Alasdair MacIntyre's Theory of Practice

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Introduction

The concept of the 'theory of practice' has a long and intricate history. Practice theorists have appropriated such a concept. They can be classified into three. Originating from the Greeks, the classical theorists are best represented by Aristotle. The modern theorists can be gleaned from Karl Marx. Among the contemporary theorists of *praxis,* Alasdair MacIntyre stands out. Aristotle and Marx are influential in the formation of the thoughts of MacIntyre.

Three goals are envisage in this paper. First, it will explore the three traditions of practice from Aristotle to MacIntyre. Most people, especially those whom MacIntyre calls as practical reasoners, assume that practice is subservient to theory. Second, it will offer an argument that aims to bring to the present discourse the independence of practice from theory. As these traditions of practice theorists will show, we could deconstruct this myth, through MacIntyre's theory of practice, and free practice from the entanglements in the webs of theory. Lastly, we will show how MacIntyre's understanding of practice can be considered in itself as a theory, especially in morality.

The Three Traditions of Praxis Theorizing

It is essential to briefly relate the background of MacIntyre's perspective from its predecessors such as Aristotle and Marx. By past usage, the word 'practice' really means the classical usage which originated from Aristotle and Marx[1] elucidated but not necessarily following Aristotle. Nonetheless, Aristotle and Marx are highly influential to MacIntyre's intellectual development. In fact, in his search for the light that our social and moral life needs,

[1]For greater and historical treatment of praxis/practice in the classical perspectives, see N. Lobkowicz Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx (IN: Notre Dame UP, 1967).

MacIntyre did not turn to Kant. He turned to Marx and Aristotle; including Freud, Nietzsche, amongst others. MacIntyre found that Aristotle initially provided the light. But, it was in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas that finally MacIntyre found such a light. However, in the context of praxis or practice, Aristotle and Marx figured prominently (more than Kant) in MacIntyre's virtue-based practice morality. Furthermore, when one will examine closely what MacIntyre's meant by practice, he is more of an Aristotelian than a Marxist, insofar as any kind of practice is reason-informed with its expected telos as such.

The word *praxis* (practice) or *praxeis* (pl., practices) is derived from the Greeks. From there, praxis has passed through Latin and then into modern European languages. Among English speaking theorists, it is now used in the plural form, i.e. practices.[2] Prior to its philosophical used, the word 'practice' has been used in Greek literature and thus utilized in Greek mythology. There, praxis is used as the name of a goddess and some other related meanings. In this regard, Fay Weldon explains praxis: "Praxis, meaning turning point, culmination, action; orgasm, some said the goddess herself."[3]

Praxis, however, entails a sort of an activity. As an activity, it is premised on human activity (Lobkowicz) or anything a human being does (Ortner).[4] This activity takes place in space and time and in all dimensions of human existence (life-world): social, economic, political, cultural, religious, moral and the rest. It is therefore very broad. The breadth of the meaning of practice, i.e. 'anything people do' cannot be explored fully in this study. This is precisely the reason why we limit our focus in the context of morality.

The practice theory is an elusive concept. Among theorists, no single agreement or consensus can be found. They cannot agree what it is. Nonetheless, as a 'theory,' it presupposes that it "treats

[2]See G. Petrovic, s.v. Praxis, in Tom Bottomore, ed., A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, 2nd Ed, London: Blackwell, 2001; 435 – 440.

[3]quoted in Petrovic, 435.

[4]Practice is used widely in contemporary scholarships across multi-disciplinary avenues, especially in human and social sciences. For MacIntyre's used of the concept he actually integrated several disciplinary lines such as sociology, anthropology, history, literature, and philosophy to come up with his goal to lay the phronesis/praxis foundation of his version of practical morality. The contemporary turn to practice seemed to focus mostly on sociology, anthropology (Bourdieu, Geertz, Ortner, etc); and, least, in philosophy (De Certeau).

practice as a fundamental category" or as a point of departure. Interestingly, if not curiously, there is a plethora of what practice is. These include praxis (as the origin of the term in classical traditions), activity, performance, language game, research programme, habitus, paradigm, framework, tacit knowledge, conceptualscheme, Weltstanchauung, Geist, among others. These competing categories are hard to classify; the problem is also compounded because theorists are mostly not explicit in what they actually meant. Commentators are left on their own to 'speculate' as to what a particular practice theorist is trying to convey. Sherry Ortner,[5] twenty-five years ago, has already noted this widespread use of this so-called 'practice-talk.' In a landmark article, Ortner wrote that "for the past several years, there has been growing interest in analysis focused on through one or another of a bundle of interrelated terms: practice, praxis, action, interaction, activity, experience, performance. A second, and closely related, bundle of terms focuses on the doer of all that doing: agent, actor, person, self, individual, subject."[6] It would seem to imply that anything that any human being does is considered a practice. Practice then refers to all human activity whatever they are. Nicholas Lobkowicz also understood praxis to refer "to almost any kind of human activity which a free man is likely to perform; in particular, all kinds of business and political activity."[7]

[5]D. Pilario offered a fresh and "one of the most systematic syntheses to date on the development of the notion of praxis/practice as it is appropriated in three major …traditions – Aristotle, Marx, and contemporary theories." See G. De Schrijver's "Preface" of Pilario'sBack to the Rough Ground of Praxis (Leuven UP, 2005), viii-xi, at viii. Among practice theorists who appropriated the Aristotelian and Marxist Traditions, Alasdair MacIntyre as will be argued infra can be considered as the true heir of such classical traditions as well as how MacIntyre transcend such classical traditions. It ought to be kept in mind that the purpose of this study is a moral enquiry on GE and patenting genetic inventions in the life science industry based on MacIntyre virtue morality specifically his theory of moral practice. Thus, this version of a theory of moral practice is used as an evaluative moral framework. It is therefore beyond our purpose to make an expository/exploratory 'adventures' of the development of the notion of praxis/practice. Pilario's 'most systematic syntheses to date' as De Schrijver claims being applied to theological method is the best 'adventures' so far, see esp. pp. 1-97.

