

ARTICLES

Teaching Justice after MacIntyre: Toward a Catholic Philosophy of Moral Education

Roger Bergman
Creighton University

How is the commitment to social justice sustained over a lifetime? This would seem to be a matter of character, and that calls attention to the Aristotelian tradition in ethics. No one provides as much insight into the challenge of the contemporary appropriation of this tradition as Alasdair MacIntyre. Although a moral philosopher rather than a moral educator, MacIntyre's critique of the failure of the Enlightenment project to construct a rationally based universal ethic, coupled with a critique of the modern nation-state of liberal capitalism as antithetical to the practice of virtue for the common good, provides a challenging if controversial context in which moral educators might think about justice pedagogy today.

Peace and justice programs have a strong presence at Catholic universities. What constitutes best practice in the preparation of undergraduates to be insightful and faith-filled agents for social change?

Two questions dominate most reflections: (a) How is a commitment to the difficult work of social justice provoked in the first place? and (b) How is that commitment sustained over a lifetime? The philosopher Marcel provides a pointed answer to the first question: "Through personal encounter. Nothing else ever changes anyone in any important way" (as cited in Maguire, 1985, p. 78). Want to provoke a new openness to questions of social justice? Then offer opportunities for personal encounter with the victims of injustice.

But once an initial commitment to social justice is born, how do any of us make this a defining pattern of our lives over the long haul? That would seem to be a matter of character, and that calls our attention to the Aristotelian tradition in ethics, a perspective Kohlberg (1970) early in his career famously dismissed as a relativist "bag of virtues" (p. 59), although he later had second thoughts (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989).

No one, in the opinion of this researcher, provides as much insight into the challenge of the contemporary appropriation of this tradition as Alasdair MacIntyre. Although a moral philosopher rather than a moral educator,

MacIntyre's critique of the failure of the Enlightenment project to construct a rationally based universal ethic, coupled with a critique of the modern nation-state of liberal capitalism as antithetical to the practice of virtue for the common good, provides a challenging if controversial context in which Catholic educators might think about justice pedagogy today. For the purpose of this essay "moral education" and "justice education" are used interchangeably.

This paper will proceed in six steps, each asking a question. First, are we all anonymous Aristotelians? MacIntyre's (1998b) argument that Aristotelian practical reason is the best tradition of ethical practice we have available to us will be outlined. This article recapitulates in highly condensed form some of the much more developed arguments of MacIntyre's major books (1984, 1988, 1990). Second, how does MacIntyre understand the moral self? That will introduce an explication of MacIntyre's conception of personal identity as the narrative unity of a life formed by social practices, with their necessary virtues, within a living tradition of moral enquiry. But that raises a further issue about the possibility of virtuous living in our present context, so different from the Greek *polis* that gave rise to Aristotle's virtue ethics, from which MacIntyre takes inspiration. That takes us to our third question: Are we all, or should we be, anonymous revolutionary Aristotelians? Knight's (1996) work provides insight here, which MacIntyre (Knight, 1998) himself recommends as an accurate depiction of his political views, including the belief that the practice of virtue today demands embodiment in local communities of resistance to injustice. But if that is a broad prescription for moral education, what is MacIntyre's analysis of the actual practice of moral education in America today? That is the fourth step. A fifth question of particular pertinence to educators in the Catholic social teaching tradition is can the language of human rights be legitimately preserved as central to programs of justice education despite MacIntyre's claim that human rights are no more real than witches or unicorns? The insights of theologian Hollenbach (1994) help us to answer in the affirmative. Finally, what are the practical implications for Catholic educators? Three brief examples from primary, secondary, and higher education are offered.

Are We All Anonymous Aristotelians?

MacIntyre (1998b) means by "plain person" (p. 138) a rational human being concerned for his or her own good who is not a professional moral philosopher. He does point out, however, that in her or his practical life, the moral philosopher continues to be a plain person faced by the same kinds of questions and challenges as anyone else. To the extent that a plain person thinks

reflectively about his or her own good and the human good *per se*, he or she becomes a moral philosopher, if not a professional theorist. Plain persons need not study the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 1925/1998) although it is clear MacIntyre thinks it would be a good idea.

