MacIntyre and the Idea of an Educated Public

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ABSTRACT: Some years ago, 1985, Alasdair MacIntyre wrote a paper on *The Idea of an Educated Public* in which he argued that the only route open for educators for the future, in order to emerge out of the current moral 'crisis' created by the 'emotivist' modernist culture is to bring back the idea of an 'educated public' from the Scottish Enlightenment and to regard education as education into such a public. The notion of an 'educated public', in effect, reappears also in all his later books on moral philosophy, particular his latest, *Three Rival Theories of Moral Enquiry*, where he takes up his original proposal that educated publics should grow around universities and canvasses the new idea that under contemporary conditions what we may need is not one universal university but three kinds contextualized within the three rival kinds of cultural and moral programmes he identifies, and, correspondingly, three kinds of educated public. This paper tries to trace the evolution of MacIntyre's idea of an educated public throughout his work, (1) arguing that there is one particular perspective on the idea which he strangely omits, that represented by Dewey/Habermas, and (2) critiquing his final solution on the basis of its possibility and political desirability.

KEY WORDS: MacIntyre, educated public, Dewey, Habermas, university, modernity, postmodernity, plurality, moral education, democracy

MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION

Alasdair MacIntyre is mainly thought of as a moral philosopher. Before *After Virtue*[1] he had already written three well-established books in this area, the first of these a history of moral philosophy. But *After Virtue* (henceforth AV) was different and controversial, an important book that "emerged from extended reflection upon the inadequacies of my own earlier work".[2] AV proposed a novel thesis about how modern moral discourse can be explained and critiqued, and contained a blistering attack on the modernist-liberal, or post-Enlightenment outlook. Popular and controversial as it became in universities, however, it was hardly regarded as a book about education. A few years later, in 1985, MacIntyre accepted the invitation to deliver one of three public lectures in honour of the prominent British philosopher of education Richard Peters and the result was *The Idea of an Educated Public*[3] (henceforth EP). The essay caused hardly a stir among philosophers of education. MacIntyre, himself, indicated *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*[4] (henceforth JR), published seven years afterwards, as the sequel to AV. In it he responded to the question raised but left undiscussed in the earlier book; "What makes it rational to act in one way rather than another and what makes it rational to advance and defend one conception of practical rationality rather than another."[5]

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His most recent book *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*,[6] (henceforth TRV) was represented as a further development of the two earlier books. Its object was, again according to MacIntyre himself, "to present and to argue for one particular point of view in some of these conflicts, but also to give something at least of an overall view of the contending parties and of the terrain of conflict."[7] In other words, it was conceived as the completion of the project begun in AV, and the author, either originally or in hindsight, evidently wants the three books to be taken together as a single continuous, coherent work.

In this way MacIntyre himself encourages one to read EP as a one-off essay on education written for an occasion and largely unconnected with his major project over the years. But I want to argue otherwise. I want to argue that EP is an important work within MacIntyre's oeuvre which links with the three books to constitute a project about education the need for which was immanent within AV and was sophisticated in his later books. It became inevitable when, in AV, after describing the predicament of contemporary moral discourse and of modern liberal culture he raised the question what kind of society would have avoided this predicament? and what kind of moral education would such a society have required?

AFTER VIRTUE

In AV, MacIntyre described "the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations" as the key to the social content of modernity's post-Enlightenment "emotivist" culture.[8] The moral project of the Enlightenment which aimed to set up a kingdom of ends, has, thus, in his view, failed on its own terms. This was bound to happen because the discourse of emotivism is characterised by "the generalisations of the sociology and psychology of persuasion... not the standards of a normative rationality."[9] In it truth is "displaced as a value and replaced by psychological effectiveness."[10] The representatives of this failure are what he describes as the key "characters" of the emotivist culture; the Aesthete, the Manager and the Therapist. These share the same characteristic of being involved in manipulative practices albeit disguised in different ways and exercised in very different social contexts, and they are actually much more numerous in our society than we suppose. What they have in common is that they take ends as being given and outside their scope, and are concerned only with techniques of effectiveness.

At the same time, MacIntyre continues, the self as presented by emotivism is one which has "a certain abstract and ghostly character".[11] This is because it "finds no limits set to that on which it may pass judgement for such limits could only derive from rational criteria for evaluation and, as we have seen, the emotivist self lacks any such criteria."[12] In general, MacIntyre represents the emotivist moral culture as a "contrast between this democratisation of moral agency

and the elitist monopolies of managerial and therapeutic expertise,' which results in a 'bifurcation of the contemporary social world' into a private realm of nebulous autonomous moral subjects and a realm of public institutions controlled by experts.[13] What explains this predicament is the fact, in MacIntyre's view, that the ancient Aristotelian notion of the self as having a *telos*,[14] has been squeezed out and left behind. The having of such a *telos*, he insists, is necessary for the self to experience the feeling of identity and solidity which it currently lacks. What is concurrently needed in the social world, as Aristotle realised, is entrenching 'virtue' and the culture of the virtues in the centre of moral and political discourse.

In AV, MacIntyre identified Nietzsche as the only other serious theoretical rival to the modernist project; the only 'genuine' or coherent alternative to this return to Aristotle 'confronting anyone trying to analyse the moral condition of our culture'[15]. Marxism he refers to only very fleetingly and dismissively in the Introduction to the book. Its 'moral defects and failures', he states, probably referring to its humanism, 'arise from the extent to which it, like liberal individualism, embodies the *ethos* of the distinctively modern and modernising world'.[16] Nietszche alone saw that that world was beyond reforming, that what was needed was a paradigm shift which rejected its *ethos*.[17] But Nietzsche, MacIntyre's says, need not have existed at all, *would not have existed*, without modernity. He is himself, MacIntyre tells us, a creature of modernity, of the Enlightenment, albeit a rebellious one. So the really fundamental question is whether the Enlightenment itself was *necessary*, whether, as he puts it, it was right in the first place to abandon Aristotle.[18]

Nietzsche's own mistake, MacIntyre contends, was to interpret the failure of the modernist account of rationality to signify the failure of all rational vindications of morality as such, when, in fact, it was no more than 'an historical sequel to the rejection of the Aristotelian tradition'.[19] Thus, the plausible alternative to modernity is not really Nietzsche but to return to the pre-modern, Aristotelian, conception of rationality. But such a conception was clearly embedded in a very different world, a very different view of reality. The subject became the material for his next book.

