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Book Review : Whose Justice? Which Rationality? By Alasdair MacIntyre

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By
Dr. Muhammad Legenhausen

Introduction

This is an important book, a book with which Muslims, in particular, need to become acquainted. The author, Alasdair MacIntyre, is one of the most profound and most controversial moralists and social thinkers of our time. The book, *whose Justice? Which Rationality? Is* not an easy work it requires some familiarity with various details of Western culture, in particular its moral and political philosophies.

So, rather than merely summarize the work, I will try to show why I think it is important for Muslim thinkers to read and criticize it. For this purpose I begin with a general discussion of the work's importance in the context of MacIntyre's other writings, and then turn to two of the major topics discussed in the work, relativism and liberalism. Finally, I offer some humble criticisms of my own, and suggestions for further research.

Of all those who have stood against the currents of modernism, Alasdair MacIntyre stands out as the philosopher who has offered the most profound critique. His *After Virtue,* which was first published in 1981, sent shock waves through the Western intellectual world. [1] He committed what for many was an unforgivable sin when he claimed that the project of the Enlightenment period of European thought was a failure.

This rejection of modernist thinking was focused upon moral philosophy, but it attracted the attention of a readership much wider than what could be expected for a book in ethics.

There were even articles in the popular press about the revival of Aristotelian thought initiated by MacIntyre's work, and in the article on the history of twentieth century Anglo–American Ethics in the

Encyclopedia of Ethics, Alan Donagan predicts that MacIntyre's attention to Thomistic thought will influence the philosophical work to be done in the Twenty first century.[2]

MacIntyre's work has also sparked controversy among political theorists and social critics, as well as professional philosophers.[3] Conferences have been convened to discuss his ideas, critical studies of his work have been compiled, and several of his books and articles have been translated into foreign languages.

In the field of ethics, MacIntyre has spawned a revival of interest in Aristotelian ethics with such force that it is now generally recognized as a serious rival to the two major strands of moral philosophy that have been dominant in the West since the Enlightenment utilitarianism and Kantianism. Numerous books and articles have been written since the publication of *After Virtue* proclaiming the advantages of an Aristotelian virtue ethics over utilitarian consequentialism and Kantian deontology.

In political theory, there has been a steady stream of writings in which liberalism is defended against MacIntyre's criticisms, or those criticisms are elaborated, often in the form of a communitarian theory which MacIntyre himself has repudiated.[4]

In religious thought, MacIntyre's work has prompted a renewed interest in Neo-Thomism, especially as it is related to ethics and social political thought.

MacIntyre's emphasis on the importance of history has also led to heated discussions in which he has often been accused of being a relativist. It was largely in response to this sort of misunderstanding which followed the publication of *After Virtue* that MacIntyre was motivated to write the sequel, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre's rejections of historicism and relativism in this latter work have also contributed to the depth of the discussions of these issues.

So, one reason for reading MacIntyre is because his work has been tremendously influential, even among those who disagree with his positions. Another reason would be interest in the topics he discusses: history, politics, ethics, religion, epistemology, philosophy in general and the relations among them. For Muslims, however, there are additional reasons to read MacIntyre.

One of the most important issues in Islamic social and political thought since the nineteenth century has been the confrontation of traditional Muslim societies with European modernism, and one of the most important facets of modernism about which Muslim thinkers are concerned is that of political liberalism. Muslims who argue that liberal ideals and institutions are compatible with Islam are usually classified as modernists.

At the other extreme are those who would claim that liberal and Islamic thought agree on nothing. The vast majority of Muslim intellectuals and scholars, however, fall somewhere between these extremes. The interesting discussion in contemporary Muslim social thought is not over whether modernists or conservatives hold a more defensible position, but what aspects of liberal thought may be

accommodated and what aspects must be rejected.

MacIntyre's writings are interesting in this context because, like many Muslims, he is very strongly opposed to many aspects of modernism and liberalism for what turn out to be ultimately religious reasons. Furthermore, the philosophical perspective he seeks to defend, a form of Neo Thomism with a strong emphasis on Aristotle, is more similar to the philosophical perspective of traditional Islamic thought than are any of the other major tendencies to be found among contemporary Western philosophers.

Of course, there remain important differences between the attitudes of Muslims and those expressed by MacIntyre, to be discussed below, but regardless of our differences, the thought of the most profound critic of modernism and liberalism in the West should be of great interest to those who feel a need to resist the imposition of modernist and liberal thought on Muslim societies, such as those inspired by the warnings of the Grand Leader of the Islamic Revolution against the `cultural invasion.'

