MACINTYRE ON TELEOLOGY, NARRATIVE, AND HUMAN FLOURISHING: TOWARDS A THOMISTIC NARRATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

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1. Introduction

Philosophers from all perspectives recognize Alasdair MacIntyre for having contributed for over more than a half century to the development of an account of the moral life understood as the teleological quest of an autobiographical dramatic narrative pursued for the sake of human flourishing.[1] From a more epistemological outlook, MacIntyre is both criticized and celebrated for his proposal that moral philosophy is inseparable from both the study of the history of philosophy and the history of moral and political life.[2] Moreover, MacIntyre has offered extensive dialectical engagement with his critics regarding the most apt perspective within the history of thought, action, and politics for offering an account of human flourishing while proposing that the privileged and singularly most apt perspective is found within the tradition of Aristotelian Thomism.[3]

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[1] See especially A. C. MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1981; 2nd ed. 1984; 3rd ed. 2007; hereafter *AV*; *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1988; hereafter *WJWR; Dependent Rational Animals,* Open Court, Chicago 1999; *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016.

[2] See especially A. C. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1990.

[3] In addition to *Three Rival Versions*, mentioned above, see also A. C. MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2009.

Despite the vast secondary literature on MacIntyre that has addressed both his entire project and particular features of it across the years, while he continued to develop his thought by means of influential scholarship, few have engaged MacIntyre's proposal by further developing the interwoven and intrinsically inseparable character of the principal components of his philosophical proposal: teleology, narrative, and human flourishing. Even fewer have done so by engaging the development of the unity among those components with the specific contribution of the Thomistic tradition to them and to their fundamental unity.[4] In fact most scholars view those components of MacIntyre's proposal as separable and potentially independent.[5] And few Thomists have attempted to re-read Aquinas in light of MacIntyre's proposal for extending that living tradition of enquiry.[6]

The lacuna in the literature especially regards the topic of narrative as constitutive of the moral life insofar as moral accountability entails autobiographical narrative self-understanding within the teleological horizon of the supreme good. When MacIntyre's scholarly readers engage his proposal regarding narrative, most merely address the extent to which narratives and

[4] For the earliest and perhaps most ambitious yet necessarily incomplete response to Alasdair MacIntyre from within Thomistic scholarship, see T. S. Hibbs, *Dialectic and Narrative in Aquinas: An Interpretation of the Summa Contra Gentiles*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1995. For an explicit rejection of the importance of the narrative unity of the human life in MacIntyre's thought, see Michael Fuller's surprising approach in *Making Sense of MacIntyre*, Routledge, London 1998, republished electronically in 2018, where he writes that MacIntyre's narrative unity can be «disregarded as something of a red herring» (p. 118) after attempting to justify his omitting all mention of MacIntyre's narrative unity (p. 117). See T. D. D'Andrea's monumental overview in *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre,* Routledge, London 2006, for a more balanced example of an exposition of MacIntyre on narrative and the Thomistic tradition which, however, omits mention of the Thomistic anthropology of narrative, despite addressing the narrative quest inherent to the Christian myth as complementing MacIntyre's proposal of a narrative quest. See especially pp. 261-262.

[5] Matthew Sinnicks with his perceptive review and succinct critical engagement of MacIntyre is a notable exception. See M. Sinnicks, *Review of 'Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity'*, «Business Ethics Quarterly», 28/1 (2018), pp. 106-109.

[6] For a significant effort to apply MacIntyre's narrative theory to Aquinas, see: P. Hall, *Narrative and Natural Law: An Interpretation of Thomistic Ethics*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1994. Christopher Lutz's prolific and insightful work offers a strong defense of the Aristotelian Thomism of MacIntyre, in contrast with those that would read him as a relativist on account of his emphasis on the role of tradition in achieving moral knowledge and the inseparability of history and philosophy. Although Lutz offers powerful arguments that MacIntyre's critical engagement with other Thomists reflects a superior understanding of the tradition, nonetheless, one does not find in his works much MacIntyrean reflection with Aquinas to advance his philosophical account, for instance, of the narrative structure of the moral life, See especially, C. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2004.

myths aid the moral agent to configure his own practical rationality through the influence of history, community, and tradition, but not insofar as one's own life is constructed within the agent's own intentionality as a story of which he is both author and protagonist. Even fewer have addressed the extent to which the living of a dramatic narrative is a feature of moral accountability, specific to human nature, and therefore an essential component of human flourishing.[7] This essay offers a brief analysis of those components (teleology, narrative, and flourishing) while taking into account MacIntyre's development of them. It concludes with a Thomistic proposal for a robust narrative anthropology crafted to constructively engage MacIntyre's proposal from the perspective of Aquinas' anthropology and ethics.