[6]N. B. Dirks, G. Eley, and S. B. Ortner, eds., Culture, Power, History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory (NJ: Princeton UP, 1994), especially Ortner's influential seminal article 'Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties,' pp. 372-411, at 388 (originally published: S. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties" in Comparative Studies in Society and History 26 (1984), 126-66, at 144-45.

[7]See his Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx (IN: Notre Dame UP, 1967), 9. Italics added.

Classical Theorizing:[8] Aristotle on *Praxis*

Pilario would greatly enlighten us about matters on practice that refer to all sorts of human activities. To quote him at length will certainly serve our purpose as to what these human activities vis-à-vis practice are:

> *Praxis is an over-determined word with quite a long and complex history. In popular discourse, the term 'practical' takes on a positive meaning to describe one who is in touch with the situation and can 'make thing work' in such a complex circumstance, as contrasted to someone who is 'impractical', theoretical', 'academic' or unrealistic. Yet, from another perspective, 'practical' has also earned another, pejorative connotation of being 'pragmatic', 'technical', 'calculative' which, in some contemporary philosophical sensibilities, is equated with instrumentalist view of reality.*[9]

What can be discerned above are the two significant distinctions as regards the meaning of *praxis*/practice. These distinctions are reminiscent of Aristotle's clearly compartmentalized sorts of knowledge relative to different human activities. That is, all human activities are guided by a corresponding knowledge that is specific to that activity. Pilario listed Aristotle's trichonomous listing. It is fairly commonplace today among those who follow Aristotle. But, they are limited to a more dichotomous sort of 'theory and practice.'[10] Aristotle's listing includes: (1) a contemplative activity which is the knowledge that is specific to such is episteme

[8]It ought to be noted that in our brief discussion of the classical notion of praxis/practice, we intentionally exclude St. Thomas Aquinas' contribution to such. His used of the word practicus connotes our ordinary use of practicum thus it is not exclusively used in moral discourse like what we are doing now. His notion of habitus is closer to MacIntyre's practice. Practicus encompasses any virtuous person, physician, politician, artisan, etc. For practicus see T. Aquinas, Summa Theologica I, Q. 14, a. 16.; for habitus, see S. Pinckaers, The Sources of Christian Ethics (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 336 ff. P. Bourdieu also uses habitus in his writings following Marcel Mauss (1872-1950). Aquinas used habitus in moral discourse and not in the social science perspectives as Mauss and Bourdieu did.

[9]Pilario, Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis, 1. Underscores added. Italics in the original.

[10]Hugh of St Victor would seem to be considered who reduced from an Aristotelian trichonomy to theory and practice dichotomy, (practice understood as the application of theory, hence, the sense of 'applied') in his treatise Practicageometriae where he suggested and thus first introduced the distinction between a 'theoretical' and a 'practical' geometry. This then immediately enjoyed a wider acceptance during his time which has survived until today. See G. Petrovic's contribution, 'Praxis', in T. Bottomore's edited work A Dictionary of Marxist Thought (London: Blackwell, 1985), 384-389, esp. 384. For MacIntyre, however, he did not distinguish between what is theory and what is applied. Doing so is a mistake for him. See MacIntyre's 'Does applied ethics rest on a mistake?' The Monist (vol. 67, 1984), 493-513. Emphasis added.

or theoria, (2) a practical activity which is the knowledge necessary for such is phronesis or praxis, and (3) a productive activity where the agent needs a knowledge called techne or poiesis.

Following Aristotle, Pilario distinguishes in the quotation above two sorts of knowledge. The positive meaning refers to Aristotle's distinction of practice and theory (praxis and theoria); while the pejorative meaning can be located in the contrast that Aristotle made between practice and productive knowledge (*praxis* and *poiesis*).[11]

Aristotle swings like a pendulum as to which can be considered as the most important of his three kinds of knowledge that would bring about what is the best life for human beings. But it would seem that in the final analysis, Aristotle favors, following Plato, that the best life for human beings is the life spent in contemplation.

As we have noted above, before the entrance of praxis in the philosophical landscape, praxis has already inhabited the world of Greek mythology. In fact, the concept also predated Aristotle. It has been in currency among the pre-Socratic philosophers or in the early Greek literature and philosophy. Socrates and Plato also used the concept. Aristotle's concept of praxis is significant because it transcended beyond the previous use of the concept. With Aristotle's use of the concept, the 'true philosophical history' of praxis begins. He must have learned it from his predecessors though; especially from Plato.