Muslim liberals who await a repetition of the European Enlightenment in Islamic culture would also be well advised to read MacIntyre, who has declared the Enlightenment project to be a failure and ultimately incoherent.

Perhaps if Muslim modernists would read MacIntyre they would become more critical of the claims made on behalf of liberalism, and would come to recognize the need to examine the intellectual history of their own traditions, as well as those of the West, to find the way forward. Perhaps MacIntyre's books can serve as a kind of vaccination against the infatuation with Western culture which Persians call *gharbzadigi.*

After Virtue

The book which initially provoked the great storm of controversy was *After Virtue,* and in order to understand the true significance of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* One must understand something about the earlier work.

After Virtue begins with the disquieting suggestion that moral discourse in the West has lost its meaning, that it serves as a disguise for the expression of preferences, attempts to gain power, emotions and attitudes, but that it has ceased to have any relation to what is truly good or right.

MacIntyre pins responsibility for the collapse of Western ethics on the Enlightenment. Much of the book goes on to criticize various aspect of Enlightenment thought in Hume, Kant, the Utilitarian's, the emotivists, and in contemporary liberal political philosophy, especially as elaborated by John Rawls. 55

MacIntyre sees only two ways to pass beyond the errors of modernism and liberalism: either we must accept a Nietzschean nihilism or we must return to an Aristotelian ethics. However, the Aristotelian alternative is not a simple return to Greek or medieval systems of thought. For the Enlightenment

criticisms of scholasticism to be successfully answered, the return must be to a reformed Aristotelianism consonant with modern science.

This means that the *telos* or end of man is not to be understood as determined by biology, rather it is to be fathomed by reflection on history, and the human practices and traditions that have evolved over the course of history. The second half of *After Virtue* consists in MacIntyre's elaboration of this historically grounded Aristotelianism and its development as a theory of the virtues.

Relativism

Like the Nietzschean critics of the arrogance of the Enlightenment, MacIntyre accepts that there is no absolute standpoint from which we can arrive at absolute moral truths. Each of us must view the world from his own position in history and society. It is this admission that led many critics of *After Virtue* to accuse him of relativism or historicism, and it is largely in response to this criticism that *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Was written.

Unlike the Nietzscheans, or *genealogists* as MacIntyre refers [6] to those often called post‐ *modernists,* MacIntyre does not accept the claim that because we are bound to our finite perspectives conditioned by history and social position, we are barred from certainty or absolute truth.

Rather, he holds that man has the ability to understand rival perspectives even when one cannot be translated into the idiom of the other. On the basis of this understanding, rational evaluation and judgment can be made with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of the rival world views and ideologies.

MacIntyre extends this discussion in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Beyond ethics, which was the focus of his attention in *After Virtue,* to the very principles of rationality, thus bringing the insights of his ethical thought to bear on epistemology.

There are two major themes developed in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?:* first, there is a continuation of the critique of liberalism found in *After Virtue* coupled with an affirmation of a religious perspective and second, there is a rejection of relativism coupled with an insistence on the significance of historical considerations for the adjudication of disputes across traditions.

When two traditions of thought are so different that what is considered self‐evident or obvious in one tradition is considered dubious or incomprehensible in the other, the very principles of reason come under question. In contemporary Western thought, what are often considered to be principles of reason are those which have proven indispensable to the natural sciences and mathematics.

If one wants to judge whether this view of rationality is correct or that, for example, found in the works of Muslim philosophers, one must be very careful to avoid begging the question by using the very principles in one's evaluation that are under dispute. Relativists have considered such controversies to be

irresolvable.

They claim that we are stuck inside our own world views, unable to make judgments on any of them. MacIntyre distinguishes two forms of relativism, which he terms relativist and perspectivalist. The relativist claims that there can be no rationality as such, but only rationality relative to the standards of some particular tradition.

The perspectivalist claims that the central beliefs of a tradition are not to be considered as true or false, but as providing different, complementary perspectives for envisaging the realities about which they speak to us. MacIntyre argues that both the relativist and the perspectivalist are wrong. They are wrong because they fail to admit the absolute timeless character of the truth, and would replace truth by what is often called warranted assertibility.

