

# Between Stories and Reason



# Between Stories and Reason:

*A Theory of Narrative  
Constructivism*

By

Vladimir Lukić

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



Between Stories and Reason: A Theory of Narrative Constructivism

By Vladimir Lukić

This book first published 2026

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2026 by Vladimir Lukić

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN: 978-1-0364-6596-4

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-6597-1

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Narrative Constructivism	
Chapter 1 .....	14
The First Premise: Social Narrativity Thesis	
Chapter 2 .....	88
The Second Premise: Psychological Narrativity Thesis	
Chapter 3 .....	139
Application of the Theory: Assessing the Limits of the Narrativity Thesis	
Chapter 4 .....	224
Constructivist Procedure: Reasoning and Reasonableness	
Chapter 5 .....	328
Narrative Constructivism: Forming a Theoretical Outlook	
Bibliography and Sources.....	363



# INTRODUCTION

## NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM

This book strives to provide a way for reconciliation of one of the biggest tensions in the current philosophical debates on moral and political deliberation. That is to say, the primary concern of this book is to show how we deliberate in ethics and politics. This tension leads us to choose between communitarianism or liberalism, *the good* or *the right*, historicism or formalism, etc. Another important thing to stress is that this book does not aim to address the whole discussion between the communitarians and liberals, rather, approach their disagreement from the standpoint of deliberation. In this introductory part, I would like to further expand on this tension and offer reasons why it is important. Secondly, I would like to claim that this tension can be overcome if we merged the mentioned particulars into a project that would strive to encompass both ways of thinking. The theory offered in this book will try to pave the way for discussion on how this tension can be mediated. The name of this theory is narrative constructivism, a theoretical foundation that encompasses both communitarian and liberal arguments, both moral terms of evaluation – *the good* and *the right*, as well as the historical influence and formal construction of our deliberation. Without further ado, we will dwell on the mentioned tension and analyze the main points of disagreement.

Communitarianism is famously taken as a critique of the liberal political theory that focuses on the concepts of unification, community, and the *good life*. Liberalism, in the eyes of the communitarian thinkers, is a society formed by the individuals that are in the state of constant separation and disassociation from one another.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, Michael Walzer, famously labeled as one of the most influential communitarians, notes that there are two arguments stemming from communitarianism, the one about liberal practice and the one about liberal theory.<sup>2</sup>

The first argument refers to the asociality of the liberal society that is detached from the tradition and history that it encompasses.<sup>3</sup> The consequence of that is that each individual in the liberal tradition imagines him/herself as unencumbered by the constraints of society while being absolutely free. The focus point of the individuals in the liberal society, according to Walzer, is to minimize their risk of achieving their goals, strivings, and ends.<sup>4</sup> The second argument against liberalism is that it does not represent real life, that is to say, it is completely detached from how people operate in their everyday lives.<sup>5</sup> Based on this critique, people are not just individuals unencumbered by social ties, rather, they are members of their own families, neighborhoods, communities, groups, etc. Most of the values, beliefs, and attitudes that they acquire, they acquire from the environment in which they are a part of. By depriving us of this structure,

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Walzer, (1990), *The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism in Political Theory*, vol. 18., no. 1., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

communitarians argue, liberalism disables us from accessing our experience as embedded and encumbered social beings.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, liberal thinkers have tried to defend themselves by pointing out the fact that it is a false premise that liberalism is about abstract individualism and skepticism about *the good*. Will Kymlicka has famously tried to defend liberalism (or, as he calls it, social democracy) from communitarian criticism. By referring to Marx and Rawls, he finds that both thinkers claim that we should primarily be concerned about not just accepting the already established set of social values and goals, but revising them.<sup>7</sup> According to him, beliefs, values, and attitudes come from both community and from the “inside”. Namely, he claims that a *good life* is the life lived from personal convictions, even if they are derived from the society and culture.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, two preconditions of a *good life*, in the liberal doctrine, are the following: to live a dignified life from the inside; and to be free and equal in the sense of pursuing the goals we have accepted. Ultimately, the doctrine of liberalism focuses on constant revisions and discussions about the already established social rules and social goals and focuses on the procedure of justice. The requirements of *justice*, according to Kymlicka, are there because liberalism’s primary focus is, in fact, a *good life*.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> W. Kymlicka, (2015.), *Liberalism and Communitarianism* in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 18., no. 2., p. 183.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 183.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 184.