In AV his task stopped at uncovering 'core' criteria of rationality within the Aristotelian tradition that render the moral language of virtue a cogent one through an analysis of its history within different Western societies from Antiquity onwards. The core he comes up with consists of: (a) a background account of what he calls a 'practice'; (b) the notion of a narrative order of a single human life; (c) a detailed account of what constitutes a moral tradition, since accounts of virtue, he conceded, vary within different moral traditions. All three factors are evidently educationally relevant. The identification of a *telos* that orders one's life which must have the unity of a narrative which is guided and concluded with the acquisition of that same *telos*, evidently renders the goals for moral education clear. The methodology of that education can be read into the crucial understanding of a 'practice'.

EXCLUDED VIEWPOINT

Before going into his notion of a 'practice', however, we need to pause and ask whether MacIntyre's account of the cultural alternatives to the 'crisis' of modernity, on which his case for returning to Aristotle depends, is a satisfactory one. The view that there are fundamental flaws in the Enlightenment's moral project, particularly in its characterisation of ethics as the province of an autonomous rational transcendental subject, is one commonly held by many writers today, but not all agree that these flaws should be represented as a 'crisis'. Most who do, like MacIntyre, read into it also the collapse of the humanistic and liberal aspirations that originally flowed from that project. The post-Nietzchean narrative of how that collapse occurred, variously referred to today as postmodernism or poststructuralism, is, evidently, very different from MacIntyre's, and so are its solutions; it tends to celebrate poetic irony against rationality, self-creation against engagement in the discourse of a 'public'. But there is still another, very different account of the future of modernity from either Nietzsche's or his which MacIntyre fails to address. This narrative begins optimistically with the humanistic Marx. It takes a pessimistic turn with Weber. That pessimism, expressed as loss of faith in the Enlightenment's narrative of emancipation, is pursued later by the exponants of the Frankfurt School, particularly Adorno and Horkheimer, along lines close to the post-Nietzschean or postmodern, but takes an optimistic turn again with Habermas, stripped of Marx's utopian vision and economic determinism. But closely akin with Habermas's view, in several relevant ways, is that of the American pragmatists, particularly Dewey.

What Dewey and Habermas share together and what distinguishes them both from the resigned sense of hopelessness of Adorno and Horkheimer, from the sceptical retreat into the narcissistic privatism or apoliticism of the post-Nietzcheans, and from MacIntyre's nostalgic utopian conservatism, is a belief that modernity can be reformed and rescued and its liberal humanism salvaged. This possibility, however, is one that MacIntyre never considers. In TRV, he represents the encyclopaedist, the genealogist, and the Christian Thomist as the three significant rival versions of moral inquiry and culture that are currently available in the Western world. But, even leaving Dewey aside, it is strange that he does not make even a reference to Habermas in any one of his books, given that Habermas is one of the major protagonists in the contemporary debate about modernity.

What Dewey and Habermas, in fact, both offer is a response to the problem of modernity which resembles MacIntyre's own in crucial ways but differs also in very fundamental ones. Habermas, in particular, agrees with MacIntyre and all the other critics of modernity in rejecting the Enlightenment's search for a value-free foundational epistemology, as well as its characterisation of rationality in terms of an autonomous free-floating transcendental moral subject. He agrees with MacIntyre also (against the post-Nietzcheans) that the criterion of rationality should be re-defined not abandoned. Finally, he also agrees with MacIntyre, as does Dewey, that contemporary liberal-democratic societies' loss of the idea

of a public needs to be remedied, and that it needs to be restored. Both Habermas and Dewey have, in fact, written books about the subject and alluded to the problem in several articles and papers.[20]

What separates them clearly from MacIntyre is, first of all, their project for a reformed version of rationality which is entirely different from his, and secondly their account of a public. Like MacIntyre they shift the location of rationality from the autonomous subject to the site of communicative action itself, to the public. But, as opposed to MacIntyre, they are concerned to preserve what they both perceive as the gains of liberal humanism, the various kinds of conceptions of freedom and, above all, democracy which Dewey, in particular, closely associated with plurality. So, to conclude on this important point, though these arguments will be taken up again later, not only is MacIntyre's account of alternative futures incomplete, it excludes a point of view which currently offers a far more challenging intellectual opposition to Aristotelianism and its Thomistic version which he takes up in TRV than that of the nearly defunct and nearly universally discredited encyclopaedist, and a much more attractive political alternative than the post-Nietzschean collapse into privatism or apoliticism.