The claim that the true conceptual history of praxis begins with Aristotle is buttressed by the fact that it was Aristotle who tried to find a more precise, if not exact, meaning of what praxis as compared to others' concepts during his time. He did this by examining 'action' as such. For Aristotle, 'action' as such is reserved only to human beings precisely because it entails some sort of rationality, freedom, and knowledge to act. *Praxis* is associated with human activities or human actions; especially the appropriate ones where a human being interacts and interrelates with fellow human beings. *Praxis* is also linked to just doing anything else; insofar as actions are assumed to have originated from being properly

[11]Ibid. It is interesting to note that Aristotle's trichonomous listing of three sorts human activities and corresponding 'knowledges' is conceptually significant here. See EE 1215a20 – 37 in Anthony Kenny , trans., Aristotle, Eudemian Ethics, Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press, 2011;also in NE 1095b15 – 1096a10, Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, London: Penguin Classics, 2004.

understood. Thus, praxis entails freedom, rationality, intention, motivation, and the rest. These human properties separate humans from the rest of the animals. To Aristotle, praxis ought to be appropriately applied only to human beings.

The conception of *praxis* as just any human activity, anything that a human being does, or 'the name of every human activity' can be deemed very broad and general. There are still other forms of human activities in which Aristotle also concerns himself with. So, for Aristotle, praxis, i.e. practical activity, is just one among other human activities such as the contemplative and productive activities. In short, there are now three sorts of human activities: contemplation, practical activity, and productive activity. Again, these activities ought to be understood more appropriately in the realm of philosophical anthropology; excluding non-humans. This has been the case when one would study the concept as praxis goes forward across multidisciplinary spheres. Precisely, only humans are capable of exercising these activities.

How are we to make sense of these activities insofar as any human activity ought to be scrutinized morally? Are there boundaries that distinguish one activity from another and vice-versa? Aristotle had in mind how these activities are distinct and unique from one another in terms of their scientific bases, ends, and goals specific to each form of activity. Actually, among multidisciplinary lines nowadays, distinctions are blurred.

More clearly, "Aristotle's listing of three kinds of knowledge corresponding to different forms of human activities: contemplative *(episteme/theoria)*, practical *(phronesis/praxis)*, and productive *(techne/poiesis)*"[12] is lucid. Each particular activity is buttressed by a specific knowledge that would bring about an end or a goal that corresponds to any of these activities. Contemplative activity is grounded on episteme/theoria with truth as its end/goal. Practical activity is based on the knowledge of practical wisdom or the *phronesis/praxis* with a view that the end is the action itself or the so-called eupraxia. Lastly, productive activity is anchored on poietical

[12]It ought to be noted that this list corresponds to the sort of people or social classes of people during Aristotle's time where just like in our society there are elites (the rich, priests, those of royal blood, capitalists, etc.), the educated middles class (e.g. philosophers, teachers, white collar workers, etc.); and, the working class, (e.g. artisans, street vendors, household helps, etc.). See EE and NE cited supra.

knowledge which is geared towards the production of something.

In the context of morality, we might ask which among these activities contributes best to human flourishing? Socrates and Aristotle have brought forth thousands of years ago crucial questions that are due a moral reflection. Socrates asks: How should one live? Aristotle poses: What is the best life for man? Since then, these moral questions have been part of any moral undertaking. Undoubtedly, the present generation of people is still trying to wrestle with these questions. Aristotle's reply to moral questions like these is enshrined in one yet complex word --- *eudaimonia*. It is as complex as the history of the concept of praxis itself. Traditional translations of *eudaimonia* include happiness, human well-being, human flourishing, or integral/total human development. We could propose a new translation perhaps, i.e., in good Spirit. It would seem fitting to translate literally: *'eu'* as 'good' while 'daimonia' as 'spirit.' Anyone then who does what is morally fitting and appropriate behavior in a consistent way could claim that s/he is indeed 'in good spirit.'

Among Aristotle's three-fold human activities, Aristotle gives primacy to practical activity that can achieve *eudaimonia.* In his moral project, he indeed favors praxis or eupraxis along with virtuous actions because they are done for the sake of doing such; not for the sake of doing something else or for any other ulterior motives apart from the action *per se.*

So, the good of praxis is action itself. But, why is this so? Why not the life of contemplation in which the teacher of Aristotle, i.e., Plato, has given precedence over Aristotle's other three forms of activities? In fact, if 'the Plato in Aristotle' would prevail, Aristotle would then be favoring contemplation more than praxis. It would not be hard to believe; and is understandably so. However, despite this possibility, nevertheless, Aristotle favored praxis as such in a specific moral sphere.

Perhaps, moral activity or a life lived in action is more exciting than the one lived in contemplation or in a productive activity. During his time, the ordinary folks such as wives, slaves, peasants, and even animals are capable of productive activities. This is the reason why Aristotle insisted that praxis is reserved only to human activities for such entails freedom and knowledge; insofar

as those we just cited are not considered as fully in an Aristotelian sense. This has been the venue of so much criticisms on Aristotelian perspectives and is rightly so. Even Marx, though influenced by Aristotle in some ways, would criticize Aristotle for this specific framework. Marx reclaimed poiesis (labor/production) as integral to *praxis.* In effect, Marx bridged the gap between the two sorts of activities.

To live *praxis* then is to live a practical life. To Aristotle, to be practical is not only the capability to make a particular knowledge or theoria work, i.e., applying a theory in specific circumstances that the actor found himself in. Living a practical life presupposes a sense of the absence of any sorts of external and internal constraints as well as assumes a sense of creativity that is beyond the productive technological creativity derived from a poietical knowledge. In the context of moral activity, inherent therefore in the practical life is the use of creativity and the freedom of self-determination (Gula) or freedom of moral excellence (Pinckaers). It enables the actor to live a life of eudaimonia, i.e. always in good spirit.