2. MacIntyre on Teleology, Narrative, and Human Flourishing

Especially since the publication of *After Virtue*, teleology has been a central, contested, and progressively developing component of MacIntyre's contribution to moral philosophy. In *After Virtue*, with examples like those of the timepiece and the ship captain,[8] MacIntyre offered Neo-Aristotelian approaches to overcoming the "is" – "ought" problem that relied upon the evaluative expectations of plain persons for the proper functioning of machines and of those engaged in established social roles.[9] After MacIntyre's ninetieth birthday, as we approach *After Virtue*'s fortieth anniversary, the entirety of his best known work can and should be seen as a defense of Aristotelian human flourishing. It is flourishing understood as embodied by humans engaged in a life

[7] Even the more perceptive critics and commentators of MacIntyre, like Christopher Lutz (see for instance: Lutz's *Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre*, in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ISSN 2161-0002), primarily address narrative in the former sense of giving meaning but not in the latter sense of giving shape and structure to one's own moral reasoning, on MacIntyre's account «human life as enacted dramatic narrative» (A. C. MacIntyre, *Can Medicine Dispense with a Theological Perspective on Human Nature?*, in T. Engelhardt, *Knowledge, Value, and Belief. The Foundations of Ethics and Its Relationship to Science*, Volume II, The Hastings Center, Hastings-on-Hudson (NY) 1977, pp. 25-43, 133). Richard Kraut, in an otherwise exceptionally insightful review, seems to miss the role of the accomplished lived story of one's whole life in determining the goodness of one's individual actions. And perhaps for this reason, he does not notice to what extent, on MacIntyre's terms, living well by actualizing one's natural powers is good for oneself. See R. Kraut, *Review of 'Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning and Narrative'*, «Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews», 2018.01.17, https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/ethics-in-the-conflicts-of-modernity-an-essay-on-desire-practical-reasoning-and-narrative/, accessed on June 10, 2019. Notice especially Kraut's concluding question directed at MacIntyre: «A larger question looms: how is being a good human being good for a human being?».

[8] *AV*, pp. 57-58.

[9] For MacIntyre's earliest work on the so called "Hume's Law" see *Ought* and *Some More About Ought*, in *Against the Self Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1978.

of virtue whereby they develop themselves in accord with their own being by actualizing their potency. Nonetheless, in the first two editions of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre famously rejected what he called "metaphysical biology" while emphasizing the social and tradition embedded rationality of virtues within a practice-based community. He therefore precluded his reader from concluding that the teleological pursuit of human life proposed by *After Virtue* constitutes a quest to live according to nature, as understood, for instance, by Aristotle himself.[10]

Nevertheless, since 1981, with the first edition of *After Virtue,* MacIntyre has continued to re-elaborate and develop his anti-liberal Neo-Aristotelian proposal to include an ever richer and more natural teleology. Along with MacIntyre's *Prologue* to the third edition of *After Virtue*, at least three of his more recent books mark significant moments that need to be taken into account to appreciate the development of his thought regarding the determination of human flourishing: 1) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 2) *Dependent Rational Animals* and 3) *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*. With each of these works, MacIntyre took important and often underappreciated steps,[11] to advance the claim that the teleology that directs and determines human flourishing is natural.

In 1988 with *Whose Justice*, he ingeniously argued for the epistemic perspective of a living tradition of thought to propagate and promote an Aristotelian practical rationality. According to MacIntyre, this tradition is found in Augustinian Thomism with its communities of virtue and recognized authorities in areas of both faith and reason.[12] By explicitly articulating his preferred form of Neo-Aristotelianism as Thomistic, with *Whose Justice?*, MacIntyre indicated the supposition, if not presupposition, of an inherent and underlying nature, determinative of teleology as the measure of human flourishing. In the chapter entitled *Aquinas on Practical Rationality and Justice*, MacIntyre dialectically develops Aquinas' understanding of the purpose of human life in accord with nature while critically engaging other Thomists.[13]

[10] For MacIntyre's rejection of "metaphysical biology", see especially *AV*, p. 162 (and also p. 58 for some further context). Below I will address MacIntyre's subsequent multilevel retraction of his rejection of "metaphysical biology".

[11] See for instance, M. Nussbaum, *Recoiling from Reason*, «The New York Review of Books», Dec. 7 (1989), pp. 36-41, republished in *Philosophical Interventions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, pp. 53-68.

[12] «There is no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing, evaluating, accepting, and rejecting reasoned argument apart from that which is provided by some particular tradition or other», *WJWR*, p. 350.

[13] See, for instance, *WJWR*, p. 192: «That completion will include the perfecting of the human body … everyone has as the true end of their nature, that for the sake of which they move toward all other goods in the way that they do…. In their present state they often do not recognize, what nonetheless they possess all the means for recognizing, if only they

Ten years later, in 1999, with *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre explicitly retracted his effort in *After Virtue* «to give an account of the place of the virtues, understood as Aristotle had understood them, within social practices, the lives of individuals and the lives of communities while making that account independent of what I called Aristotle's 'metaphysical biology'.»[14] After nearly two decades of dialectical engagement with commentators and critics of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre realized that, while his teleological account of human flourishing depends upon one's perspective within a mode of enquiry, that account is also most robustly rooted in the objective determination specified by the substantial form of natural kind, that is, human nature. With *Dependent Rational Animals*, more than twenty years after publishing *After Virtue's* precursor, *A Short History of Ethics*,[15] MacIntyre expressed his realization of the importance of the human bodily condition. He especially emphasized those virtues of mutually acknowledged dependence that, while being established in historically dynamic relationships, also point to MacIntyre's discovery of the extent to which Aquinas had modified Aristotle's understanding of the virtues in order to take into account, more deeply, human vulnerability.[16]