What is politically worrying about MacIntyre's own challenge to modernity is that it seems also to carry with it a threat to democracy. What he demonstrates above all in AV is a dislike for plurality. Or, more accurately, what he does is distinguish a kind of plurality which consists of 'an ordered dialogue of intersecting viewpoints' and which he favours from one which consists of 'an unharmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments',[21] with which he identifies modern discourse. But the plurality he supports, in fact, sounds suspiciously like Lenin's notion of democracy as a plurality of ideas within a 'single will'.[22] An illustration of the two different conceptions of plurality can be made from a recent debate in Malta about the liberalisation of the mass media. Until 1990 in Malta there was one state owned television and radio station regulated by a constitution and a broadcasting ordinance which guaranteed impartiality in the representation of alternative viewpoints in matters of political and industrial controversy, freedom of expression, balance, etc. The controversy came about when a new government, reacting to the discrimination it had suffered from the media when in opposition, pledged itself to liberalising broadcasting by breaking the state monopoly and granting licences to privately owned radio and television stations in order to ensure a plurality of viewpoints for the future. Its opponents argued against this that private stations were not needed, that a plurality of view-points could be guaranteed within the state-owned media by setting up a parliamentary commission to act as watchdog to ensure it. The difference between the two sides, in essence, was one between different philosophies of plurality which reflected different attitudes towards private enterprise but also, ultimately, democracy. What MacIntyre seems to favour is something like the latter kind of 'controlled' plurality, and this is borne out in his later writings.

Finally, to return to the point I have been making, it would be interesting to know why MacIntyre excludes Habermas and his line of critical theory. Evidently, the acknowledgement of this other view should put him under pressure to

reassess his own moral, cultural and educational project against the alternative it provides, particularly since though he wants to argue in favour of a certain qualified relativism, namely that different rationalities and different moral and political conceptions derive from different traditions and are primarily assessible within those traditions, he does not want to go the whole relativistic hog of subscribing to the incommensurability thesis also. In fact, while insisting that all theories of justice and rationality are embedded in traditions, he concurrently holds that there are grounds for preferring some theories to others. Also, it must be the case that a different viewpoint will introduce a different critical stance on the other competing viewpoints including his own; which means that MacIntyre's evaluation of the potential criticism against his preferred project lacks consideration of the critique which the excluded viewpoint of Dewey and Habermas would make of it.

VIRTUE AS A PRACTICE

MacIntyre defines a 'practice' as 'any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of 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.'[23] He says that 'in the ancient and medieval worlds the creation and sustaining of human communities – of households, cities, and nations' depended on this notion of a practice,[24] and explains how 'goods internal to a practice' are cultivated by analogy with teaching a highly-intelligent seven-year-old chess; bribing the child to play with candy, etc., to begin with, but hoping eventually that 'there will come a time when the child will find in those goods specific to chess, in the achievement of a highly particular kind of analytical skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity, a new set of reasons, reasons now not just for winning on a particular occasion, but for trying to excel in whatever way the game of chess demands.'[25] We describe these goods as 'internal' because we can only specify them in terms of a game or practice itself and because they can only be recognised by the experience of participating in them.

MacIntyre's illustration clearly bears a strong affinity with Dewey's account of the ideal form of intrinsic control internal to the democratic community which he also illustrated with the example of a game.[26] Dewey also argues that players who are or become committed to a game make its rules or 'practice' their own and seek excellence within it through that same commitment to the goods 'internal' to it; the game, thereby needing little help from external authority to regulate it. Indeed, what MacIntyre calls a 'practice' sounds pretty close to what Dewey had in mind when describing democracy as a 'way of life'. Dewey would have agreed wholeheartedly that the goods internal to a democracy can only be specified in terms of its practice and recognised by the experience of participat-

ing in it. Again he would have agreed with MacIntyre that this idea of a 'practice' 'involves standards of excellence and obedience of rules as well as the achievement of goods'. He would also have agreed that it involves the idea of 'progress', even if 'progress is rarely to be understood as straightforwardly linear'; and the conception of living one's life, of a greater or lesser part of it, as a practitioner of the 'practice'.[27]

Entering into a 'practice', MacIntyre continues, involves accepting 'the authority of these standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them'. The standards themselves are not immune from criticism but entering into a 'practice' means 'subordinating ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners' who represent its more advanced state so far. This requires, according to MacIntyre, the virtues of justice, courage, and honesty,[28] though different societies have defined the content of these virtues in different ways; 'practices', he asserts, 'never have a goal or goals fixed for all time.'[29] Though they need to be distinguished from institutions which are interested in external goods, it must be recognised that no practice can survive without institutional support. The importance of the virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness, in this context is precisely to protect practices from the corrupting power of institutions.

Up to this point there seem to be no problems with MacIntyre's democratic credentials. The problem arises when he contrasts the relationship between moral character and political community envisaged by liberal individualist modernity with that of the ancient and medieval tradition. The first, he asserts, effectively excludes any such relationship while the latter makes it central to private and public life. This is because liberal individualism simply regards the community as an arena in which individuals 'pursue their own self-chosen conception of the good life', protected by the political institutions which are 'neutral between rival conceptions of the good life for man.'[30] Ancient and medieval societies, on the other hand, envisaged 'one of the tasks of government to make its citizens virtuous, just as it is one of the tasks of parental authority to make children grow up so as to be virtuous adults.'[31] This is where he parts company, conclusively, with Dewey. 'The modern state,' he continues to complain, 'is indeed totally unfitted to act as moral educator for any community.'[32] And the pessimistic conclusion with which he ends the book, following this fact, is that 'what matters at this stage is the constitution of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.'[33]

THE EDUCATED PUBLIC

The question left suspended with this conclusion, of course, is, what kind of communities should they be, and how does one set about creating them? MacIntyre's answer in his 1985 eassay is that they should be educated publics. But

before discussing his notion of an educated public in EP, it is important to reflect briefly on MacIntyre's politics as they have emerged in AV. As we have seen he represents the relationship between individual and community in terms of two necessary alternatives; an atomistic individualism which places the community in opposition to the individual, which denies the community any moral, political and educative value whatsoever, and one which views the *state* (not the community) as 'moral educator'? But what has happened to the third Deweyan alternative; that which regards the *community* as moral educator. Dewey's contention was that it is the act of 'living together' that educates,[34] and that education, in this sense, is simply assured by unrestricted communication; i.e., by plurality in itself.[35] MacIntyre, at this stage at least, favours the Hegelian idea of the state as educator with its notoriously anti-individual implications. But there is also, in his account of a 'practice', the idea that it requires a 'vanguard'; those who represent the most advanced state of the practice.

