

EXCLUSION AND LEGITIMACY

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ALASDAIR MACINTYRE'S CONCEPT OF PRACTICES

APPLIED TO PHILOSOPHY

Alan Kazakov

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uOttawa

Department of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts

University of Ottawa

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to provide a new definition for philosophy rooted in MacIntyre's account of a "practice". In the first chapter, I explain MacIntyre's concept of a practice as it appears in *After Virtue*—including its critical components, namely, internal goods, standards of excellence, and the historical dimension of practices—through a consideration of the practice of guitar lutherie. I then use this account to build up an initial definition of philosophy as a practice, and briefly clarify two minor confusions that could easily arise regarding such an account. In my second chapter, I take up MacIntyre's view that practices are always spatiotemporally situated in order to question whether or not my definition from Chapter One could include non-Western philosophy within it. I argue that this is possible within the peculiar epistemic conditions of modernity, based on a reading of MacIntyre's paper "Relativism, Power and Philosophy". In Chapter Three, I consider another key component of MacIntyre's account—namely, that of institutions—and arrive at some extra qualifications regarding the concepts of both "external goods" and "corruption" to deepen the account, and then introduce my own concept of "institutional hegemony" to account for academia's present status with regards to the practice of philosophy, which I use to explain a discordance between the present reality of philosophy as a discipline and the conclusions I draw in Chapter Two. I then extend this line of thought in the fourth chapter to look at some objections that could be made against a MacIntyrean view of philosophy-as-a-practice from a feminist and postcolonial lens. These objections are then addressed in the fifth chapter, where I show that the MacIntyrean ought to be in agreement with the feminist and postcolonial projects, and that the MacIntyrean framework can indeed accommodate them.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AV* A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*
- WJWR* A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*
- 3RV* A. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*
- RPP* A. MacIntyre, *Relativism, Power and Philosophy*
- CTS* R. Geuss, *Changing the Subject: Philosophy from Socrates to Adorno*
- MFCP* E. Frazer & N. Lacey, *MacIntyre, Feminism, and the Concept of Practice*
- JPDD* C. Heyes, *Justification, Pluralism, and Disciplinary Discontents; or, Leaving Philosophy*
- RSWM* G. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*

There is a tendency, above all, to underestimate the universally human inclination to conformism, which continually finds new ways and means for self-deception.

— Hans-Georg Gadamer

PREFACE

This thesis began with the realization, upon my first reading of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* in the winter of 2019, that his concept of a "practice" as it was articulated in Chapter 15 of that book provided great insight into a question that had been increasingly troubling me since I had begun to study philosophy in earnest some four years prior to that moment: namely, what *is* philosophy? This was a question that troubled me less in the strictly philosophical sense than it did in a more mundane, practical one, insofar as I found myself generally incapable of adequately responding to the question "what is philosophy?" in the sense in which it is asked by your parents at the dinner table after you've announced that you're switching majors.

What began as a relatively naïve hunch—that MacIntyre's concept of a practice reflected the internal logic of everything that I had been doing in my undergraduate education, and thus served as a wonderful definition of philosophy in a sociologically-adequate sense—was later problematized over the course of my initial research as I encountered a number of difficult and serious objections from a plethora of sources, objections which I grappled with not only in the initial research phase, but all throughout the writing of the text itself. Thus, while my initial intention in the germinal stages of this thesis had been to reconstruct MacIntyre's concept of a practice and apply it to philosophy in a relatively straightforward manner, the result that lay before me when much of the dust had settled was a thesis that advanced that straightforward definition in a first chapter, and then subsequently considered those objections in all their seriousness for nearly a hundred pages.

In the first chapter, I explain MacIntyre's concept of a practice as it appears in *After Virtue*—including its critical components, namely, internal goods, standards of excellence, and the

historical dimension of practices—through a consideration of the practice of guitar lutherie. I then use this account to build up an initial definition of philosophy as a practice, and briefly clarify two minor confusions that could easily arise regarding such an account. In my second chapter, I take up MacIntyre’s view that practices are always spatiotemporally situated in order to question whether or not my definition from Chapter One could include non-Western philosophy within it. I argue that this is possible within the peculiar epistemic conditions of modernity, based on a reading of MacIntyre’s paper “Relativism, Power and Philosophy”. In Chapter Three, I consider another key component of MacIntyre’s account—namely, that of institutions—and arrive at some extra qualifications regarding the concepts of both “external goods” and “corruption” to deepen the account, and then introduce my own concept of “institutional hegemony” to account for academia’s present status with regards to the practice of philosophy, which I use to explain a discordance between the present reality of philosophy as a discipline and the conclusions I draw in Chapter Two. I then extend this line of thought in the fourth chapter to look at some objections that could be made against a MacIntyrean view of philosophy-as-a-practice from a feminist and postcolonial lens. These objections are then addressed in the fifth chapter, where I show that the MacIntyrean ought to be in agreement with the feminist and postcolonial projects, and that the MacIntyrean framework can indeed accommodate them.

What emerges in hindsight is that the thesis has two structures, so to speak. The first (nominal) structure is the one I have just outlined above: a relatively brief account of philosophy as a MacIntyrean practice followed by an extended consideration of various objections, organized under three broad headings that constitute the three middle chapters of this thesis, and a concluding chapter to tie everything together. Such a structure might give the impression that my objective here has been to advance a somewhat simple idea and then engage in a kind of untutored *disputatio*.

But what ought to emerge, I hope, from the actual content of the thesis is its second (real) structure: namely, a new definition of philosophy that is built up progressively over the course of five chapters, with the objections in effect serving as means for further refinement of my italicized definition on p. 22, which can only be understood as preliminary and tentative. As such, the definition from Chapter One cannot be fully and properly understood without the further qualifications I make subsequently in the thesis; nor can those further qualifications be seen as ancillary to the tentative definition, for they are part and parcel of a comprehensive and coherent understanding of philosophy as a practice situated in the context of the 21st century.

A prior understanding of the content of *After Virtue* would be highly beneficial to the reader, though not strictly required, and I have tried to provide an account here that is enlightening both to those with no prior exposure to MacIntyre as well as to his seasoned readers—though, admittedly, I have chosen to aim more squarely at the former cohort, as this is ultimately a work whose main topic is not MacIntyre *per se*, but rather contemporary academic philosophy; and I venture quite confidently that there are probably more people in our discipline today who aren't intimately familiar with MacIntyre's work than those who are. The thesis is thus largely unwilling to hide from criticism behind the density of the last four decades of MacIntyre scholarship, and should (at least in principle) be defensible on its own terms as a standalone work.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING PHILOSOPHY AS A PRACTICE

MacIntyre's core definition

MacIntyre defines a “practice” in the following way:

By a “practice” I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence 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. (*AV* 218)

In this thesis, I will be referring to this definition as MacIntyre’s “core definition” of a practice, and this for the following reason: all of the essential components of a practice (internal goods, standards of excellence, and the sociohistorical dimension of these) are contained within it. However, this definition on its own can only be understood as cursory and incomplete, and requires a significant amount of unpacking in order to be in any way compelling. What follows in this section is my attempt to carry out just such an unpacking, with the goal of developing this core definition into my own definition of philosophy. To this end, I will begin by explaining the more esoteric components of MacIntyre’s core definition.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre uses his example of teaching a child chess to define and draw a distinction between internal and external goods, and his example of portrait-painting to explain standards of excellence and their historical evolution. I want to make an attempt here to explain these same concepts more thoroughly and holistically—and on my own terms—by looking at one particular practice that I am somewhat familiar with: the practice of guitar lutherie¹, which I would

¹ One might be tempted here to draw a distinction between practices and crafts, and to place the luthier’s craft in the latter category. I do not take it that MacIntyre makes this distinction; in fact, it would appear that what MacIntyre first articulated as “practice” in *After Virtue* later becomes, seemingly without explanation, “craft” in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. Not only does MacIntyre refer to farming first as a practice (*AV* 218) and then later as a craft (*3RV* 68) in these two respective works with no distinction, but the account of “craft” in Chapter Two of *Three*

argue is a kind of hodgepodge of a practice that intersects with not just lutherie in the strict sense (as the fabrication and repair of stringed instruments), but also guitar-playing, electrical engineering, and audio engineering. There are three principal reasons for this choice.

The first is that I take seriously MacIntyre's claim that a practice can only be properly understood by someone already initiated into that practice. Since my main hobby is playing the electric guitar (and this hobby more often than not forces one to also become one's own technician—and thus engage in lutherie on some basic level—when seriously pursued), it is one of the practices I feel most comfortable speaking confidently of², except, of course, for philosophy—but I think the practice of philosophy is, for reasons that I shall explain later, a poor introductory example for the concept of a practice; and I believe examining the practice of guitar lutherie serves as a good midway point between what I see as the highly simplistic examples used in MacIntyre's account and the overly complex nature of the practice of philosophy.

The second reason is that I believe considering this practice in particular will do a good job of laying the foundations for later observations and additions I will make to MacIntyre's account, which I see as in some ways underdeveloped or otherwise ill-suited to readily apply to philosophy. It is my hope that the examples I use to replace MacIntyre's will make my later claims concerning “delocalized practices” more intuitive to the reader.

The third reason is that, like all intellectuals, I am fairly self-absorbed and will take any opportunity to listen to myself talk about the things I find interesting. However, in the interest of

Rival Versions appears to be, in effect, little more than a re-articulation of his account of “practice” in more explicitly Thomistic-Aristotelian terms following his Thomistic turn in 1985 (on this latter point, see Bavister-Gould 2008).

² Guitar-playing might appear to be the more logical candidate here, but as I shall explain later, guitar-playing's “architectonic” status with regards to guitar lutherie makes the latter a better example to highlight a number of key points.

not being *too* self-indulgent, I have opted to leave most of the more onerous aspects of my examples as footnotes that can be safely ignored by the reader who doesn't feel the need to read about abstruse details concerning the history of rock music or the specific technical differences between one guitar model and another.

To understand MacIntyre's distinction between internal and external goods, consider the following hypothetical situation. An intermediate guitar player gets a job at a music store in the guitar department. They have no particular interest in or passion for the technical side of musical equipment, and simply wish to get paid to hang around in a place where they are surrounded by expensive equipment that they cannot afford in order to play it under the pretense of familiarizing themselves with the store's inventory. At first, they are simply tasked with clerical and sales duties. However, at one point, the store's owner (who is also the in-house luthier) desires to teach their craft to this person, so they propose a deal. The person is told that they will be moved over to a junior position aiding the luthier in exchange for a pay bump of four dollars an hour. They are tasked with performing basic setups: truss rod adjustments, action adjustments, intonation adjustments, etc. The person is given the pay bump no matter the quality of the work they do, but if they finish a set-up job (which typically costs around forty dollars) to the full satisfaction of the luthier, such that the luthier does not need to make any further adjustments to the instrument, the person will also receive half the profit from the job. As with MacIntyre's chess-learning child, the person is thus motivated to do the job, and do it well; and as time goes on, in learning the more advanced aspects of the craft, it is hoped that the person acquires an appreciation for the goods specific to guitar lutherie—which we might describe as a highly particular kind of attentiveness, concentration, and tactile skill, as well as a particular kind of end-product in the form of a guitar

that both sounds good and plays well—such that they are no longer motivated principally by the money, but by a passion for the craft³.

As with MacIntyre’s example of teaching a child chess, this example shows the distinction between two kinds of goods. On the one hand, there are what MacIntyre calls external goods: these are goods that are “externally and contingently attached [to practices] by the accidents of social circumstance” (*AV* 219). Money, taking the form here of a wage increase and a cut of the profits, is a key external good, as are status and prestige. For MacIntyre, these goods are never uniquely tied to a single practice, and as such they can always be accrued through alternative means. In contrast, internal goods are goods that are essentially linked to a particular practice; as such, the internal goods of a practice like guitar lutherie can only be achieved by engaging in lutherie or some other practice of that specific kind.

