MacIntyre: Teaching, Politics and Practice

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In the first part of this paper the marked differences between the stances of some philosophers of education who view the field as a self-contained discipline and MacIntyre’s contrasting view are outlined and discussed, with the author seeing the greater merit in MacIntyre’s position. This leads on to a review in the second part of the paper of the differences between MacIntyre and Dunne on teaching as a practice and on the range of issues that underlie these differences. Again, the paper argues in favour of MacIntyre’s claim that teaching is subservient to the good it serves, in this case the good of the learner and of the community. Criticisms are then made, however, of how MacIntyre conceives of the good of the community, and of its promotion by learning. In particular, his advocacy of partisan universities and his arguments for rationalising the rivalries between them are faulted. In its concluding part, the paper finds more merit in the pedagogical features of MacIntyre’s late work Dependent Rational Animals, particularly the rationale advanced for educating independent practical reasoners.

MACINTYRE AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

In a fairly recent piece of writing in a book with a section entitled ‘What Counts as Philosophy of Education?’ and responding to an article on the subject in the same section by Maxine Greene (Greene, 1995), Walter Feinberg laid down what he takes to be the parameters within which philosophy of education, ‘at least as presently conceived’, works. (He insists that his is not an essentialist definition.) (Feinberg, 1995, p. 26). Greene had argued for the need to resituate it ‘within the discourse about rights, self, rationality and power and provides an analysis that emphasises deconstruction and renewal’ (p. 24). Feinberg complained about this kind of discourse that it need not constitute philosophy of education and ‘could simply reflect a philosophical discourse about education’ (p. 26). Philosophy of education, he contended, ‘is a discourse about institutions that are intended to educate’, namely about schooling in this broad sense of the word (ibid.). Though there are, he agreed, educational problems that
can elicit a philosophical response, including such fundamental questions as what counts as education, and how it is to be distinguished from indoctrination, training and the like (p. 28), a concern with schooling is, he argued, what first brought ‘the profession’ of the philosopher of education into being. This is why philosophers of education and their courses are not usually found in philosophy departments, and why they have founded their own associations and journals. A concern with schooling, Feinberg continued, need not merely mean a concern with the work of teachers as such; it could include issues about educational policy, evaluation, etc. that are indirectly related to classroom practice. Philosophers of education could also raise critical questions about schooling itself, including radical ones about its justification. Their overarching practical concern, however, is with ‘the improvement of the institutions through which the activity of educating is advanced’ (p. 27). This was the goal, he argued, that was set for philosophy of education by its founders, and is a definition of the ‘actual practices that are presently identified as Philosophy of Education’ (ibid.). So, although there is ‘a real sense in which Philosophy of Education is what philosophers of education do’, it should not stray from these (Feinberg’s) parameters, otherwise ‘there would be very little to distinguish their discourse from other kinds of philosophy that are concerned with rights, power, self or that attempt to understand knowledge and the possibility of its transmission’ (pp. 27–28). And Dewey’s claim that all philosophy should be viewed as ‘Philosophy of Education’ was ‘probably wrong’. ‘Without the institutions and practices that are explicitly intended to educate,’ Feinberg argues, ‘the profession of Philosophy of Education as we know it today would not exist’ (p. 26).

This sort of characterisation of philosophy of education may explain why, as I have pointed out elsewhere, notwithstanding the radical challenge he set them in London in 1985, Alasdair MacIntyre’s lecture on ‘The Idea of an Educated Public’ (MacIntyre, 1987), was greeted with virtual indifference by philosophers of education, though it was philosophers of education who had invited him to London to begin with. The lecture departed, in fact, from a problem that MacIntyre represented as fundamental for professional teachers today—it was not directly about what happens in schools or formal institutions where education is deliberately transacted but about an educated public that grew non-formally around the universities of eighteenth-century Scotland. So it did not, on Feinberg’s account, fall within the parameters of philosophy of education. MacIntyre’s interest in the idea of an educated public has continued over the years following, reappearing briefly in Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (1988), written as a sequel to After Virtue (1981), and addressed fully with the publication of Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry (1990). This is a treatise about the future of university education, since it is the university that provides the moral and intellectual leadership and sustenance for the educated public as he conceives it. Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry, at least, would appear to satisfy the exigencies of philosophy of education as Feinberg described it, since universities evidently qualify as ‘institutions and practices that are typically intended
to educate’ (Feinberg, 1995, p. 26). But not even this is so since, although Feinberg did define the concerns of philosophy of education in these broad terms as ‘institutional philosophy’, universities do not appear to fall within its mandate in his view of things. Thus, we find him expressing approval of Greene because of her firm ‘placement of Philosophy of Education within an intergenerational context’ (ibid.), quite clearly limiting its concerns to those of upbringing. Again, MacIntyre’s *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999a), billed as a continuation of his three earlier books, did concern itself with upbringing, but in the broader sense in which it occurs non-formally through the efforts of a local community, not as in schooling. So this would also fail, on Feinberg’s understanding, to qualify as a contribution to philosophy of education, and should, according to his advice, be kept firmly outside the sphere of interest of professional philosophers of education.