MacIntyre's (1998b) major thesis is that "plain persons are in fact generally and to a significant degree proto-Aristotelians" (p. 138). Here is the key insight. In the ordinary activities of personal, familial, and social life, "one inescapably discovers oneself as a being in norm-governed direction toward goals which are thereby recognized as goods" (pp. 138-139).

These norm-governed directednesses are what Aquinas [a good Aristotelian] calls [inclinations]...It is in virtue of our relationship to these...[inclinations], partially defining as they do our nature as human agents, that the precepts of the natural law are so called. (p. 139)

That is, if we are paying attention to the intrinsic requirements of human interaction in our ordinary lives, we are learning the precepts of the natural law.

This insight raises two further questions: (a) "How does the plain person make of the ends which are her or his by nature ends actually and rationally directive of her or his activities?" and (b) "In what social contexts do plain persons learn how to order ends rightly and to recognize their mistakes when they have failed to do so?" (MacIntyre, 1998b, p. 139). How does the natural law come to be recognized and intelligently practiced? We do so through being taught by those more expert than ourselves how to pay attention to and how to think about our activities. According to MacIntyre,

it is through initiation into the ordered relationships of some particular practice or practices, through education into the skills and virtues which it or they require, and through an understanding of the relationship of those skills and virtues to the achievement of the goods internal to that practice or those practices that we first find application in everyday life for just such a teleological scheme of understanding as that which Aristotle presents at a very different level of philosophical sophistication in the *Nicomachean Ethics*....We...become evidently, even if unwittingly, Aristotelians. (p. 140)

We learn by doing and by reflecting on that doing in concert with others. That doing MacIntyre (1984) calls a practice, which he defines as

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (p. 187)

Practices, then, foster the virtues necessary to achieve specific human goods. Reflection on such practices and their vagaries is integral to moral development and human achievement.

What we learn from such reflection is to make two crucial distinctions. First, we learn to distinguish what pleases me here and now from what makes for excellence in pursuit of the goods internal to the practice in which I am engaged. Second, we learn to distinguish what is good unqualifiedly from what is good for me here and now at this stage of my moral progress. Clearly, there is a reflexive dynamism or dialectic at work here, one suggested by Aristotle's (1925/1998) definition of virtue which invokes both "the mean relative to us" (§1106b36-1107b2) at this particular stage of our development and "the man of practical wisdom"—the virtuous person in the ideal who has achieved or is achieving his *telos*. As MacIntyre (1998b) puts it, "through a process of learning, making mistakes, correcting those mistakes and so moving toward the achievement of excellence, the individual comes to understand her or himself as *in via*, in the middle of a journey" (p. 140). That journey, as we have seen in Aristotle's perspective itself, is a developmental project.

Or rather, the individual comes to understand her- or himself as simultaneously in the middle of various journeys, since "no individual lives her or his life wholly within the confines of any one practice" (MacIntyre, 1998b, p. 140). How are the goods of these various practices to be ordered? What is the supreme good which relativizes all other goods? That is, the plain person will "from time to time...retrospectively examine...what her or his life amounts to as a whole" and so will ask, "to what conception of my overall good have I so far committed myself? And, do I now have reason to put it in question?" (p. 141). Each of us is a protagonist in "a story whose outcome can be success or failure" (p. 141). It is "in terms of the outcomes of particular narratives about particular lives" that "the conception of a *telos* of human life is generally first comprehended" (p. 141). We move from the particular stories that make up a life to the overall story that is a life, and then to the universal story that is human life *per se*.

In such retrospective self-examination, as plain persons

we characteristically draw upon resources provided by some stock stories from which we had earlier learned to understand both our own lives and the lives of others in narrative terms, the oral and written literature of whatever particular culture it is that we happen to inhabit. (MacIntyre, 1998b, p. 141)

A cultural tradition provides us with a theory of the *telos* of human life that demands our allegiance over rival traditions. Thus, we have arrived at what Horton and Mendus (1994) describe as the three central concepts of MacIntyre's moral theory: (a) the narrative and therefore teleological self engaged in (b) social practices with their attendant goods and virtues as understood in the context of (c) a living tradition of moral enquiry. The first of these three concepts is especially relevant to the present discussion and so deserves further analysis.