Internal goods have two key characteristics. The first is that they can only be specified by reference to the practices they belong to, or by examples drawn from those practices. In the case of the internal goods of chess, which MacIntyre identifies as “a certain highly particular kind of analytical skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity” (*AV* 219), we either speak of these goods in direct reference to chess, or we connect them to proximate internal goods in other practices where we perceive an analogical similarity: for this reason, we might speak of an athlete, a politician, or a general “playing chess” in their respective areas. Barring this, we find our vocabulary too imprecise to pick out the specific nature of the internal good, and so we have to

³ Of course, guitar lutherie involves much more than the adjustments that are part of a basic setup—in fact, a basic setup requires relatively little technical skill at all and can be seen more as basic maintenance, essentially on par with re-tightening the bolts on one’s IKEA furniture. More involved work, such as making changes to the electronic hardware, or leveling or replacing the frets, or, especially, the *building* of a guitar as opposed to merely repairing or modifying an existing one, is where the luthier’s craftsmanship truly shines through.

resort to clumsy language like “a certain highly particular kind of”. The same applies to the internal goods of guitar lutherie: the “highly particular kind of attentiveness, concentration, and tactile skill” mentioned in my example can only be properly understood either through reference to the practice itself, or to practices of an adequately similar nature, such as perhaps carpentry or automotive mechanics.

The second key characteristic of internal goods is that they can only be adequately recognized through the experience of participating in the practice they belong to. To understand this, consider the Stratocaster, arguably the most famous electric guitar model ever made. First manufactured by Fender in 1954, the Stratocaster has experienced a significant evolution in its 67 years of continuous production. Not only has Fender modified the design’s specifics on numerous occasions over the years and created different lines of the same model to meet different price points; the design has also been emulated by countless other companies, whether they be cheap knock-offs or high-end boutique models. As a result, a guitar player is able to own a Stratocaster-style guitar whether they’re looking to spend a hundred dollars or ten thousand dollars⁴. This leads to a situation where you could have a dozen different Stratocaster-style guitars side-by-side, which all look more or less the same, but whose quality (in terms of the particular guitar’s representation of the achievement of the internal goods of guitar lutherie) will differ greatly; and it requires a

⁴ Towards the lower end of the spectrum, you might have something like the Bullet Stratocaster (retailing at \$240), which is manufactured by Squier, Fender’s subsidiary brand created to manufacture Fender-style guitars at modest price-points. On the opposite end, you have the Fender Custom Shop, where master luthiers create limited runs of extremely accurate replicas of some of rock’s most iconic guitars, even going so far as to artificially reproduce the source guitar’s specific cosmetic damage that comes from years of use. For example, in 2016, Fender Custom Shop released the David Gilmour Signature Stratocaster Relic, which is a replica of Gilmour (of Pink Floyd fame)’s famous “Black Strat”. Upon release, it retailed at around five thousand dollars, and has since increased in value to the tune of eleven thousand dollars. Incidentally, the *actual* Black Strat was sold by Gilmour at a charity auction in 2019 for just shy of four million dollars, making it the most expensive guitar ever sold at the time.

certain degree of technical knowledge to be able to identify the difference between two models of the same guitar at different price-points. An experienced practitioner will be able to understand the technical differences that underpin the price differences—the wood, the hardware, the frets—but will also be able to identify when a particular guitar is *actually* worth more or less than what it's priced at, based on differences in playability and tone⁵. In contrast, someone who has no experience in the practice and is just picking up a guitar for the first time will be at a complete loss when it comes to accurately gauging the differences in quality. As a result, what frequently happens with new players is that their judgments will more often than not be based on purely aesthetic considerations rather than ones that appeal to the internal goods of the practice—so the colour of a guitar's finish, for example, or the aesthetic preference for a maple fretboard versus a rosewood fretboard, will be of primary concern—and they will generally take the brand reputation and the price alone to be a good indication of the guitar's quality, regardless of its underlying characteristics.

MacIntyre refers to the basis upon which experienced practitioners make valid judgments concerning internal goods as “standards of excellence”. He writes:

A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods. To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences, and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice. (*AV* 221)

For MacIntyre, these standards of excellence “rule out all subjectivist and emotivist analyses of judgment” (*AV* 222) since individual, subjective tastes are overridden by standards whose authority

⁵ Squier has recently been praised for putting out models that play exceptionally well for the price. Though in the past, Squiers were seen as cheap, low-quality, entry-level guitars, the recent Classic Vibe and Vintage Modified lines (both in the \$600 price range) have been of such high relative quality that many players have noted that “there isn't \$1,400 worth of difference” between these two lines and Fender's flagship American Professional II line, which retails for around \$2,000.

derives from the internal logic of the practice itself. In my lutherie example, such standards of excellence enable the luthier to authoritatively judge the junior luthier's set-up job. This is not only reflected in the more mathematical aspects of the set-up—such as, for example, using a radius gauge to determine whether or not the string action has been adjusted in a way that aligns correctly with the fretboard—but also in the act of the luthier playing the guitar in order to get a more intuitive sense of how well the guitar plays after the adjustment.

In guitar lutherie, there are, broadly speaking, two key internal goods relating to the guitar itself: playability and tone. Playability, as I have just alluded to, has to do with the tactile quality of the guitar. A perfectly straight neck, well-adjusted string action, and high-quality tuning pegs will allow the player to move up and down the fretboard more easily, fret the notes more easily, and stay in tune while playing, respectively. Tone, on the other hand, has to do with the timbre of the guitar's output signal, and thus is discussed in strictly auditory terms: a guitar's tone will be said to be “good” if the signal's timbre works well for the style of music being played⁶.

Of course, judging whether or not a particular guitar tone is good or not is not a matter of getting some scientific reading of the signal's physical properties and consulting a chart, as we might be inclined to picture it when we speak of “objective” standards. Ultimately, participants in the practice will listen to the signal and make the judgment via certain mental processes that might not even be fully clear to those practitioners themselves. As a result, there does exist a certain degree

⁶ Attempting to elaborate this serves as a good illustration of what MacIntyre means when he says that internal goods can only be identified by participating in the practice in question. It is very difficult, in abstract terms, to convey exactly what a “good guitar tone” is; and one finds it helpful to appeal to Wittgenstein's distinction between what can be shown and what can be said. In other words, the best way to explain what good guitar tone is would be to sit someone down and make them systematically listen to recordings of different guitarists with a desirable tone—David Gilmour, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimi Hendrix, and so on.

of subjectivity in the judgment of a guitar signal's tone, and what sounds "good" to one practitioner might sound "bad" or merely "average" to another. However, there are still certain standards that will guide the *validity* of such judgments, and will dictate the terms in which those judgments can be expressed and justified. As with any practice where a highly particular kind of sensory experience needs to be described through language, a specialized vocabulary develops to make subtle distinctions between the varieties of experience proper to that activity. Think, for example, of the use of adjectives like "peaty", "oaky", and "spicy" to describe subtle distinctions in the flavour of scotch whisky, adjectives that can only be sufficiently grasped when the person has developed a palate that can seize these distinctions. This naturally requires a certain exposure to drinking scotch, which at first only tastes strong and abrasive, no matter the particular bottle. But—importantly—once that palate is developed, there will be no massive, fundamental disagreements over the basic facts of the flavour of a particular scotch. Two experienced scotch drinkers might disagree over the extremely subtle notes present in Lagavulin 16, such as whether vanilla or fig is more dominant in the finish, but there can be no disagreement over the fact that Lagavulin 16 is *peaty* (though it might so happen that one of the drinkers doesn't personally enjoy peaty scotch). With respect to guitar tone, a similar vocabulary develops ("bright", "smooth", "jangly", "punchy") to describe the subtleties of the sound produced by some combination of guitar, amplifier, and effects pedals, and a particular piece of equipment will be judged in terms of this vocabulary to have met or failed to meet some particular standard of excellence, and therefore to have achieved or failed to achieve the internal good of a desirable tone.

Someone hoping to initiate themselves into the practice of guitar lutherie will never acquire the necessary skills to grasp these subtleties without taking the time to subject themselves to such pre-existing standards of tone and playability. "If", MacIntyre says, "on starting to listen to music, I

do not accept my own incapacity to judge correctly, I will never learn to hear, let alone to appreciate, Bartok's latest quartets" (*AV* 221); and similarly, the newcomer to guitar lutherie who does not accept their incapacity to judge correctly will never be able to feel and appreciate the difference between a well-set-up guitar and a poorly-set-up guitar, or to hear and appreciate the specific tonal qualities of a Seymour Duncan SSL-5 pickup or a vintage Hiwatt amplifier head. While someone engaged in the practice of guitar-*playing* can certainly be a good guitarist without needing to be intimately familiar with their equipment, a luthier will not be able to engage in their craft without being able to feel (for playability), hear (for tone) and appreciate these subtle distinctions. And, adjacently, someone who wishes to build and repair amplifiers or effects pedals will need to do the same in relation to the equipment that they specialize in.

These standards, however, are not created during the practice's inception and fixed for all of time: rather, they develop historically as practitioners innovate within the practice. In guitar lutherie, new designs or features are introduced by luthiers, whose guitars or components are then used by musicians and immortalized on famous records⁷. This point is perhaps best illustrated by the development of guitar distortion. Initially, what was generally valued (in jazz, for example, which is the genre the electric guitar had first been invented for) was a clean tone, and 1950s jazz, blues, and rock 'n' roll generally did not deviate from this⁸. However, beginning in the 1960s,

⁷ Innovations such as the Floyd Rose locking tremolo system, the active pickup, or even the electric guitar itself, for example.

⁸ There are some notable exceptions. The first use of distorted tone is generally attributed to Willie Lee Johnson's guitar work on Howlin' Wolf's 1951 song "How Many More Years", which was achieved by simply overdriving the volume of his low-fidelity amplifier to the point of break-up, i.e. to the point where the amplifier tubes were incapable of processing the signal adequately.

distortion—which had started as more or less of an accident⁹—became highly desirable after the massive success of the Rolling Stones’ 1965 hit “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction”, where Keith Richards used a Maestro Fuzz-Tone pedal for the main guitar riff¹⁰. This led to an explosion of popularity and demand for distortion pedals, which were subsequently picked up by everyone from Jimi Hendrix to Robby Krieger (of the Doors) to Jimmy Page (of Led Zeppelin), thereby solidifying distortion’s place as *the* sound of rock music. The sound of distortion would go on to be refined further and further, with new genres being created that each have their own standards of excellence with regards to distortion in guitar tone, being pushed to its limits in genres like heavy metal¹¹.

For MacIntyre, this multiplicity of (sometimes contradictory) standards of excellence within a single practice is unified by the fact that “the sequences of development find their point in a progress towards and beyond a variety of types and modes of excellence” (AV 221), so that instead of having two opposite standards of excellence (such as the clean tones valued in jazz and the heavily distorted tones valued in metal) constitute some sort of conflict, they rather present two

⁹ As the apocryphal story goes, the Davies brothers (the founding members of the Kinks) did not get along very well, and during one particular conflict, Ray Davies slashed the speaker cone of his brother’s amplifier with a razor blade, leading to the particular distorted tone that can be heard on “You Really Got Me” and “All Day and All of the Night”.

¹⁰ There are two interesting things to note about this event. The first is that the Maestro Fuzz-Tone was originally invented to replicate a distorted tone that had itself been achieved by accident during the recording of Marty Robbins’ 1960 track “Don’t Worry”, when session guitarist Grady Martin plugged his bass guitar into a faulty channel in the mixing desk. The second is that Keith Richards had originally used the pedal merely as a placeholder in order to track a horn part in the studio and wasn’t expecting the distorted guitar to appear on the final cut. He recalls that the first time he heard the song on the radio, he wasn’t aware that his manager had released the track as-is, and he panicked because he thought it sounded insane. As such, the early history of distortion—from the creation of the effect to its popularization—is a history of errors and accidents that eventually became desirable in their own right.

¹¹ There is an amusing video of a metal guitarist playing well-known metal riffs with no distortion, creating a sound that many viewers aptly characterize as “surf rock from Hell”. I note this merely to illustrate just how central guitar distortion is to the genre. <https://youtu.be/dVqqWUyDPzA>

different—but, *ceteris paribus*, equally valid—ways of achieving the internal goods of the practice.