In 2007, MacIntyre offered a new *Prologue* to the third edition of *After Virtue* whereby he extended his appreciation for the metaphysical and biological roots of human flourishing already mentioned in *Dependent Rational Animals*. MacIntyre's comments regarding the development of his own understanding of his intellectual project are doubly important for appreciating the full depth of the interconnection between teleology, narrative, and flourishing, within his defense of the Thomistic tradition as the best philosophical perspective for advancing a viable account of morality. Indeed, MacIntyre first comments on his own relationship to Aristotle and Aquinas by referring that when he wrote *After Virtue,* although he had just become an Aristotelian, he was not yet a Thomist, as evidenced by his account of Aquinas at the end of chapter 13. MacIntyre adds:

> I became a Thomist after writing *After Virtue* in part because I became convinced that Aquinas was in some respects a better Aristotelian than Aristotle, that not only was he an excellent interpreter of Aristotle's texts, but that he had been able to extend and deepen both Aristotle's metaphysical and his moral enquiries.[17]

Then, MacIntyre addresses the issue of the metaphysics of human nature and biology in their relationship to human flourishing. Here, too, it is worth quoting MacIntyre's words because of their importance for appreciating the devel-

would attend to them, that in being moved by a love for their own good, they are being moved by a love of and desire for God».

[14] A. C. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, cit., p. x.

[15] A. C. MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, Macmillan, New York 1966.

[16] A. C. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, cit., p. xi.

[17] *Ibidem*, p. x.

opment of his understanding of the role of nature in his account of teleology, narrative and human flourishing.

> In *After Virtue* I had tried to present the case for a broadly Aristotelian account of the virtues without making use of or appeal to what I called Aristotle's metaphysical biology. And I was of course right in rejecting most of that biology. But I had now learned from Aquinas that my attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding. It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do. So I discovered that I had, without realizing it, presupposed the truth of something very close to the account of the good that Aquinas gives....[18]

MacIntyre's development of his account of morality maintains continuity throughout his work by weaving together teleology, narrative, and flourishing. However now, with the third edition of *After* Virtue and with his deeper understanding of Aristotelian Thomistic metaphysical anthropology, he also comes to realize explicitly that the practices embedded in the customs and narratives of communities with their epistemic traditions require a deeper bedrock for the determination of human perfection.[19] Human nature, with its inherent potency for perfection, specifies the capabilities for human actualization: that is, the content, configuration, and consistency of flourishing. While not offering a neutral, impartial, or objective epistemic perspective, that deeper bedrock does offer a reference point for human reason. For MacIntyre, human reason is always bound by its perspective of community, history, and tradition, and is therefore constantly challenged to dialectically critique and provisionally discern among those perspectives,[20] at least for those who live at the critical junction between perspectives, especially as masters of their own tradition and therefore qualified to expertly engage rival modes of moral enquiry.[21]

[18] *AV*, p. xi.

[19] Regarding the independence of a truth understood as the measure of one's tradition, see: *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, cit., pp. 201-202.

[20] Regarding the continual epistemic demand to give an account for oneself, at least within one's own community, see: *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, cit., p. 197: «So my identity as one and the same person requires me on occasion to make intelligible to myself and to others within my communities what it was that I was doing in behaving as I did on some particular occasion and to be prepared at any future time to re-evaluate my actions in the light of the judgments proposed by others.» And regarding the possibility for error and correction as manifestation of the objectivity of the understood truth (p. 200): «It is only insofar as someone satisfies the conditions for rendering him or herself vulnerable to dialectical refutation that that person can come to know whether and what he or she knows».

[21] Regarding the role of experts within communities and their responsibilities to vivify

All along, but without fully realizing it, MacIntyre was more of a Thomist than he appeared, and perhaps more so than he appreciated or would want to give himself credit. Four features of his early work that continue throughout his entire oeuvre manifest his deeply Thomistic inclinations.

1) His effort to demonstrate the inherent rationality of the morally good life in the face of the quandaries of moral dilemmas.[22]

2) His constant conviction that by means of dialectical engagement with rival traditions one's own position is tested, always implicitly presupposed an objective truth that could ultimately resolve the dispute, although not necessarily by affirming the truth of either of the rivals. (The critical confrontation could lead to the collapse of both or even all of the existing rivals due to their newly discovered epistemic unsatisfactoriness.)[23]

3) His strong anti-relativist claims that a seriously rational view of the good life must entail that it is better to die than to commit certain atrocities. MacIntyre sharpens the point in a fairly early essay published in 1977, before developing his sympathies towards Aristotle's moral theory manifest in *After Virtue.* While considering current quandaries in medical ethics in light of atrocities committed by authorized personnel acting under obedience to the Nazi regime, he writes: «Any account of morality that does not allow for the fact that my death may be required of me at any moment is thereby an inadequate account».[24]

4) His objection to both scholastic (whether medieval or renaissance) and Kantian versions of divine voluntarism as fundamental ground to objective moral obligation to uphold that there must exist an inherent moral rationality for universal moral truths.[25]

More recently, in 2016, with *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, MacIntyre once again takes up the issue of teleology and develops it further by integrating human teleology within the structure of narrative self-understanding. In

their own communities and traditions by dialectically engaging rivals, see for example: *WJWR*, p. 354. See C. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Lexington Books, Oxford 2006, for a masterful study of what Lutz calls "Tradition-Constituted and Tradition-Constitutive Rationality", especially with the title of chapter two on pp. vi and 33.