This is the roughest sketch of this discussion. By deriving the consequences of this discussion, the tension expands to encompass two key dichotomies - between *the good* and *the right*, as well as the one between historicism and reasoning. To better understand the first tension, I will refer to Sandel and his emphasis on the basic difference between communitarianism and liberalism. He finds that the liberal ideal is the one that takes priority of *the right*, while communitarianism takes priority of *the good*.

*The ideal I've described might be summed up in the claim that the right is prior to the good, and in two senses: The priority of the right means first, that individual rights cannot be sacrificed for the sake of the general good (in this it opposes utilitarianism), and second, that the principles of justice that specify these rights cannot be premised on any particular vision of the good life. (In this it opposes teleological conceptions in general.)<sup>10</sup>*

We can also see this difference in our earlier discussion. Liberal thinkers argue that prior to talking about *the good*, we need to discuss the just procedures of construction, while communitarians focus on the standards of excellence and goodness that are present in the given tradition. The contrast that Sandel brings into the discussion has roots in the classical ethics of David Ross. He distinguishes *the right* from *the good* and finds the first one to be connected to duties that we are morally required to do, while the second one is concerned with what is valuable.<sup>11</sup> The theory of *the right* is often connected to Kantianism, while the theory of *the good* is connected to

---

<sup>10</sup> M. Sandel, (1984.), *The Procedural Republic and the Unincumbered Self* in *Political Theory*, vol. 12., no. 1., p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> W. D. Ross, (2002.), *The Right and The Good*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Aristotelianism or Utilitarianism.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the goal of human life is particularized in the theory of liberalism, often resulting in the self-constitution of our goals, while communitarians argue for the teleological constitution of our lives and emphasize the unity of our practices and goals, as well as their dependence on the societal structure.

The tension between historicism and reasoning is also an important one. Eugene Miller rightly stresses the importance of the reemergence of historicism in political theory as it sheds light on political epistemology.<sup>13</sup> Historicism brings further understanding of the evolution of our conceptual framework, and our social practices, as well as provides a way of analyzing the social changes and the reasons for those changes occurring. The claim is that the social and psychological system of values, beliefs, and attitudes does not come out of the vacuum, it is deeply rooted in the historical evolution of our communities and the practices that are a part of them. Miller attributes the methodology of historicism to Hegel and his philosophical project that emphasizes the internal logic of the epochs and tradition, as well as the development of cultural-based cognitive categories.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, historicism opens the door for the notion of goodness to be further elaborated. Namely, as John Wallach notes, if we consider goodness from a historical perspective rather than a purely philosophical one, its influence on both social and personal levels can be

---

<sup>12</sup> It is also worth noting that many communitarians subscribe to the neo-Aristotelian methodology, while, on the other hand, many liberal thinkers find Kantianism to be the basis for their moral and political views. This will be a reacquiring topic throughout this project.

<sup>13</sup> E. F. Miller, (1977.), *Positivism, Historicism, and Political Inquiry in The American Political Science Review*, vol. 66., no. 3., p. 796.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 800.

highlighted.<sup>15</sup> In short, our vision of the good life differs depending on the moment in history, the area in which we are located, and the position that we occupy. Communitarians often embrace historicism while highlighting that the community that encumbers us has a long history of change and its values dependent on tradition.

One way of addressing the duality of the proposed theories is to refer to the faculty of human deliberation. I suspect that the core of this disagreement lies in the way in which we think about moral and political issues, assuming that the theories of communitarianism and liberalism are both moral and political doctrines. The questions that are raised are the following:

- How do we attain beliefs, values, and attitudes in relation to the world around us and to others who are a part of that world?
- How do we constitute *the self*? Is it externally or internally motivated, or does the answer lie somewhere in between?
- What is the relationship between historicism and reasoning?
- How do we reason through the external, socially influenced factors?

Both communitarianism and liberalism, based on this introduction, provide quite clear-cut answers to all these questions. This book problematizes the answers of the mentioned theories and tries to find a middle ground, while also disqualifying certain premises/conclusions of both projects. For it to be successful, we would need to provide a new theoretical foundation that is based on the philosophies of both communitarian and liberal philosophers.