My examples vs. MacIntyre's

Why go to all of the trouble of re-explaining MacIntyre's concept of a practice using an example that has nothing to do with philosophy, and in so much (seemingly unnecessary) detail? By this point, a number of key features of practices that were not explicitly considered in MacIntyre's original account ought to have manifested themselves.

The first thing that should be noticed is that, as I tried to communicate the specificities of guitar lutherie on a deeper and more involved level, I found myself being increasingly unable to express things adequately without reference to not only guitar lutherie itself, but another practice closely related to it—namely, guitar-playing. Eventually, as I began to write at length about tone, it also became necessary to allude to amplifiers and effects pedals, both of which are the products of practices that are not themselves guitar lutherie, but are directly adjacent to it.

These adjacent practices do not simply exist in close proximity to one another—there is a sense in which they bleed into one another, where practitioners of one practice will generally need to be in some way concerned with, and involved in, the others. But the relationship between these practices is not quite the same as Aristotle's account of what he refers to as “architectonic” *techne* in the opening lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where, for example, bridle-making “falls under” horsemanship, and therefore “the ends of the architectonic [*techne*] are more choiceworthy than the ends under them, since they are pursued for the sake of the former” (1094a13-16). Though we can clearly see, in purely abstract terms, that the ends of guitar lutherie, amplifier-building, and effects-pedal-building all fall under guitar-playing, which itself falls under musicianship, the implied superiority of the architectonic practice does not reflect the actual attitudes of individuals

involved in these practices¹². For in reality, expert luthiers, amplifier builders, and effects pedal builders are generally met with great respect and reverence by experienced guitar players, perhaps most movingly exemplified by Mark Knopfler’s song “Monteleone”¹³. Thus, such groups of practices resemble less an ordered hierarchy than they do a kind of social milieu, a community of individuals engaged in different but related practices, where the expression of a mutual concern and interest for one another’s practices is partly constitutive of the internal goods of any one individual practice within the group (in ordinary language, this dynamic is generally identified as a virtue carrying the name of “worldliness”)¹⁴. I call such configurations “networks of practices”.

It should be noted that levels of involvement between practices that stand in some relation to one another differ greatly from one practice to another. The relationship between a luthier and a guitar player is obviously not the same as the relationship between, say, a chess player and an artisan who makes chess boards, or a sculptor or carver who makes chess pieces—the sculptor need not be a good chess player to produce good pieces, and the chess player need not know anything about carving or sculpting to be a good chess player. Aristotle distinguishes in *Physics* II 3 between two kinds of crafts relating to two different kinds of concern regarding the

¹² The position that architectonic practices are in some way superior can be felt in the opening chapters of both the *Metaphysics* (981b25-982a2) and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (I 1), as well as when MacIntyre refers to philosophy, in line with Aristotle’s position, as “the master-craft of all master-crafts” in *Three Rival Versions* (3RV 68).

¹³ During the 2009 concert “An Evening with Mark Knopfler”, Knopfler takes a moment to introduce the inspiration behind the song, which is about John Monteleone, who is considered by many to be the greatest living archtop guitar luthier. In addition to being a beautiful song, I would also argue it is a terrific exemplification of both the content and the emotional character of what MacIntyre identifies as the second kind of internal good in practices, namely, “the good of a certain kind of life” (AV 221), within guitar lutherie. Incidentally, Knopfler excels at doing this exact thing with many different practices in his music—trucking in “Border Reiver” and fishing in “The Trawlerman’s Song”, for example. https://youtu.be/1ZtR4rKt_zA

¹⁴ This is why I speak specifically of “guitar lutherie” as opposed to “lutherie” more generally—a concert violinist would hardly entrust their prized violin to a luthier who works almost exclusively with electric guitars, and a guitar luthier whose social milieu is composed of mainly rock musicians would not feel the need to be intimately familiar with the intricacies of the violin.

knowledge of the matter in question: “the craft concerned with the use and the architectonic one concerned with production” (194b1), such as when two crafts—seafaring and rudder-making—are both concerned with rudders in two different ways, the former knowing how to use it to navigate a ship (and thus knowing what sort of form it should take) and the latter knowing how to make it (and thus knowing what sort of wood should be used and how to carve the raw materials into the final product). This example of the rudder occupies a space somewhere in between guitars and chess sets, for the rudder-maker must be concerned with the practice of seafaring in order to create a rudder that is optimal for seafaring, but they need not necessarily be accomplished seafarers themselves, whereas luthiers will generally need to be *good* guitar-players in order to also be good luthiers; and conversely, ship captains will need to know about some of the technical aspects of rudders in order to purchase and install an optimal rudder for their ship. And similarly, guitar-players will need to know the technical aspects of their instrument for the same reasons, but the level of involvement of the latter will generally be much higher due to the technical complexity of a guitar and the guitarist’s standard involvement and concern with basic maintenance. So we see that each network of practices has to be understood on its own terms, and generally will only be properly understood by the practitioners engaged in at least one of the practices which constitute the network.

The second feature of my account that differs from MacIntyre’s is as follows. I alluded earlier to philosophy being “too abstract” to serve as a good introductory example to the concept of a practice. I want to now take a moment to clarify what I meant by this and explain why I think the practice of guitar lutherie serves as a good mid-way point between using chess as an example and using philosophy as an example. The key advantage of MacIntyre’s use of chess as an introductory example is its relatively bounded nature. Chess has rules, which, in the context of a game of chess,

hold just as categorically as the laws of the natural world. Philosophy, too, has a somewhat analogous set of rules in the form of logic; but the laws of logic are not as restrictive for philosophical inquiry as the rules of chess are for chess, for the rules of the latter are constitutive of the game of chess itself, whereas the laws of logic are not constitutive of the practice of philosophy. The closer analogue would be that the laws of logic are about as restrictive to philosophy as the structures of English grammar are for English writing; and as David Mitchell once humorously remarked, “*King Lear* is just English words put in order.”

In contrast to philosophy, however, guitar lutherie does have certain standards of excellence that are grounded in more readily-understandable physical phenomena. The straightness of a guitar’s neck, for example, can be accurately determined with specialized tools like a neck relief gauge, or a more simplistic straightedge (which can also identify unlevel frets); the alignment of a guitar’s string action in relation to the fretboard can be determined with a radius gauge; and intonation can be measured with an electronic tuner. All of these are precise measurements whose validity and utility can be much more easily grasped by a newcomer to the practice than, say, debates concerning nominalism versus realism, moral realism versus moral anti-realism, or logical analysis versus phenomenology. In even more straightforward terms, it is easier for a newcomer to guitar lutherie to recognize a straight neck or a well-adjusted action than it is for a newcomer to philosophy to recognize a formally good argument, or a compelling one.

There is also a notable difference between the child’s motivation to *win* in MacIntyre’s chess-based example and the person’s motivation to *do the job well* in my lutherie-based example. For one thing, the latter case requires a more subtle understanding of the acceptance of pre-existing standards of excellence. Chess is a practice where you have a competitive game with rules, and clearly defined winners and losers, as with most any other game or sport—a checkmate is an

uncontestable victory, as is knocking out an opponent in boxing, or scoring more goals than the other team in a game of hockey, at least in the strict sense (we sometimes speak of a chess player, boxer, or hockey team winning a “moral victory” despite their formal loss). But many practices are decidedly not like this. Especially in the case of philosophy, for example, there are no checkmates. Lutherie is a closer analogue to philosophy in this case because the conditions of “victory” are much less strictly defined—in fact, the very word “victory” seems ill-suited to the language of the practice. Unlike chess, philosophy and guitar lutherie do not have a static key criterion that identifies an objective victor, but are rather centrally constituted by a continual re-evaluation of what the key objectives of the practice ought to be. This is less so the case for guitar lutherie, for, as I have already said, it occupies the status of a kind of conceptual midway point between chess and philosophy; but particularly in the case of philosophy, the very question of what the objective of philosophy is (or should be) is of central concern to the practice itself, and is perennially re-examined. Consequently, through a standard undergraduate education at a university with a good analytic/continental balance among the faculty (such as ours), one is liable to be educated in as many differing answers to those questions as there are philosophers. The intellectual schizophrenia of being converted to Wittgensteinian quietism one semester and Heideggerian phenomenology the next is a dynamic that simply does not exist in practices like chess, because no matter how you go about it, it’s always going to be about checkmating the king.

Conveniently enough, these considerations concerning the difference between chess and philosophy serve as a good segue into Raymond Geuss’ highly compelling account of philosophy as articulated in the introduction to his *Changing the Subject: Philosophy from Socrates to Adorno*, which might serve to better illustrate this last point.

Geuss identifies one of the fundamental characteristics of philosophy as being that “it generally avoids giving a direct answer to a direct question”, preferring instead to change the question itself. To explain what he means by this, he invites us to consider the Ingmar Bergman film *The Seventh Seal*, in which the Swedish knight Antonius Block, returning home from the Crusades and infected by the bubonic plague, challenges Death to a game of chess, with victory granting Block momentary reprieve. At first, the game proceeds according to the usual rules, taking place in sessions occurring over several days. At one point, Block feels the need for confession and absolution following his experiences in the Crusades. He enters a confessional and, during the confession, reveals what he thinks is his winning strategy in the chess game to the priest—but the priest had been Death in disguise, thus rendering Block’s strategy worthless. Finally, towards the end of the game, Block realizes that he will soon be checkmated. In a last-ditch effort, he “accidentally” sweeps his cloak across the board while making his next move, knocking over the pieces. He then claims he can’t remember how they were set up. Death, however, has a good memory, so he puts the pieces back in their place and ultimately defeats Block.

Geuss frames this chain of events in the context of Block attempting to find a solution to an immanent problem, namely, dying of plague. As such, there are three distinct moves made by Block. The first is challenging Death to a game of chess, which does not solve the problem, but nevertheless “stave[s] off the inevitable and gains the Crusader time”. The second “consists in elaborating a strategy for winning the game of Chess by following the rules to bring about a configuration on the board which is recognized as a checkmate of his opponent” (*CTS* 3).

The third moment, for Geuss, is the critical one. When Block attempts to escape the game by sweeping his cloak across the board, he has done something of a fundamentally different nature than the first two moves. For in doing this, Block “was not acquiring an advantage *in* the game of

chess ... [he] was trying to find a way out of his difficult situation not by making a recognized move *in* the situation but by changing the definition of the situation itself" (CTS 4). This move, as opposed to the Crusader's first two moves, is what constitutes "philosophy" for Geuss. Whereas chess is understood as a limited game with unchanging, bounded rules, philosophy is primarily characterized by its peculiar ability to not only challenge the existing rules, but to reframe the entire context in which those rules themselves exist. As Geuss himself puts it,

The most characteristic feature of philosophy is its connection with a moment when the gears shift, the code breaks down and changes or is changed, the definition of the situation is thrown into question, and we need to reflect on the wider context within which a course of action (including possibly a discussion) has been proceeding, when expectations change and terms need to be redefined. (CTS 5)

Speaking of the existence of anything like an essence of philosophy (in the Aristotelian sense), Geuss argues that "it is probably a mistake to think that there is anything like a single transhistorical nature or essence of 'philosophy'; there are only related historical practices, and some of these practices¹⁵ will be associated with mastery of certain forms of rule-guided behaviour: correct Latin, *disputatio* according to fixed rules, formal abilities of various kinds such as those needed to do mathematics" (CTS 8-9). Within MacIntyre's framework, I believe it is reasonable to advance that that these "related historical practices" (in the colloquial sense) together constitute *a practice* (in the MacIntyrean sense), and that the single transhistorical nature or essence of "philosophy" is nothing more than the constantly-evolving structure that ensures some level of continuity between these various historical practices—namely, the (MacIntyrean) practice

¹⁵ Here, Geuss is obviously using "practice" in the colloquial sense, rather than in the sense of MacIntyre's particular definition.

itself. In other words, if Geuss' view of philosophy as "changing the subject" holds up, it is only insofar as the concept itself is rendered coherent through its existence as a practice.