Instead of truth, they hold that the best we can attain is the right or warrant to assert various statements in various circumstances. Macintyre's solution to the problem of how to reach absolute truth from a historically limited position is that attention to history itself may reveal the superiority of one tradition over another with respect to a given topic.

To have passed through an epistemological crisis successfully enables the adherents of a tradition of enquiry to rewrite its history in a more insightful way and such a history of a particular tradition provides not only a way of identifying the continuities in virtue of which that tradition of enquiry has survived and flourished as one and the same tradition.

But also of identifying more accurately that structure of justification which underpins whatever claims to truth are made within it, claims which are more and other than claims to warranted assertibility.[7] The concept of warranted assertibility always has application only at some particular time and place in respect of standards then prevailing at some particular stage in the development of a tradition of enquiry.

And a claim that such and such is warrantedly assertible always, therefore, has to make implicit or explicit references to such times and places. The concept of truth, however, is timeless. [8]8

MacIntyre argues that since a tradition can fail to pull through an epistemological crisis on its own standards, the relativist is wrong if he thinks that each tradition must always vindicate itself. MacIntyre further argues that there are cases of cultural encounter in which one must come to admit the superiority of an alien culture in some regard, because it explains why the crisis occurred and does not suffer from the same defects present in one's own culture.

It is in this way that the people of Rome could come to accept Christianity, and the people of Iran, Islam. Each people saw that their own traditions had reached a point of crisis, a point at which further progress could only be made by the adoption of a new religion. The relativist claims that there is no way in which a tradition can enter into rational debate with another, "But if this were so, then there could be no good reason to give one's allegiance to the standpoint of any one tradition rather to that of any other.[9]

To the contrary, MacIntyre claims that the question of which tradition to which one is to give one's allegiance is far from arbitrary, and the intellectual struggle of all those who have changed their minds about the correctness of an intellectual or spirit" tradition is more than ample evidence that the question, "Which side are you on?" is one which requires rational evaluation, however much other factors may come into play.

Perhaps MacIntyre is reflecting here on his own brief membership in the Communist Party and subsequent rejection of Marxism and conversion to Catholicism. One who adopts an intellectual position must always ask himself if it can adequately respond to criticism, criticism which can mount to produce what may be termed an epistemological crisis. "It is in respect of their adequacy or inadequacy in their responses to epistemological crises that traditions are vindicated or fail to be vindicated."[10]

MacIntyre also argues that the position of the relativist is self-defeating. The relativist pretends to issue his challenge from a neutral ground where different traditions may be compared and truth may be proclaimed relative to each of them. But this is as much a claim to absolute truth as any other.

This argument and others similar to it which are to be found in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Have provoked penetrating criticism. John Haldane has argued that one need not assume that there is some neutral ground from which to issue the relativist claim. [11] Within an intellectual tradition, one may observe that there are other incommensurable traditions and decide that relativism best explains this.

MacIntyre accepts Haldane's point, admitting that the case against relativism in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Needs to be amended at the same time, 'he points out that within every major intellectual tradition, various claims are presented about morals and rationality as absolutely true. The problem is then raised as to how this anti-relativistic commitment to truth can coexist with the recognition of rival intellectual traditions with their different standards of rationality and morality.

MacIntyre's solution is that common standards are to be sought, even where none exist, by dialectical interchange between the rival viewpoints. One tradition of inquiry will be in a position to uphold the truth of its claims against rivals in which those claims are not recognized when it develops the intellectual apparatus to explain the rival viewpoint, and why the disagreement has arisen, and why the rival is incorrect.

In other words, through intellectual conflict between traditions, a tradition can vindicate itself only when it can enrich its own conceptual resources sufficiently to explain the errors of its rivals. This kind of conflict and progress is only possible when there is a commitment to finding the truth.

With relativism there can be no intellectual advancement, because there is no attempt made to adjudicate among different theoretical viewpoints, and without the attempt to reach a more comprehensive position in which truth and falsity can be distinguished, traditions cannot evolve rationally, nor can they maintain their previous truth claims.

MacIntyre sees relativism as tempting those who despair of intellectual advancement, and for the sake of intellectual advancement, he sees it as a temptation that must be avoided.

MacIntyre dismisses the perspectivist position with the rebuff, “theirs is not so much a conclusion about truth as exclusion from it and thereby from rational debate.”12 The perspectivalist, like the reductive religious pluralist, states that rival traditions provide different views of the same reality, and none can be considered absolutely true or false.