---

<sup>15</sup> J. R. Wallach, (2018.), *Democracy and Goodness: A Historicist Political Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 19.

In this book, we will call this theory the theory of narrative constructivism. Narrative constructivism is primarily descriptive in a way in which it offers a description of how we deliberate about moral and political issues. However, it also has a normative tendency since the description begs for further elaboration on why we transform our deliberations in relation to the world and others in the world. Therefore, the explanatory power of this theory is both descriptive and normative.

Furthermore, I will provide the overall outline of the book in order for the reader to be acquainted with its aims.

In short, on the one hand, we have a communitarian theory – the theory of the narrative, while on the other, we have a Rawlsian approach – constructivism. I argue that the main substance of our deliberation comes from the narrative approach and that the narrative itself is shaped by our reason-giving procedure over time, which gives it its form. The narrative approach itself has two premises – the social narrativity thesis and the psychological narrativity thesis, the first one explaining the social aspect of our lives, while another one describing how we are shaped within the constraints of the society and those living within it. The first claim is that our beliefs, values, and attitudes are shaped by the social tradition in which we are embedded in. The psychological narrativity thesis claims that our self-constitution itself depends on the narrative, as well as that the very process is narrative in nature. Reasoning, on the other hand, gives rise to a constructivist procedure that guides our narrativity in a more reasonable direction. Therefore, everything that we have in the beginning is a narrative and, afterward, this narrative is shaped into another narrative based on constructivist procedure.

I start by providing an outline of the theory of the narrative taken from MacIntyre's theoretical opus. This will be the first premise – the social narrativity thesis. However, since the book does not encompass the same goals that MacIntyre has and it directly disagrees with them, the discussion opens on how to retain the notion of the narrative and make it independent from MacIntyre's teleology and apparent naturalism. MacIntyre believes that there are three things that are at the core of our social and moral lives – practice, tradition, and narratives. Practices shape our lives and make sense (are intelligible) within one tradition. These traditions give us intelligibility in narrative form and are justified by narratives as well. In this book, I am interested in retaining the narrative approach while discarding some of the consequences of MacIntyre's theory. I argue against MacIntyre's critique of liberalism and ethical monism. In order to do that, I am establishing a theory of moral political pluralism based on the approaches of Richard Rorty and Isaiah Berlin. By concluding that pluralism is a state of things in our current political and moral realm, we would need to reinterpret MacIntyre's notion of the narrative. One of the consequences of this view is that there is a plurality of narratives based on the ways of life. As a contrary force to MacIntyre's teleological narrativity, I am proposing narrative hermeneutics, a view that states that we derive meaning from our practices and social realm while embracing pluralism. Different practices and different social narratives breed different forms of life. By doing that, the first premise is established showing how the social world around us shapes our beliefs, values, and attitudes.

The second part of my book proposes the psychological narrativity thesis and deals with the notion of the narrative *self*. Political and moral

deliberation is done by an agent who can morally and politically deliberate. If this deliberation comes from an agent who is encrypted by data that he/she has received from the social realm, or, a social narrative, we will need to see what is going on in the case of his/her position in the narrativity. When we ask a question “*Who am I?*”, the answer that we give is the story that we speak about ourselves. The theoretical approach that I am taking here is the one proposed by Ricoeur as it is the one that is most compatible with MacIntyre’s social narrative theory. Ricoeur sees *the self* as both objective and subjective and within this framework, there is a constant hermeneutical tension between the social narrative and the narrative of *the self*. In the final two subchapters, I am trying to further elaborate on the nature of the narrative *self* and defend it against the likes of Galen Strawson and his theory of episodocity. If the psychological narrativity thesis is successfully argued for, we can move to the next step of this project, testing the first two premises.