My definition of philosophy

Grasping this irreducibly social dimension of philosophy also brings to light a crucial detail, namely, the socially-rooted nature of the "philosophical canon", by which I mean the body of texts that are generally agreed upon by philosophers to be the products of philosophy. On such a MacIntyrean view, there can be no Ideal "philosophical text" that underpins the truth of a judgment concerning a particular text regardless of whether or not that text is taken to be philosophy—philosophy is only that which has been *recognized* to be philosophy.

There are, however, two key specifications we must make about this recognition. The first is that it is not enough to merely have *someone* recognize a particular text as "philosophical": the recognition has to be made by an appropriate person. If I were to go to my neighbourhood pub and have some napkin scribblings be recognized as philosophy by some random group of a dozen drunken patrons, this would not make those napkin scribblings philosophy. The second is that this recognition on behalf of an appropriate person needs to be made on the basis of appropriate reasons. If I simply slipped an envelope containing \$20,000 under the door of each of my committee members' offices, and had my thesis approved on the basis of this bribe, that recognition would not be legitimate.

The MacIntyrean framework provides us with a rather obvious answer to the question "what are the appropriate reasons for recognizing a work as philosophy?" We have seen that the principal objective of participating in a practice is to attain its standards of excellence and thereby achieve the goods internal to that practice. It is thus clear that the "appropriate reason" would be the one that refers to the standards of excellence and internal goods of philosophy: a reason such as "this

text, by advancing a coherent and reasonable argument that furthers our understanding of moral agency, is philosophical insofar as it contributes to the field of ethics” is valid, while “this text is philosophical because it was printed with a particularly pretty font” is not.

We have also seen that only those who are initiated into the practice can identify the internal goods of a practice and judge whether or not a particular case succeeds or fails in achieving them. It is therefore only those who are initiated into the practice of philosophy who are in a position to be the “appropriate person”. On this basis, I believe I can justifiably advance my own preliminary definition of philosophy as follows: *a text is said to be “philosophy” if it is recognized by the initiates of the practice of philosophy to have achieved the internal goods of the practice, using the pre-existing standards of excellence of the practice as the base rubric for the judgment. Someone is a philosopher if they have produced philosophy and are therefore initiates of the practice. Philosophy itself (as a practice) is the ordered system of internal goods, historically-constituted standards of excellence, and embodying institutions which renders the determination of whether a text is philosophy or not possible.*

Note that this is, in effect, the implicit logic upon which a thesis defense is based. A candidate submits a thesis for evaluation, that is to say, for determination of whether or not it is philosophy (and adequately so). The committee members, who are established practitioners of the practice of philosophy, judge the thesis on the basis of whether or not it contributes to the field (i.e., achieves internal goods) on the basis mainly of the pre-existing standards of excellence of the practice. If the thesis is accepted, the candidate is given a diploma that institutionally signifies the candidate’s newfound place as a member of the practice of philosophy. And similarly, systems like tenure and peer review are also buttressed by this logic.

However, this preliminary definition needs to be significantly fleshed out in order to protect it from a number of criticisms that could be advanced against it. I want to begin by briefly looking at two such objections of relative simplicity. The first objection is as follows: if the only way to become a “philosopher” is to have one’s work recognized by someone who is already a philosopher (i.e. an initiate of the practice of philosophy), then this implies an infinite regress, a chain of successive legitimations that would have no end unless we posited some “prime mover of legitimation”—a concept that would be incoherent in this framework, as one would need to explain how this prime mover received their authority without having themselves been legitimated by another. The second objection consists in asking what would happen in the case where two philosophers (or two groups of philosophers) of relatively equal status disagree with one another on the status of a particular individual (*A* says that *B* is a philosopher, *C* says that they are not)—this is the case, for example, for polarizing figures such as Derrida, who has been the subject of numerous polemics concerning his status as a “true” philosopher.

With regards to the first objection, the issue lies solely in the notion of a “prime mover of legitimation”, for the idea of a “chain of successive legitimations” is essentially correct: the Western philosophical tradition¹⁶ is based on precisely this, whether this legitimation takes the form of a diploma from an institution of philosophy, or of having some other established philosopher take the text in question seriously by responding to its arguments. But this does not mean that this chain must find its origin with *a* prime mover, for this would imply that philosophy

¹⁶ I do not use this term with the intention of claiming that there is (or isn’t), in reality, a “West”—I use it more so in the sense that, the concept’s coherence (or lack thereof) aside, “Western philosophy” holds sway in the discipline today and directs much of our understanding of its history and how we speak of it, whether or not we accept the validity of “the West” as an idea. The presuppositions regarding the very idea of a “Western philosophical tradition” will be addressed in the following chapter.

has a monological origin, as opposed to a dialogical one. Philosophy, as we know it today, is only known through its history¹⁷. If we recognize Thales as the “first philosopher”, this is in large part due to Aristotle and Diogenes Laertius. Whether or not there had in fact been someone prior to Thales who had engaged in what would come to be known as “philosophy” is ultimately meaningless, because philosophy—understood in terms of practice and tradition—took its initial (Western) form via the unparalleled influence of Plato and Aristotle, who provided the overall groundwork for the subsequent 2,500 years of Western philosophical enquiry. In this sense, “philosophy”, rather than being some ontological category that was “discovered” by these two, is rather a tradition of thought that began with the Greeks and that continued from then-on to unceasingly evolve, only to truly become a practice due to the successive chain of thinkers who solidified it. There can be no “prime mover” precisely because philosophy is a “socially established cooperative human activity”, both in its present state and in its origins.

With regards to the second objection, it should first be noted that normally the utterance “*x* is not a philosopher”, when used to speak of figures like Derrida, is primarily a polemical utterance, and its metaphilosophical basis is often unelaborated by the accuser. The sense of this utterance within MacIntyre’s framework can largely be formulated in two ways: what I’ll call the “weak objection” and the “strong objection”. The weak objection, commonly made in informal contexts, essentially says “I personally do not see the value in *Of Grammatology*, for I tried to read it and it made no sense to me—and therefore, it is not philosophy”. This objection holds no weight because it can be applied just as easily to Heidegger, Frege, or Aristotle as it can to Derrida. If the conditions

¹⁷ I mean “history” here in Vico’s sense, as something that is *made* by human beings.

for rejection are based ultimately on the capacity of the reader to make sense of a text, and the text is not *literal* non-sense (evidenced by the fact that other readers have been able to pull something of value from it with some degree of coherence among one another), then those conditions are ultimately subjective and make no appeal to the standards of excellence or internal goods that actually determine the philosophical status of a text.

On the other hand, it is precisely to these standards of excellence and internal goods that the strong objection appeals to, which says something more like “*Of Grammatology* fails to attain the standards of excellence and the internal goods of philosophy in such a grave manner that it cannot even be categorized as ‘bad philosophy’—it is simply not philosophy *at all*”. This objection is more valuable because it appeals to the correct reasons to make this judgment. However, disagreements of this nature are addressed by MacIntyre in the following way:

[A]ll reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought transcending through criticism and invention the limitations of what had hitherto been reasoned in that tradition; this is as true of modern physics as of medieval logic. Moreover when a tradition is in good order it [*sic.*] is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose [...] Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict. Indeed when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or dead. (*AV* 257)

Considering the radical nature of Derrida’s critique of the philosophical tradition, it should come as no surprise that he occupies such a polarizing position within the practice. We can find analogues in any other practice where some new arrival diverges so fundamentally from the *status quo* that a debate of a similar order arises, with the same sorts of accusations that advance exclusion: Luther in Christianity (insofar as he was excommunicated and branded a heretic); Kerouac and the other artists of the Beat Generation in literature and poetry (Truman Capote having once remarked, when asked about Kerouac’s prose, “that’s not writing, that’s typing”); Expressionist painting (which was criticized with the moralizing rhetoric of Nordauian degeneration); and so on. But what makes it clear that Derrida is truly a philosopher is that the

debate concerning his work takes this sort of form, and that the debate occurs within the practice and between its practitioners.

The nature of the contentiousness regarding Derrida's status as a philosopher can be contrasted with figures who are sometimes colloquially taken to be "philosophers" in pop culture but are not given this recognition within the practice of philosophy, generally for good reason: figures like Alan Watts, Robert Pirsig, Ayn Rand, and Jordan Peterson. With these sorts of figures, the rejection is based more so on the fact that there is no serious current of recognition among the initiates of the practice, the recognition being found instead among amateurs. Self-described "Libertarians" and Republican senators may advance Ayn Rand's "objectivism", and the "I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual" crowd will find Robert Pirsig's "metaphysics of quality" appealing, but one will not find seminars on Rand or Pirsig taking place at any serious philosophy department¹⁸. In contrast, regardless of the critiques that may be advanced against Derrida, there are certain facts we can point to in order to ground the claim that he is a philosopher: he was educated at the *École normale supérieure*; he occupied a number of posts at many prestigious universities; and his work has had a profound influence on a large number of practitioners of philosophy, who have themselves gone on to produce influential work. To defend the "strong objection" against Derrida, one would need to show that, in effect, all of the people who accorded Derrida these external goods had made a fundamental error. Defending a position like this would not only be difficult; if we accept the MacIntyrean framework, it is incoherent. For accusing such a large number of established members of the practice of being completely wrong cannot hold up

¹⁸ This is not to be taken as a categorical condemnation of either Rand or Pirsig, but merely an explanation as to why—in fact—one could not legitimately claim that they can be presently construed as philosophers.

in the framework of practice—the accusers lack the necessary authority to make a judgment of that kind when there are so many philosophers on Derrida’s side. The debate would rather always constitute an internal argument regarding internal goods as characterized in the above passage from *After Virtue*.

It appears, then, that it is possible to uphold my definition of philosophy despite these two criticisms. There are, however, a number of much deeper concerns that demand responses of a higher calibre in order to be sufficiently addressed. To these issues I now turn.

CHAPTER TWO: DELOCALIZED PRACTICES

The first major concern that I wish to address has to do with the potential for a Western chauvinist misreading of MacIntyre's concept of practices in light of his view of tradition, which might conclude that "philosophy" is an achievement unique to the West and that there is no proper place for things like Chinese or Indian thought¹⁹ in philosophy departments. This is because for MacIntyre, practices always exist in some distinct spatiotemporal background context. It is no accident that, when he needs to give an example of the evolution of internal goods and standards of excellence within a practice and chooses the practice of portrait-painting to do so, he writes not of portrait-painting as such, but of "the practice of portrait painting as it developed in Western Europe from the late middle ages to the eighteenth century" (AV 220), which he traces via the standards of excellence first exemplified by medieval icons, and then their subsequent evolution through an antithetical Flemish naturalism, which find a certain eventual synthesis in the work of Rembrandt. While MacIntyre admits this reconstruction is brief and inadequate—serving more to illustrate a particular point about the historical evolution of standards of excellence than to be a serious attempt at art history—the notable absence of any foreign influence in the three key moments MacIntyre identifies raises the question of what the status of such foreign influence is within such spatiotemporally-situated practices.

It must first be noted that such influence does, clearly, occur. For example, Lawrence Bickford has chronicled the profound influence of Japanese painting on 19th-century Western art

¹⁹ Though it is my intention to ultimately show that Chinese and Indian *philosophy* are, in fact, valid categories, I will refrain from using these terms until I have justified their coherence. In the interim, by "Chinese and Indian thought" I mean the traditions of wisdom, ethical thought, and rational enquiry present in these two cultures whose status as philosophy is, for the sake of argument, currently in question.

(particularly Impressionism) through Western artists' exposure to, among other things, ukiyo-e woodblock prints (Bickford 1993). This influence would prove to be more than just a passing fad as it cemented itself in arguably the most popular Western painter of all time, van Gogh, who would himself go on to be a major influence in his practice²⁰. In a similar vein, such exchanges have also occurred in the practice of philosophy. Schopenhauer, quite famously, had been heavily influenced by Indian thought through his engagement with recently-available translations of the Upanishads. He would not be the first nor the last major Western philosopher to engage seriously with the tradition that produced these texts²¹. And conversely, non-Western thought would in turn be influenced through its exposure to the West, as in the case of Tetsurō Watsuji, a Japanese philosopher who had studied in Germany in the 1920s (as was common for Japanese intellectuals in that period) and was among the first to read Heidegger's *Being and Time*, a text he would go on to engage with and critique from the perspective of Japanese thought in his own text, *Fūdo*²².