More recently across the Atlantic in Britain, in 2002, John White announced his concern that the political liberalism that animated the thinking of the founders of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain seems to have lost favour among its current members at a time when liberalism is emerging as the dominant view in British politics, left and right. Of course, if joining the club of philosophers of education means that one also needs to be a liberal, besides subscribing to the professional focus Feinberg describes, then MacIntyre would be ruled out for political reasons also. To be fair to White, he does not advocate any political exclusivity of this kind, if for no other reason than because it goes against ‘the liberal principle of not putting impediments in the way of harmless autonomous preferences’ to which he subscribes (2002, p. 424). This qualification that the preferences must be ‘harmless’ (my italics) is troubling. He certainly does welcome the new plurality as a sign of health. One is not sure what he means by harmless. What qualifies as harmful? And does MacIntyre, a well-known, relentless, enemy of liberalism over the years, qualify as such? White does not attack any of the ‘five critical stances’ towards liberalism he detects within British philosophy of education as harmful, nor does he identify any of them with MacIntyre’s influence. Neither does he include MacIntyre in the considerable list of philosophers—Aristotle, Derrida, Dewey, etc—who have inspired contributions to the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* by ‘enthusiasts’ who are not ‘advocates of liberalism itself or of liberal reforms in education’ (p. 423). And, apart from the deprecatory reference to such contributors as ‘enthusiasts’, and as writers of ‘scholarly treatises, not easily applicable to current educational practices’ (ibid.), White is right in not identifying MacIntyre among such contributors. Little in fact has been written about MacIntyre and education anywhere, never mind the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, even with this de-focusing of philosophy of education from its original pre-occupation with ‘improving practice within a liberal democratic society’ (ibid.).

I am not myself at all sympathetic with either Feinberg’s or White’s attempt to reduce philosophy of education to a professional club working...
within the parameters of a discipline. I am even less sympathetic with their reduction of education as a whole to schooling, or even to what happens in institutions set up for the purpose. This is why I think that MacIntyre’s philosophy, though I disagree with it profoundly (especially with its political aspects), has an important contribution to make to the debate about education today, not narrowly conceived as schooling but broadly conceived as a lifelong process. Indeed, his writings about education so conceived have been more direct and substantial than those of many of the philosophers written about in White’s researched list. MacIntyre himself believes that any conception of the philosophy of education as a distinct area of philosophical inquiry is a mistake’ (2002, p. 9), and I think he is right. This is because, in his case, he regards teaching differently from Feinberg and White, and, indeed, from most philosophers of education, including Joseph Dunne whose argument with MacIntyre on the matter has occasioned this volume of articles. To put it in MacIntyre’s language, he does not think of teaching as a distinct practice. He does not, therefore, think that it merits a distinct area of philosophical inquiry set up to treat it as though it were. In my own case, I am in sympathy with Richard Rorty’s criticism of philosophy itself as a discipline or fach in Consequences of Pragmatism (1982) and elsewhere, and with his contrary representation of it as a strand in the conversation of humankind. I am also somewhat in sympathy with Rorty’s view that philosophy, at least in its concern with meaning, has little to say to education. This is not, however, a discussion I can take up here, where I am responding to the editors’ invitation with some reflections on the exchange between Dunne and MacIntyre on the notion of a practice, putting it within the broader context of MacIntyre’s political and educational (in the broader sense) concerns over the span of his writings.