How Does MacIntyre Understand the Moral Self?

It is a "central thesis" for MacIntyre (1984) that

man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, a story-telling animal....[For] I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" And what the narrative concept of selfhood requires is...twofold. On the one hand...I am the subject of a history that is my own and no one else's. (p. 216)

And "to be the subject of a narrative that runs from one's birth to one's death is...to be accountable for the actions and experiences which compose a narratable life" (p. 217). On the other hand, "I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question" (pp. 218-219). And what is the question to which each of us must fashion an answer through the narratives of our lives? "What is the good for man?" indicates "a narrative quest" that "is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge" (pp. 218-219). This perspective on the narrative unity of a human life suggests a new definition of the virtues:

The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which

we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. (p. 219)

The virtues are necessary to particular practices within a life, but also to the unity of that life as a whole. This brings MacIntyre to a provisional answer to the fundamental question:

The good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is. (p. 219)

Fuller (1998) recapitulates “the basic structure of MacIntyre’s ‘narrative unity’ argument” as follows:

(1) We should...drop Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s “metaphysical biology,” since it has been discredited by modern science....(2) We can retain the intelligibility of the idea of a *telos* for human life by suggesting that each human being can and must provide their own *telos* by “telling themselves a story” about their own life....(3) But, in practice, each individual’s story interlocks with other individuals’ stories. (4) A principal form of such interlocking is through the shared story or stories which membership of the same tradition provides....(5) Such narrative intelligibility...is an essential ingredient of having any concrete sense of personal, intellectual and moral identity....(6) But, in practice, the modern self is confronted by a welter of competing traditions....(7) There are principally three such competing traditions: (Aristotelian/Thomist) Tradition, Encyclopaedia, and Genealogy [see MacIntyre, 1990]. (8) Therefore, if we can effectively argue the case for the greater coherence of...[the first] of these competing narratives... we can...restore a fairly definitive *telos*, identity, and “narrative unity” to the bewildered modern self. (pp. 118-119)

In sum, for MacIntyre (1998b) there can be no coherent personal moral identity apart from participation in a tradition of social practices and moral enquiry. We are all anonymous Aristotelians because “every human being... lives out her or his life in a narrative form which is structured in terms of a *telos*, of virtues and of rules in an Aristotelian mode” (p. 146). It is of course possible for a person to fail to learn and to practice well this Aristotelian mode. Indeed, it is MacIntyre’s indictment of modern moral philosophy specifically and modern culture generally that each has fostered such failure. One of MacIntyre’s (1984) essential complaints against modernity is that “when the distinctively modern self was invented...what was invented was

the individual” (p. 61), and that “the self thus conceived...is now thought of as criterionless, because the kind of *telos* in terms of which it once judged and acted is no longer thought to be credible” (p. 33). We live “after virtue.” The typically modern self has no “home” (tradition) in which to learn the virtues. But to the extent that we engage in social practices governed by norms that point toward goods internal to those practices and which can only be achieved through the development of the relevant virtues, and to the extent that such practices compel us to reflect on how those goods are to be ordered relative to our overall good and to the good for humans *per se*, as well as to the extent that we come to understand that we can only answer such questions in terms of a living tradition, to that extent we are all, however unwittingly, proto-Aristotelians. But that answers only our first two questions. What is MacIntyre’s fuller analysis of the contextual challenges facing the education of the moral self into the virtues? In a word, what are MacIntyre’s politics?

Are We All Anonymous Revolutionary Aristotelians?

Knight (1996) offers an accurate summary of MacIntyre’s political views. Knight begins with a review of MacIntyre’s moral theory and his critique of other theories, which Knight sums up this way: “Aristotelianism is...less a particular (syllogistic) conception of practical rationality than the general rationality of practices as such, in contrast with which all other rationalities may be described as ideologies” (p. 888). Although the point is not elaborated, Knight makes this interesting observation on MacIntyre’s behalf: “Aristotelianism is the tradition of the moral theory of practice that has developed in the West, but other civilizations have other such traditions” (p. 889).