How are we to categorize such cross-cultural transactions? A more conservative reading of MacIntyre might state that there are two separate practices—Western European painting and Japanese painting, for instance—that might interact with and influence one another to some extent, but otherwise remain distinct, unique practices with their own traditions, standards of excellence,

²⁰ The degree to which the Japonisme of the 19th century constitutes an orientalism is, of course, an important consideration, as are the orientalist dynamics of other “alien” influences on Western art, such as the role of Polynesia in Gauguin's later painting. I do not wish to claim here that any of this—whether it is seen more properly as naïve influence or conscious appropriation—is not in any way problematic. Rather, I simply wish to show that it is well-established that alien traditions interact with one another, and influence one another, as a matter of course.

²¹ Again, here the issue of orientalism is just as prevalent as in the question of art—for example, Donald S. Lopez, Jr. has argued that it is ultimately Voltaire who is responsible for inaugurating the common attitude in the West that Buddhism is “more of a philosophy than a religion” (see Lopez, Jr. 2017), an attitude that Evan Thompson has characterized as “Buddhist exceptionalism” in *Why I Am Not a Buddhist*.

²² Translated in 1961 as “Climate and Culture”. The more recent Augustin Berque translation translates this title more accurately as “*Le milieu humain*”.

and internal goods, such that we could not coherently speak of anything like “painting as such”. On the other hand, considering the profound extent of mutual influence that such distinct practices exercise on one another—especially in a contemporary globalized context—makes it, at the very least, not unreasonable to ask whether or not it makes more sense to envision the relationship between Western European and Japanese painting as one where they are both part of a single practice of painting wherein both traditions rather constitute different schools within the same practice, in much the same way that phenomenology and ordinary language philosophy are seen as two different schools of thought within the practice of philosophy rather than two separate practices²³. My intention is to argue this latter, more inclusive view. There are, however, a number of difficult questions that arise as a result.

First of all, I need to provide an account of how practices (which *do* clearly always *originate* in highly specific spatiotemporal contexts) transcend such initial states. Such an account must explain, for example, how it is that “Western philosophy”—which canonically originated in Classical Greece—was able to spread to the Roman Republic, the Arab world, Western Europe, and eventually, the globe, all the while retaining some sort of conceptual continuity. In the case of the inclusion within philosophy of non-Western traditions of thought which have their own unique traditions and histories, I have to also explain how two such different traditions can come to constitute one and the same practice, despite their separate origins. This point is important because

²³ Some phenomenologists or ordinary language philosophers might contend that the other school is, indeed, on their terms, “not *really* philosophy”—that their preferred methodology is the one “true” philosophy. I disagree with such claims for two reasons: firstly, on the basis of the argument I made in the previous section concerning the status of figures like Derrida; and secondly, on the basis of my account being actually reflected in the social reality of the practice, where both phenomenologists and ordinary language philosophers are recognized as being philosophers and are made to put up with one another within the same academic discipline.

it will be what distinguishes the true *inclusion* of Chinese and Indian thought into the practice of philosophy from something like “(ultimately Western) philosophers discussing (ultimately non-philosophical, or at most peripheral) Chinese and Indian ‘ideas’”—in other words, the account would need to justify the conceptual coherence of a term like “Chinese philosophy” or “Indian philosophy”, which would need to be of the same status as a term like “German philosophy” or “French philosophy”.

This latter point can be clarified by considering one of MacIntyre’s own recurring examples of a practice, that of farming. We know that farming originated in a large number of isolated prehistoric societies: the Inca in South America; the Gunditjmarra in Southeastern Australia; the Sumerians in the Levant; and the Pawnee in the Great Plains, to name only a few.

So, what we have in the case of farming is at least four centres of origin—and thus, working with a very restrictive account of practices, four practices—which sprung up independently of one another and yet, at the very least, share a very large common set of not only internal goods (a good harvest, as well as the good of a particular kind of life revolving around a particular kind of relationship to one’s food, to the outdoors, and to being in tune with the rhythm of the changing seasons), but also standards of excellence (relating to crop yields, crop quality, and farming efficiency) and technical skills (such as tilling, sowing, irrigating, harvesting, and pest control). Though we might allow certain differences between these practices, such as one particular culture’s unique spiritual relationship to the land (or more broadly to nature) as opposed to another’s, the extent of common ground at least makes it reasonable for us to ask whether or not these four practices are indeed *the same thing*—each one simply possessing a set of local particularities—as opposed to four truly distinct practices. Indeed, *prima facie*, it seems rather odd to speak of, say, “Incan farming” as a practice that is fundamentally distinct from “Sumerian

farming”, as opposed to simply referring to both as “farming”; and the issue at hand is especially pertinent as the increasing globalization of the modern world has allowed for extensive encounters between various cultures (it is difficult to overstate the importance of the Columbian exchange, as well as the global reach of the industrial revolution). If such a conceptual move turns out to be possible, and it turns out that it is indeed possible for there to be practices that transcend the initial spatiotemporal context from which they originated—practices that I will refer to as “delocalized practices”—then the question of whether it is possible to conceive of philosophy on such terms becomes one which is not so easily brushed away in either the affirmative or the negative.

We can gain insight into what MacIntyre might make of the possibility of delocalized practices by looking at his 1984 paper “Relativism, Power and Philosophy” (*RPP*). While on the surface, it is largely a recapitulation of the central thesis of *After Virtue* through the lens of the contemporary relativism debate, it contains a number of elements which will be of use to us regarding these considerations.

MacIntyre’s account of lower-order relativism

MacIntyre begins with the claim that relativism represents one possible conclusion to a set of philosophical problems that only arise in a particular kind of geopolitical situation, which he calls a “frontier or boundary situation”. To illustrate what he means by this, he considers the situation facing a person in the seventeenth century who inhabits both the Irish and English linguistic communities, as might have been the case for someone living in northern Ireland at that time. MacIntyre speculates that, at some point in such a person’s life, “economic and social circumstance may enforce on such a person a final choice between inhabiting the one linguistic community and inhabiting the other”; and such a choice, according to MacIntyre, is one whose scope extends far beyond that of merely choosing between two “languages” conceived of in a narrow sense. For both

languages carry with them a set of presuppositions which will necessarily uphold “one cosmology rather than another, one relationship of local law and custom to cosmic order rather than another, one justification of particular relationships of individual community and of both to land and to landscape rather than another” (*RPP* 7).

He considers this claim with respect to the use of proper names, namely the difference between speaking in Irish of “Doire Colmcille” and speaking in English of “Londonderry”. Though some philosophers of language might maintain that these are simply two different names denoting the same thing, MacIntyre shows how they are strikingly different in meaning. Each respective proper name, for one, presupposes the legitimacy of the named settlement’s claim to one and the same land: a settlement “with a continuous identity ever since it became in fact St. Columba’s oak grove in 546” in the case of Doire Colmcille and a settlement “made only in the seventeenth century ... [which] presupposes the legitimacy of that settlement and of the use of the English language to name it” in the case of Londonderry. The fact that a proper name “names *in the first instance* only *for* those who are members of some particular linguistic or cultural community” (*RPP* 7) means that the full meaning of a name cannot be divorced from the scheme in which it is at home; and for this reason, the use of the name “Londonderry” by, for example, an ignorant stranger asking for directions does not point to the name being presuppositionless, for the stranger’s use of that name is “parasitic upon its uses” by the primary linguistic community which uses the name as it does²⁴.

²⁴ There are evident parallels to be made here in the Canadian context regarding the ongoing colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state. One thinks, for example, of Hochelaga, the name of an Iroquois settlement on land now occupied by the city of Montreal (though “Hochelaga” is itself likely a French bastardization of the name “Osheaga”). It is worth noting that the name “Hochelaga” now most commonly denotes a neighbourhood *within* the city of Montreal, and “Osheaga” most commonly denotes a music festival which takes place annually in

Thus, when our boundary bilingual must choose between using English or Irish, they are also choosing between what are “to some substantial degree alternative and incompatible sets of beliefs and ways of life”. And a central feature of such a system is that it will have “internal to it its own specific modes of rational justification in key areas and its own correspondingly specific warrants for claims to truth” (*RPP* 8). This does not mean that the rival claims of another community—for example, the Irish claims of dominion over Doire Colmcille and thus the illegitimacy of Londonderry—cannot be represented in seventeenth-century English, but rather that “the outcome in each case of rendering those beliefs sufficiently intelligible to be evaluated by a member of the other community involves characterizing those beliefs in such a way that they are bound to be rejected” (*RPP* 8). So, for example, the seventeenth-century English use of the concept of property rights to claim dominion over New England or Rupert’s Land, while legitimate from the English point of view since the land in question had previously belonged to nobody and was thus available to become private property, would not have been able to be adequately characterized in seventeenth-century Mohawk, for from that perspective, that land belonged to nobody precisely due to the fact that it was something that could never be made into private property—namely, common land.

Such cases, of course, do not mean that no expression whatsoever in one language can be adequately translated into the other—translating expressions such as “snow is white” does not pose these sorts of problems—but this is beside the point for MacIntyre. He argues that the importance lies precisely in the points of untranslatability between languages, for the features of languages

Montreal, thus in many ways further cementing the colonial relationship through the appropriation of these traditional proper names, whose use might have otherwise constituted a form of resistance. In searching for comparisons, one is led to think of the absurd optics had the Ottoman Empire named a district of Istanbul “Constantinople”.

that give rise to such difficulties are precisely the features that also give rise to the plausibility of relativism. One such key feature is a linguistic community's power to "extrapolate from uses of expressions learned in certain types of situations to the making and understanding of new and newly illuminating uses", a power which depends on the linguistic community's "shared ability to refer and allude to a particular common stock of canonical texts, texts which define the literary and linguistic tradition which members of that community inhabit". MacIntyre claims that the eventual abstract concepts that go on to make up a particular community's worldview first arise from such a poetic and literary canon, and as a result, the concepts cannot be fully divorced from those origins, for "the movement of thought from the concreteness and particularity of the imaged to the abstractness of the conceptual never completely leaves that concreteness and particularity behind" (*RPP* 9). So fully understanding a linguistic community's conception of concepts like courage, justice, authority, property, and so on will depend on the ability to grasp such poetic allusions, and if a person does not have access to a linguistic community's canon—as would be the case when, say, a seventeenth-century Englishman attempts to articulate an Irishman's claims over Doire Colmcille outside of the deep framework of seventeenth-century Irish, and within the deep framework of seventeenth-century English—those claims will naturally lend themselves to a key misunderstanding and will appear to be lacking in justification. This, claims MacIntyre, is what is neglected by certain contemporary philosophers of language: that in fact, "the sentences-in-use which are the untranslatable parts of this type of language-in-use are not in fact capable of being logically derived from, constructed out of, reduced to or otherwise rendered into the sentences-in-use which comprise the translatable part of the same language-in-use" (*RPP* 10).

The key upshot of these observations is that, if one were to try to evaluate the relative validity of two such rival claims, as in the case of our boundary bilingual, they will find that what their

situation precludes is “the possibility of appeal to some neutral or independent standard of rational justification to justify the choice of one set of beliefs, one way of life, one linguistic community rather than the other” (*RPP* 10). As such, the choice between the two linguistic communities will necessarily be of an epistemologically arbitrary character, thus turning our boundary bilingual—if they are perceptive enough—into a relativist.