MacIntyre objects that the traditions really do conflict with one another, and the fact that they are rivals itself bears testimony to their substantive disagreements over what is true and false. The claim that there is no ultimate truth of the matter is really just a way of avoiding the work that needs to be done in order to determine exactly where and in what respects in each of the rival traditions.

The truth lies, and when the differences in the rivals is so deep that the very principles of rationality are called into question, the rivalry produces an epistemological crisis, but even here, the need and duty to provide a rational evaluation of the rivals remains.

MacIntyre contends that epistemological crisis occurs when different traditions with different languages confront one another. Those who learn to think in both languages come to the understanding that there are things in one language for which the other does not have the expressive resources, and thereby they discover a flaw in the deficient tradition.

In this way he shows how rational evaluation of different traditions is possible, although this evaluation itself must begin from within a specific tradition. His emphasis on the fact that the starting point of our inquiry is tradition‐bound is comparable to a common theme among writers in the hermeneutic tradition, such as Gadamer.

The fantasy of universal standards of reason to which all rational beings must submit by virtue of being rational has been abandoned. This separates MacIntyre from traditional writers, as Thomas McCarthy has observed, Even arguments like Alasdair MacIntyre's for the superiority of premodern traditions are not themselves traditional arguments but the traditionalistic arguments of hyperreflexive modems. 1313

What distinguishes MacIntyre from others who share his sensitivity to context dependency is his robust sense of the truth. The incommensurability of competing traditions, according to MacIntyre, is not as absolute as some have imagined.

Logic retains authority, even if its principles are disputed, and what is sought is truth, and although he rejects correspondence theories of truth that would pair judgments to facts (because he considers the concept of fact to be an invention of seventeenth‐century European thought), the theory of truth to which he gives his allegiance is still a correspondence theory. 14

In response to a sympathetic comparison between his position and views current among certain

philosophers of science, MacIntyre objects.

I had hoped that what I had said about truth in enquiry in Chapter 18 of **Whose Justice? Which Rationality?** Would have made it adequately clear that I regard any attempt to eliminate the notion of truth from that of enquiry as bound to fail. It is in part for this reason that I regard the Nietzschean tradition as always in danger of lapsing into fatal incoherence. [15]15

MacIntyre's solution to the problem of relativism is especially important for Muslims because it offers a way to break the deadlock between Muslim intellectuals who, over impressed with the intellectual traditions of the West, deny that Islam asserts any absolute truths that man is capable of grasping, and those `Mama' who insist on the self evidence of the fundamental troths of their own traditions.

Without seeing that such claims are ineffective against rival systems of thought in which there are profound differences about what, if anything is to be considered self‐evident. The solution MacIntyre offers is one in which there is hope that the absolute truths of Islam can be rationally defended against opponents as certain, but only by developing the Islamic intellectual traditions to the point that they are able to explain the successes as well as the failures of their rivals.

Liberalism

MacIntyre's disappointment with liberalism is more extensive and more profound than that of other Western critics more extensive because it applies to the political theories of both the left and the right, more profound because it traces the failings of liberalism to its origins in the Enlightenment, and traces the injustice of the modern nation‐state to its very essence.

As Ronald Beiner observes what makes MacIntyre unique is that for him the problem is not merely individualism or liberalism but modernity as such. Therefore he includes even Marxism within the scope of his critique.[16]

In some ways, MacIntyre's rejection of liberalism is similar to his rejection of relativism. Just as the relativist contradicts himself if he would proclaim the absolute truth of the proposition that there are no absolute truths, the liberal contradicts himself by proclaiming neutrality between all ideologies, when, in fact, liberalism itself is an ideology.

Liberalism is an intellectual tradition as ideological as any other, and it allows for scholarly inquiry only after initiation into accepted modes of appraisal which deny the worth of serious challenges to liberalism itself.

Just as Haldane argued that the relativist need not claim that relativism is absolutely true, independent of any tradition, defenders of liberalism have responded to MacIntyre's criticism of liberalism by admitting that liberalism is an ideology, that it is not absolutely neutral. [17]17

Whose Justice? Which Rationality? MacIntyre responds that liberalism is a defective and ultimately incoherent ideology. His insight into the defects of liberalism is one which was first expressed in his first book, *Marxism an Interpretation,* which was written when he was only twenty three years old.