Perhaps he intended the Marxian solution in AV of setting up Aristotelian\Thomistic vanguards to create the 'local forms of community' as enclaves of resistance against the liberal culture of the modern state, given its failure to do the job of moral education itself!? At any rate MacIntyre's view of the state is explicitly a paternalistic one; one which makes its citizens virtuous in the way that parents make their children virtuous, and this needs to be remembered when his views of the educated public are taken into account. The matter is different with Habermas who also despairs that the modern state can be a moral educator but not because it has lost its paternalistic credibility but, to the contrary, because its institutions fail to emancipate its citizens and create instead what Horkheimer and Adorno called a 'totally adminisrated' society. Habermas also pins his hope in the 'life world' and in the resistance of local communities, but his communities are social movements with emancipatory programmes defined very differently from MacIntyre's educated public.

MacIntyre opens EP with a basic premise; that 'teaching young persons how to think for themselves, how to acquire independence of mind, how to be enlightened, as Kant understood "enlightenment",'[36] cannot be brought together with socialisation in modern liberal democratic societies precisely because this way of representing independence of mind excludes the notion of an educated public. He proceeds to describe such a public proposing a model, in effect, much closer to our times than medieval society; the Scotland of the first half of the eighteenth century when, having lost its political sovereignty and having, as a consequence, to redefine its national identity, it, needed 'to provide a milieu for nationwide debate on its future development'.[37] The universities, which were also being reformed at the same time, became the centre of the debate which spread informally into a wider community. This educated public was ultimately 'composed of the male middle classes, a spectrum that could range from the sons of the minor nobility to the sons of shopkeepers'[38].

The Scottish educated public arose out of a situation of national crisis, but it already bore the intellectual seeds of its own destruction 'in the controversies which provided it with so much of its intellectual life.' Quite simply, as these

became more complex, the common-sense philosophy on which it was founded, 'ceased to be able to articulate a common educated mind.'[39] It thus went the way of many other contemporary European societies, particularly the neighbouring English, in that 'moral and theological truth ceased to be recognized as objects of substantive inquiry and instead were relegated to the realm of privatized belief.'[40] How could this have been prevented? One obvious way, would have been to give up philosophising, 'to retreat from debate into assertion', but this remedy, MacIntyre rightly says, 'equally conclusively puts an end to the existence of an educated public.'[41] What needed to be challenged instead was the new encroaching views of modern philosophy which cannot, of its very nature, provide shared beliefs of a socially cohesive kind because it does not acknowledge any of its texts as having special authority.

Andrew Fletcher had suggested something of the kind at the time, MacIntyre says, proposing this canonical status for Aristotle's **Ethics** and **Politics**. But these texts, he says, 'presuppose a kind of state and a kind of economy far too alien to eighteenth century Scotland,' involved in political, socio-economic and demographic upheaval.[42] This upheaval, MacIntyre says, was reflected in the realm of knowledge and the curriculum which lost its unitary frame-work on belief, perspective, and way of debate.[43]

MacIntyre does not want to eliminate the liberal arts and the sciences. But he argues that they can only be 'effectively appropriated and developed in the arena provided by an educated public' with its shared standards of justification, 'shared view of what the past of the society of which it is a nucleus is,' and its shared ability to participate in common public debate. In the absence of such a public, he complains, you reduce them 'so far as those who are not specialist are concerned, to the provision of a series of passively received consumer products', and 'the consequent impoverishment extends beyond the general public to the content of the specialized disciplines.'[44] This being the case, a multidisciplinary curriculum, he rightly insists, does not do the trick, notwithstanding other benefits it may have; it 'cannot take us even one step towards the restoration of an educated public,'[45] nor can any other type of educational reform. The curriculum and the mode of teaching itself, he concludes, must be adjusted to the needs of an educated public.

But what is the remedy once the original unity and coherence of belief and 'practice' that made for the constitution of a public is unavailable? MacIntyre makes an interesting, and, as it turns out later, crucial, reference to Mill's hope for an educated public adjusted to the socio-cultural situation of nineteenth century England, at the point when agreement of the kind found in eighteenth century Scotland was impossible. Mill's novel idea was for a public 'founded on a particular agreement to disagree'. For this particular public to survive, 'allegiance to the purpose of the debate would have to be as important to the participants as their allegiance to their own point of view.'[46] MacIntyre says that Mill was one who saw himself as contributing to such a public, but he leaves it at that in EP, he does not discuss the feasibility of this solution, which, in effect, reflects Mill's democratic outlook and is in line with what Dewey proposes. Yet subse-

quently it resurfaces in a particularly important way later in TRV and features crucially in his conclusions there.

Earlier on MacIntyre summarises three factors that made the educated public of the Scottish Enlightenment possible: (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 made by the intellectual protagonists;[47] (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;[48] and (3) some large degree of shared background beliefs and attitudes informed by the widespread reading of a common body of texts which are accorded canonical status within that particular community, not as a final court of appeal but inasmuch 'that appeal to them has to be treated with a special seriousness, that to controvert them requires a special weight of argument.'[49] This common possession of a shared body of texts requires also, and this is the crucial point, an established tradition of how they are to be read and construed.

Moral philosophy, MacIntyre says, was 'to some degree the keystone of the curriculum and it was moral philosophy of one particular kind'[50] – the kind that steered a course away from Hume's secular but anti-Christian morality and from the dogmatic appeal to a neo-Calvinist understanding of scripture which 'is incompatible with the whole project of rational justification'.[51] This moral philosophy, articulated by Reid and Steward represented 'the stance of the Presbytarian clergy of the Moderate party and of their social allies'[52]. It was a stance 'at once secular and yet both consonant with and supportive of the Christian religion.'[53] Politically, this kind of stance would be represented today in several European countries by the Christian-Democrat parties.

