acclaimed and criticized. In the fifth chapter of After Virtue, MacIntyre defines ethics as having "classical and theistic aspects" and following Aristotle's pattern. "Ethics is a science that enables persons to grasp how they transition from the phase of man–as-he-happens-to-be to the condition of man–as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-essential-nature," he says." (MacIntyre, 2007). This definition serves as the cornerstone of his critical and constructive arguments because Contemporary moral theories have rejected the conception of essential human nature while restoring this aspect of human nature a firm foundation for ethical theories can be maintained. His criticism of modern moral philosophy is based on the incapacity of existing ethical approaches in the modern period, stating that these are emotive, ignoring the historical origins of many moral notions, and dispersing these concepts over multiple moral systems.

Additionally, he asserted that contemporary moral frameworks are insufficient for resolving moral dilemmas for which he presents three major features of modern moral thought. One is the rejection of enlightenment project of justifying morality followed by Pascals' new conception of reason. Secondly, the refutation of Aristotelian concept of final cause and the third one is the disorder in moral language. To resolve ethical issues, he argues that a return to Aristotelian moral theory is the most effective way to address the moral failings of the modern-day by enhancing the characteristics of moral agents that enable them to choose the best choices for themselves and other members of their community. In the modern era, the deteriorated self or moral agency can be rebuilt through a narrative coherence of heroic Aristotelian Virtue.

Nonetheless, MacIntyre's critique of Enlightenment is plausible. But many others philosophers, such as Nietzsche, have agreed that modern moral theories have failed, it is generally agreed that this is not limited to just MacIntyre, but many other people. However, MacIntyre applied historical, social, and logical analysis to demonstrate the failure of modern moral philosophy. In addition, many philosophers take issue with him for neglecting to recognize at least three hundred years of modern thought.

Additionally, MacIntyre criticizes social science for being too generalized. MacIntyre's critical approach leads to a diagnosis of contemporary moral instability and a rational resolution. This is why critics of MacIntyre's work face challenging targets, as more critics of modern moral theory have no solution to the contemporary ethical issues. Despite the strength of MacIntyre's critical argument, upon reading his work,

we discovered that his theory contains no novel insights. Hegel and E. H. Carr have already emphasized on historical analysis. Karl Marks has already articulated his emphasis on the vital role of philosophy in resolving all societal problems.

Furthermore, Phillipa foot echoes the call for a return to Aristotelian Virtue ethics. However, what is novel? His work is comparable to Einstein's, who borrowed ideas from many scientists and virtually merged them in a profound thought. Hence, MacIntyre's ethical approach is reasonable and solution oriented.

Conclusion

Based on what we know, it is apparent that MacIntyre has contributed to exciting critiques of the modern period. MacIntyre's core claims are that we must employ a historical analysis to grasp the contemporary challenges and that the conflicts in the modern moral systems are interminable. Hence, in crisis and since, they all have rational explanations and arguments subsequently these need philosophical explanations and rational solutions to these but unfortunately, philosophy is of decreased importance in the post-societal state, which must be rebuilt to resolve all societal difficulties. Aristotelian telos is overlooked and thus results in destructive moral self or agent. Chaotic moral language is the result of two things: First, because conceptions of modern moral thought have been left undefined due to the failures of the Enlightenment mission, and second, because the historical process has, through time, distorted our concepts to an incredible degree. MacIntyre's approach of historical analysis is not neutral as he ignored the ethical contributions of Hellenistic thought. His emphasis on history, axial role of philosophy in society, flawed modern moral endeavors and a return to Aristotelian virtue centered approach, in short, his critique of modern era has nothing new in it but already given by many scholars like Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Phillipa Foot, Bernard Williams and Maria Kuna but still his theory has practical implications. Hence, MacIntyre's critique is plausible to accept his solution to accept Aristotelian Virtue ethics approach rather than modern liberalism or emotivism ethics but the present research reveals that MacIntyre's critique not only has some flaws but many other thinkers have already highlighted the same issues and suggested the virtue ethics approach as its solution. So, inspite of his popularity among the academicians his ethical thought has nothing new in it.

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