We have briefly explored Aristotle above vis-à-vis the concept of praxis and have found out that it is only right to begin with him as we have traced and learned that it is through him that the real history of such a notion originated. Aristotle must have truly desired for such concept to be understood intelligibly. Aristotle's influence is undoubtedly universal as it penetrated different spheres of culture and tradition; both secular and religious.

In summing up a brief exploration of Aristotle's conception of *praxis*, at least three points could be gleaned. First, the true history of 'practice' originated from Aristotle who tried to give it a more precise meaning than his predecessors. Second, 'practice' is more appropriately exercised by human beings. They are so exercised for the sake of such and not for the sake of something else; which the rest of the other creatures (women, slaves, artisans, animals) cannot do the same. Third, praxis or eupraxis is a necessary or constitutive element, along with the virtues,[13] for humans to live the best life for them, i.e., *eudaimonia.* Achieving such, a life lived in good spirit requires creativity beyond poiesis and other human qualities specific to them.

[13]Aristotle conceived the virtues anthropologically which includes: justice, temperance, fortitude, and prudence.

"Modern" Theorizing: The Young Marx on *Praxis*[14]

Among other social theorists like Hegel and John Rawls, many students in social philosophy classes are usually introduced to Marx. Philosophers theoretically tried to interpret and understand the dynamics of the life-world thru Marx's famous idea. But more importantly, understanding the world is not enough, changing it is what is important. It can only be done thru a revolutionary *praxis.* Of course, this Marxist paradigm is made famous in his Theses on Feuerbach.[15] However, it does not follow that change is always for the better. For changes can also generate more problems. Change is ambivalent!

For Marx, what is *praxis?* Marx did not agree with Aristotle and Hegel in terms of privileging the episteme/theoria and Geist; respectively. For Marx, the task of such a philosophy of theory or spirit is to become a philosophy of action. In this conception, Marx figured that the central or the core of a new philosophical orientation should transcend itself from mere theory to become a philosophy of praxis. However, he did not deny the relevance of theory. But, theory is supposed to serve *praxis;* or at least the understanding that theory is a form of praxis. This is indeed a novel conception. It is sort of reversing the trend beginning with Hugh of St.Victor, Francis Bacon, and others. An exception can perhaps be made on Aristotle's perspectives of his trichonomous senses of knowledge. Unlike his predecessors who were earlier mentioned, Aristotle's perspectives of praxis are clearly demarcated.

The context of Aristotle and that of Marx are definitely different. Like other Greek thinkers during his time, Aristotle begins his reflection from an act of awe and wonder about the order and beauty of the created realities. Many of them are 'cosmologists' such as the pre-Socratic philosophers. On the other hand, given his *Sitz-im-Leben,* Marx has started his reflection on his experiences of

[14]Although no distinction is offered here as regards the Young and the Mature Marx, most professional philosophers and theologians knew that when Marx talked and wrote about praxis he still inhabited a philosopher's world. See his Paris Manuscript or aka Economic and Philosophic Manuscript.

[15]Thesis 11 read as follows: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it.' See K. Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, in K. Marx and F. Engels, Collected Works Vol. 5 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 5. Obviously we mentioned this thesis among other theses for this is crucial in understanding Marx praxis. See also MacIntyre, "The Theses on Feuerbach: A Road Not Taken," in K. Knight, ed., The MacIntyre Reader, 223-234.

protests against the suffering and injustice that people experience. To Marx, such torment is brought about by alienation and misery prevalent in the society he was in.

Following Aristotle, Marx also conceived praxis as appropriate only to humans. Karl Marx calls a human being as a being of praxis. Marx was undeniably aware of Aristotle's three-fold senses of knowledge as well as the activities which such senses of knowledge support. Aristotle made the boundaries of such very explicit. But, Marx blurred the boundaries.

For Marx, the moral agent is a free creative being of *praxis* or 'a conscious species-being.' The moral agent is unlike creatures of lower sort of consciousness which are of the unreflexive kind.[16] Distinguishing animals from humans, which is reminiscent of Aristotle, Marx has theorized on labor *(techne/poiesis)* and *praxis* thru making explicit the apparent link between the two. Marx has favored the higher form of human labor as an act of *praxis.* Among animals, such productive capacity is limited only to animal survival. It is not an act of a conscious moral agent. Humans can transform and reproduce the whole of nature. Their productive capacity *(techne/poiesis)* is more universal than the more specific production of animals. In this sense, the productive capacity of animals could be understood as 'labor' while the productive capacity of humans is rightly called as *praxis.*

To Marx, humans who labor like animals do are not doing praxis. This is because *praxis* presupposes a free creative action. Unlike animals, humans have the freedom to produce for one's self and for all in need. Such activity is not alienated. It is thus considered as a human activity or a 'self-activity.' There are no sorts of constraints whatsoever that hinders a human's self-activity from doing what s/he wants to accomplish. This is what we meant by a higher form of labor.

Marx reiterates that humans qua humans can transform labor into praxis. Animals cannot do as humans do insofar as they are doing 'labor' that is understood as a 'self-activity.' The necessary elements of being humans as such are rightly in place. That is, they are doing their 'labor' as creative and free-species beings.

[16]Rosalind Hursthouse broadens this to include human beings who do not as yet attain the age of reason. See her "Virtuous Actions" in Timothy O'Connor and Constantine Sandis, eds., A Companion to the Philosophy ofAction (Blackwell, 2010), 317-323. This whole collection is devoted to a full understanding of human action.