In such a culture, MacIntyre says, taking up the issue again in JR, the professor of moral philosophy obviously plays a cardinal role as 'the official defender of the rational foundations of Christian theology, of morals, and of law,'[54] and philosophy in general (obviously in its Aristotelian\Thomistic form) comes to enjoy a certain hegemony in the culture as the standards of philosophical debate and inquiry displace the church tribunals as adjudicators over moral and cultural matters and over orthodoxy in general. MacIntyre argues, in fact, that what held the curriculum together for the educated public of the Scottish Enlightenment was a certain intellectual continuity between moral philosophy and the other forms of inquiry. And this owed itself to a common understanding of the intellectual enterprise, of philosophical inquiry, as essentially deductive, proceeding from first principles that are established by 'common sense'. Thus it was that common sense philosophy gave rise to an established scheme of human knowledge which was 'unitary and more or less integrated... the articulated disciplinary parts of which involved continuous reference to each other. And both the unity and the differentiation of that scheme were replicated in the curriculum.'[55] In short, this educated public was 'a philosophically educated public, with shared standards of rational justification and a shared deference to a teaching authority.'[56]

MacIntyre demonstrates the same pessimism with the contemporary possibility of such a public at the conclusion of EP as he did in AV: the 'concept of an educated public has no way of taking on life in contemporary society,' he says, 'It is at most a ghost haunting our educational systems.'[57] But, he adds, it is a ghost that cannot be exorcized. How could an educated public be reinvented? Fletcher emerges as 'the hero of this narrative', as one who both foresaw the predicament and the solution to it; 'that a revival of the reading of Greek philosophical and political texts would necessarily be central to any form of education that could enable a community to resist this outcome successfully or to recover from it.'[58]

RIVAL UNIVERSITIES, RIVAL PUBLICS

TRV can easily, and in my view accurately, be read as MacIntyre's attempt to exorcise that ghost, at least in his own mind. The reason why he keeps returning to the notion of an educated public in his writings and why it becomes so central to him is clear; notwithstanding his pessimism about the possibility of its existence in the modern world, he seems to have grown more and more persuaded that its coming into being constitutes the only hope for the rationalistation of contemporary moral and cultural discourse. The vague conclusion in AV that only 'local forms of community' resisting the dominant modernist culture are possible in the contemporary world was clearly unsatisfactory for him, from this point of view. In TRV he suggests a vastly different, more optimistic, alternative, drawing on his preparatory reflections in EP and JR.

A crucial factor of the Scottish educated public as he describes it in these works was the role played by the universities and the professors in the coming into being and continuing existence of such a public. In TRV he suggests that the answer now may not be dissimilar to the answer then; it could lie in reconceptualising the universities as cultural and intellectual foci for contemporary educated publics but within the pragmatic reality of an irremediably pluralistic world. This reality imposes *different* educated publics growing around different universities that represent the different contesting moralities and cultures within that world. This is the only rationalistation of moral discourse, he seems to have concluded in TRV, which the contemporary world seems capable of. The current state of the liberal university anyway, he says, is particularly bleak as, under pressures of different kinds, it encounters growing problems of self-justification and has grown more and more detached from the community. In short, it grows more incapable of intellectual leadership and self-justification.

He, again, returns to the past, to explain what enabled medieval and pre-liberal universities to function as centres of rational inquiry that served as the hub of educated publics and he comes up with three things: (1) the emergence of agreement upon standards of justification through the work of inquiry itself, not only by philosophers but also professors of mathematics, history and law; (2) the

enforced exclusion from the universities and colleges of points of view too much at odds with the consensus underpinning both inquiry and education; (3) the use of preferments and promotions to ensure that the upholders of the consensus, including those who extended, corrected, or otherwise improved the standards of rational justification embodied in it, occupied the relevant professorial chairs.[59] What (2) and (3) mean, essentially, is that 'fundamental dissent' must be excluded from the university otherwise genuinely rational inquiry is impossible.[60] The liberal university's current predicament, in fact, as MacIntyre sees it, lies in abandoning these conditions in the name of a false understanding of tolerance.

So what is a true understanding of tolerance? It begins with the understanding that one can provide conflicting accounts about how any text is read, and that no reading of a text is non-partisan. This is what, MacIntyre argues, creates the intellectual conflict of which the contemporary protagonists are those he identifies in his book. 'Any attempt', he says, 'to revive and restore a curriculum in which rational justification received its due' would need to take account of these conflicts and ensure that texts are read *against* one another, on the one hand, and given different readings on the other.' This is his understanding of tolerance and the fundamental twist in MacIntyre's thinking from AV that makes a pluralistic society composed of competing educated publics with different universities as their nuclei possible. The consequent cultural milieu would become 'a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict, in which a central responsibility of higher education would be to initiate students into conflict,'[61] Mill's solution referred to in EP. In it university professors would play a double role; the partisan role of advancing inquiry from within the particular point of view they support and entering into controversy with other rival standpoints,[62] and the non-partisan activity of promoting and sustaining institutionalised forms of conflict.