[22] See for instance: A. C. MacIntyre, *Moral Dilemmas*, «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», 50, Supplement (1990), pp. 367-382, republished in Id., *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays, Volume 2*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 85-100.

[23] The rationality of traditions and their dialectical encounter is a theme present throughout much of MacIntyre's work, including his so called "trilogy": *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*.

[24] A. C. MacIntyre, *Can Medicine Dispense*, cit., pp. 119-137 (pp. 120-121). See also MacIntyre's extended argument against both relativism and perspectivism in *WJWR*, pp. 352-369.

[25] See A. C. MacIntyre, *Can Medicine Dispense*, cit., pp. 25-43. «God is required as a power to give that moral form to the events in the after-life of individuals that Kant sees as lacking in the events of their mortal life» (p. 135).

the first chapter, MacIntyre extends his Neo-Aristotelian engagement with emotivism, already begun in *After Virtue*, by developing what is at once a philosophy of the moral theory of expressivism and a history of the development of that expressivism. He does so in order to critically engage with its principal authors, and most especially with the critic of expressivist "morality", Bernard Williams, to show the rational superiority of Aristotle's account of desire, teleology, and the narrative structure of human life, composed of a multitude of actions, that constitute the full human framework for the pursuit of the good. In this way, MacIntyre forcefully argues from human experience, not from abstract natures, for the determination of criteria to evaluate between good and evil actions and between those enacted stories that structure the whole of one's life insofar as they can be considered as good and evil, or simply, thoughtfully coherent versus slapdash and inherently frustrating.

In his response to the emotivist and expressivist denial of the inherent rationality of human desire, MacIntyre distinguishes between needs and desires to show the difference between two kinds of human inclination towards an object of satisfaction. Those that are not rational and therefore constitute mere "need" in MacIntyre's vocabulary and those that are rational and therefore qualify as "desire", or that which Thomists would call "rational appetite for the understood good".[26] In very Thomistic fashion, but without using scholastic vocabulary or explicit references to Aquinas, MacIntyre distinguishes between the needs of children and the desires of grown mature moral agents by making explicit the role of temporal understanding of the self as configuring one's rational desires within the context of one's autobiography. Or, to put it more straightforwardly, as does MacIntyre when referring to desires in rational adults:

> they know, although they do not always bear in mind, that how they act now may make it easier or more difficult or impossible to satisfy those desires in the future. So they sometimes have to consider whether or not they should forgo satisfying some present desire for the sake of keeping open some future possibility.[27]

It is fascinating to note especially in light of the unity among teleology, narrative, and flourishing, that MacIntyre, in addition to considering here the Aristotelian Thomistic account of virtues and their acquisition over time, he also refers to the relationship to neuroscientific and cognitivist discoveries. He

[26] MacIntyre gets closer to such traditional Thomistic terminology while extending his argument against emotivism when he writes: «If, therefore, someone were to give as the sole reason for their acting as they do that it achieves the satisfaction of some desire, without also claiming that in satisfying their desire they were achieving some good, they would have done nothing to make their action intelligible as an intended action, let alone to show that it was justified», *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 9.

[27] *Ibidem*, p. 3.

does so regarding how choices determine the future experience of feelings regarding not just pleasure and pain, but also other emotions and their related "needs", such as the perception of threat, fear, anger, and laziness.[28] Moreover, MacIntyre explains another way by which humans who have achieved the use of reason may be distinguished from children: «their awareness not only of their future but of their past».[29] Once again, MacIntyre reconnects practical rationality and moral decision making to our bodily constitution, the metaphysical biology of the human, and our narrative self-understanding. Practical reason's role in shaping desire takes place over time and modifies the whole person, body and soul, to acquire the virtuous dispositions that facilitate future decision making in accord with flourishing while configuring one's desires to prepare oneself to more thoroughly enjoy the perfection that one hopes to attain over time by means of one's rational, upright choices.[30]

While developing the unity of teleology, narrative, and human flourishing in *Ethics and the Conflicts of Modernity*, as with the rest of his writings, MacIntyre elucidates the communitarian features of human nature and, therefore, the cooperative aspects of teleology, narrative, and flourishing. Within the context of rational community cooperation, language constitutes a central capacity of human nature. MacIntyre proposes four characteristics of human language:

1) the syntactic structure that allows for the reflexive asking and the answering of questions in pursuit of the validation of the truth of the matter,

2) the power of communication that allows for cooperation and association,

3) the tenses and logical connectives that allow for the pursuit of shared goals over time, and

4) the capacity to tell stories about heroism, failures, and projects, to learn from, and also tell those "stories that we enact" by our lives.[31]

These four features of language permit humans to test and to challenge their own understanding in view of offering a dialectical account of the reasonability of their individual and common project for the pursuit of human flourishing by means of the enactment of those stories as they dramatically perform them with and in community. Thus, «a great deal turns then on yet another distinctively human power, the ability to identify our mistakes and to learn from them».[32]

Having developed the components of human flourishing determined by natural teleology that are most proper to human nature and most central to

[28] MacIntyre explicitly refers to the neuroscientific intersections with his account of human desire on the following page: «the history of our desires is also inseparable from our biochemical and neurophysiological history», *ibidem*, p. 4.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 3.