Once we have established the approaches of the social narrative and the narrative of *the self*, that is to say, social narrativity and psychological narrativity thesis, we have a specific framework of how we constitute our moral and political deliberation. The third chapter then shows why the narrative approach is limited and why it needs to be “updated” with another theoretical view. In order to show that, the third chapter includes three sub-chapters – on the topics of nostalgia, narrative pluralism (ideology), and moral progress. These sub-chapters apply narrativity to the real world and we can see the pros and cons of it. The first sub-chapter will show the connection between the social narrative and the narrative of *the self*. If the social narrative progresses beyond the narrative embeddedness of *the self*,

we feel like we have an intelligibility crisis. Intelligibility crisis in this context is taken to show that when the narrative evolves and changes, a person needs to reconstruct and re-formalize the narrative for it to make sense again. The second sub-chapter deals with narrative pluralism which is exhibited in the different forms of lives, ways of life, and ideas on life. In the political realm, these ideas develop into different ideologies since they are linked with moral and political deliberation. This is the place in which the normative theory is introduced to support narrative pluralism. The normative framework which I offer should be assessing the acceptability of the narratives held. In this sense, I propose Rawls's theory of reasonableness which encompasses his understanding of liberty. By combining reasonableness and liberty, we are providing a framework of normative pluralism that enables the narratives to be considered as equally valid. Another claim is that the narrativity thesis on its own cannot provide standards of self-assessment. The last sub-chapter, the one on moral progress, deals with the theory of how narratives and meta-narratives (traditions) change. It is argued that the narratives are not static but in a state of constant change. By looking at the reasons for the narratives progressing, we need to provide a theory of moral and political progress. I am doing the same procedure I suggested in the previous sub-chapter, the one on reasonableness and liberty. That is to say, using this model, we can establish the view on why we consider one narrative to be progressive and why we consider some narratives to be regressive. I am also introducing the notion of the epistemic crisis, found in MacIntyre's theory, and that suggests the constant narrative state of change.

The consequence of the third chapter is the following – a mere narrative thesis is necessary but not sufficient to explain moral and political deliberation. The first sub-chapter provides evidence that the selves(people) who have intelligibility crises are connected to the previous narratives, the ones that are not here anymore. By reformulating the relation between the personal and the social narrative, *the self* is reinterpreting in the social narrative around him/her. Therefore, narrativism is the basis for moral and political deliberation, but something else is at play here. The second sub-chapter shows that if the narrative theory should be a foundational one, it should embrace the fact of pluralism. It should also show that, within this framework of pluralism, different narratives influence one another and promote change within the narratives themselves. If the narratives were fundamentally different and incompatible, the potential for change and coexistence would be unattainable. Again, there must be something else here at play. Finally, the last sub-chapter shows that the narratives are progressing, but the narrativity thesis itself cannot fully encompass the reasons for that change. There also must be something else at play here as well. Reasonableness is offered as the main moral principle of narrative change in every case. Further explanation of reasonableness will be provided in the fourth chapter where I differentiate between what is rational (substantial) and reasonable (formal).

Therefore, from the third chapter, I conclude that, while narrative theory is a foundation for moral and political deliberation, it offers merely a substantive account, but not a formal one. Therefore, a formal account needs to be provided in order to have a full picture.

The fourth chapter offers exactly that, a formal account based on constructivism. This theoretical approach is usually supported by the theorists that subscribe to the liberal doctrine, following John Rawls and his methodology. This chapter begins by defining what constructivism is since it is a relatively new view filled with the multiplicity of methods of research. By exploring these numerous ways of conducting the constructivist philosophical methodology, I end up subscribing to a local, dependent, Neurathian constructivism, which recognizes the contextual and narrative-driven nature of moral and political reasoning, while emphasizing the role of reason-giving procedures in shaping deliberation. I come to that conclusion by exploring three important concepts – reasons, reason-giving procedure, and reasonableness. Reasons, both explanatory and normative, are used as the material for the reason-giving procedure. I argue that the reason-giving procedure, when rational, operates with intelligible reasons that we attain from the relationship between the social and personal narrative. Furthermore, I defend the reason-giving procedure from the philosophers who emphasize the irrationality of our reasoning. I claim that every thought and action that we make has a reason behind it, following Scanlon's research on reasons. By expanding the view on intelligible reasons and connecting them to the reason-giving procedure, we have connected narrativity with reasoning.