Lower-order relativism in relation to delocalized practices

Before I continue with MacIntyre’s proposal for how such a relativistic situation can be surmounted, I want to briefly frame the above observations in the context of the question of delocalized practices. An immediate problem presents itself in the question of whether or not a particular practice represents one such untranslatable component of a particular linguistic community’s conceptual scheme, thereby lending credence to the claim that delocalized practices are not possible. It should be immediately evident that “philosophy”, due to it being a practice that is so directly concerned with such questions of truth, justification, and so on, is much more likely to hold such a status than is “farming”, which is not as intimately linked with concepts such as justice or cosmic order. But even farming is a dubious contender for being a delocalized practice on this model. I spoke earlier of one difference that we could potentially identify between various local practices of farming: a particular culture’s unique spiritual relationship to the land and to nature. Such a difference, which might seem dismissible due to the large overlap of internal goods, standards of excellence, and requisite skills among these varied practices of farming, now reveals itself to be precisely the sort of untranslatable concept for a linguistic community that generates the conflict considered above. For a linguistic community’s relationship to their land, and thus their conception of, say, what constitutes caring for a particular forest or a particular valley, will affect their conception of the internal goods of farming and how those internal goods contribute to

the community's broader project in such a way that these conceptions are not able to be adequately represented in an alien conceptual scheme.

Glen Coulthard does an excellent job in *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition (RSWM)* of demonstrating how the more abstract traditional ethical views of the Dene people arise out of a common stock of stories integral to the Dene canon. He recounts a story told by a Sahtu Dene elder about his brother hunting moose:

Edward was hunting near a small river when he heard a raven croaking, far off to his left. Ravens can't kill animals for themselves, so they depend on hunters and wolves to kill food for them. Flying high in the sky, they spot animals too far away for hunters or wolves to see. They then fly to the hunter and attract his attention by croaking loudly, then fly back to where the animals are.

Edward stopped and watched the raven carefully. It made two trips back and forth in the same direction. Edward made a sharp turn and walked to where the raven was flying. There were no moose tracks, but he kept following the raven. When he got to the riverbank and looked down, Edward saw two big moose feeding on the bank. He shot them, skinned them, and covered the meat with their hides.

Before he left, Edward put some fat meat out on the snow for the raven. He knew that without the bird, he wouldn't have killed any meat that day. (George Blondin, cited in *RSWM* 61)

For Coulthard, this story articulates the traditional Dene views regarding their land as one of mutual interdependence between all things and the subsequent responsibility of all things to one another, in stark contrast to both the Western conception of land as a thing to be mastered and exploited, as well as the common misunderstanding that land is “simply some material object of profound importance to Indigenous cultures”—rather, land is also seen as “a field of relationships of things to each other” (*RSWM* 61). The ethical precepts that arise from such a worldview, then, are markedly different from those at home in the modern Western framework of instrumental rationality: the traditional Dene view “meant that humans held certain obligations to the land, animals, plants, and lakes in much the same way that we hold obligations to other people. And if these obligations were met, then the land, animals, plants, and lakes would reciprocate and meet

their obligations to humans, thus ensuring the survival and well-being of all over time” (*RSWM* 61).

The story of the moose hunter, then, can be extrapolated to highlight a similar relationship to the objects and places proper to farming; and such a consideration ought to make it clear that the internal goods of anything like a practice of farming within the framework of the Dene linguistic community would be in at least some key ways diametrically opposed to the internal goods of the practice of farming within the framework of, say, eighteenth-century Britain in the throes of the industrial revolution. As such, the particular context in which individual actions such as tilling, irrigating, sowing, and harvesting are executed can drastically affect the full meaning of those actions; and moreover, if MacIntyre’s account is correct, then this context cannot be adequately articulated outside of the Dene language. So it might seem that what the four isolated centres of origin that I previously considered can be said to defensibly share in is not a single, unified, delocalized practice, but rather a mere set of similar technical skills that, while denoting the same action in a purely physicalist sense, occupy much the same status as do the proper names “Doire Colmcille” and “Londonderry” with regards to the physical area corresponding roughly to the geographic coordinates 54.9966° N, 7.3086° W. This revelation, then, jeopardizes the possibility of being able to speak of a delocalized practice of philosophy; and given that the *specific term* “philosophy” largely identifies a practice and tradition proper to the linguistic communities of a set of European nations, this then jeopardizes the possibility of being able to speak of anything like “Indian philosophy”, “Chinese philosophy”, or “Indigenous philosophy” without a fear of committing some sort of fatal equivocation that uproots the traditions of thought in these communities from their original context and places them into a new one incapable of adequately characterizing their respective worldviews. However, this argument only holds if we let relativism

have the last word; and MacIntyre believes that we can respond to the relativist argument (thus presented) such that it does not²⁵.

Modern languages and higher-order relativism

To do so would require our boundary bilingual to learn some new language of a different kind, a language with two key characteristics that seventeenth-century Irish or English do not have. Firstly, “its everyday use must be such that it does *not* presuppose allegiance to either of the two rival sets of beliefs”; and secondly, “it must be able to provide the resources for an accurate representation of the two competing schemes of belief, including that in the tradition of each community which provides that background for its present beliefs, without which they cannot be fully intelligible nor their purported justification adequately understood” (RPP 13).

The first key characteristic can be illustrated through the new status of proper names in such a new language, which would not occupy the same status that Doire Colmcille does in seventeenth-century Irish. Instead, a proper name in such a new language would identify 54.9966° N, 7.3086° W in such a way that it would be “equally available for any user to employ whatever his or her beliefs” (RPP 13); in other words, it becomes a proper name detached from the deep

²⁵ It should be additionally noted that the ramifications of any conclusion to this problem will extend well beyond the mere realm of philosophy of language or of MacIntyre scholarship. In fact, the stakes are very much the same as the ones that frame *After Virtue*. For if this form of relativism has the last word, then the lack of a neutral standard collapses the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations: human relationships become nothing more than “relationships of will and power unmediated by rationality” (RPP 11). In other words, in such boundary conflicts, each contending party will act reasonably in accordance with their own conception of reason; but conflicts between two such parties will always be a matter of one party imposing their standards of reasonableness onto the other, and “when it becomes reasonable from the point of view of one of the contending parties to impose their will by force upon the other in the name of their own idiosyncratic conception of reasonableness, that is what they will do” (RPP 11). And that is what they indeed did do, MacIntyre claims, in the case of the English relationship with the Irish. Suffice it to say that conceding to this relativist vision strips all anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles of their moral high ground in their respective conflicts, giving the struggle of, say, Thomas Sankara the same moral weight as that of an underdog boxer taking on the reigning heavyweight champion.

framework of languages-in-use as described earlier, whose full meaning does not presuppose any particular set of beliefs. Such a language would also be characterized by “the absence of texts which are canonical for its common usage”, as canons presuppose beliefs, and this language is meant to be as neutral as possible between competing sets of beliefs; instead, such a language would provide “resources for the representation of an indefinite variety of systems of beliefs, most of them originally at home in very different types of linguistic community”; and it is able to do so via “a variety of devices which enable those who construct such representations to do so in a way that is quite independent of their own commitments” (RPP 14).

Does such a language exist? MacIntyre claims that this is in fact the status of every modern language. He notes that

words as common as “*polis*” and “*dikaiosune*” in fifth century Attic Greek cannot be translated in any strict sense into twentieth century English or French or German [...] but their use can be quite adequately elucidated. The traditions that appealed to canonical texts can now become matter for successful historical enquiry and the relevant texts embodying those traditions can be established, edited and translated or otherwise elucidated. The belief-system of any and every culture [...] can thus be accurately represented within our own. (RPP 14)

MacIntyre claims that this is what Charles H. Kahn was able to do with the verb *eimi* in Homeric Greek²⁶; and we might add that this is what MacIntyre himself was able to do with the words *aretê* and *dikaiosune* in both Homeric and Attic Greek in chapters ten through thirteen of *After Virtue*. He notes, however, that this relationship is asymmetrical—in other words, though MacIntyre and Kahn can do this for words in ancient Greek, the Homeric linguistic community would not be able to do the same for modern English words like “be”, “virtue”, and “justice”—that is, the words which present themselves as the flawed direct translations of the Greek words identified above.

²⁶ See Kahn, Charles H., *The Verb “Be” in Ancient Greek*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1973.

And this relationship between modern English and archaic Greek holds true also of the relationship, for example, between modern English and seventeenth-century Irish (or even, we might add, seventeenth-century English, though MacIntyre himself does not go so far as to explicitly state this).

This last point where I contrast modern English with seventeenth-century English highlights what I see as an important element in MacIntyre's theory: namely, that these features that MacIntyre claims are exclusive to modern languages seem to have nothing to do with the linguistic structures of a particular language, but rather with the privileged epistemic position that modern language users find themselves in by way of the accumulation of scholarship and historical knowledge. Two important points arise from this observation. The first is that there is no reason to believe that the languages MacIntyre uses as examples in his paper—English, French, and German—have any essentially superior command of these features than do, for example, modern Mandarin or Hindi. The second point is that we are able to make use of these unique features of modern language, it would seem, more and more effectively whenever there is some breakthrough study which serves to add a new dimension of nuance that contributes to the adequate characterization of a particular system of belief—studies like Edward Said's *Orientalism*, for example, or more generally any study that uncovers hitherto hidden biases and other oversights affecting translation and interpretation²⁷.

²⁷ I do not at all intend to say that misrepresentations do not occur in modern-language scholarship—the point is rather that adequate representation is possible. But, as Said has shown, such adequate representation can indeed be rare. It is also worth noting that MacIntyre certainly does not see the 20th century as wholly free of these boundary situations. The abstractness with which the seventeenth-century Irishman's case is presented in RPP is recapitulated in more personal terms during an answer to a question at his 2019 keynote “Moral Relativisms Reconsidered”, where he brings up that his own family faced this sort of situation “two generations ago” in having to choose between being an Irish Gaelic or Scottish Gaelic speaker, or an English speaker. It is also relevant here that the Troubles only formally

So it would appear that the sort of boundary situation that preoccupies the boundary bilingual in seventeenth-century northern Ireland can be surmounted in the conditions of modernity. Would it be enough, then, for such a person to simply learn twentieth-century English or French (or Mandarin or Hindi) and conduct their enquiry in one such language in order to escape their relativist predicament? MacIntyre believes we would be mistaken to think so. For, in using such a language to search for a rationally-founded, neutral standard as to the nature of justification, appeal to which might finally settle the debate between the rival claims of seventeenth-century Irish and seventeenth-century English, a problematic feature of modern language reveals itself: namely, that agreement over such a thing “is not to be obtained” (*RPP* 15). Here, MacIntyre is alluding to what he characterizes as the interminable debates of modern moral discourse in the early chapters of *After Virtue*—and we will recall that this characterization extends not only to the popular discourse of town halls and televised editorial news, but also to the more technical and specialized discourse found in the corridors of philosophy departments.

The reason for this problematic feature stems, in effect, from the very same features that give the languages of modernity the ability to adequately represent different systems of beliefs in the first place. For the historical processes that allowed us to acquire this ability equally meant “the gradual accumulation in the culture of so many different, heterogeneous and conflicting bodies of canonical texts from so many diverse parts of the cultural past that every one of them had to forego any exclusive claim to canonical status and thereby, it soon became apparent, any claim to canonical status at all” (*RPP* 15). This led to the awareness of the wide range of conflicting

ended in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement. All this to simply stress the point that the *potentiality* of delocalized practices is not the same thing as the *actuality* of delocalized practices.

justificatory arguments, and a multiplication of rival standpoints, none of which can definitively claim victory over the others; hence the interminable debates among rival schools in academic disciplines, where, for example, “within philosophy foundationalists war with coherentists and both with sceptics and perspectivists; while conceptions of truth as empirical adequacy contend against a variety of mutually incompatible realisms and both against truth conceived as disclosure” (*RPP* 16).