[30] For an ultimately devastating yet subtle critique of expressivism, see *ibidem*, especially pp. 22-23.

[31] *Ibidem*, p. 27.

[32] *Ibidem*.

human upbringing and having emphasized the role of language because of its capacity for testing truth claims about facts and values and its capacity for enacting and telling stories, MacIntyre proceeds to respond to the expressivist objection to moral objectivity. He responds by demonstrating, with Aristotelian terminology, that the good functioning of any thing according to its nature is a question, at once, of both fact and value, but never a mere expression of personal preference, taste, or approval. MacIntyre concludes his argumentation by bringing together and completing the various threads of his recovery of Aristotelian teleology, narrative, and flourishing, that he began in *After Virtue* by concluding: «Nonhuman animals function well or badly. And as with machines or wolves, dolphins and gorillas, so too is it with human agents and societies. They too function well or badly».[33] To function well or badly is of course to act in accord or in contrast with ones's own nature with its inherent purpose. MacIntyre relaunches with greater clarity the claim to appreciate the capacities proper to our nature in order to determine the moral good, thereby, once again, defeating a rigid separation between "is" and "ought". He also adds another criteria of determination for the quality of the story being enacted by one's autobiography, and even contending against the expressivism dominant at the end of our postmodern epoch.

Up until this point, I have not stressed the role of "practice" in MacIntyre's thought because it has been given thorough treatment by virtually all of his readers, whether critical or complimentary. "Practice", the concept of an activity ordered towards an intrinsic end, runs through the whole of his scholarship. In *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, MacIntyre offers a new development and a somewhat novel approach to the concept by developing "practice" within the context of a hierarchy of ends to explain how the structure of human life, in accord with natural teleology, entails a multitude of actions, many of which fulfil the requirements of "practice" insofar as they are pursued for their own sake, that is, for the sake of ends internal to those very practices, while also being ordered towards an overarching end that is necessary for the whole of one's life to be considered rational.

The task of reason to structure desires requires ordering the whole of one's life to a further end. «Each of us discovers in our lives a certain kind of directedness toward a final end that is our own, toward perfecting and completing the lives that are our own, by living out what in terms of our particular abilities and circumstances we judge to be the best possible life for us».[34] The human capacity to order practices to a final end constitutes constructing the story that is first in human intention and then in action and only subsequently told, whether by prose, poem, or song. As Aristotle wrote about the story:

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 29. [34] *Ibidem*, p. 54.

«the end is everywhere the chief thing».[35] MacIntyre draws the conclusion regarding rational agency according to human nature and the construction of a personal autobiographical narrative as the chief task of human life. «Reflective agents thus increasingly understand themselves and others in terms of a certain kind of narrative, a story in which they as agents direct themselves or fail to direct themselves toward a final end, the nature of which they initially apprehended in and through their activities as rational agents».[36] Of course, the teleological and narrative quest for flourishing requires those habits of excellence that perfect the human faculties such that «agents who are sound and effective practical reasoners... must be disposed to act as the virtues require, and that such agents will be directed in their actions toward the achievement of their final end».[37] Despite the claim that there is always a true story to be found within the life of a rational agent, nonetheless, «rational agency does not require that agents are always able to think of themselves as in terms of that story.»[38] The challenge to ascertain the truth, even regarding that which is most intimately personal remains and becomes even more universal for MacIntyre the Thomist than for the MacIntyre prior to *After Virtue* delineated in 1977 by MacIntyre in *Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science*.[39] Due to the critical capacity of human reason, along with its limits, we are always susceptible to epistemological crisis and, therefore, in need of the support of a community of enquiry within a dynamic tradition. Although vulnerability and dependence may first be appreciated in terms of the neediness and fragility of the human body, vulnerability and dependency, along with the virtues of acknowledged dependence, also encompass the epistemic challenges of human life that challenge us in ways quite different than the vulnerability and dependence that we may observe in other animals.

3. A Proposal for Thomistic Development

At the beginning of this essay, I described a lacuna in the vast secondary literature on MacIntyre regarding the absence of attention from Thomists in developing a reading of Aquinas that explicitly displays a narrative moral anthropology. Theologians, including Thomists, have to an even greater de-

[35] While describing tragedy, Aristotle makes this comment at *Poetics*, VI, 1450a 23, (*The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 1984) and continues to write (towards the end of 1450) that «the plot is, as it were, the principle and the soul».

[36] A. C. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 54.

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 243.

[38] *Ibidem*, p. 58.