In the revised edition of this work MacIntyre emphasizes the need for an ideology on the scale of Christianity or Marxism that can offer an interpretation of human existence by means of which people can situate themselves in the world and direct their actions to ends that transcend their own immediate situations. He argues that liberalism is an ideology that cannot function effectively as such.

The axis about which the failure of liberalism turns is its assertion of the fact/value gap.[18] Liberalism fails as an ideology because it does not permit one to discover one's own identity and appropriate ends by gaining knowledge of nature and society, or by understanding human existence in relation to al-Haqq, the Exalted.

In liberalism, all values are personal except the value of respecting personal values, and this is simply not sufficient to orient one's life. Modernism inhibits orientation because from the point of view of modern liberalism, religious traditions seem irrational.

The standards of rationality to which the religious traditions of enquiry appeal are so different from those which dominate the natural and social sciences in the West today that traditional and modernist ways of thinking have become nearly mutually incomprehensible.

Nevertheless, a tradition may come to be rationally accepted by those who live within the horizons of Western liberal culture once they come to recognize themselves as imprisoned by a set of beliefs which lack justification in precisely the same way and to the same extent as do the positions which they reject but also to understand themselves as hitherto deprived of what tradition affords, as persons in part constituted as what they are up to this point by an absence, by what is from the standpoint of traditions an impoverishment. [19]

The impoverishment of which MacIntyre speaks here is one which Islam excels at eradicating. What the individual posited by liberal theory lacks is an effective ideology to provide understanding and purpose on the basis of which communities can be established.

Modern liberal thinkers imagine themselves to be independent, but MacIntyre charges that from an Aristotelian point of view they have refused to learn or have been unable to learn that “one cannot think for oneself if one thinks entirely by oneself,” and that it is only by participation in rational practice-based community that one becomes truly rational.

MacIntyre admits that this kind of recognition amounts to a sort of conversion. Individuals at the point of conversion will invite a tradition of enquiry to furnish them with a kind of self knowledge which they have not as yet possessed by first providing them with an awareness of the specific character of their own incoherence and then accounting for the particular character of this incoherence by its metaphysical,

moral, and political scheme of classification and explanation.

The catalogs of virtues and vices, the norms of conformity and deviance, the accounts of educational success and failure, the narratives of possible types of human life which each tradition has elaborated in its own terms, all the invite the individual educated into self-knowledge of his or her own incoherence to acknowledge in which of these rival modes of moral understanding he or she finds him or herself most adequately explained and accounted for. 2020

Not only does MacIntvre explain how someone in a liberal society may evolve to the point of being able to convert to a religious tradition, his astute observations regarding the logic of liberal thought also helps to illuminate the West's failure to understand the current Islamic movement and its hostility towards it. The liberal's moral analysis is one which begins by abstracting the claims to be debated from their contexts in tradition, and then proceeds with an evaluation of rational justifiability which is supposed to convince any rational person.

The liberal fantasy of universal progress implies that the most rational standards are those which dominate the most recent trends of its own thought. To the extent that Muslims are unwilling to adopt the standards of modernism, they are thought to be irrational. Islamic intellectual traditions are taken to be more or less the same as what the West progressed beyond when it abandoned medieval scholasticism.

The caricature of Islam drawn by the liberal West requires neglect of the particularities of character, history, and circumstance. This makes it impossible to engage in the kind of rational dialogue which could move through argumentative evaluation to the rational acceptance or rejection of a tradition. Thus, the kind of debate which is enforced in the public forums of enquiry in modern liberal culture for the most part effectively precludes the voices of tradition outside liberalism from being heard.

Materialistic consumerism is a direct result of the liberal's pretense of neutrality. Since all the citizens of the liberal state are supposed to be free to pursue their own happiness, and since despite their differences about what ultimate happiness is, the vast majority seem to be in agreement on the idea that its pursuit is aided by ever increasing acquisition and consumption, which goes by the euphemism of *economic development,*

It becomes nearly self evident that it is in the national interests of the liberal state to pursue economic development. 21 MacIntyre explains that those who adhere to the standpoint dominant in peculiarly modern societies recognize that acquisitiveness is a character trait indispensable to continuous and limitless economic growth, and one of their central beliefs is that continuous and limitless economic growth is a fundamental good.