We begin to move outward from MacIntyre’s analysis of practices as such with the following distinction: “Practices must not be confused with institutions” (as cited in Knight, 1996, p. 889). Medicine is a practice; a hospital is an institution. Institutions are concerned with money, power, and status. Institutions make practices possible, but whereas practices tend to be cooperative, institutions tend to be competitive. “In this context,” in MacIntyre’s own words, “the essential function of the virtues is clear. Without them, without justice, courage and truthfulness, practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions” (as cited in Knight, 1996, p. 889). Money, power, and status are what MacIntyre calls goods external to practices (Knight, 1996). There is an inevitable tension between the goods internal to and the goods external to practices. How that tension is played out depends on the culture. Institutions should serve practices and internal goods should be

honored more than external goods, however necessary those external goods are to the practices.

“In the post-Enlightenment world, however, the reverse rationale has increasingly prevailed. Both capitalist corporations and states are structured in the same, bureaucratic way” (Knight, 1996, p. 890). And the managerial reasoning common to both “entails the obliteration of any distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations by denying the reality of the latter” (p. 890). Management, from MacIntyre’s point of view, “is a mere technique, not a practice with goods internal to itself” (Knight, 1996, p. 890), so that in the characteristic institutions of modern culture, what MacIntyre calls the “goods of effectiveness” are more highly valued than the “goods of excellence.” This “moral error” is at the heart of MacIntyre’s critique of modernity (Knight, 1996, p. 891). This moral reversal is particularly apparent in MacIntyre’s comments on the identification of *pleonexia* or acquisitiveness as a vice in Aristotelian theory and as a virtue in capitalist cultures. In the former, work is understood as a practice whose rewards are primarily internal to it, while in the latter, work is undertaken primarily in order to acquire external goods. Given the pervasive entrenchment of such a moral reversal, what is to be done?

According to Knight (1996), MacIntyre believes that “the problem is not to reform the dominant order, but to find ways for local communities to survive by sustaining a life of the common good against the disintegrating forces of the nation-state and the market” (p. 894).

Accordingly, the tasks for a politics in the Aristotelian tradition are to defend the rationality, ideals, creativity and cooperative care for common goods of practices against institutional corruption and managerial manipulation, and to uphold internal goods of excellence against external goods and claims of effectiveness. (p. 895)

In this context, MacIntyre indicates what role the university might play in such Aristotelian politics. “The ‘peculiar and [socially] essential function’ of universities is, now, to be ‘places where...the wider society [can] learn how to conduct its own debates...in a rationally defensible way’” (Knight, 1996, p. 895). MacIntyre’s politics are obviously revolutionary in a very particular way. There seem to be no barricades, not even metaphorical ones, in sight.

On the other hand, in the introduction to the revised edition of *Marxism and Christianity*, MacIntyre (1995) argues that “an adequate regard for justice always involves not only a concern that justice be done and injustice prevented or remedied on any particular occasion, but also resistance to and, where

possible, the abolition of institutions that systematically generate injustice” (p. vii). Where possible, MacIntyre does indeed seem to envision reform of the dominant order through the abolition of unjust institutions. Just how broad an agenda this might be is indicated by his subsequent assertion that “capitalism...provides systematic incentives to develop a type of character that has a propensity to injustice” (p. xiv). But then he draws back from that potentially more revolutionary agenda by urging that “the need” is “to construct and sustain practice-based forms of local participatory community that will be able to survive the insidious and destructive pressure of contemporary capitalism and of the modern state” (p. xxxi). But what does that mean for the social practice that is moral education?

What is MacIntyre’s Analysis of Moral Education in America Today?