[39] A. C. MacIntyre, *Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science*, in Id., *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Volume 1*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 3-23.

gree than philosophers, eschewed pursuing a narrative anthropology like that proposed by MacIntyre. Nonetheless, fascinating possibilities for research are available for Thomistic theologians who take interest in pursuing a narrative metaphysical anthropology through the lens of Christology. Indeed, the Incarnation interpreted in light of MacIntyre's narrative proposal, while paying attention to the *ipse enarravit* («he himself told the story») of *John* 1, 18 along with *Gaudium et Spes* n. 22, with its statement that Christ «fully reveals man to man himself», opens a treasure of Thomistic texts for reinterpretation regarding the *fittingness* of God made man living a human story, which would of course require the eternal entering time to enact a narrative for the sake of our salvation.[40] By means of such condescension, God perfects revelation by facilitating its intelligibility, by means of a didactically efficacious condescension towards his creatures constrained by temporal finitude. Such revelation would also consist in his offering an exemplary cause for the moral life thereby alleviating, without eliminating, the epistemological crises described by MacIntyre.[41]

I have argued throughout that MacIntyre's developing account of natural teleology, narrative, and human flourishing entails that each of these three components is intrinsically interwoven with the other two. In *Three Rival Versions*, MacIntyre summarized succinctly his understanding of the narrative structure of the moral life, while also summarizing the unity that I have proposed to be at the core of his proposal:

> because my life is to be understood as a teleologically ordered unity, a whole the nature of which and the good of which I have to learn how to discover, my life has the continuity and unity of a quest, a quest whose object is to discover the truth about my life as a whole which is an indispensable part of the good of that life. So on this view my life has the unity of a story with a beginning, middle, and end, beginning with birth and ending, so far as concerns the final judgment to be passed on it-in respect of the achievement of my good-with death.[42]

As mentioned above, while analyzing Greek theatrical tragedy in the *Poetics*,

[40] For the Vulgate translation for the Latin, see *Biblia Sacra juxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, CBCEW, 9th January 2006. And, for *Gaudium et Spes*, see *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, St. Paul Books & Media, Boston 1992.

[41] See, for instance, *Summa contra Gentiles, Corrected Leonine Text*, Enrique Alarcón (ed.), Corpus Thomisticum, IV.54, n. 5 [3926]: «cum beatitudo hominis perfecta in divina fruitione consistat, oportuit affectum hominis ad desiderium divinae fruitionis disponi.... Nihil autem sic ad amorem alicuius nos inducit sicut experimentum illius ad nos. Amor autem Dei ad homines nullo modo efficacius homini potuit demonstrari quam per hoc quod homini uniri voluit in persona: est enim proprium amoris unire amantem cum amato, inquantum possibile est. Necessarium igitur fuit homini, ad beatitudinem perfectam tendenti, quod Deus fieret homo.»

[42] A. C. MACINTYRE, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, cit., p. 197.

Aristotle asserted that the end is everywhere the chief thing in the story. He then extends his consideration with a text often cited by literary theorists, by using the analogy of the soul to indicate that the end of the story informs it everywhere, as the soul does the body. Throughout the *Prima Secundae*, the part of the *Summa Theologiae* that examines how the human person pursues the end through action, Aquinas also uses the analogy of form and matter to describe moral agency.[43] Even more pertinent to our theme, is the fact that in Question 89 Article 6, right at the end of his discussion of sin, Aquinas addresses the first free act by which a child begins to be capable of the use of reason. Although this text has been neglected by many Thomists, perhaps especially by those who consider themselves Aristotelian and are otherwise prone to read Aquinas more carefully,[44] it offers an analysis of that which is required for moral accountability and its commencement within the child in accord with Aquinas' developmental psychology, and is therefore especially apropos to the theme of narrative anthropology in Aquinas. Indeed, for Aquinas, use of reason, or moral accountability, requires the capability to direct oneself and the whole of one's life to one's end which is to understand oneself as author and protagonist of one's own story.

For Aquinas, there is no middle ground between the immature with their incapability of what he calls "discretion" and the rational.[45] One either has it or one does not. Rationality consists in the capability to consider oneself and to direct oneself to the due end. For Aquinas, every unimpeded human being has the inherent capability, so long as it is brought to fruition through adequate upbringing, to come to understand that there is a good that surpasses

[43] See *ST*, I-II, 18,2.

[44] Aside from J. MARITAIN's groundbreaking article on q. 89 a. 6 (*The Immanent Dialectic of the First Act of Freedom*, in *The Range of Reason*, Scribner, New York 1952) and S. DIANICH's *L'opzione fondamentale nel pensiero di S. Tommaso*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1968, the text had been neglected by many Thomists (see the odd omission in S. RAMÍREZ, O.P.'s monumental *In I-II Divi Thomae Expositio, Edición de las Obras Completas de Santiago Ramírez, O.P.,* Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 1972) until very recently, despite the revival of interest and growth in Thomistic scholarship during the twentieth century, with the exceptions of a few existentialists (see for instance C. FABRO, *La dialettica di intelligenza e volontà nella costituzione esistenziale dell'atto libero*, in *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, Maggioli, Rimini 1983, pp. 57-85) and a more significant number of authors promoting a transcendentalist approach to Aquinas that separated fundamental freedom from the so called "categorical" of ordinary moral action, as displayed by K. RAHNER (*The Commandment of Love in Relation to the other Commandments*, *Theological Investigations*, *Volume 5*, Crossroad, New York 1966, pp. 439-460) and J. FUCHS (*Basic Freedom and Morality*, in *Human Values and Christian Morality,* Gill & Macmillan, Dublin 1970).