Their audiences would be encouraged to recognise this partisanship, and would themselves learn to adopt 'an ironic distance and, in so separating themselves from themselves, to open up the possibility of an awareness of those fissures within the self about which and to which genealogical discourse is addressed.'[63] For this to happen, the lecture room would have to be replaced by 'a theater of the intelligence, a theater in turn requiring critical commentary from both its adherents and opponents.'[64]

MacIntyre thus presents us with a scenario of rival universities, 'each advancing its own enquiries in its own terms and each securing the type of agreement necessary to ensure the progress and flourishing of its enquiries by its own set of exclusions and prohibitions, formal and informal,'[86] while, at the same time, ensuring the creation of institutionalised fora for debate between the rivals. MacIntyre describes the kind of philosophical education he deems desirable. 'Becoming philosophers', he says, 'is to embark on a *techne*'[65]; it is an apprenticeship in a craft. The teacher is the master-craftsman who 'is the model of the person with *sophia*'.[66] This model, which was at home in the middle ages in the institution of the craft guild, was natural for Aquinas, the central protagonist of the book, who also characterised philosophy as a craft.

The close coherence of the notion of 'a craft' with that of 'a practice' is not difficult to see. With the change of hero the former is now the more appropriate notion: moral inquiry is now 'a virtue-guided craft'.[67] Otherwise, it is all still there; the subordination of the interpretation of texts to a tradition and to one's own individual *telos*, the 'conception of a rational teaching authority'[68] faith in which, MacIntyre contends, needs to precede rational understanding and requires, in turn, a new virtue to which the will needs to be subordinated; '*humility*,' he tells us, 'is the necessary first step in education or in self-education.'[69] Humility is not one of the virtues cited in AV because it is, very evidently, not an Aristotelian virtue but it is necessary for membership in MacIntyre's Christian educated public which has the *Summa Theologiae* as its central canonical text. The *Summa Theologiae*, he says, is 'a work of instruction at this highest stage, comprehending and integrating into itself however that in the other disciplines which theology needs, and providing also the frame-work within which the other disciplines have to be understood.'[70]

MacIntyre also reaffirms the same conception of the self he describes in AV, as 'a teleologically ordered unity', and provides an extremely interesting and detailed account both of the kind of education an initiation into the educated public he supports requires, and of how that educated public of which one then becomes a member helps the individual to discover and promote that unity. The fundamental educational question such a public asks itself in this respect is 'through what form of social engagment and learning can the errors which may obstruct such discovery be brought about?'[71] The kind of education an educated public as MacIntyre himself envisages it requires is an 'education (which) is first of all an initiation into the practices within which dialectical and confessional interrogation and self-interrogation are institutionalized'[72].

Liberals and genealogists would certainly disagree, but that is another story that cannot be told here. The question here is, what can one make of this scenario of a society composed of competing different educated publics growing around ideologically exclusive universities operating on very strictly defined denomenational lines under conditions of 'constrained disagreement' and competing intellectually within arenas and public fora, conceptualised significantly as 'arenas of intelligence', under mutually agreed rules. Presumably, one advantage of this arrangement compared to the present one of unrestrained plurality within common heterogenous universities is that it replaces this plurality of anarchy, as he describes it, with a plurality which, at least, converges into these arenas and fora and is, therefore, to some degree at least, contained, focused and rationalised by them. Another advantage, in his view, is that it restores to the universities their justification and their status of leadership within their different adherent communities which would owe a common allegiance to the same tradition which they represent and rationalise in the most sophisticated way that that tradition permits at its current historical stage. In short, it would replace the current heterogenous and rootless philosophical and moral culture with a framework which would rationalise the conflict and restore some coherence to our moral and political scene.

Nor is the model of a university 'advancing its inquiries in its own terms etc.,' an entirely fanciful one in today's world; it is typical of the Catholic universities common throughout Europe which adopt all the screening and other control mechanisms for orthodoxy in the areas that count, philosophy and theology, which MacIntyre recommends. Catholic universities provide the intellectuals for the Catholic communities, the Catholic 'educated publics', in different countries, as well as the political leadership of the Christian Democrat parties which, in turn, promote socio-cultural, political, and ethical programmes that reflect Catholic orthodoxy and values. The screening mechanism of these universities which guarantees and controls their orthodoxy is, however, an authority outside the university itself; the ecclesiastical authorities who have the power of veto over staff appointments and academic curricula. The question is whether liberals or genealogists would want to adopt it and set up their own denominationally orthodox universities, or indeed whether they would go along with MacIntyre's project as a whole; and the answer to both questions is clearly no.

Genealogists, in particular, would probably not even want to be in any university at all. They are, by nature extremely suspicious of philosophy professors and would rather be seen as deconstructing 'writers and muck-raking journalists', to quote Richard Rorty, marginalised from the intellectual life of the universities, providing their own ironic commentary of the socio-cultural and political scene in interviews and otherwise engaging themselves in their private self-creation, than professional university professors setting themselves up as 'guardians of culture'.[73] Moreover, the very idea of a public itself is particularly repellant to them. Any liberal, on the other hand, would shudder at MacIntyre's proposals for the very reason that they are radically illiberal. So the actual chance of getting agreement from these quarters with MacIntyre's project is nil.

Nor would it be acceptable to the tradition we have identified with Dewey and Habermas. In his account of the educated public as he sees it, MacIntyre makes an important distinction between the moral education through philosophical inquiry into the good specific to human beings as such, which will be typical of the members of the public, and the moral education of 'a great many ordinary agents, educated into that practice within households or local communities, (who) learn to be and are virtuous without ever explicitly raising philosophical issues.'[74] In short, he recognises that his educated public would have a very restricted membership; it would be a bourgeois public just like the Scottish educated public. In the last chapter of the book where he actually uses the expression 'educated public' again, understood once more in the same sense and with the same reference to the Scottish Enlightenment as in EP and JR, he actually confirms as much. Such a public, he says, expresses itself 'in and through institutionalised means, clubs and societies, periodicals and more formal educational institutions'; i.e., in forms typical of the bourgeois.[75] Nor does he state anywhere what the relationship between the educated public and the wider community would be. But Dewey and Habermas, anyway, would reject this exclusivity in principle.