What MacIntyre (1998a) has written about in “Aquinas’s Critique of Education” might well represent his Aristotelian perspective on contemporary American education:

Where for Aquinas education presupposes a background of shared moral beliefs, the dominant educational ideals of contemporary America presuppose a morally heterogeneous and divided society. Where for Aquinas the goal of education is the achievement of a comprehensive and completed understanding, in modern America what education offers are skills and knowledge designed to enable the student to pursue the satisfaction of her or his preferences, whatever—within certain very wide limits—they may be. And where for Aquinas what the individual is to be measured by, in education as elsewhere, is her or his success or failure in directing her- or himself towards *the* human good, the dominant culture of the American present takes it for granted that there is no such thing as *the* human good, but that each individual must at some point choose for her- or himself among a variety of different and rival conceptions of the good. A good education is then an education that prepares individuals for making such choices. And by that standard a Thomist education is a bad education. (p. 107)

And by that same contemporary standard, a truly Aristotelian moral education is a bad education. Given the current popularity of character education programs in the United States, MacIntyre’s critique of American education might seem not only unduly harsh but simply off the mark. In fact, without ever using the term character education, MacIntyre (1999) provides a devastating critique in his wryly titled essay, “How to Seem Virtuous

Without Actually Being So.” An examination of that essay will help us put Aristotelian moral education in critical tension with the actual practice of the preferred mode of character education in America today, which often claims an Aristotelian pedigree (e.g., Bennett, 1993; Lickona, 1991; Murphy, 2002; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999).

In “How to Seem Virtuous Without Actually Being So,” MacIntyre (1999) argues for two conclusions. The first is that not all virtue-concepts are created equal. Any rationally defensible account must distinguish between genuine and counterfeit virtues. Second, because our society includes

a number of rival and incompatible accounts of the virtues...there can be no rationally defensible shared programme for moral education for our society as such, but only a number of rival and conflicting programmes, each from the standpoint of one specific contending view. (p. 118)

If modern moral philosophy and culture is “after virtue,” *a fortiori* modern moral education is after virtue education. But “the proponents of shared public moral education,” who are “enormously influential...insist to the contrary that we do in fact share a morality” (p. 118). How does MacIntyre refute this claim for a commonplace morality?

According to MacIntyre (1999), any “tolerably systematic and coherent understanding of the virtues” (p. 119) must answer four questions. The first concerns “counterfactual judgments.” If I judge an act to be virtuous, to what judgments am I necessarily committed in other circumstances? Judgments of virtue must arise out of a reasonably comprehensive and not merely *ad hoc* or spontaneous perspective, if they are to be rationally defensible. “A second [and not logically independent] question concerns the type of reason for acting as he or she does which is ascribed in judging that someone is brave or generous or just” (p. 119). One of the differences between genuine and counterfeit virtues is the difference between right and wrong reasons for one and the same action. One might perform a courageous act to save another person’s life or to call attention to oneself as courageous. Intentions reveal reasons, and not all reasons are created morally equal. A third question is closely related to the second: “What was it, both in the situation and the action, which pleased or pained the agent?” (p. 120). We are reminded that the virtuous person, according to Aristotle (1998), will be pleased or pained in the right way at the right things. MacIntyre’s (1999) fourth and final question that all rationally defensible accounts of the virtues must answer is “what range of different types of situation provides a sufficient warrant for such an ascription of a virtue to that individual?” (p. 121). This question emphasizes the need for

a systematic and comprehensive account of the virtues, including regard for each of the concerns raised by the three previous questions.

MacIntyre (1999) argues that “the answers supplied by commonplace usage are highly indeterminate” (p. 121). Any shared public program of moral education will necessarily be open and thin if it is to claim allegiance within a heterogeneous and divided society. Indeed,

what our contemporary political culture requires from those who claim public and political authority is an appearance of virtue congruent with the rhetoric of shared values. And both the appearance and that rhetoric are well served by the indeterminacy of the virtue-concepts of contemporary commonplace usage. (p. 122)

It is important to note that MacIntyre is not arguing that it is impossible for individuals ever to act virtuously in contemporary society, but that a publicly supported program of moral education is unlikely to foster genuine virtue as a matter of course. It is more likely that individuals will, through no fault of their own, learn to seem virtuous without actually being so. Genuine virtues, as we have seen MacIntyre argue previously, depend on social practices aimed at genuine human goods within living traditions of moral enquiry into the human good *per se*. Such traditions provide highly determinate answers to MacIntyre’s four questions. And that determinacy can presently be found only in local communities that are countercultural. The culture to which they are counter, of course, is precisely that culture in which a commonplace rhetoric of shared morality can produce only counterfeit virtues.