TEACHING PRACTICES

Dunne opens the interview with a question related to the problem MacIntyre identified in ‘The Idea of an Educated Public’, and even earlier in Against Utilitarianism (1964), as lying at the heart of modern education, that I alluded to earlier. The problem, or ‘forlorn’ task, as he put it, is to ‘shape the young person so that he or she may fit into some social role and function that requires recruits’, while teaching them also ‘how to think for themselves, how to acquire independence of mind, how to be enlightened, as Kant understood “enlightenment”’ (1987, p. 16). These are two tasks, he argues in ‘The Idea of an Educated Public’, that can only be harmonised within the embracing idea of an educated public. But that idea, MacIntyre insists, is lost to us in the modern world, with its liberal emotivist culture. This culture MacIntyre describes in detail and attacks with particular virulence in After Virtue. Emotivism is ‘the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgements are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character’
It appears in a great ‘variety of philosophical guises’ in the English-speaking world, as well as in the work of Continental philosophers like Sartre and Nietzsche. Its major characteristics are its total disregard for historical context and a theory of conceptual incommensurability that it sustains at the same time that its competing theories claim ‘objectivity and impersonality’ (p. 21). Its offspring is the plurality of voices that characterises modern moral life and that he views as ‘an unharmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments’ incapable of any sort of rational resolution (p. 10). In *After Virtue* MacIntyre claims that ‘every moral philosophy, and emotivism is no exception – characteristically presupposes a sociology’ (p. 22), and that the modern emotivist social world is one which blurs ‘any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relationships’. In public life ‘the ends are taken as given and not available for rational scrutiny’, while private life is marked by the ‘democratisation of moral agency’ (p. 33). MacIntyre refers the reader to the social psychologies of Sartre and Erving Goffman to describe the self this culture produces, as one possessing ‘a certain abstract and ghostly character,’ and lacking ‘any necessary social identity, because the kind of social identity it once enjoyed is no longer available’ (p. 31).

The kind of social identity MacIntyre has in mind was available, in his view, in the ancient and medieval world. He continues to attack the liberal conception of public life as simply ‘an arena of individuals who pursue their own self-chosen conception of the good life’ reflexively, without any point of reference except perhaps to an abstract law of nature, protected by institutions and states that deliberately maintain themselves ‘neutral between rival conceptions of the good life for man’ (p. 37). Thus, he says, they render themselves ‘totally unfit to act as moral educator for any community’ (p. 39). It is against this sociology of the modern world, and the anti-liberalism that is characteristic of all his writing, that one needs to understand the counter discourse, first of a practice in *After Virtue*, then of an educated public in ‘The Idea of an Educated Public.’ His political appeal in *After Virtue* is for ‘the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.’ This is a difficult undertaking, given that ‘the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time’. Part of our predicament, MacIntyre insists, is our unawareness, our lack of consciousness, of this fact. In short, our problem is a problem of education, so that we need a new St Benedict to lead us back into the light. (p. 245).

The notion of a practice would be central to the life of these communities. A practice, MacIntyre describes as ‘any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which the goods internal to that activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to and partly definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends
and means involved are systematically extended’ (p. 25). The issue between Dunne and MacIntyre in the interview was whether teaching could be properly described as a practice, the former expressing surprise that the latter said no. Against Dunne, in fact, MacIntyre insisted that ‘teachers are involved in a variety of practices and that teaching is an ingredient of every practice’ (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 8). ‘Teaching,’ he continued to argue, ‘is never more than a means,’ it ‘does not have its own goods. The life of a teacher is therefore not a specific kind of life’. The goods the teacher’s job furthers are those of the subject she teaches, mathematics, music, or whatever, which is why he thinks, as I said earlier, ‘any conception of the philosophy of education as a distinct area of philosophical inquiry is a mistake’ (p. 9).