That a systematically lower standard of living ought to be preferred to a systematically higher standard of living is a thought incompatible with either the economics or the politics of peculiarly modem societies. But a community which was guided by Aristotelian norms would not only have to view acquisitiveness as a vice but would have to set strict limits to growth insofar as that is necessary to preserve or enhance a

distribution of goods according to desert. 2222

From the Aristotelian point of view advocated by MacIntyre, the problem with the modern liberal state goes way beyond its worldliness. There is no way, MacIntyre insists, for those who rule in a modern state to avoid doing injustice.

Modern nation states which masquerade as embodiments of community are always to be resisted. The modem nation state, in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services, which is always about to, but never actually does, give its clients value for money, and on the other as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one's life on its behalf it is like being asked to die for the telephone company. To empower even the liberal state as a bearer of values always imperils those values.23

His criticism of the liberal state is so harsh that it could be mistaken for a form of anarchism was it not for the fact that he explicitly advises his readers to cooperate with the state by paying their taxes.

What sort of politics *does* MacIntyre advocate? MacIntyre suggests that the focus of the political life of an Aristotelian of the sort he lauds should be "the family, the neighborhood, the workplace, the parish, and the school, or clinic, communities within which the needs of the hungry and the homeless can be met."24

Are we then to leave the state to "the barbarians" mentioned at the close of *After Virtue?* 25And what are we to do about the hungey and homeless who live outside our parish? Is it not incumbent upon a religious society to take the reins of state power out of the hands of those who are driving it to ruin, even if the nation‗state of its own momentum will not readily change course?

A more realistic political Aristotelianism than the one advocated by MacIntyre would not shun the need to shoulder the burden of the modern state in full recognition of its deficiencies and in the hope that it could be transformed into something better. MacIntyre does not see this as a live option because he seems to be thinking of Europe and the U.S.

Whereas the prospects for anything better than liberal government are unpromising, because the major alternative there to liberalism is nationalism, and nationalism easily degrades into fascist rage we have witnessed in the attempt to exterminate the Muslims of Bosnia. Within Muslim societies, however, there is an alternative to both nationalism and liberalism which is not taken seriously by Western theorists?

MacIntyre's retreat to the local takes the punch out of his critique of liberalism. Liberals do not oppose local associations with substantive ideologies, values and purposes. Liberal political theory is a theory of ***government,*** not of local voluntary associations. If MacIntyre had announced at the start of his book that his quarrel with liberalism was over how local associations are to be organized, and not about government, it would not have attracted the attention it has.

Indeed, if one were to read *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* from the start with the assumption that the critique of liberalism was not to extend to liberal theories of government, much, of what MacIntyre says would not make any sense. Consider the passage quoted above in which limits to economic growth are advocated.

What is at issue here is how whole societies conduct their economic affairs, and no matter how large and thriving the private sector of any society is, the role of governments in directing the economic affairs of the societies they rule is undeniable. So, what MacIntyre is objecting to is the flaws of liberal governments and of liberal theories of how governments should conduct their affairs.
Here again, MacIntyre's work should be helpful for those engaged in the development of Islamic political theory. If we accept MacIntyre's critique of the modern form of nation state, the creation of Islamic republics cannot be the ultimate goal of Islamic political activity, but only an intermediary stage in a development leading to more perfectly Islamic forms of governance, culminating in the governance of the *Wali al_`Asr*(*ajtf*), may his emergence be hastened.

Religion

Muslims share a common cause with Western critics of liberalism, such as MacIntyre and others who have launched their criticisms from a religious standpoint. By examining this work it may even be discovered that this sort of criticism is more appropriate from an Islamic standpoint than from a Neo_Thomist one.

The alienation expressed by MacIntyre is a social one, but there are deeper forms of alienation, which from the religious point of view have their source in distance from God. The sort of community MacIntyre seeks is one whose rival paradigms are those of the Christian Church and the Muslim ummah. But the source of the cohesion of these communities is their harmony with the divine order.

If the methods of evaluation of rival traditions as outlined by MacIntyre are to be employed to compare Christendom and the ummah, it will be necessary to examine the ways in which the intellectual traditions within the two communities have responded and continue to formulate responses to the challenge of liberal modernism.

For his own part, MacIntyre concludes that the Thomistic synthesis of Augustinian and Aristotelian thought has been confirmed in its encounter with other traditions. But the analysis he offers is not specific to the defense of Catholicism, but rather may be used to support various forms of traditional thought against the secular liberal scientism which prevails in the West.