MacIntyre’s (1999) second conclusion toward which his argument moves concerns moral education more directly: “All education into the virtues, especially the education of the young, has to begin by discovering some way of transforming the motivations of those who are to be so educated” (p. 123). The problem faced by moral educators “is how to enable their pupils to come to value goods just as and insofar as they are goods, and virtues just as and insofar as they are virtues” (p. 123). But it is exactly this motivation and this valuation that a thin, open, and indeterminate commonplace moral education cannot systematically produce. Again, graduates of such a program may occasionally

do what a genuinely virtuous person would do...but because they have misidentified what it is about these actions that would make them genuine examples of some particular virtue, they will extrapolate falsely in making inferences as

to what the virtues require in situations other than those with which they were at first familiarized. (p. 123)

The crucial difference is that

true judgments about what virtues are required in some particular situation... always either presuppose or are explicitly derived from some conception of the human *telos* as being the achievement of a type of life of which the virtues are necessary constitutive parts. (p. 124)

It is precisely this *telos* that a shared public program of moral education in a heterogeneous society cannot agree on, perhaps even argue constructively about, as MacIntyre (1998a) has argued that “the American present takes for granted that there is no such thing as the human good” (p. 107). And as “there is no theory-neutral, pre-philosophical, yet adequately determinate account of the virtues...so it also becomes clear that there can be no theory-neutral education into the practice of the virtues” (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 126).

I have previously pointed out MacIntyre’s (1999) argument that “Aristotelianism is...at odds with the standpoint of the established economic systems of advanced modernity” (p. 128). He now argues that because

that this is so strengthens [his] claim that there is no non-controversial stance to be taken on the virtues, and that this is so in a way and to a degree that makes it impossible for there to be a single shared public system of moral education with determinate and substantive moral content. (p. 128)

From MacIntyre’s Aristotelian perspective, moral education as a social practice conducive to the development of virtue can only be genuine within local communities alternative and resistant to the counterfeit morality of commonplace rhetoric. It is not too strong to say that for MacIntyre there is a real possibility that the modern self as such cannot be a fully realized moral self. A fractured *polis* militates against the integration of the self into a coherent tradition of virtuous living. The education of the moral self can only be practiced in opposition to the social conditions of post-Enlightenment managerial, acquisitive individualism. If “the barbarians...have already been governing us for quite some time” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 263), moral educators must sit up, take notice, and respond accordingly. They may be the new St. Benedict that MacIntyre is awaiting.

This, then, is the framework MacIntyre provides in which to think about education for justice in Catholic education today. If the crucial question we

must ask ourselves is how to form our students to be insightful, faithful, lifelong agents for social change whatever their career or profession, then MacIntyre offers a compelling and challenging answer: We justice educators must be at least countercultural if not revolutionary Aristotelians. A few further questions come quickly to mind. What are the social practices that structure our courses, programs, and curricula? What are the virtues necessary to those practices? How does our Catholic, Christian heritage provide a determinate narrative that ultimately forms our ideal of the persons we and our students are meant to become? In a world of gross injustice, violence, and suffering, what is the human *telos* that informs our teaching, learning, research, and way of proceeding?

MacIntyre, Human Rights, and Catholic Social Teaching

There is one major obstacle, however, to a Catholic justice educator's full embrace of a MacIntyrian perspective, and that is his dismissal of the language of human rights, which is for him an expression of that commonplace morality, in this case a morality with global pretensions, that can produce no genuine virtue. Can the language of human rights be legitimately preserved as central to programs of justice education despite MacIntyre's (1984) claim that human rights are no more real than witches or unicorns? Hollenbach (1994) describes a posture from which to answer this important question.