THE RETURN TO THE PAST

Habermas, for one, does not regard the need for educated publics as that for fixed competing orthodoxies arising from and backed by traditions and modelled on a pre-modern past. Rather, his publics come into being relatively spontaneously; they are generated from tensions within the contemporary 'lifeworld', within the cracks created in the structures of post-liberal societies by the different crises to which they are inevitably prone. There they are inclined to appear as social movements of different kinds. Their purpose is not the perpetuation of some kind of orthodoxy or tradition. Indeed, characteristically, they have no traditions and they have no past to draw upon since they are thrown up, more or less, by the historical moment. Indeed, their object is often 'emancipation' from different kinds of repressive traditions, from the past, from the prevailing orthodoxies; examples are the student movements of the 1960s, the women's and gay movements and the environmental groups. Their greatest struggle is to avoid being rationalised into the status quo, and the arenas they choose for it are not primarily intellectual but political.

Indeed, MacIntyre's whole project of going back to the past for his model of an educated public has been particularly criticised by Walter Feinberg[76] and Susan Mendus[77]. Mendus accuses MacIntyre, along with others like Alan Bloom and T.S. Eliot, of 'nostalgia for the past', of subscribing to what Bernard Williams calls 'the myth of the Fall'.[78] Drawing on Williams she argues that there is no way back to the pre-reflective past because it is not merely the world that has changed since but the selves inhabiting it. The modern self, she points out, is a reflective self; 'we have moved from a state of innocence to a state of reflection', she argues, 'And there is no going back... without some form of suppression, and the unreflectiveness consequent upon suppression is quite distinct from the unreflectiveness consequent upon innocence'.[79] So the real question Mendus insists is not how we can go backward but how we need to go forward, and to answer it we need to refer to our modern understanding of ourselves and of the world not to models of 'educated publics' from the past.[80] Mendus criticises MacIntyre's final solution for the universities depending, as it does, on a variety of controls on the curriculum and exclusionary measures against the 'wrong' appointments, any liberal-democratic society, she says, would evidently find objectionable. But, MacIntyre has no interest in liberal-democratic societies, so the more telling point against his solution is the one I made earlier that it would not win the consent of liberal democrats on which it obviously depends.

Feinberg's criticism against MacIntyre, also for wanting to go back to a pre-modern idea of an educated public, is aimed rather against his pessimism about the possibility of an educated public under contemporary conditions. Feinberg who, unlike Mendus, is sympathetic with the view that we need to refind a public, argues that MacIntyre 'overstates his case in a number of ways', and 'has not established a case for the *impossibility* of a public in modern times.'[81] He

simply, Feinberg says, 'describes a situation where a public does not happen to exist', but to justify moving from there to the thesis that it cannot exist, Feinberg continues, he would have to show that life has become so complex that it is no longer possible for a person with a reasonable education to sufficiently grasp its complexities, and that it is bound to remain complex in this way. Hence that we are fated to a society in which the most important matters must be left in the manipulative hands of experts who are themselves limited by their disciplinary training. 'MacIntyre,' Feinberg says, 'does not argue for either of these points although it is clear that he is assuming both of them.'[82] Moreover, Feinberg rejects the 'lost public' thesis because, he argues, its solution when it is approached as a problem, resolves itself into one of two positions; either to 'grab hold of a particular community and make it comparable to the public', as MacIntyre does, or to 'grasp a particular conception of the good and insist that such a conception is foundational for the development of a public'.[83] Feinberg cites Haldane as one who has made the latter argument in favour of a re-found Christianity, of returning Christian doctrinal teachings to the centre of the curriculum. But it is a Haldane who has read MacIntyre right in this respect, for this is the direction TRV takes.

But the crucial problem here, in both cases, MacIntyre's and Haldane's, is why we would want to accept that a particular conception of the good is required for the formation of a public, or why we would want to return to the kind of public they cite, to the kinds of solutions which have already been historically superceded in different ways. MacIntyre's contention that modernity was a mistake to begin with is a vacuous one since, as Mendus argues, mistake or not, it is now deeply embedded in the contemporary self, and no amount of change to the external world will return us to pre-modern times. But the other point is that the social environment of the contemporary Western world bears no rese blance at all to that of the Christian medieval societies or to the nationalistic socio-cultural environment of eighteenth century Scotland. Feinberg rightly points out that, for instance, unlike the past, one crucial phenomenon any notion of the educated public today would have to cope with is our multi-ethnic societies. But, this apart, MacIntyre would need to persuade people today that returning to the pre-modernist, pre-liberal past is worth it. That giving up what a growing number of people in today's world take to be the benefits of modern liberal-democracy, the various freedoms and the democratic form of life, is a good idea.

Finally, Habermas creates embarrassment for MacIntyre's account of things which could explain why he is unacknowledged and unmentioned in MacIntyre's work. For Habermas has described how educated publics, with characteristics similar in many ways to the bourgeois educated public of the Scottish Enlightenment, sprung up also in the other countries of 17th and 18th century Europe, and has argued that these publics are *characteristic products of the Enlightenment* arising from, not reacting against, the conditions of modernity, incorporating liberal-democratic principles and values, and engaged in rational-critical discourse! Indeed Habermas cites Kant, the arch-villain in AV, as the philoso-

pher who, originally, gave this idea of a bourgeois educated public 'its theoretically fully developed form'.[84] One clear consequence of Habermas's work for MacIntyre is that his central tenet that an educated public cannot be produced under modernist conditions turns out to be false. For another, MacIntyre's account of the general criteria for the existence of such a public, which he argues for extensively and regards as universal, including his other major tenet that educated publics need central texts with acknowledged authority of the kind he describes for their existence, collapses also. Moreover, Habermas does not make MacIntyre's error of seeking models of educated publics from the past; indeed his view is quite the opposite, the bourgeois public sphere is, he comments very pointedly, 'a category that is typical of an epoch. It cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that "civil society" (*burgeliche Gesellschaft*) originating in the European High Middle Ages; nor can it be transferred, ideal typically generalised, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations.'[85]

The solution in TRV evidently reflects MacIntyre's appreciation of the difficulties with his proposal to take the world back to pre-modern times. It tacitly acknowledges the contemporary conditions and, abandoning the thesis about pockets of resistance in AV and galvanised by his thesis in JR that different coherent accounts of justice and rationality are possible, it tries to rationalise the plurality of today's world into the distinctive intellectual traditions that constitute it. The conclusion that these traditions must, for the sake of overall coherence, resolve themselves into self-enclosed competing communities of discourse has the advantage of neatness and simplicity but meets with all the difficulties, and possibly others too, enumerated above.