[45] See *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter *ST*), I-II, q. 89, a. 6, where Aquinas refers to the child's capacity for discretion: «secundum quod in illa aetate est capax discretionis» *Textum Leoninum,* Romae, 1888 edited and digitally transcribed by R. Busa SJ, verified by E. Alarcón.

both the needs of one's sensitive appetites and the limited goods achievable here and now through actions that are for their own sake. Once one develops the capabilities for such understanding of oneself before the final end, one is obliged to convert oneself, and everything else, to the end as soon as one can. One must order oneself to the final end because it is higher than everything else. It would be irrational to live for anything else. So, while considering the tragic condition of the human in a condition of original sin and therefore tainted by the loss of integrity and disordered due to the punishment that is communicated to all members of the human race on account of the sin of Adam and Eve, Aquinas affirms that the end, a truly transcendent and overarching end, knowable in some way even by a child, is everywhere in the story of he who turns, even just vaguely or implicitly, to the due end to live according to the highest aspirations of human nature and to direct oneself and everything else, by means of one's natural rationality to the due end, which is first in the order of intention.[46]

Although Aquinas does not write here in terms of "story" and "narrative", he does so elsewhere as I indicate below, and he also writes very explicitly in terms of form uniting the whole of human life around the end, and most especially so in his treatise on charity, which he considers to be the form, mother, and root of all right action and of all virtue.[47] Right at the beginning of the *Prima Secundae*, in the Prologue, Aquinas quotes St. John Damascene to state that insofar as he is created in the image of God, the human is «an intelligent being endowed with free-will and self-movement» and therefore, in similitude with God, «is the principle of his actions, as having free-will and control of his actions»[48] For Aquinas to exercise such dominion over one's activities is to direct oneself to one's end.[49] To give form and finality to one's activity is to construct the plot of one's life, towards which each of one's choices are ordered. Indeed, given that human life has the structure of a story, Aquinas asserts that the eternal law, the metaphysical foundation for the natural law, is indeed a law and therefore promulgated because it has been written in the *Book of Life*, that temporal script designed to guide the lives of the saints and present within the eternity of divine knowledge.[50]

MacIntyre's epistemology of moral accountability entails that while being

[46] See *ST*, I-II, q. 89, a. 6, ad 3: «primum enim quod occurrit homini discretionem habenti est quod de seipso cogitet, ad quem alia ordinet sicut ad finem, finis enim est prior in intentione.» Of course, Aquinas also clarifies the need for divine aid to complete this conversion from sin to a life of sanctifying grace. *ST*, I-II, q. 89, a. 6: «Et si quidem seipsum ordinaverit ad debitum finem, per gratiam consequetur remissionem originalis peccati.»

[47] See *ST*, II-II, q. 23, a. 8c, and ad 1, 2, 3.

[48] *ST*, I-II, *Prologue*, Benziger Brothers, New York 1947.

[49] See also *ST*, I-II, q. 18, a. 4, especially ad 1 and 2, regarding the order to the end of every human action.

[50] *ST*, I-II, q. 91, a. 1, ad 2.

author of one's own enacted story, one is also always susceptible to revision of one's own self-understanding. In *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, he describes the challenge of understanding ourselves and indicates Aquinas, along with Aristotle and Marx, as «those philosophers who have thrown most light on the political and moral life» and who «have each provided ways of understanding ourselves that require a retelling of the stories of our lives, the replacement of a less by a more adequate narrative.»[51] Emplotment, therefore, is a life-long task, even the life-long task.[52] Whether describing the interplay between judgment of conscience and judgment of choice, the impediments to knowing the demands of natural law, or the stains upon the soul caused by sin that obscure the natural light of reason to illumine the mind by those moral truths needed to act rightly here and now, Aquinas offers a highly sophisticated anthropology of epistemic challenge in the moral domain that explains the possibility and the causes of error.[53]

Aquinas also offers a narrative balm and guide to orient the wounded and disoriented by means of exemplar causality, that is, by the imitation of the virtuous paragon.[54] MacIntyre concludes *Ethics in the Conflicts of Morality* by showcasing four real stories to emphasize and to display that his narrative account of morality can only be fully understood through the presentation of lived stories that exemplify the theory by their reality in real lives. Indeed, he writes: «Moreover, like all theoretical conclusions in politics and ethics, this one can be understood adequately only by attention to the detail of particular cases that in significant ways exemplify it, not imaginary examples, but real examples. Understanding such conclusions is inseparable from knowing how

[51] A. C. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 237.

[52] David Carr writes to acutely observe in a similar vein regarding the epistemic challenge of constructing our own story in the living of it: «we are constantly striving, with more or less success, to occupy the story-tellers' position with respect to our own lives. Lest this be thought merely a far-fetched metaphor, consider how important, in the reflective and deliberative process, is the activity of literally telling, to others and to ourselves, what we are doing. . . . narrative activity, even apart from its social role, is a constitutive part of action, and not just an embellishment, commentary, or other incidental accompaniment.» (D. Carr, *Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity*, in L. P. Hinchman and S. K. Hinchman (eds.), *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1997, p. 125).

[53] Regarding the judgments of conscience and of choice, see the excellent summary of the Thomistic sources and twentieth century debate in M. S. Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, cua Press, Washington, dc 2013, p. 49, especially footnote 132. Regarding the difficulty for humans in our postlapsarian state to come to know the requirements of natural law, see: *ST*, i-ii, q. 100, a. 1 and regarding the impediments to know the natural law, see: *ST*, i-ii, q. 94, a. 2. Regarding the obfuscation caused by the stain of sin, see: *ST*, i-ii, q. 86, a. 1.