Hollenbach (1994) begins with this arresting observation:

During the last century and a half, the Roman Catholic church has moved from strong opposition to the rights championed by liberal thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries to the position of one of the leading institutional advocates for human rights on the world stage today. (p. 127)

How can this dramatic moral reversal be explained? Hollenbach's thesis is that

the pivot on which this reconstruction [of human rights] turns is the traditional natural-law conviction that the human person is an essentially social being. Catholic thought and action in the human rights sphere, in other words, are rooted in a communitarian alternative to liberal human rights theory. Because of this stress on the communal rather than the individualist grounding of rights, contemporary Catholic discussions of constitutional democracy and free-market capitalism diverge in notable ways from the liberal theories of rights that are regnant today. (p. 128)

To quote *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican Council II, 1965), since “God’s plan gives man’s vocation a communitarian nature” (§30), “more than an individualistic ethic is required” (§24). It is against this background of communitarian anthropology that Hollenbach (1994) remarks that “the most pointed objection to human rights theory on Aristotelian-Thomistic grounds is that of Alasdair MacIntyre” (p. 129).

MacIntyre assumes that because human rights are framed as universal by Enlightenment philosophy and post-Enlightenment liberalism that they are necessarily at odds with community and the common good. If that assumption were true, Catholicism and human rights would have to part company. But that this assumption is mistaken can be seen by even a cursory review of Pope John XXIII’s (1963) encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, in which the common good and human rights are explicitly linked and even defined in terms of one another. John famously defines the common good as “the sum total of those conditions of social living whereby men [*sic*] are enabled to achieve their own integral perfection more fully and easily” (§58). In their 1986 pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops further refine this tradition by defining human rights as the “minimum conditions for life in community” (§79). As Hollenbach (1994) puts it, “understood this way, rights language does not presuppose an individualistic view of the person....It begins rather with a discussion of the ‘responsibilities of social living’” (p. 141), a contemporary articulation of the biblical imperative to love one’s neighbor.

Having articulated this communitarian ethic of human rights, Hollenbach then considers the charge that is sometimes leveled against MacIntyre: that his emphasis on local community and tradition makes him a relativist. MacIntyre’s own rebuttal has been to argue for intellectual engagement between rival traditions toward more adequate formulations of truth. Traditions must be open to correction through encounter with other traditions. But according to Hollenbach (1994), MacIntyre “has failed so far to reflect sufficiently on the institutional implications of his commitment to inquiry as constitutive of any tradition that is in working order.” But if he is to follow through on this commitment, “he must endorse rights such as freedom of speech and religion. Without these rights, participation in inquiry must come to an end....MacIntyre’s animus against the idea of human rights is self-contradictory” (pp. 143-144). The creation of the virtuous community, says Hollenbach, depends on the acknowledgement of human rights beyond one’s own community of practice and inquiry. We learn the natural law language of universal human rights through authentic encounter with those outside our immediate communities of discourse.

Within Catholic tradition it is no contradiction to organize a moral education program with an emphasis on social justice defined in terms of universal human rights and to think of that program as fostering a community of students and teachers mutually engaged in learning what it means to practice the virtues over a lifetime of social engagement. That second dimension makes us, as MacIntyre would say, revolutionary Aristotelians. But that hardly precludes us from being countercultural Catholic Christians committed to universal human rights. Indeed, it demands it.

Practical Implications

Practice flowing from this educational philosophy obviously cannot be limited to the occasional or even regular lesson plan devoted to the various dimensions of Catholic morality. In MacIntyre's vision, it is the ongoing, self-critical moral life of the community as a whole, rooted in a living tradition, which forms and educates each successive generation. In this last section, I review examples of how that vision might be embodied in (a) teacher-student relations at the primary level, (b) an extracurricular retreat program at the secondary level, and (c) curricular content and pedagogical structure in a university course.

Educational philosopher Nel Noddings (1992) has argued that continuity in teacher-student relations is crucial to the development of classrooms as caring communities in which moral concerns and behaviors are modeled by the teacher, practiced by the students, and examined by teacher and students in dialogue. Noddings proposes that the creativity and depth of these relations would be enhanced if teachers and students stayed together, always subject to their mutual agreement, for longer than one school year. For example, a teacher would continue with his or her first graders as they moved on to second and even third grade. This would mitigate the need to begin each year with the task of building a new community of learners in the classroom, and would create the opportunity to deepen the mutual trust and personal knowledge that had been established between teacher and students the previous year.