We might be inclined to observe here that this is little more than a reformulation of the original seventeenth-century boundary conflict. And there are indeed similarities. However, the key difference between the two scenarios is an important one: whereas the seventeenth-century boundary conflict consisted in disagreements over standards of justice (among other things) with no neutral standard of rational justification to appeal to, this contemporary conflict consists in a disagreement over the purportedly neutral standard of rational justification *itself*—in other words, such a standard now *does* exist, but there is not one, but several, and there is no clear way to decide between such rival standards. In MacIntyre’s words, we are in effect faced with the same problem, “albeit for very different reasons” (*RPP* 17). MacIntyre would later go on to describe the social landscape resulting from this state of affairs in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (*WJWR*), which differs significantly from the boundary bilingual’s social landscape, in the following way:

What many of us are educated into is, not a coherent way of thinking and judging, but one constructed out of an amalgam of social and cultural fragments inherited both from different traditions from which our culture was originally derived (Puritan, Catholic, Jewish) and from different stages in and aspects of the development of modernity (the French Enlightenment, the Scottish Enlightenment, nineteenth-century economic liberalism, twentieth-century political liberalism). So often enough in the disagreements which emerge within ourselves, as well as in those which are matters of conflict between ourselves and others, we are forced to confront the question: How ought we to decide among the claims of rival and incompatible accounts of justice competing for our moral, social, and political allegiance? (*WJWR* 2)

Such considerations might make the situation seem hopeless. But famously, for MacIntyre, this present situation is a contingent social condition which we can and must overcome rather than a necessary condition of rational social existence.

Surmounting higher-order relativism

Both forms of relativism identified by MacIntyre thus far arise when an astute observer recognizes that their point of view is ultimately rooted in a number of presuppositions whose rationality cannot be ultimately verified against some contending point of view for lack of a neutral standard of justification. This situation is one that most people in modernity find themselves in at the present moment; but MacIntyre argues that “it does not follow ... that we are thereby condemned to or imprisoned within our own particular standpoint” (*RPP* 17). Let us take another look at the way MacIntyre characterizes the modern relativist predicament:

When we learn the languages of certain radically different cultures, it is in the course of discovering what is untranslatable in them, and why, that we not only learn how to occupy alternative viewpoints, but in terms of those viewpoints to frame questions to which *under certain conditions* a version of relativism is the inescapable answer. [Emphasis added] (*RPP* 16-7)

What sorts of conditions would be required to surmount this version of relativism? On MacIntyre’s view, they are conditions not unlike those that allowed Western philosophy to become a developed form of enquiry in the first place. This required languages of a third kind of status which occupied a sort of mid-point between the conditions of seventeenth-century Irish and those of the languages of modernity—languages, according to MacIntyre, like fourth-and-fifth-century Attic Greek, twelfth-to-fourteenth-century Latin, and seventeenth-to-eighteenth-century English, French, German, and Latin. Such languages were “neither as relatively presuppositionless in respect of key beliefs as the natural languages of modernity” while, at the same time, not being “as closely tied in their use to the presuppositions of one single closely knit set of beliefs as some

premodern languages are and have been” (*RPP* 18). Interactions between such languages will thus produce a particular set of conditions:

Such languages-in-use ... have a wide enough range of canonical texts to provide to some degree alternative and rival modes of justification, but a narrow enough range so that the debate between these modes is focused and determinate. What emerges within the conceptual schemes of such languages is a developed problematic, a set of debates concerning a body of often interrelated problems, problems canonical for those inhabiting that particular scheme, by reference to work upon which rational progress, or failure to achieve such progress, is evaluated. Each such problematic is of course internal to some particular conceptual scheme embodied in some particular historical tradition with its own given starting-point, its own prejudices. (*RPP* 18)

This body of canonical problems is what we generally know as the “traditional problems of philosophy”, and for MacIntyre, becoming a philosopher always involved being initiated into such a tradition, which involved not only familiarizing oneself with the canonical problematic, but also with the languages in which that problematic arose—thus, MacIntyre observes, “it is no accident ... that for Irish speakers to become philosophers, they had first to learn Greek and Latin, like Johannes Scotus Eriugena in the ninth century” (*RPP* 18). Such individuals would thereby initiate themselves into and contribute to a bounded project—a tradition—with internal conditions of what progress constitutes within that tradition. MacIntyre claims that traditions of this kind typically go through “certain well-marked stages [...] among them periods in which progress, as judged by the standards internal to that particular tradition, falters or fails” in such a way that the adherents of that tradition “may have to learn [...] that their tradition lacks the resources to explain its own failing condition” (*RPP* 18). Note that this is exactly the sort of condition MacIntyre believes modern moral discourse is in, and his antidote is, famously, to identify those failures from the standpoint of some rival tradition—in his case, an Aristotelian one—and to try to provide a solution to those failures from within that rival tradition, hopefully rationally convincing the adherents of the failing tradition to switch allegiances (this is, in effect,

the overall project of *After Virtue*). As such, surmounting this higher-order relativism is always a matter of trying to build a bridge between two islands of rational enquiry.

Notice that, thus far, I have been speaking *exclusively* from a Western standpoint. The Irish-English boundary conflict is a Western one; the characterization of modernity's ability to overcome first-order relativism—only to be caught in second-order relativism—is explained in terms of Western examples; and MacIntyre's account of how this second-order relativism is surmounted places the philosophical tradition proper to the West as the focal point of his argument. I believe that I have now sufficiently laid the groundwork to draw out the conclusions I identified at the beginning of the chapter, so I now want to do two things. First, I want to briefly explain why a Western-chauvinist reading of MacIntyre is a misreading, and explicitly so; second, I want to explain how philosophy indeed becomes a delocalized practice in the wake of modernity and second-order relativism, and thereby justify the place of non-Western philosophical traditions within a delocalized practice of philosophy.

MacIntyre's reasoning, broadly, for not considering alien traditions does not appear to be grounded in a belief in their inferiority, but rather in what he sees as his own incapacity to adequately tell their histories. Speaking of the Jewish tradition, for example, he writes:

...of all the histories of enquiry [the Judaic one] is the one which, perhaps more than any other, must be written by its own adherents; in particular for an Augustinian Christian, such as myself, to try to write it, in the way that I have felt able to write the history of my own tradition, would be a gross impertinence. Christians need badly to listen to Jews. The attempt to speak for them, even on behalf of that unfortunate fiction, the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition, is always deplorable. (*WJWR* 11)

This observation is then followed by the claim that that, though he omits it in *WJWR*, the Arabic tradition is also a necessary component of the history MacIntyre has tried to tell, “not only for its own sake but also because of its large contribution to the Aristotelian tradition”; and that, furthermore, “the narratives of such sharply contrasting traditions of enquiry as those engendered

in India and China” are also required. Having pointed this out, MacIntyre admits that merely stating this does nothing to correct the incompleteness of his project; “but”, he says, “at least it clarifies the limitations of my enterprise” (*WJWR* 11). This being the case, I think it is fair to conclude the following: MacIntyre’s project is not, *per se*, a defense of Western exceptionalism—in fact, he appears to explicitly rebuke such a reading by inviting scholars coming from other traditions—Jewish, Arabic, Chinese, Indian or otherwise—to contribute to his project. Therefore, anyone wishing to claim that a MacIntyrean framework of practice and tradition displays an irreducible Western chauvinism (as opposed to a self-aware Western perspective) would find the onus on them to explain why they believe this is the case. It could be argued, perhaps, that if we *were* to give those traditions their proper treatment, what would emerge is the realization that they are indeed so unlike Western philosophy that to describe them with the word “philosophy” would be an equivocal act; but I believe this would be mistaken for the following reason.

There have been what I see as three key points that have arisen in the discussion so far: (1) in modernity, all languages are capable²⁸ of representing the views of alien traditions adequately, meaning there can be fruitful conversations that occur between radically different traditions; (2) modern languages cannot hold any one tradition to be canonical, but are rather composed of a large set of heterogeneous and conflicting traditions; (3) traditions of rational enquiry are first formed by the emergence of a focused and determinate problematic generated by debates within some set of languages which occupy the “third kind of status” mentioned earlier.

²⁸ Recall that the capacity to do this and its actuality are not the same thing—hence MacIntyre’s refusal to try to represent the views of the Jewish, Arabic, Chinese, and Indian traditions.

To speak of delocalized practices, then, seems rather natural in the conditions of modernity, for the possibility of their existence seems to be confirmed by these first two points. Notice that, ontologically-speaking, practices are ultimately a nominalist category: they only exist insofar as there are particular individuals who presently engage in the practice, and the concept of “practice” is used to understand the relationship that those individuals have towards one another and towards some shared history. As such, the structure of the practice is dictated by the social circumstances of its present adherents; and those adherents today are all products of that “amalgam of social and cultural fragments inherited both from different traditions from which our culture was originally derived [...] and from different stages in and aspects of the development of modernity”. Those fragments today consist not only of the various Western traditions of enquiry that MacIntyre identifies—the French Enlightenment, the Scottish Enlightenment, and so on—but also of the various traditions, beliefs, and so on that were imported into the West from outside of it, such as those that I identified at the very beginning of the chapter. Recall, too, that philosophers are never *just* philosophers—they are individuals who are to some degree initiated into a variety of practices, most importantly cultural practices (music, film, literature, painting, etc.) that are integral elements of those “networks of practices” with which philosophy finds itself in relation. So the fragments that constitute the framework of a cultured Western individual in modernity will include not only the things MacIntyre mentioned, but also the ukiyo-e woodblock prints of Hiroshige and Hokusai, the films of Satyajit Ray, Akira Kurosawa, and Wong Kar-Wai, the music of Ravi Shankar, Fela Kuti, and so on—either explicitly through direct exposure to these figures, or implicitly through indirect exposure via their influence on Western artists like Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cezanne, George Harrison, Paul Simon, Wes Anderson, George Lucas, and Quentin Tarantino. And, as

mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, similar cross-cultural exchanges have occurred in philosophy itself, and increasingly so over the years.

Couple this situation wherein no one tradition occupies canonical status (and, in fact, where the very idea of being able to inhabit a single spatiotemporally-situated tradition is itself put into question) with the observation that we have (at least in principle) the epistemic resources to adequately characterize and understand each tradition on its own terms, and it becomes clear that all traditions of philosophical inquiry find themselves in dialogue with one another, engaged in roughly the same sort of project. The fact that scholars of Chinese and Indian philosophy like Bryan Van Norden and Jay L. Garfield can exist within philosophy departments seems to attest to this.

Prior to the possibility of delocalized practices, we could have defensibly understood “philosophy” to be a word that picked out a tradition of rational enquiry that was both unique to the West and an untranslatable part of its conceptual scheme—in such a situation, the use of the term “Chinese philosophy” would have been one that fundamentally mischaracterized the Chinese tradition of rational enquiry in a way similar to a 17th-century Englishman explaining to someone “the Irish claims over Londonderry”. But today, because we have the capacity to adequately represent these various traditions—not just the Western ones, but also non-Western ones—we are not cursed to always misrepresent the Chinese tradition of rational enquiry when we speak of “Chinese philosophy”. “Philosophy” ceases to be a word that picks out something specific to the Western tradition, thereby rendering it an untranslatable component of that conceptual scheme; now, that word is generally available to us to designate all traditions that engage in practices who have analogous similarity to, say, different kinds of farming, or different kinds of painting. In other words, insofar as the Chinese and Indian traditions of rational enquiry can be shown to engage in

activities that are similar to—and intelligible to—the Western tradition, they are not separate practices, but rather a distinct tradition within a delocalized practice, a delocalized practice in which no one tradition can claim canonical status. And indeed, it becomes one of the challenges of contemporary philosophy to figure out how to navigate this utterly new and unprecedented dynamic. Recall Geuss' claim that there is nothing like a transhistorical nature or essence of philosophy, only a series of related historical practices—the advent of modernity can be seen, in a way, as a great unmooring, a moment where a previously closely-knit set of traditions of high cultural similarity had to face the reality that there were beings in disparate parts of the world who had also achieved similar things, though perhaps not on quite the same terms. We can thus characterize the political, economic, and social phenomena that are broadly understood by some scholars as the construction and propagation of white supremacy to be not just a moral failing, but an epistemological one too.