The notion of reasonableness holds the most important place in this chapter. It effectively answers the question of the third chapter and provides a normative-formal standard of action. Intelligible reasons that we attain from narrativity are connected to the Rawlsian term of rationality, while reasonableness is used as a trans-narrative, quietist-realist term. Following

Rawls, reasonableness is connected to the Kantian philosophical heritage, and it involves considering the perspectives, needs, and interests of others. It also emphasizes fairness, mutual respect, and the acceptance of the liberty of *the other*. Reasonableness requires balancing one's reasons with those of others, often leading to compromises or adjustments in the rationality of the narrative. The difference between rationality and reasonableness creates a full circle in this book, seen both from the communitarian and the liberal perspective.

The fifth and final chapter of this book connect all the pieces of the puzzle. I finally provide reasons on why I am subscribing to a very particular form of constructivism while connecting it to narrativism, and I offer the connection between the substance and the form of narrative constructivism with a Habermasian view on deliberating serving as an anchor to my position. After establishing a clear-cut connection, I conclude this project with the overall theory of narrative constructivism which I hope enriches the debate surrounding the mentioned issues.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE FIRST PREMISE: SOCIAL NARRATIVITY THESIS

### **Philosophical Framework and Narrative**

As stated in the title of this book, narrative plays a key role in the understanding of our political and ethical deliberation. The first part of the book, therefore, elaborates on the first premise that it rests itself on – the social narrativity thesis. Sadly, the elaboration is not as straightforward as it might seem as social narrativity has been at the center of philosophical investigation for decades now. As Anthony Rudd puts it:

*Over the last two or three decades, various philosophers, including MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur (as well as psychologists, sociologists, theologians, and others) have argued that the notion of narrative has a central role to play in our thinking about personal identity and about ethics.<sup>16</sup>*

The author that will prove to have the most influence on this view is, without a doubt, Alasdair MacIntyre. Blagojević asserts that the theory of narrativity has become prominent during the 1980s, championed by MacIntyre after which similar accounts were proposed by Charles Taylor and Marya

---

<sup>16</sup> A. Rudd, (2007) *Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Narrative Unity—Reply to Lippitt*, Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy, vol. 50., no.5, p. 541.

Schechtman.<sup>17</sup> The concept of narrative, both in ethical and political contexts, finds significant grounding in MacIntyre's philosophy, where it plays a central role in shaping moral identity and communal values. It is also worth noting that the account of the narrative is deeply engraved within MacIntyre's philosophical framework, however, this book distances itself from it. The reasons for that will be given after the elaboration of his notion of narrative. While MacIntyre's notion of narrative closely follows his philosophical system, I argue that it is not entirely dependent on it. One cannot speak about MacIntyre's narrative if one does not address two key methods. One is the general outlook of MacIntyre's project, while the second one is the reason for agreeing or not agreeing with the project itself. That being said, in the following parts of this chapter, I plan to analyze MacIntyre's project which he created in his book *After Virtue* with some references to *A Short History of Ethics* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*; the former being before *After Virtue*, while the latter being written after it. The second part of this chapter consists of deriving the concept of the narrative from MacIntyre's framework. The main goal in this chapter can be summed up by the following process: giving a general outlook on MacIntyre's philosophical system, explaining what role a conception of narrative has within it, and deriving the conception of narrative from the philosophical framework given in the first step. After we establish the notion of the narrative without MacIntyre's philosophical constraints, we will elaborate the version of the social narrativity thesis based on the theory of narrative hermeneutics.

---

<sup>17</sup> B. Blagojević, (2020) *We Have no Future: Teaching Philosophy to Narratosceptic Students in Godišnjak za Pedagogiju*, vol. 5, no. 2., p. 75.

## MacIntyre's Project: The Revitalization of Virtue Ethics

Following the words of Thomas D'Andrea, MacIntyre stands between continental and analytical thought and is tearing down the walls that separate them as a theorist who has incorporated an encyclopedic corpus of philosophical tradition within his philosophical project.<sup>18</sup> That is to say, MacIntyre invokes continental thought and provides an answer to the questions that have been plaguing analytic philosophy. It should be said that such a philosophical method is quite fitting for MacIntyre, considering the goal he set for himself. Namely, already at the beginning of his, probably, most famous book, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre offers one of the most interesting propositions of recent ethical theory. We have, according to MacIntyre, lost both a theoretical and an applied understanding of morality.<sup>19</sup> In a society and time determined by pluralism, we have lost something extremely important - the common good and the goal that unites us. We have lost the value system that had the power to direct us towards a common conception of good. However, what is the biggest loss of the modern understanding of morality is the fact that it prevents us from arguing about goods and goals at all. Our moral language has become so diverse that the concepts themselves have lost the meaning they once had. Pluralism leads to moral relativism and emotivism which are the ruling paradigms against which MacIntyre fights.<sup>20</sup> But how did we come to that? How did we get from a moral system that managed to unite us to a moral system in