Indeed, a major flaw in all of MacIntyre's writings is that it fails to pay any attention to Islam at all. When MacIntyre compares competing traditions of liberal, Marxist and religious thought, the term religious can always be replaced by *Christian* without altering the intended meaning. [26]26

Prior to his conversion to Neo‑Thomism, which occurred some time between the writing of *After Virtue* and *whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre could be scathingly critical of Christianity, even if, at the very same time, appreciative of its strengths. 27

The weaknesses of Christianity to which he drew attention in his first book were its dogmatism and otherworldliness its inherent tendency to disown its own revolutionary vision, to circumscribe itself within the spiritual and to accommodate itself to the *status quo,* even if this meant tyranny Nothing in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Explains how these criticisms are to be answered.

Islam, on the other hand, has not disowned its revolutionary vision, nor has it had an episode comparable to Galileo's encounter with the Inquisition. This is not to deny that terrible injustices have been and continues to be perpetrated in the name of Islam, nor that fanatical intolerance has not marred doctrinal disputes among Muslims.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the dogmas accepted by Muslims have not prevented them from accepting the natural sciences or technology, nor from the adoption of Western social institutions when it has appeared (rightly or wrongly) rational to do so. It must also be admitted that the call for justice issued by Islam, particularly in its Shia version, retains its ability to inspire revolutionary fervour.

The hope for a just society in this world has not been abandoned by Muslims. Because it began as a political no less than spiritual movement, Muslims cannot deny that Islam demands them to seek justice in the here and now. Because of the priority of the spiritual, however, Islam is able to provide the moral basis and orientation lacking in secular ideologies.

MacIntyre's failure to answer his own criticisms of Christianity have left at least one‑Muslim reader with the impression that his work provides a better defense of Islam than it does for the Christianity he himself professes.

History

The review I have presented thus far of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* may give the false impression that the book consists of highly abstract discussions of such issues as relativism, liberalism, rationality and religious traditions. Such discussions are indeed to be found between the covers of this volume, but the bulk of the work is history.

The concepts of justice and practical rationality are examined through their historical developments in four traditions Aristotelian, Augustinian, Human and modern liberal. The book is divided into twenty chapters, the first of which is an introduction. There follow seven chapters on the evolution of the concepts of justice and practical rationality from the Homeric period, through Plato and culminating in Aristotle's conceptions of justice and practical rationality.

Next come three chapters on Augustine and the synthesis between Aristotelian and Augustinian thought

formulated by Aquinas. This is followed by five chapters on the Scottish Enlightenment, ending with a critique of Hume. There is only one chapter specifically devoted to modern liberalism, and then three more to draw conclusions.

MacIntyre contends that the concepts of justice and practical rationality must be studied through the examination of the traditions in which these concepts have emerged. But the history MacIntyre tells is not a mere recounting of what was said or written in the past; rather, it is a critical history in which triumphs and defeats are evaluated, and lessons drawn for contemporary thinking on the relevant issues.

The critique of liberalism, for example, is not confined to the chapter devoted specifically to this topic, but is a theme which recurs amidst historical discussions of earlier traditions of enquiry. As a result, the history of ideas recounted by MacIntyre is not a mere succession of doctrines espoused and then forgotten.

But it is a history of how ideas become influential, are misunderstood and are reformed and synthesized with others through an ongoing process of rational evaluation in which the very standards of rational evaluation themselves take part in the process.

It is here that MacIntyre may be misunderstood as advocating historicism, the view that reality is beyond the reach of the human intellect because the intellect is forever held captive to the prejudices and other shortcomings of its historical situation. This sort of historicism is said to result from subtracting the notion of Absolute Mind from Hegels philosophy and it is not uncommon among twentieth century philosophers.

Versions of it have been propounded by Dewey Rorty, Gadamer and Foucault. But MacIntyre explicitly rejects historicism in both its Hegelian and its more recent formulations. And here our discussion of the role of history in MacIntyre's work returns us to the rejection of relativism.

Contrary to the relativist historicists, he holds that it is precisely through the study of the history of rational debate that the timeless truth reveals itself, and furthermore, he claims that this approach to reality is advocated by Aquinas.

MacIntyre is aware that it will be objected that rational justification, according to both Aristotle and Aquinas, is a matter of deducibility from first principles, in the case of derived propositions, and of the self‑evidence of these first principles ‑as necessary truths.

MacIntyre responds that this objection fails to recognize the difference between rational justification within a science and the rational justification of the sciences. It is only the former sort of justification that proceeds by way of deduction and self‑evidence.