This is, as an evidently dissatisfied Dunne hinted, a narrow way of conceiving teaching and inapplicable to primary school teachers, and perhaps MacIntyre, in fact, did not give the right answer. But this was the kind of answer to be expected from his discussion of a practice in After Virtue. Dunne’s next, not unconnected, question was about MacIntyre’s view, in the same book, that we should respond to modernity’s ‘fragmented’ view of the self with one that encourages us to perceive our life as a unity, an unfolding narrative that takes the form of a quest for self-discovery set by one’s telos. In fact, this is what, MacIntyre says, locating our lives within a practice helps us to do, and the teacher’s task, the job set for her by the community, is to initiate us into its practice or set of practices. She is a mere means to this end. In After Virtue, he draws on Plato’s and Aristotle’s account of the education of a philosopher (one, one would suppose, he would extend to the education of the mathematician, musician, and so on), to connect this process of initiation with the idea of embarking on a techne, of being apprenticed to a craft in which the teacher is the master-craftsman and ‘the model of the person with Sophia’. This idea, seized on by Aquinas, was at home in medieval society where the ideal of the craft guild gave it a concrete vehicle for its expression (1981, p. 68), and was central to its life, crucial to the creation and sustenance of all human communities—of households, cities, and nations. ‘In our relationship with other practitioners’ in a practice, MacIntyre says, we willingly subordinate ourselves to its rules and its internal standards of excellence as they are represented to us by masters who are its most competent and authoritative exponents (p. 31). Indeed, ‘a conception of rational teaching authority’ is fundamental to this model of apprenticeship into a practice where ‘faith in authority has to precede rational understanding’ (p. 71). The pedagogical question here, in his view, where its whole object is the self-discovery of the learner, is: ‘through what form of social engagement and learning can the errors which obstruct such discovery be brought to light?’. And the answer is, he believes, the kind that exposes the learner to the possibility of dialectical refutation. In this sense, it requires the learning community to have a conception of itself as one ‘systematically engaged in a dialectical enterprise in which the standards are sovereign over the contending parties’ (1990, p. 200).
Indeed, self-discovery ‘is first of all an initiation into the practices within which dialectical and confessional interrogation and self-interrogation are institutionalised’ (p. 201). A pedagogical model invented, he says, by Socrates, also developed by Plato and Aristotle and perfected by Christianity. Within it, the role of the teacher or master is conceived as that of the skilful interrogator to whose authority the learner/apprentice willingly submits.

Teaching is not, within this model, a separate game played in its own right to serve its own internal purposes, as would be the case in a practice, properly so called. Quite the contrary, teaching is subservient in its purposes and in everything else to the game it serves, to the practice it serves, and its whole point is to help learners discover themselves within that practice. MacIntyre compared the appropriate pedagogy with teaching someone to play chess, where the ultimate object is to develop the learner’s skills in the game to the point where love for the game and eagerness to excel even further in its skills and virtues outweighs the joy of winning. His unmistakable suggestion was that this pedagogical model should be widespread, applying not just to schools but to all locations and situations where anyone is taught anything within the context of a practice; the home, the neighbourhood, the workplace and so on. The chief point to note here is that MacIntyre’s concern with teaching is with something broader than what falls within the activity of professional teachers in schools. It incorporates everyone with a teaching role within a practice in a community, whatever it may be. This is one factor that seems to have escaped Dunne. My own view, however, is that though MacIntyre’s account of teaching here may be suited precisely for the teaching of subjects, mathematics, music or whatever, it is not appropriate for these broader aspects of teaching, covering non-formal environments of upbringing and social exchange, or, indeed, for primary teaching. Of these, MacIntyre gives a more satisfactory account in *Dependent Rational Animals*. In this account, subject teachers are cast like other professionals serving the community, recognising the standards of excellence and the ethics internal to their activity as teachers, but recognising also that those standards are not important in themselves but in so far as they better serve the object of that activity which is the good of the patient, the client, the student, as they discover themselves in these roles.

In short, as MacIntyre says, teaching is a means since the good it serves is not intrinsic to itself but is that of the learner and the community. And he is right in this respect. Indeed it is tragic where things are otherwise; where teaching is regarded as a self-serving and self-regarding profession. In *After Virtue* he insists that practices should not be confused with institutions precisely because the latter, which are indispensable supports for practices, are typically concerned with external goods while practices are interested in their own internal goods and standards of excellence. In this sense, teaching would appear to qualify as an institution in his conception of things. The interests it serves are political interests. In MacIntyre’s case he would have it serve the interest of the local
community. In the same book the function he attributes to the virtues is to protect practices from the corrupting power of the institutions that support them, teaching, one assumes, included. He identifies three such virtues internal to every practice, truthfulness (or honesty), justice and courage, but, not surprisingly, he later adds another one, in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, namely humility, understood as deference to proper authority.