Thru self-activity, labor can become *praxis.* Again, this conception differs considerably with Aristotle and MacIntyre for both believe that *praxis*/practice is done for the sake of it; not for the sake of something else or for other ulterior motive. In the case of Marx, it is very clear that praxis is meant to produce life's material necessities. What we have pointed out so far in here is how Marx has blurred the boundaries between Aristotle's three-fold kinds of knowledge. This is what MacIntyre considered as a 'liquidation of the self into' more than or beyond 'a set of demarcated areas of role-playing' (AV 205) which Aristotle has firmly established.

In addition, as regards the relationship between the trichonomous senses of knowledge, Marx favors the primacy of *praxis* over *theoria/episteme* and *techne/poiesis.* Marx argues that *praxis* is the guarantee that a particular theory is reliable because *praxis* is the ultimate criterion of any sort of knowledge. It is also true with techne/poiesis precisely because it can only become praxis when done freely. Freedom is a *sine qua non* for *praxis*. In fact, with the prevalence of emotivism and disagreement in some moral debates nowadays, Marx proposes that *praxis* has the intellectual/practical resource to overcome such disagreement in transcending the theoretical to become the practical. Theory ought to be realized in practice. Its ultimate criterion is *praxis*; thus, 'melts' such disagreement.

Many were influenced by Marx. Some assert the superiority of his *praxis* over theory. They also argue that the criterion of truth is praxis. In fact, one only remembers that at the graveside of Marx, his companion F. Engels made famous what Marx meant by praxis when he said that 'the truth [proof] of the pudding is in the eating.' Many post-Marx followers modified his position. Some unified his theory and praxis while some favored theory.

MacIntyre's Theory of Practice

One of the moral insights of MacIntyre that has imprinted an indelible mark among his colleagues and even among other scholars across multi-disciplinary interests is his reformulated virtue morality and practice is at the core of it (including narrative and tradition). As an answer to the flaws of current moral theories that he himself has detected, MacIntyre presents his Virtue Theory

or the 'virtues-based practice morality.' This is also what we call the theory of practice of Alasdair MacIntyre.

The theory of practice, as MacIntyre himself calls it, is the first stage in his own reconstruction, reformulation, and revival of the morality of the virtues. MacIntyre's project of renewal for a more adequate morality based on virtues proceeds in three stages. To MacIntyre, "there are no less than three stages in the logical development of the concept" of virtue morality. They have to be presented and analyzed in logical order so that the core conception of a virtue is understood well. Each stage has its own conceptual background. Practice figures as the first stage. Then, follows what he characterized as 'a narrative order of a single human life.' He completes these with the notion of what constitutes a moral tradition as the third stage. Essentially, an adequate morality that is based on virtues needs this MacIntyre triptych: practice, narrative, and tradition.[17]

MacIntyre's triptych can be used as a tool to guide one's moral enquiry. The three core concepts can serve as the foundation of a new virtue morality. They are inextricably intertwined so that virtue morality can be concretely understood.

Unlike many contemporary theorists on practice who do not explicitly write what they meant; MacIntyre, nonetheless, does not leave us orphans when he illustrated what he meant by practice. MacIntyre defines practice as:

> *"Any coherent and complex form of socially-established cooperative human activity through which the goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended."* [18]

MacIntyre believes that such a definition, tortuous as it appears, "does not completely agree with current usage."[19] More so, the concept of practice used here is even different from the way MacIntyre has used the term prior to the publication of his After Virtue.

[17]See AV, esp. pp. 187 and 191.
[18]See AV, p. 187, emphasis added.
[19]See AV, 187; emphasis added.

Key constitutive elements are embedded in this definition of practice. A cursory investigation of the concept of practice would surface the following elements:[20]

a. It exhibits coherence and complexity and requires theoretical acumen.
b. It is socially established hence, it is formal and objective.
c. It is a shared activity, public, institutionalized, and carried out through human cooperation, not only participation.
d. It involves technical skills that are exercised within evolving traditions of value and principles, norm and standards of authority. This minimizes moral subjectivism.
e. It is organized to achieve certain standards of excellence or beyond such.
f. Certain internal goods are produced in the pursuit of excellence, not external goods.
g. Engaging in the activity increases human power to achieve the standards of excellence and internal goods.
h. Engaging in the activity extends human conceptions of its internal goods.

Prior to defining what he meant by practice, MacIntyre laid the foundations of his triptych providing, at least in brief, the whole gamut of the history of the virtues — from the Homeric heroic society, to Aristotle's Athens, to the perspectives of Christianity (i.e., New Testament and St. Thomas Aquinas), to B. Franklin's Philadelphia (utility), and to J. Austen's virtue system.[21]

Below is a breakdown of the key concepts that MacIntyre meant in his ***Theory of Practice****:*

People who would like to lead a virtuous life in a particular field or profession ought to first understand what the practice has been. Practice lays down the background from which a person ought to learn how to act accordingly so that he could lead a virtuous life. In essence, practice is a 'human activity' because it takes people

[20]T. L. Cooper's "Hierarchy, Virtue, and the Practice of Public Administration: A Perspective for Normative Ethics" Public Administration Review (July/August, 1987), 320-328. This article is helpful in delineating these elements of practice.