We rightly lament that too often children in foster care are passed from one family to the next and the next, as we know this hinders the development of their ability to relate trustfully to other persons, which is so crucial for moral formation generally. And yet, albeit in less troubled circumstances, we currently make a practice of that very pattern by limiting teacher-student relations to 9 months. If, as MacIntyre argues, community is essential to a moral education in the virtues, and if, as Noddings (1992) proposes, continuity

of teacher-student relations enhances caring and therefore community, then keeping teachers and students together for more than one school year seems an appropriate way for Catholic elementary schools to bolster their efforts to form trusting, caring children receptive to the Catholic moral vision.

Although caring relations between teacher and student are never unimportant at any level of education, at the secondary level it may be especially important for Catholic educators to create ample opportunities for the fostering of healthy peer relations and community among their adolescent charges. Whereas my first example portrayed a structural dimension of primary education aimed at the enhancement of classroom relations and learning, my second example comes from outside the classroom. Few moral and spiritual formation programs are as successful and emulated as the freshmen retreat at a nearby Catholic high school. To quote one student's own testimonial, 7 years later, to the power of that experience:

The Freshmen Retreat offered...a communal space in which male adolescents such as myself could realize that they continue to be precisely that—male adolescents—and yet open themselves up to a more emotionally vulnerable and spiritually grounded way of relating to each other. There were many elements for which I am still thankful: the tremendous generosity of the large team of upperclassmen who every year guided the freshmen through the weekend; the shared small group discussions in which masks could fall away and true feelings emerge; the afternoon service project to remind us that our spiritual growth was not to be isolated from the wider world. Most of all, I remember the so-called “witness talks.” During one long night in a large open room, students would one by one take the microphone in front of hundreds to speak of God in their lives. Their words often expressed what I was distinctly starting to feel, that God, rather than being experienced as a distant Other, is to be found most readily in the richness of people relating lovingly in community.

A full description of the retreat is neither possible nor necessary here, but the reflection above does indicate its most important elements: The retreat is crafted to appeal to present-day young male adolescents in communal settings both intimate and expansive; it is organized and led under the tutelage of adult staff and faculty, and its value modeled by upperclassmen who have attended 10 preparatory meetings; it makes use of small group sharing to foster affective vulnerability; it is “outer” and mission-directed while grounded in the “inner” and interpersonal; and it fosters a quintessentially Catholic sacramental and moral vision of the presence of God in the human person and especially in

human relationships and community. It offers a genuine rite of passage, if not into full moral and spiritual adulthood, then certainly into its antechamber.

A final example of a “MacIntyre-friendly” pedagogical practice is from the Justice and Peace Studies Program at Creighton University. The class, Faith & Moral Development, is innovative in at least two ways. First, although it is a 3-credit hour course, it consists of three 1-credit hour, student-led seminars over three semesters. And although the individual seminar rosters will vary, there is enough consistency of membership, format, and purpose that students develop a modest sense of community and sense of shared commitment to social justice and to a spirituality to support that commitment over the long haul. Second, students take turns leading the discussion of writings by or about moral exemplars such as Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the villagers of Le Chambon, France, who rescued Jewish children from the Nazi war machine during World War II. In addition to case studies that give students a glimpse of a heroic legacy, we also consider various theoretical perspectives (psychological, philosophical, theological) on the faith and moral development of such exemplars, who provide diverse but compelling images and narratives of the human *telos* so important to MacIntyre’s Aristotelian vision.

Catholic educators have much to learn from MacIntyre about teaching justice in our present cultural and historical circumstances. His ideas merit consideration and his challenges deserve response.

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Roger Bergman is the director of the Justice and Peace Studies Program in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Creighton University. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Dr. Roger Bergman, Creighton University, 2500 California Plaza, Omaha, NE 68178.