**PRACTICES AND UNIVERSITIES**

Re-establishing rational authority, which he believes should be the authority of a practice, is MacIntyre’s overriding political, moral, and educational concern, and his reflections on teaching in the broad sense described earlier, are an aspect of it. In *After Virtue*, as we saw, he speculated about the growth of new communities that would restore such authority to the modern world. In ‘The Idea of an Educated Public’, however, he chose a model much closer to our time, namely eighteenth-century Scotland, forced to reassess its national identity and its position in the world after annexation by the English. The lead in this situation was taken not by an unlikely latter-day St Benedict, but by the universities. And they were able to do this because of their intellectual homogeneity; because they had the fortune of sharing the same philosophy of common sense developed by Reid and Stewart, and of belonging to a common educational tradition that gave pre-eminence and authority in the university to the professor of moral philosophy as ‘the official defender of the rational foundations of Christian theology, of morals and of law’ (1987, p. 20). Common-sense philosophy proceeded from first principles that were ‘seen’ to be true and moved deductively from these, giving rise to a scheme of knowledge that was the general curriculum of the university; one that was ‘unitary and more or less integrated, the articulated disciplined parts of which involved continuous reference to each other.’ The moral stance of these professors was also one; it reflected that ‘of the Presbyterian clergy and of the moderate party and of their social allies’ (p. 21), and was ‘at once secular and yet both consonant with and supportive of the Christian religion’ (p. 20). It was around these universities that the Scottish educated public grew. And it fulfilled ‘at least’ three conditions necessary, in MacIntyre’s view, for any such public to exist: (1) the existence of ‘a tolerably large body of individuals, educated into both the habit and the opportunity of active rational debate, to whose verdict appeal is being made by the intellectual protagonists’, i.e. the professors in the universities (p. 18); (2) ‘shared assent, both to the standards by appeal to which the success or failure of any particular thesis or argument is to be judged, and to the form of rational justification from which those standards derive their authority’ (p. 19); and (3) ‘some large degree of shared background beliefs and attitudes, informed by the widespread reading of a common body of human texts, texts which are accorded a canonical

status within that particular community,’ which, in turn, requires ‘an established tradition of interpretive understanding of how such texts are to be read and construed’ (p. 19).

What is important here is (2) and (3), which together establish the parameters of authority within which the master’s authority is understood (as authority over the master), namely her submission to the standards inherent in the practice of rational debate, but also to the form of rational justification from which these standards derive their authority, and finally to the established tradition of an interpretive authority for reading the canonical texts. As with the advent of the local communities in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre mixed pessimism over the restoration of such a public with a very guarded optimism, describing it as ‘at most a ghost haunting our educational system,’ but ‘a ghost that cannot be exorcized’ (1987, p. 34). So it is no great surprise that in his next book, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, he suggests that what he puts forward would work today with a radical reform of the modern university system and with the abolition, in particular, of the liberal university, which he considers both a symptom and cause of our present predicament in education. He does not propose a return to the homogeneity of the Scottish universities, which would be impossible, to restore stability and order in the contemporary world. Rather, he envisages a harmonious readjustment of the university system that would rationalise the rivalry between the three versions of moral inquiry, or intellectual traditions, he sees as alive in today’s world: the Encyclopaedist, the Genealogist and the Thomist. It is important to understand that stability and order are the virtues of social life MacIntyre values; that politically he is a Platonist championing the authority of the unum and an enemy of multiplicity and change. The problem he sees with the liberal university, the modern state, the modern curriculum, is their inability to reflect a single mind. The merit of the Catholic tradition which he has admired as intensely as he has disliked liberalism is precisely its Platonic qualities: its cohesion, its unity, its sense of a community, its emphasis on virtue and its historical obedience to a continuous and coherent body of texts and traditions and to an undisputed interpretive authority for reading them; that of the Pope and his moral theologians. The canonical texts would stand to his public like Papal encyclicals, with the same moral and teaching authority.