Rational justification within a perfected science is indeed a matter of demonstrating how derivative truths follow from the first truths of that particular science, in some types of case supplemented by additional

premises; and the justification of the principles of a subordinate science by some higher-order enquiry will be similarly demonstrative.28

As for the rational justification of the sciences, however, this method is inadequate, for here we face disagreement about what is self-evident. But in the face of this disagreement we are not to despair, for the intellect has the capacity for dialectical as well as deductive reasoning. The passage quoted above continues.

First principles themselves will be dialectically justifiable; their evidentness consists in their recognizability, in the light of such dialectic, as concerning what is the case per se, what attributes, for example, belong to the essential nature of what constitutes the fundamental subject matter of the science in question.

MacIntyre continues with the admission that there are some first-principles, such as the logical relations between wholes and parts that any rational being must find undeniable. But these alone will not be sufficient to provide the necessary basis for the deductive justification of the sciences.

The self-evident principles admitted by rival traditions of enquiry will not be sufficient to settle the disputes between them. For disputes at such a fundamental level there is no alternative but examination of the history of thought on the disputed subject, an appreciation of the insights to be gained from each of the rival modes of enquiry, and an attempt to find a place in one's own tradition for the truths formulated in the rival tradition.

In this way, we find suggestions in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* for a programme which would lead to the development of Islamic thought, and whose successful completion would result in the revival and vindication of its traditions of enquiry in the international marketplace of ideas Islamic centres of learning, God willing!

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory, 2nd edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). The translation of this work into Farsi by Mr. Shomali and Mr. Shahriari is near completion. A lengthy serialized review by the translators continues to appear in Ma'rifat. The translation of whose Justice? Which Rationality? Into Farsi is being undertaken by Mr. Mustafa Malikiyan.
2. Lawrence Becker, ed. Encyclopedia of Ethics (New York: Garland, 1992), p. 543
3. See Peter McMylor, Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity (London: Rutledge, 1994), and After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre, ed., John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).
4. Communitarians emphasize the importance of reference to one's community in accounts of the self, moral agency and practical reasoning; and they advocate a politics designed to nourish the community and its values at the expense of individual autonomy and liberal rights. More will be said about MacIntyre's rejection of communitarianism later in this review.
5. The most important defense of political liberalism in the twentieth century is Harvard professor John Rawls'. A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).
6. In his Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).
7. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? p. 169.

8. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? p. 363.
9. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? p. 366
10. Ibid.
11. See John Haldane, “MacIntyre's Thomist Revival: What Next?” in After MacIntyre, pp. 96–99, and MacIntyre's response in the same volume, pp. 294–297. Haldane is Director of the Center for Philosophy and Public Affairs at the University of St. Andrews.
12. Whose Justice? Which Rationality, p. 368.
13. Thomas McCarthy, “Philosophy and Critical Theory,” in David Couzens Hoy and Thomas McCarthy, Critical Theory (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 47. McCarthy is an expert in contemporary German philosophy and social thought at Northwestern University.
14. See Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, p. 356f.
15. After MacIntyre, p. 297 298. Here Madntyre is responding to the Hegel scholar, Robert Stern of the University of Sheffield.
16. Ronald Beiner, What's the Matter with Liberalism? (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 35. Beiner is a political philosopher at the University of Toronto.
17. See Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, Liberals and Communitarians, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
18. Alasdair MacIntyre, Marxism and Christianity (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 124.
19. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? p. 396.
20. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? p. 398.
21. For a critique of unrestrained development by the Muslim American scholar of tasawwuf, William Chittick, see his “Toward a Theology of Development,” Echo of Islam, October 1994, the Farsi translation of which by Narjess Javandel appeared in Marifat, No. 14, pp. 40–49.
22. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? p. 112.16. Ronald Beiner, What's the Matter with Liberalism? p. 164.
23. After MacIntyre, p. 303.
24. Interview with Alasdair MacIntyre in the American Philosopher, Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 151.
25. After Virtue, p. 263. There he writes, “What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time.”
26. MacIntyre admits his neglect of Islam, despite its importance, “not only for its own sake but also because of its large contribution to the Aristotelian tradition,” in the first chapter of nose Justice? Which Rationality? p. 11.
27. See Alasdair MacIntyre, Marxism and Christianity (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).
28. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? p. 173.

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