It seems to me, on the other hand, that MacIntyre's call for a return to the notion of a public and, more specifically, of an educated public, is on the right track. The merit of his EP essay is that it brings the case for such a public home more forcefully, perhaps, than at any other time since Dewey. In this sense, his position is also, undoubtedly, strengthened by the current climate of dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment notion of autonomous rationality which he shares with post-Nietzscheans and social democrats alike. The post-Nietzscheans oppose the very idea of a public so there is no alternative there for anyone who would support it but not in MacIntyre's form. Post-Nietzscheans value *paralogy* as against consensus, and MacIntyre is probably right here in criticising them for having, owing to their pessimism with modernity, abandoned rationality altogether too quickly. At the same time, the dystopias into which writers like Foucault have painted the normalizing discourse of consensus; the danger of a panopticon society, cannot be ignored. But it seems to me that a panopticon, perhaps in the shape of his new university, is what MacIntyre wants to construct his educated public around. Social democrats, on the other hand, who think that the project of restoring an educated public is fundamentally right, must look elsewhere for their inspiration, and that elsewhere seems to be the Dewey\Habermas democratic tradition which MacIntyre simply ignores.

NOTES

[1] Alasdair MacIntyre: 1981, *After Virtue*; (London, Duckworth).
[2] ibid., p. vii.
[3] Alasdair MacIntyre: 1987, The Idea of an Educated Public, in Graham Haydon (ed.) *Education and Values*, (London, Institute of Education, University of London).
[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1988, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, (London, Duckworth).
[5] ibid., p. ix.
[6] Alasdair MacIntyre: 1990, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, (London, Duckworth).
[7] ibid., p. 8.
[8] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 22.
[9] ibid., p. 29.
[10] ibid., p. 29.
[11] ibid., p. 31.
[12] ibid., p. 30.
[13] ibid., p. 30.
[14] ibid., p. 32.
[15] ibid., p. 104.
[16] ibid., p. viii.
[17] ibid., p. 104.
[18] ibid., p. iii.
[19] ibid., p. iii.
[20] Dewey's most famous contribution to the subject was, of course, *The Public and its Problems*, (Chicago, The Swallow Press, 1927), while Habermas wrote *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Oxford, Polity Press, 1989, first pub. 1962)
[21] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 10.
[22] *Marx, Engels, Lenin, On Historical Materialism* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1976)
[23] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 175.
[24] ibid., p. 175.
[25] ibid., pp. 175–176.
[26] John Dewey: 1938, *Experience and Education* (New York, Macmillan)
[27] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 176.
[28] ibid., p. 178.
[29] ibid., p. 180.
[30] ibid., p. 182.
[31] ibid., p. 182.
[32] ibid., p. 182.
[33] ibid., p. 245.
[34] John Dewey, 1966, orig. 1916, *Democracy and Education* (New York, Macmillan) p. 6.
[35] ibid.
[36] MacIntyre, *The Idea of an Educated Public*, p. 16
[37] ibid., p. 18.
[38] ibid., p. 24.
[39] ibid., p. 26.
[40] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 217.
[41] MacIntyre, *The Idea of an Educated Public*, p. 26.
[42] ibid., p. 27.
[43] ibid., p. 27–28.
[44] ibid., p. 29.
[45] ibid., p. 30.
[46] ibid., p. 32.
[47] ibid., p. 18.
[48] ibid., p. 19.

[49] ibid., p. 19.
[50] ibid., p. 20.
[51] ibid., p. 21.
[52] ibid., p. 21.
[53] ibid., p. 20.
[54] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 248.
[55] ibid., p. 250.
[56] ibid., p. 248.
[57] MacIntyre, *The Idea of an Educated Public*, p. 34.
[58] ibid., p. 35.
[59] ibid., p. 223.
[60] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 60.
[61] ibid., pp. 230–231.
[62] ibid., p. 231.
[63] ibid., pp. 232–233.
[64] ibid., p. 233.
[65] ibid., p. 61.
[66] ibid., p. 63.
[67] ibid., p. 128.
[68] ibid., p. 84.
[69] ibid., p. 131.
[70] ibid., pp. 128–129.
[71] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 200.
[72] ibid., p. 201.
[73] Richard Rorty, On Ethnocentrism – a Reply to Clifford Geertz, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 1986, 525–534, p. 530.
[74] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 197.
[75] ibid., p. 217.
[76] Susan Mendus, All the King's Horses and all the King's Men: justifying higher education, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. **26**, No. 2, 1992, 173–182.
[77] Walter Feinberg, The Public Responsibility for Public Education, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. **25**, No. 1, 1991, 17–26.
[78] Mendus, All the King's Horses, p. 176.
[79] ibid., p. 176.
[80] ibid., p. 180.
[81] Feinberg, The Public Responsibility for Public Education, p. 20
[82] ibid., p. 20.
[83] ibid., p. 21.
[84] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 102.
[85] ibid., p. xvii.