[21]See AV, 121-180.

to act rationally and work towards a common goal. Such 'human activity' is what gives meanings and values to an individual who would form, inform, and transform his environment so that he can help himself acquire necessary qualities. In turn, the activity will lead him to achieve goods internal to the practices. It is in society that a moral agent does become virtuous.

Such moves/actions of people are directed toward achieving the following: (1) meeting the rules and demands required in the activity, (2) pursuing the internal goods or the intrinsic benefits that humans experience as they perform such activities, and (3) going beyond the set standards of excellence in their respective particular field. Note that one of the internal goods is about (4) realizing man's telos or one's conception of 'what is good for man.'[22]

All the four aforementioned targets that were implied by MacIntyre can be achieved if practice is 'systematically extended.' D. F. Pilario explains that this is because practice has been formulated, critiqued, and "developed throughout … [its] long history."[23] This idea about the systematic extension of the human activity fits well with the notion of 'tradition.'

MacIntyre's notion of a virtue is very clear when he characterized it with the concept of 'internal goods' and 'standard of excellence.' A virtuous moral agent would consistently aim at internal goods more than the external ones. Moreover, virtuous moral agents would most of the time, if not always, look up to some 'standards of excellence' of those who have lived virtuous lives in their communities.

Here is an exposition about the achievement of internal goods. In a classic Aristotelian teleology, MacIntyre believes that genuine and authentic practices aimed that 'the goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence' of such. Here, it can be deduced that MacIntyre strongly criticizes the liberal society that enshrined 'external goods' and a sense of 'predictability' (AV 88-109). MacIntyre admits though that "external goods" are also considered goods; but, the goods he deemed very important and necessary as the *telos/finis* of practices are the internal goods. These goods are not

[22]Phillips, 'Critical Notice: After Virtue,' 113.

[23]D. F. Pilario, Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu. LeuvenUniversity Press, 2005, 82.

a priori one, but they "are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence." Richard Gula seems to corroborate the point above. In The Good Life: Where Morality and Spirituality Converge, he argues that "there is more to us, and more to life, than what we do. Our interior life affects our external behavior." Indeed, what we are and what we have inside do express what we show outside of our selves.[24]

The other target of practice involves the pursuit and the advancement of the standard of excellence. Without the 'standard of excellence,' practitioners might not achieve the internal goods that can be drawn out from the human activity. Hence, for a moral agent to consistently seek internal goods, he must "enter into a practice" and has "to accept the authority of those standards." He has to recognize the inadequacy of one's own performance as "judge[d] by them." MacIntyre further wrote: "It is to subject my own attitude, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice" (AV, 190). Thus, one cannot "be fully initiated into a practice without accepting the best standards realized so far."[25] David Miller[26] also supports this idea when he describes the 'standard of excellence' as being "understood in terms of how these are exhibited by the practitioners."

Another end goal of a practice is that every person uses it as a springboard to realize his telos. He has to direct his self towards 'what is good for man.'[27] Unlike other approaches to morality, practice does not reject or deny the telos of the moral agent; instead, it paves the way to it. It has been typical that a person lacks a telos that would provide him with the conception of what is truly good for him. So, a person ought to understand the practice where he is born into and gets initiated on. He has to work within the boundaries of practice, achieve the internal goods, pursue its standard of excellence, and realize his telos so that he can make himself contributory to human flourishing and to an eventual union with God.

For MacIntyre, life remains an ideal that all social moral activity is really in search of. Because people are in a quest for the

[24](New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 4; see also his Reason Informed by Faith, esp. Ch 1.

[25]Ibid., 190; see also his "A Partial Response to my Critics" in Horton and MendusAfter MacIntyre, 287-
304, esp. p 300.

[26]See his "Virtues, Practices and Justice" in Horton and MendusAfterMacIntyre, 245-64. Quotation at 245.

[27]Phillips, 'Critical Notice: After Virtue,' 113.

realization of such, the best life for human beings is that which is spent in seeking such — in spending and seeking what is the best life for human really is.

Further, four other adjectives are mentioned in MacIntyre's definition of practice. These four other adjectives in the concept of practices — cooperative, socially-established, complex, coherent — are explained in-depth below.

First, the human activity is 'cooperative' because the moral agent who is pursuing a virtuous life is being helped and guided by people who can already be considered virtuous in that particular field or profession. Somehow, the assistance they give come in the form of (a) the set rules and demands that they have also passed thru during their time and (b) those they have earlier added or created as they continue to pursue excellence in the field. The moral agent is also cooperating as he willingly submits himself to the demands and the rules that are particularly required in the field.

The 'cooperative human activity' is also 'socially-established' because it takes at least a group of people to create actions that are long-lasting and continuous. MacIntyre stresses that any moral agent, which has a 'narrative self,' includes 'cultural roots' from which humans participate in a 'socially established human activity.' The practice is not established by any single individual but by a community from which it draws its authority. This idea is largely different from the liberal individual conception of the self. Within a practice, a human being is born, does live in multiple relationships, fulfills his social roles, and gets habituated in that sort of activity. So, doing morality is a communal activity. Practice does "display some degree of complexity and coherence so as to show an aiming at some goal in a more or less organized manner."[28]

For instance, Paul Hoyt-O'Connor writes about how medicine is 'socially established and carried out through human cooperation.'