[54] Aquinas does use the term narrative and recommends its use within theology, see *In Sent*. q. 1, a. 5: «oportet etiam quod modus istius scientiae sit narrativus signorum.»

they find application».[55] With various formulations Aquinas repeats throughout his works that «examples move more than words» («plus movent exempla quam verba»).[56] Like Aristotle, Aquinas perceived our need to learn how to be virtuous by observing an exemplar of virtue. In Question 34 of the *Prima Secundae*, Aquinas explains that in the area of the moral life and the human passions, where experience is so important, he says again while using the Latin "magis" instead of "plus" to indicate that «example moves more than mere words».[57] Moreover, Aquinas repeatedly affirms throughout his work that the «action of Christ was our instruction».[58] When commenting on the washing of feet at the Last Supper (in *John*, 13.15), Aquinas refers to Jesus' own words «I have done this to give you an example» to base his theology of Jesus' moral pedagogy on Jesus' divine authority.[59] Aristotle's virtuous man is, for Aquinas, the Word Incarnate. In fact, Aquinas concludes that Jesus's words refer not just to the washing of the feet but to his entire life as an example for his disciples.

MacIntyre's account of autobiographical dramatic narrative illuminates his Aristotelian Thomistic view of natural teleology and likewise of human flourishing, while also challenging Thomists to discover the depths of Aquinas' anthropology in its full dynamism insofar as it views the human person as called to enact, as both author and protagonist, a dramatic performance spanning a lifetime to represent the divine alive in his earthly image by means of the very human exemplarity of God made man. To take MacIntyre's Thomistic proposal seriously entails the task of engaging Aquinas's anthropology and moral theory by integrating texts from his treatises on action and law with his biblical commentaries, including his important yet underappreciated commentary on the Book of Job.[60] Such a Thomistic task, inspired by MacIntyre's narrative proposal would contribute to a more dynamic and historically sensitive read-

[55] A. C. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, cit., p. 243.

[56] *In Ionannem* 13, 15, lect. 3, n. 1781. For a detailed account of *sequela Christi* in Aquinas, see: J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin – maître spirituel*, see for example ch. 5 sections entitled "Imiter Dieu en imitant le Christ" pp. 147-152 and "Je vous ai donné l'exemple…" pp. 153-159, and ch. 6 "La conformité au Christ" pp. 186-196, and ch. 14 "Le modèle de toutes les perfections" pp. 484-489.

[57] *ST*, I-II, q. 34, a. 1: «in operationibus enim et passionibus humanis, in quibus experiential plurimum valet, magis movent exempla quam verba.»

[58] Aquinas supplies various formulations for the dictum that Christ teaches by example: «Christi actio fuit nostra instruction», «Christus proponebatur hominibus in exemplum omnium», and «cuncta quae Dominus fecit vel in carne passus est, documenta et exempla sunt salutaria.» See J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, cit., ch. 5, note 49 for further details.

[59] See *In Ioannem* 13, 15, lect. 3, n. 1781.

[60] See C. Nicolosi's dissertation *Auctor Bonorum: Narrative and Divine Providence in Thomas Aquinas's Expositio super Iob ad litteram,* Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, School of Philosophy, *ex manuscripto,* 2012.

ing of Aquinas, more fully appreciative of the underlying understanding of human life as a story, for the individual, for the community, and for the whole of humanity. This more dynamic reading of Aquinas, inspired by MacIntyre's narrative account of the moral life, would allow a more acute appreciation for the Augustinian elements presupposed by Aquinas. Indeed such a reading of Aquinas could reflect Aquinas's Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian synthesis by appreciating Augustine's account of the temporal and autobiographical character of human life, whether understood individually or in community.[61]

Abstract · MacIntyre on Teleology, Narrative, and Human Flourishing: Towards a Thomistic Narrative Anthropology. *Alasdair MacIntyre's account of moral philosophy offers an interwoven theory of teleology, narrative, and human flourishing. As MacIntyre has continued to develop these three central components of his proposal, he has also reinforced their inseparability and mutual dependence. Nonetheless, many of his commentators continue to neglect the interrelatedness of these components on account of their having underappreciated the extent and depth of his conversion to Aristotelian Thomism. This essay displays MacIntyre's development of moral philosophy over the course of his career. It also focuses on MacIntyre's Thomistic integration of natural teleology within his metaphysical anthropology to emphasize the distinctiveness of narratives understood as real dramatic enactments constitutive of human flourishing. Although few Thomists have attempted to re-read Aquinas in light of MacIntyre's proposal for extending that living tradition of enquiry, this essay concludes with a Thomistic proposal for a narrative anthropology crafted to constructively engage MacIntyre's proposal from the Thomistic perspective*.

Keywords: *MacIntyre, Narrative, Aquinas, Teleology, Human Flourishing*.

[61] For Augustine's treatise on time and human action, see *Confessions,* Book xi, and for a proposal for a narrative account of Aquinas in light of Augustine's metaphysics and phenomenology of time, see R. A. Gahl, Jr., *Time in Augustine and Aquinas: What Time Was It When Adam Was Created?*, a contribution to the forthcoming *Aquinas's Sources: The Notre Dame Symposium*, T. L. Smith (ed.), St. Augustine's Press, South Bend (in) 2019.