---

<sup>18</sup> T. D'Andrea, (2006.) *Tradition, Rationality and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Hampshire. p. 397.

<sup>19</sup> A. MacIntyre, (1981.) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame Press, Indiana. p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11. – 12.

which we cannot even participate? The first part of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, which comes as a continuation of *A Short History of Ethics*, comes down to this question. The final paragraph of that book opens a problem that plagues MacIntyre - modern moral philosophers talk about moral concepts as if they are without history and as if they are floating in a vacuum in which there is no social context and time. They build their theories without regard to the moral history of our society and without regard for moral concepts as concepts that have an entire history behind them.<sup>21</sup> If we look at MacIntyre's endeavor through these two books, we can view it as a historical project.<sup>22</sup> *A Short History of Ethics* starts from the elaboration of virtues in heroic societies to a modern ethical conception. In *After Virtue*, however, MacIntyre analyzes the history of philosophy to find an ethical tradition that has managed to encompass a common conception of good and that has managed to offer a framework in which we have the possibility of a moral discussion. If someone has only read *A Short History of Ethics* and is only now embarking on *After Virtue*, the result will not surprise him/her. By rejecting much of the history of ethical thought, the choice boils down to two theorists - Nietzsche and Aristotle. Christopher Lutz rightly divides *After Virtue* into two parts - the argument against ethical conceptions and the argument for ethical conception.<sup>23</sup> The first part is destructive, while the second part is constructive. In this respect, Nietzsche would fit perfectly

---

<sup>21</sup> A. MacIntyre, (1990.) *A Short History of Ethics*, Touchstone, New York. p. 269.

<sup>22</sup> MacIntyre himself stresses that his project is in line with what Hegel called the history of philosophy, or, as Collingwood took all successful historical writing to be. In A. MacIntyre, (1981.) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame Press, Indiana. p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> C.S. Lutz, (2012.) *Reading Alasdair MacIntyre's "After Virtue"*, Continuum, London. p. 1-2.

with MacIntyre's mission in the first part of *After Virtue* as a theorist who saw all the weaknesses of the Enlightenment project of morality.<sup>24</sup> However, although they have a common starting position, Nietzsche and MacIntyre differ in their goals. Nietzsche aims to destroy the foundational moral system and point out all the difficulties of modern philosophy, while, on the other hand, MacIntyre wants to offer an alternative. He, however, does not find an alternative in Nietzsche's thought. In the end, the choice comes down to one theorist - Aristotle. Thus, MacIntyre's philosophy aims to revitalize the theory of virtues in the contemporary social context.<sup>25</sup> It is certainly clear to him that the very history of the theory of virtue is determined by social frameworks; therefore, he seeks to determine the very core of the theory of virtues. What makes up a comprehensive theory of virtues are three notions - practice, narrative history, and tradition. For my overall argument, the primary focus is to define the concept of narrative. However, it will also be necessary to briefly explain the concepts of practice and tradition since they are deeply linked with our main concept. Again, bearing in mind that the role of practice and tradition are marginal for my needs, we would not dwell much on them apart from the most general outlook.

Before starting the outlook on these three concepts, the strategy for it needs to be addressed. Two ways in which we can go about this investigation are either summarizing what MacIntyre is saying and providing a critique afterward or connecting these concepts, highlighting the part where they

---

<sup>24</sup> G. Garrard, (2008.), *Nietzsche for and Against the Enlightenment in The Review of Politics*, vol. 70., no. 4., p. 596.