> *In the case of medicine, the good of a practice is confirmed not simply in a person being treated successfully on a given day but that many are cared for everyday. This provision of health care is conditioned by a vast array of organizations including not only hospitals and clinics but also universities and research institutes and those insurance corporations and government organizations which finance the operations of all of them. Thus, medicine is never merely a private practice. Its continued*

[28]See Pilario, op. cit., 81.

success depends upon the well-functioning of a score of medical, economic, and political institutions.[29]

The 'socially-established cooperative human activity' is 'complex' because other people in the past interplay as the moral agent relates with his people's narrative as well as the past concepts/theories/events that are passed on thru tradition. In a person's narrative, the complexity can lie on the human person's activities on being (a) relational, (b) embodied, (c) historical, and (d) unique but fundamentally equal. In a person's tradition, the complexity can be deemed in the act of transmitting what has been created, shaped, defined, and identified as what people in that particular field or profession have considered as the 'relevant goods for man' and/or the 'goods of excellence.'

Such 'complex socially-established cooperative human activity' is also considered 'coherent' because it is a meaningful whole that is directed towards common goals. Such goals were mentioned earlier. Practice, as a background/context for one to lead a virtuous life, is described as meaningful because the people doing the 'activity' are not left on their own. They are supported by and integrated to their respective 'narrative' and 'tradition.'

In this definition of practice, MacIntyre reminds his readers of his criticism against the democratized, asocial, and ahistorical liberal conception of the self. That liberal self has no coherence and brings forth emotivism. It also has no sense of complexity because the self is made the measure of morality that is totally independent; if not, is disembodied of any moral standpoint. It would also follow, rather necessarily, that the liberal conception of the self cannot speak of a 'socially cooperative human activity.' With more sociological and psychological underpinnings, the idea of the self-regarding and the other-regarding standpoints can be noticed. Obviously, the self-regarding standpoint has reference to the liberal/positivist conception of the moral agent. The standpoint of MacIntyre's triptych affirms the other-regarding model.

MacIntyre's Virtues-Based Practice Morality

MacIntyre reiterates what it means to be a human being and at the same time a moral agent; i.e., a narrative self. With this, t here

[29]"Virtue and the Practice of Medicine" available on-line: http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Bioe/BioeHoyt.htm (20/04/08). Emphasis supplied.

is a sociological, cultural, and historical 'embodiedness.' It gives coherence and complexity in the life of any human being. It is the gift to all or the sort of 'givenness' that is denied by the liberals.

Through the triptych, MacIntyre hopes to 'restore rationality and intelligibility' to our moral attitudes and commitment. MacIntyre considers that moral concepts, whether in philosophy or theology, do presuppose sociology. Moral concepts are embodied explicitly or implicitly in the real world or in set and concrete practices.[30] The embodied concept, i.e., practice, is not a neutral one. It is "expressive of the core values a specific tradition defends and upholds."[31]

The "best theory" referred to by MacIntyre is the intellectual tradition or his account of "tradition-constituted inquiry."[32] The tradition lies on the rationality that is composed of the three-fold reformulated version of virtue ethics. Tradition is highly connected to narrative, virtue, and practices. The narrative of an individual life is located in a specific particularity; in the here and now. It has to be understood in such specificity, but not absolutely. It has to be seen in a wider social context — a background in which the human person finds one's self.

Virtues are defined by the sets of practices. Those sets of practices, in turn, are sustained and are situated within a tradition that gives the wherewithal for practices to flourish or where the self pursues the goods of practice.[33] "Traditions themselves are shaped by, transmitted, and borne through practices which themselves have histories. Traditions as worlds of meaning define, or at least try to set the parameters for defining, what are the relevant goods for man."[34] In a vintage MacIntyre fashion, an absolute understanding of the so-called 'relevant goods for man' is not offered. MacIntyre leaves this concept open because traditions have an open-ended character. As Jean Porter describes, "They derive their unity from an

[30]See AV, 1 and 23.

[31]D. F. Pilario, Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu, (Leuven, Belgium: LeuvenUniversity Press, 2005), 82.

[32]See Macintyre's "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science" in Hauerwas and Jones, eds., Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eardmans Publishing Company, 1989), 138-157; see also an extended work by LUTZ, Christopher Stephen, Tradition In The Ethics Of Alasdair MacIntyre : Relativism, Thomism, And Philosophy,(Lanham, Md. : Lexington Books, 2004).

[33]See Horton, J. and S. Mendus, "Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue and After." In Horton, J.andMendus. eds. After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Works of MacIntyre. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1994, 11.

[34]See Odozor, PaulinusIkechukwu. Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal: A Study in Catholic Tradition since Vatican II. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.

orientation toward goods which are contested within the tradition itself."[35]

MacIntyre's triptych is inextricably intertwined. Here is the crucial exposition in AV about the relations of the elements in his triptych:

For there are no less than three stages in the logical development of the concept which have to be identified in order, if the core conception of a virtue is to be understood, and each of these stages has its own conceptual background. The first stage requires a background of what I shall call a practice, the second an account of what I have already characterized as the narrative order of a single human life and the third an account a good deal fuller than I have given up now of what constitutes a moral tradition. Each later stage presupposes the earlier, but not vice versa. Each stage is both modified by and reinterpreted in the light of, but also provides an essential constituent of each later stage. The progress in the development of the concept is closely related to, although it does not recapitulate in any straightforward way, the history of the tradition of which it forms the core (AV, 186-87).

The paragraph above embodies the core essence of the virtues which MacIntyre has reformulated. It is in this paragraph thatMacIntyre explicitly identifies the stages of the development of his virtue morality —practice, narrative, and moral tradition.