In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, as in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* he acknowledged that, once they already exist, there is no philosophically persuasive way of reducing the competing rationalities of the modern world to one, as was possible in eighteenth-century Scotland. The best that could be contemplated is the elimination of the liberal university, the rationalisation of the university system into these three rival partisan universities, each with its educated public, canonical texts, interpretive traditions etc. and the setting up of a forum for the rival universities. This might be founded, as John Stuart Mill had put it, ‘on an agreement to disagree’, and on the same ‘allegiance to the purpose of the debate’ between the disagreeing parties as they show to their internal debate. Thus, he would replace the ‘unharmonious melange
of ill-assorted fragments’ of discourse in the liberal university, with ‘an ordered dialogue of intersecting viewpoints’ (1981, p. 10). The function of the forum would be:

to uphold and to order the ongoing conflicts, to provide and sustain institutionalized means for their expression, to negotiate the modes of encounter between opponents, to ensure that rival voices were not illegitimately suppressed, to sustain the university - not as an arena of neutral objectivity, as in the liberal university, since each of the contending standpoints would be advancing its own partisan account of the nature and function of objectivity - but as an arena of conflict in which the most fundamental type of moral and theological disagreement was accorded recognition’ (1990, p. 231).

An ambitious project no doubt! Not one, however, that is impossible from MacIntyre’s point of view. How will these partisan universities retain their homogeneity, and thereby avoid the fate of the Scottish universities and their publics? By (1) ensuring that the academic community is well-knit intellectually, with a single mind, and able to work together to create a coherent curriculum for the university as a whole and for the public that feeds on it; by (2) enforcing the exclusion of points of view which are too much at odds with this consensus; and by (3) using preferments and promotions to reward those who uphold and advance the consensus, including those who extend, erect, or otherwise improve the standards of rational justification embodied in it, ensuring that they occupy the relevant professorial chairs (p. 224). All these measures liberals would find loathsome, and so do I, along with the predictable requirement that they re-introduce something like the religious and moral tests and exclusions that were typical of medieval universities (p. 230), and that ensured their protection from the kind of ‘fundamental dissent’ that, he says, threatens the progress of genuinely rational inquiry and more especially of moral and theological inquiry (p. 66). MacIntyre is not insensitive to the inherent dangers of these arrangements, that they are ‘liable to error and abuse, and to consequent injustice’ (p. 224). But, he argues in mitigation, the liberal university is already unjust as matters stand. Its proclaimed inclusiveness is hypocritical since it actually marginalises its most radical critics, Genealogists and Thomists, who ‘still cannot be heard in any authentic and systematic way’ in its fora, so that the excluded have to be ‘continually trying to devise new ways to allow these voices to be heard’ (p. 236). Besides, he continues, the ‘enforced and constrained agreement’ this arrangement promises (p. 230) is a healthier intellectual climate for the pursuit of inquiry than the present climate of ‘increasing disarray’ in the liberal university (p. 225). And though he also admits that the partisan university is exposed to the dangers of intellectual complacency, parochialism and dogmatism, he believes that this can be avoided by keeping its intellectual and moral traditions alive and dynamic; by taking account of conflicting readings of texts, and ensuring that texts are read against one another, by putting their own theses to the test by exposing

them to the objections of their opponents (p. 231), and by meeting up with these same opponents in the fora of open debate mentioned earlier, where a key concern would be to ensure that there is a debate and that every voice is heard.