<sup>25</sup> J. Begley, (1995.), *The Virtue Theory of Alasdair MacIntyre in Pacifica*, vol. 8., no. 2., p. 220.

intersect and, afterward, removing the unnecessary weight. Roughly speaking, the strategy taken in this chapter is somewhere in between the first and the second way. A summary will be given nonetheless; however, it will be dependent on the intersection mentioned. Now, the question arises, what is this intersection? It is located in one important notion, arguably, the key motive for MacIntyre, the notion of intelligibility. This concept is ingrained with MacIntyre's main goal, the quest for unity. As it was noted, MacIntyre's main complaint is the separation of meaning and ethics that modern liberal society brings. In short, rigid individualism has detached itself from the ethical goal or, *telos*, and this brings meaninglessness to our practices which dictate our ways of life. In order to "go back on the right track", MacIntyre longs for unity of meaning and practices. One of the premises is that meaning itself is dependent on tradition and that every tradition is a narrative-based social order. Therefore, in short, MacIntyre is trying to invoke the unity of tradition, narrative, and practices which is portrayed in his emphasis on intelligibility. In the next sub-chapters, I will be summarizing MacIntyre by also expressing the importance that intelligibility has with practices, tradition, and narrative.

### **The Conception of Practice: A Way to Acquire Virtues**

Before we focus on the analysis of the very concept of practice, it is important to offer a brief overview of the theoretical models from which MacIntyre derives the concept of practice and makes it an original contribution. First of all, we must keep in mind that MacIntyre was influenced on the one hand, by Marxism, and on the other, by Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> D'Andrea claims that MacIntyre was influenced by one particular conception of

In this respect, the notion of practice in MacIntyre's theory is developed from the model of Marxist philosophy and the classical theory of virtue. Let us, for now, dwell on the presence of Marxism. MacIntyre was heavily influenced by Marxist philosophy, although his interest in Marxism waned in the late 1960s after he saw the extremes of communist regimes.<sup>27</sup> However, the legacy of Marxism is still reflected in MacIntyre's writings in two ways. The first is a critique of the capitalist social system, while the second is an alternative version of social practice. Marxist *praxis* is defined as a free, universal, creative, and self-creative activity that is inherent in humans and allows them to change the social world as well as themselves.<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx's *praxis* is, therefore, a revolutionary activity through which persons transcend theory and by their action change the very frameworks of the social system. Of course, *praxis* would show the shortcomings of one system (Marx, in this instance, refers to the bourgeois social order) and thus open the way to a new one. This understanding of practice offers MacIntyre a starting position.

It was mentioned earlier that MacIntyre is a theorist who focuses on virtue ethics and, therefore, it is necessary for him to incorporate the concept of practice understood in this way within his system. In order to do that, in

---

Christianity - Thomism. Namely, MacIntyre takes over the rationalist understanding of Christianity which relates to the Aristotelian tradition; he has kept this understanding to this day. From: T. D'Andrea, (2006.) *Tradition, Rationality and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Hampshire. p. 163.

<sup>27</sup> R. Ward, (2017.) *Virtue in Practice: Alasdair MacIntyre's Concept of Virtue*, Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, Rome. p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> G. Petrović, (1967.) *Praxis in Dictionary of Marxist Thought 2nd ed*, Harris, Laurence; Kiernan, V.G.; Miliband, Ralph, Blackwell Publishers Ltd. p. 435.

addition to the Marxist elements of *praxis*, he also adds the Aristotelian ones. As one of the three key elements of virtue theory, practice must contain the concept of excellence. Excellence, according to Aristotle, does something good in and of itself. This can be examined from the examples of an eye or a horse, the examples offered to us by Aristotle himself. The excellence of the eye makes both the eye and the function of the eye good; a horse's excellence makes a horse and its function good.<sup>29</sup> The function of the eye is, of course, to see things, while the function of the horse is to carry the rider, and so on.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the excellence of something is reflected both in the good that that something brings and in the good that it causes.<sup>31</sup> If we come across a horse that cannot perform its function, we will say that it is not excellent. The process becomes a little more complex when we determine the excellence of human activities, however, it comes down to the same procedure. In his *Politics*, Aristotle raises the question of the distribution of flutes, and wonders to whom they should belong.<sup>32</sup> The answer to that question lies precisely in the notion of excellence. The best flutes should belong to those who have excellence in playing the flute, that is, the best flute players.<sup>33</sup> Here the skill of a specific activity is associated with excellence (although that is not always the necessary case). The best flutes should belong to the best flute players because they will make the best use of those flutes.<sup>34</sup> In that respect, excellence is reflected in the very