Frazer and Lacey provide a compact account of MacIntyre's moral theory in general. Below is their concise description:

> *Liberalism can only either make the good, the right, the virtuous, a matter of subjective opinion, or falsely universalize the judgment of an ideal rational individual. MacIntyre and other critics trace this dilemma to liberalism's individualism. MacIntyre elaborates his criticism of liberal individualism into a positive thesis of social identity and social structure (which are two aspects or moments of the same thing – by contrast to dualistic liberal analysis which separates the individual from and confronts him with the social whole). Social identity and social structure are set in time – in traditions which have narrative unity (as does the good human life which is informed by the quest for narrative coherence). ...*
>
> *So, for MacIntyre, man's moral nature and moral practice are tied up with his sociality, his membership of a tradition and his participation in practices: not with his individuality and autonomy. To do the right*

[35]See her "Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre" in M. Murphy, ed., Alasdair MacIntyre, (Cambridge, 2003), pp 38-69, at 42.

and to pursue the good is not to act or pursue individual preference; it is to live that good life which is given in tradition. To exercise the virtue is to do what is necessary to attain enjoyment of goods which are internal to practices. Practices are socially established and will usually be sustained by social institutions, like bodies of authority, codes, rules and regulations. Standards of excellence and criteria for judging whether one is doing the practice right are therefore objective, or at least intersubjective. But there is room for individual creativity, for pushing the boundaries forward, for doing better than any other practitioner has dreamed of.[36]

The deontology and utilitarian modern accounts of morality can be called as 'duty-based morality.'[37] The virtue theories can be called as 'virtues-based morality.' Upon critical scrutiny, it ought to be recognized that duty-based and virtues-based accounts do not necessarily belong to the same plane of morality. Theoretically, the purported goal of duty-based morality is to offer a method of systematizing principles or rules ofaction that can aid the moral agent to form perspectives, 'see' what to do, or recommend actions in specific circumstances. Such is easier said than done precisely because problems of greater moral imports usually would lead to moral interminabilities (MacIntyre), moral quandaries (Pincoffs), or psychologically moral schizophrenias (Stocker).

A scholastic notion propounds that agere sequitur esse. It means that action follows being; or, as a being is, so it acts. The duty-based morality centers on the actions of the moral agent; so, such type of morality provides action-guiding principles. However, the duty-based morality misses the moral agent who is acting. It does not necessarily concern itself with what sort of person the agent is becoming or turning into as he follows the rule or performs the duty.

In contrast, although not in an absolute sense, virtues-based morality tends to shift the emphasis to the moral agent more pointedly on some concrete disposition for acting, whether self-regarding[38] and executive dispositions such as courage and

[36]"MacIntyre, Feminism and the Concept of Practice" in J. Horton and S. Mendus, eds., After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame, 1994), 265-282, at 270.

[37]See Statman, "Introduction to Virtue Ethic," in Statman, ed., Virtue Ethics (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1997), 1-41; also B. Williams, "Virtues an Vices" in Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (London/NY: Routledge, 1998).

[38]M. Slote would seem to be contributing to the revival of morality of the virtues by bringing to our attention these perspectives, i.e., 'self-regarding' and 'other regarding.' See his From Morality to Virtue (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992). In a more recent article, 'From Morality to Virtue' in D. Statman, ed., Virtue Ethics (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1997), 128-144, he used the concepts of 'agent-

temperance; or, other-regarding dispositions such as fairness/justice and truthfulness/honesty. It primarily concerns itself with the moral agent. The rules and duties just follow next. Here, the moral agent asks the fundamental question: What kind of person I must be to do such and such?[39]

Admittedly, the virtues-based morality does not have the luxury of the claims of the duty-based morality. It does not provide what the other set of theories provide. It does not purport to offer action guiding principles. What it concentrates is the moral agent and what he needs. That is, it emphasizes what sorts of relevant virtues to acquire. It can recommend that such virtues are needed to achieve human flourishing; both individually and communally.

Rules and obligations are important. In any of his writings, MacIntyre never repudiates this claim. But, they are secondary. Virtues are primary. Rules and obligations are made for the moral agents and not otherwise. A piece of clothing, by way of analogy, no matter how grand and expensive is always fitted to the person, not the reverse. This is echoed in several sagacious traditions; especially in the context of religious morality.

Note that virtues-based morality does not repudiate duty-based morality. For in essence, it really takes virtuous people to precisely discharge what the rules impose or what duty requires. It ensures positive consequences leading toward greater human flourishing. This could be perceived as an advantage of virtues-based morality. When compared to duty-based morality, virtues-based morality is broader, more complex, and more realistic.

Virtues-based morality is a distinct alternative framework that can be employed in doing a moral-theological enquiry in the context of patenting genetic inventions in the life science industry. Moral issues have been brought about by this technical advancement; not to mention economic, political, and legal developments in the contemporary era.[40]

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favouring' and 'agent sacrificing' to suggest the same perspectives. MacIntyre also uses the same in DRA.

[39]See for instance, A. MacIntyre, "Once More on Kierkegaard" in J. Davenport and A. Rudd, eds., Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001), 339-356, at 346.

[40]See May, C. A Global Political Economy of Intellectual Property Rights: The New Enclosures? London/NY: Routledge, 2000. Also, see Dutfield, Graham. Intellectual Property Rights and the Life Science Industries: A Twentieth Century History. England/USA: Ashgate Publishing

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