THE PEDAGOGY OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Of course the university professor, cast in the role of master and intellectual protagonist, plays a key role in this model of a university and in the intellectual life of the educated public that forms around it. This role is discharged through her active participation in debates and in the dialogue into which she initiates new members. I am not at all sympathetic, however, with the university system within which such a role falls; a system which resembles the constrained model of the religious, particularly Catholic, university. I am completely out of sympathy with the whole idea of partisan universities, with the inquisitorial way MacIntyre would have the university conduct the recruitment of its professors, and, even more, with its methods of ensuring their orthodoxy. I do not know about the Encylopaedist, whose star, in my view and by his admission, declined a long time ago (indeed, his reasons for representing it as a competing intellectual tradition today are not persuasive), but the Genealogist, of which he identifies Foucault the most important contemporary representative, would certainly have no part in it. I am not sure, either, how he proposes to give marginalised outlooks other than the Thomist, the Encyclopaedist and the Genealogist a voice within his tripartite system. I am not convinced that a tripartite system of partisan universities is less hegemonic than the permissive liberal university, which, at least, has the merit of being open in principle to all outlooks. Certainly, an appropriate political infrastructure of laws and regulations would have to be created to control the growth of the university system and to ensure that it stays intact, as a system of partisan universities. This might be achieved not so much by keeping MacIntyre’s original tripartite structure and by excluding additions to it, but by ensuring that any addition would conform to the basic institutional requirements as MacIntyre identifies them. Even the safeguards to internal orthodoxy that he describes could not guarantee that the kind of discord which tends to grow with time, even within the most homogeneous cultural entities, will not eventually show its head within the partisan universities; unless of course that orthodoxy is safeguarded with regular witch hunts among the professors, or with other internal repressive mechanisms designed to unearth signs of radical dissent and nip them in the bud. This thought by itself is enough to put me off completely. Indeed, it leads to the question why, once he proposes to adopt measures to exclude voices of radical dissent from the university, he should not be prepared to advocate this principle for the wider society to restore it to sanity and protect it from barbarism. Why should he be averse to creating the same mechanisms at the level of the state to ensure that radical dissent is kept out of its other institutions and out of the lifeworld itself?
He answers this question for me indirectly by describing totalitarianism as an ‘evil’ system and disavowing any interest in politics at the level of the state. He disassociates himself ‘strongly’ from those communitarians who ‘advance their proposals as a contribution to the politics of the nation-state’ (1994, p. 302). Liberals are right to hold, he says, ‘that modern nation-states which masquerade as the embodiments of community are always to be resisted,’ since it is claims of this kind that are a recipe for totalitarian and other evils. For Aristotelians like himself, he continues, the nation state ‘is not and cannot be the locus of community’ (p. 303). Any nation state that projects itself this way, he continues, ‘in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution.’ (p. 303). In ‘genuinely Aristotelian conceptions of the polis,’ he says, the polis itself ‘for a variety of reasons has to be a relatively small-scale and local form of political association. And when practice-based forms of Aristotelian community are generated in the modern world, they are always, and could not but be, small-scale and local’ (p. 302). The mistake liberals make, he continues, is to suppose that ‘any form of political community which embodies substantive practical agreement upon some strong conception of the human good’ must perforce generate totalitarianism (p. 303). This is not so when the political community one has in mind is ‘some form of local community’ one ‘within which the activities of families, workplaces, schools, clinics, clubs dedicated to debate and clubs dedicated to games and sports, and religious congregations may all find a place’ (1999a, p. 135). Unsurprisingly, it is along these lines that he describes the politics of the local community in Dependent Rational Animals, where he traces out the stages and activities through which human infants are nurtured into the community through a kind of collective pedagogy. The aim here is to create members who ‘understand themselves as practical reasoners about goods, about what on particular occasions it is best for them to do and about how it is best for them to live out their lives’ (p. 67).

An Aristotelian community, MacIntyre argues, recognises human interdependence as a simple social and biological fact; we are first dependent on others then, with time, the position is reversed as others (who may include those whom we were formerly dependent on) become dependent on us. And the community bases its ethics on this fact. The independent practical reasoner is one who is ‘able to give to others an intelligible account of one’s reasoning’, but about means theoretical or practical, not about ends (p. 105). Fruitful debate with others, MacIntyre argues, presupposes agreement already about the relevant ends, and these must obviously, since they do not come from the community itself, come from elsewhere, from another authority—papal, professorial or whatever—qualified to set them. On this level of means, however, the community ‘must afford expression to the political decision making of independent reasoners on all those matters on which it is important that the members of a particular community be able to come through shared rational deliberation to a common mind’. It would seek to do this by affording them fora for deliberation and procedures of decision-making that are generally acceptable, ‘so that both deliberation and decisions are
recognisable as the work of the whole’ (p. 129). For this, MacIntyre brings in a notion of ‘conversational justice’ which presupposes certain conditions of truth and economy in the communication: ‘first that each of us speaks with candour, not pretending or deceiving or striking attitudes, and secondly that each takes up no more time than is justified by the importance of the point that she or he has to make and the arguments necessary for making it’ (p. 111). It must also ensure that ‘those whose exercise of reasoning is limited or nonexistent (to) have a voice in communal deliberation about what these norms of justice require’, by giving a formal place to the role of proxy in the community’s politics (p. 132). MacIntyre argues that our practical encounters with the seriously disabled help to benefit us since they help us understand the good of the community and are practically valuable to us because they contribute to our self-knowledge. The proxy’s role is to speak for the disabled ‘in just the way that that particular disabled individual would have done so for her or himself, had she or he still been able to speak’ (p. 139).