---

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, (1906.) *Nichomachean Ethics*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., London. p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, (1999.) *Politics*, Batoche Books, Kitchener. p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 68.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 68.

activity of playing the flute, and in the consequences that result from that. The best flute players achieved excellence in their craft. A flute played by someone who has achieved excellence in the craft of flute playing will produce better music than a flute played by someone who has not achieved excellence in the craft of flute playing. Furthermore, a player who has achieved excellence in the craft of flute playing will make better use of the best flute compared to someone who has not achieved similar excellence and therefore should have it.

In Chapter 14 of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre offers us, for the first time, his definition of practice:

*By 'practice' I am going to mean 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 that 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.*<sup>35</sup>

Through this definition, we can extract a multitude of standards that activity must fulfill for MacIntyre to consider it a practice. But first, it is extremely useful to break down this abstract definition by applying it to individual examples. Let us imagine a group of friends who went camping. In addition, they brought a soccer ball and wanted to play a game with it. Considering that there is no football field or any field in the area, they set

---

<sup>35</sup> A. MacIntyre, (1981.) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame Press, Indiana. p. 187.

new rules for the game. This "new" game is based on the participants making a circle and kicking the ball to each other, with each of them being able to touch the ball only once. Whoever touches the ball more than once gets negative points. This game would not be a practice. On the other hand, a football match would be practice. Also, digging in the ground is not a practice, however, agriculture is. Masonry is not practice, but architecture is. The same goes for various sciences like physics, biology, psychology, etc., they are all practices.<sup>36</sup>

Why is this the case? First, this game made by a group of friends is not socially established, but an activity made solely because of the circumstances. Football is not a private activity; it is socially established and contains regulations and rules that are general and binding on everyone who plays it. Also, although this game seems to have coherent rules, they are subject to change that can be initiated by even the smallest detail. For example, if the rules requiring everyone to touch the ball at least once are too demanding for the participants, they can change those rules so that they can touch the ball twice, or more times. In retrospect, it would be hard to imagine that during a football match, the players decide that it is much more convenient to turn off the offside rule because the game would be more spectacular. However, it is worth mentioning that the rules of socially established activities also change from time to time. In the second half of 2020, it was possible to make two more changes to the matches than before due to the circumstances that followed as a result of a global pandemic. Also, in the earlier history of football, the rule of offside was changed three

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 187.

times - in 1863., 1925. and 1990.<sup>37</sup> But once the rules are changed due to specific circumstances or because the world organization of that sport believes that the changes would improve the game itself, the new rules immediately come into power and oblige everyone who plays that sport. Furthermore, football contains various formations, strategies, ways of cooperation, as well as various methods of improving individual skills. Does this imaginary game contain that? It would be hard to say so. Someone can be better in that game, and someone worse because of certain physical predispositions, explosiveness, speed of reactions, etc. On the other hand, football offers certain standards of excellence that a player must meet to be excellent in that sport. For that to happen, he must first master the rules of football, acquire the skills that are required of him/her, and live a life in accordance with that practice. In the end, football also points us to a certain conception of the good that is reflected in virtues. As for our imaginary game, that would not be the case. According to MacIntyre, various arts, sciences, crafts, sports, politics (Aristotelian), family management, etc., meet the standards of practice.<sup>38</sup>

The relevance of practice is crucial for the project that MacIntyre is after. Every practice defines a person who is pursuing it; it is the groundwork for both virtues and meaning. Furthermore, if we were to consider ourselves as projects, a premise which is explicit in *After Virtue*, these projects should be worked on.<sup>39</sup> The success of these projects is reliant on the activities that

---

<sup>37</sup> C. Williams, (2020.), *The History of the Offside Rule*, site:

<https://www.colossusbets.com/blog/history-offside-rule/> accessed: 14.09.2020.

<sup>38</sup> A. MacIntyre, (1981.) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame Press, Indiana. p. 188.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 174.