He describes the pedagogy that produces independent practical reasoners in even more detail than he does that which turns one into an educated person in *After Virtue*. It occurs in three stages. The first involves the transition from merely having reasons for acting in early childhood to being able to evaluate them as good or bad, thereby deciding on whether to act on them or not. The second is the transition that brings the ability to stand back from our present desires so as to be able to evaluate them, which is a necessary condition for engaging in sound reasoning about our actions. Neither of these transitions, of course, is made alone, and a number of obstacles, physical, social and psychological, could stand in their way. Other people provide the resources (nursing, feeding, clothing, nurturing, teaching, restraining and advising) and help us in other ways to avoid encountering and falling victim to disabling conditions, to obtain needed, often scarce, resources, to help us discover what ways forward there may be, and to stand in our place from time to time in proxy, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves (1999a, p. 73). The third transition, from being aware only of the present to a stage in which one’s view is informed by an imagined future, where we come ‘to understand ourselves as directed to a range of goals that are more or less remote from our present situation and to order our desires accordingly,’ completes the process (p. 76). MacIntyre describes the relationship between the three stages as complex but interdependent and as contributing towards a single vertical process of development, so that failure at any one stage compromises the others. Two things are required to complete this pedagogical description; the virtues into which independent practical reasoners are inducted, and the virtues of caring and teaching required of the enablers, those who make essential contributions to the process, and how they relate to the virtues of the practical reasoner (p. 77).

One notices that in these circumstances of upbringing, MacIntyre speaks of the teachers as enablers, and stresses that the virtues are exercised and learnt not in some specific place, like a school, but in the whole range of activities and contexts of practices in which one learns from others how to
discharge one’s roles and functions within the home, the school and, later, according to our calling. One’s first teachers, one’s parents, bring one to the point where one is educable by other teachers who take over to teach one the elements of various practices; namely the skills they require, and how to recognise the goods internal to them, especially those in terms of which the excellence of the practice is defined. The virtues required by these teachers are those of risk-taking and patience, courage, justice in assigning tasks and praise, the temperateness required for discipline and the cheerful wit of an amiable will (p. 92). At this second stage of growth the object is not, again, to encourage children to question the goods internal to the practice but to teach them how to recognise these goods and respond rightly to them; to help them identify what the harms and dangers are in each situation, and what the virtues require by way of response (p. 93). Knowing how to act virtuously, which is the third stage of growth, evidently involves more than simple rule-following; it needs the other elements of practical reasoning also, namely reasoning skills and self-knowledge, and other kinds of knowledge as well, otherwise we are unable to imagine the range of realistic alternative futures open to us in our circumstances. Honesty is the virtue that makes the achievement of self-knowledge and the ability to resist self-deception, possible in these circumstances. One imagines, though MacIntyre himself does not state it, that schools would play an important part in the second and third stages of this process, but he also emphasises the role of others in the processes of learning: of one’s parents, family and the other members of one’s household at the beginning. Later they could be ‘farmworkers or carpenters or teachers or members of a fishing crew or a string quartet’ (p. 89). Our interaction with these various sorts of people on different occasions and in different places, in family settings, workplaces, schools, churches, clubs, and so on, enables us to develop our skills, exercise our virtues and acquire significant knowledge, particularly self-knowledge.

In short, he recognises that creating independent practical reasoners is something that requires the commitment of the whole community, not something for the school alone. With this commitment and an appropriate schooling, the quality of independent practical reasoning is within everyone’s grasp. One notices, however, that teachers at this stage are merely listed along with others to play their part in this task, they are not distinguished from them as in any way different. Creating educated persons, on the other hand, who presumably provide the local community with its intellectual leaders, requires something different and more systematic; a different kind of initiation into a very different kind of community, the educated public, through the agency of the university where one is apprenticed to a person specialised for the task; a master, or professor working with a community of learners. MacIntyre makes it clear that the relationship between student and professor derives from a very different sentiment from that between enablers and enabled practical reasoners, not one of generosity (that marks the outlook of the enabler) but of magnanimity that marked Aristotle’s *megalopsychos*. In either case, however, the teacher, whether cast in the non-formal role of the enabler or
in the formal role of master is still a means serving different practices; those of the local community in the former case and those of the educated public in the latter. The idea of a teaching profession conceived of as a practice with its ends set for it by the collective perception of its members formed by an internal debate does not work politically for MacIntyre. It was what was the case in Scotland with the original educated public, and that public was eventually brought down, as the professors found it more and more difficult, and eventually impossible, to think with a single mind.

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