This of course means that the next line of enquiry in our exploration of the idea of philosophy as a practice has to be the observation that, in actuality, academic philosophy *does* prioritize the Western tradition, and while there has been an increasing amount of space given to non-Western philosophical traditions over the last few decades, they are still generally held to be peripheral with respect to the Western tradition. What might the reasons for this be? I will attempt to answer this question in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: INSTITUTIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL HEGEMONY

If the account of delocalized practices that I have just given is correct, then what we might call a “*de jure-de facto* explanatory gap” opens up. *De jure*, philosophy should, in principle, be understood as a kind of international agora, or perhaps more correctly a market square: a common space shared by a number of different buildings of relatively similar size. But *de facto*, the situation is more akin to that of a cathedral square, where a number of smaller, peripheral buildings lie in the shadow of the towering edifice of (in this instance) the “Western philosophical tradition”, which is seen as the focal point of the square’s existence, the surrounding buildings largely erected either in service to it or as a matter of mere unrelated adjacency. To understand this state of affairs, we must examine a key aspect of MacIntyre’s account of practices which I have neglected up until now: that of institutions.

Upon providing this account, two main elements will emerge that will require some further consideration: the concept of “corruption” and the status of external goods. MacIntyre sees institutions as posing a risk to practices by “corrupting” them, but the specifics of what this term actually means are largely absent both from his work as well as the secondary literature. This is because the term is generally taken to be elementary and self-evident—and to a certain degree, it is—but by taking the time to flesh it out somewhat, my hope is that two things will become clear. The first is that “corruption” in MacIntyrean terms can essentially be understood as when individuals engage in vicious behaviour and use a practice primarily in pursuit of external rather than internal goods in a way that systematically inflicts harm on the abilities of other practitioners within the practice to achieve internal goods. The second is that external goods, when given proper consideration, are much more closely linked to practices than MacIntyre makes it seem.

Following this, I will introduce a new concept that I believe helps to more adequately characterize the present state of philosophy as a practice: that of “institutional hegemony”. I will then end the chapter by identifying a key concern I have with institutional hegemony, and in so doing I hope to lay the foundations for showing why I believe it is responsible not only for the above-mentioned *de jure-de facto* explanatory gap, but also for a particularly difficult state of affairs when it comes to rectifying that gap.

Institutions and external goods

MacIntyre first introduces his distinction between practices and institutions by contrasting chess with chess clubs, physics with laboratories, and medicine with hospitals. According to him, whereas the primary function of practices is to achieve internal goods, institutions are “characteristically and necessarily concerned with [...] external goods”. Institutions are linked to practices in the sense that they instantiate them, and their function with relation to practices is to acquire external goods and distribute them as rewards—a task which is necessary to sustain the practice in question, for “no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions”. However, institutions do not always fulfill their function in sustaining practices, for MacIntyre also sees them as the axis upon which practices are corrupted. Since institutions are so intimately related to the practices that they instantiate, “institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution” (AV 226). This, MacIntyre says, is where the function of the virtues in relation to practices lies: they serve to resist the corrupting power of institutions.

The above account might appear so brief as to likely be lacking several key aspects of MacIntyre's complete account. But in fact, he says little more on this topic in *After Virtue* than what I have recounted above. As with his notion of a practice, MacIntyre's concept of an institution within the framework of practices has a specific definition²⁹; and the term "institution" in that specific usage hardly even makes any appearances outside of pp. 226-228. Furthermore, this lack of any further elaboration on the concept of institutions is not made up for anywhere in the rest of MacIntyre's work. He appears to provide no further characterization of the specifics of this concept in any subsequent books or articles, where the word "institution" takes on, for the most part, the less formal sense in which he more commonly uses it (cf. note 29)—in fact, MacIntyre has never penned a single publication containing the term "institution" in the title³⁰.

This lack of attention to the concept of a practice-instantiating institution is likewise reflected in the secondary literature. Only seven papers have been written on MacIntyre that contain the term "institution" in the title, and these almost exclusively in the domain of business ethics, where MacIntyre's pre-existing framework is deployed in some applied context. Wherever the term appears otherwise, the author generally does little more than briefly recapitulate MacIntyre's definition with little to no critical engagement, taking it as given. Compare this to a term in MacIntyre scholarship like "tradition", which appears over 80 times in the titles of the secondary

²⁹ Elsewhere in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre attributes the term "institution" to such things as "money" (AV 81); "marriage, war, [and] the remembrance of the lives of the dead" (AV 120); the *agôn* in Homeric Greece (AV 161); and "the code of revenge in [heroic] sagas" (AV 195). Clearly, none of these are institutions in the sense that MacIntyre intends in relation to practices.

³⁰ This chapter and the next will include several references to quantitative analysis of the appearance of particular terms in MacIntyre scholarship. In all instances, the claims are made on the basis of the extensive primary and secondary bibliographies found on the International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry's website, which contains over a thousand entries. <https://www.macintyreanenquiry.org/bibliography>

literature, and indeed overshadows both the concept of an “institution” and that of a “practice” in MacIntyre’s own work after his Thomistic turn in 1985.

To this end, I wish to examine two notable works where MacIntyre’s concept of institutions is focalized a bit more strongly, for I believe some further characterizations can be gleaned from these contributions. They are, first, Tony Burns’ “Alasdair MacIntyre, Utopianism, and the Politics of Social Institutions”, which will allow us to better pin down the moral status of institutions; and second, Paul Hager’s “Refurbishing MacIntyre’s Account of Practice”, which will allow us to better specify the function and moral status of those external goods that institutions acquire.

Burns contends that MacIntyre’s concept of practices and institutions is especially pertinent for those who seek to “develop a critique of managerialism and the abuse of power within hierarchical social institutions of contemporary society”, but that to do so first requires that we “get away from the [...] suggestion that whereas practices are necessarily ‘good’, institutions are inherently ‘bad’, precisely because of the association that they have with the idea of corruption”. He attributes to MacIntyre the view that “all institutions might be regarded as corrupt practices”, which “leads inevitably to the conclusion that no institution at all could ever be good”. This, he says, leaves the MacIntyrean with “an extremely pessimistic view regarding the possibility of transforming the world [...] for the better”, for it would appear that the only way to achieve good in the world would be to do away with institutions “in the hope of replacing them with the corresponding practices, pure and unalloyed”; but this would be impossible in the MacIntyrean framework due to its characterization of the nature of the relationship between practices and institutions, and so no positive change is possible (Burns 2019 456).

The problem with Burns’ argument, as should be immediately evident to anyone who has read *After Virtue*, is that it is predicated on a total mischaracterisation of MacIntyre’s account, and an

incoherent one at that. He begins by (somewhat correctly) reconstructing MacIntyre's position that "practices cannot exist on their own, but only in an institutional form". But in subsequently characterizing institutions as "corrupt practices" (or, in other words, as *a practice of a certain kind*), the distinction between practices and institutions is utterly collapsed. On this view, institutions are nothing more than a debased form of practices and practices nothing more than a virtuous form of institutions, a view which MacIntyre upholds nowhere in his work. In fact, Burns then contrasts the account he has built up with what he sees as a superior conception of institutions found in the work of Ivan Illich, who was "far more optimistic and willing to engage with the world of institutions as they currently exist, with a view to improving them"—and his reconstruction of Illich's view has far more in common with MacIntyre's actual position than does his own reconstruction of MacIntyre!

Despite this, however, Burns' paper is useful for two reasons. Firstly, it serves as a kind of foil that identifies very clearly a key sticking point where MacIntyre's concept of institutions is most liable to be misunderstood. Burns' contention that MacIntyre believes that "all institutions are necessarily bad", while still incorrect, is a somewhat defensible reading; for it is quite easy to get this impression from the tone of some of MacIntyre's characterisations, such as when he contrasts "the ideals and the creativity of the practice" with "the acquisitiveness of the institution" (AV 226), or when he identifies the purpose of institutions exclusively as the acquisition and distribution of external goods (specifically MacIntyre's recurring trio of money, status, and prestige)—goods which (as we shall see in a moment with Hager) are themselves liable to be misread as being "morally dubious". But it would be a mistake to see institutions in this way, and this precisely for the second reason Burns' paper is useful. As a way to overcome the supposed problem he identifies, Burns suggests that what is needed is "criteria for the ethical evaluation of existing

social institutions”, such that we can “differentiate between good institutions and bad ones” (Burns 2019 456). What should emerge from this statement is that it makes the most sense to understand institutions as a functional concept in the sense that MacIntyre intends in Chapter Five of *After Virtue*. For as MacIntyre has shown in that chapter, valid arguments that move from factual premises to an evaluative conclusion—the thing supposedly denied by Hume’s is-ought gap—are possible when the argument turns on the use of a functional concept. For example, MacIntyre argues that “from such factual premises as ‘This watch is grossly inaccurate and irregular in time-keeping’ and ‘this watch is too heavy to carry about comfortably’, the evaluative conclusion validly follows that ‘This is a bad watch’” (*AV* 68). This is due to the “special character” of the concept of a watch, namely, its status as a functional concept:

That is to say, we define ... “watch” ... in terms of the purpose or function which a watch ... [is] characteristically expected to serve. It follows that the concept of a watch cannot be defined independently of the concept of a good watch ... and that the criterion of something’s being a watch and the criterion of something’s being a good watch ... are not independent of each other. (*AV* 69)

Institutions, too, are clearly a functional concept; that is to say, MacIntyre defines them in terms of the function they are expected to serve, namely, to sustain practices. As a result, the criteria that Burns seeks are nothing more than whether or not the institution is successfully fulfilling this function. The only difference is that the terms “good” and “bad” are supplanted here, respectively, with the terms “sustain” and “corrupt”: “good” institutions sustain practices, and “bad” institutions corrupt them. It is thus evident that institutions cannot be—as Burns claims MacIntyre says they are—“necessarily bad” any more than watches are necessarily bad, or, to bridge the gap between good and bad as functional terms and good and bad as moral terms, any more than human beings are necessarily bad (for MacIntyre’s moral theory turns on the Aristotelian notion that “man” is a functional concept).

This naturally raises the question of what it means for an institution to “sustain” or “corrupt” a practice. And this, too, is a notion that is woefully under-elaborated in *After Virtue*. MacIntyre only ever characterizes corruption in two ways: he says that institutions have “corrupting power” (AV 226), thereby linking corruption with institutions; and he says that corruption is caused by vice (i.e., the lack of virtue) and is prevented by the exercise of the virtues, which uphold “integrity” in a practice (AV 227). Apart from this, he only identifies “the desire to excel and win” (AV 232) as a potential corrupting force. The term, it would seem, is taken by MacIntyre to be more or less elementary and self-evident. And likewise, the concept of corruption has been given little attention in the secondary literature either. Only one paper exists that mentions “corruption” in the title—John Dobson’s “Against MacIntyre: The Corrupting Power of Practices” (Dobson 2017)—and Dobson similarly takes the term to be elementary, only ever really insinuating that corruption largely consists in a straying from the pursuit of internal goods in favour of the pursuit of external goods (a straightforward characterization that is commonly found all throughout the secondary literature). This characterization is not false *per se*, but it would benefit from being expanded on.

Recall that a key part of MacIntyre’s core definition of a practice is that, when the practice is in good order, its practitioners are able to achieve the internal goods of the practice and thereby systematically extend the human powers to achieve excellence (this is, in fact, *the* key function of a practice). It should thus follow that “corruption”—understood here as some sort of major negative impact on the practice—is something that would systematically prevent practitioners from accomplishing this. “Systematically” is the operative word here because we can hardly claim that a practice has been “corrupted” due to the actions of some individual vicious actor who has little to no effect on the practice taken as a whole. An undergraduate philosophy major plagiarizing

their final paper and getting away with it is certainly not good for the practice, but the student's position of relative unimportance within the practice makes this less a case of "corruption" than a case of that student cheating themselves of that practice's internal goods, as with MacIntyre's chess example when the child who has come to appreciate the internal goods of chess cheats in a match. However, if, for example, a faculty member were to systematically pay no attention to clear instances of plagiarism in their course or systematically boost their students' grades when it is not deserved—and acquired a reputation for this—because they are employed on contract and need their gradebooks to reflect a certain strong average in order to renew their contract or acquire a permanent position, this would constitute a form of corruption; for now, the actions of the professor impede their students' ability to achieve the internal goods of the practice (why put in the hard work to submit a good paper if it's well known that you can submit plagiarized or otherwise poor work and still get an A, especially if doing so frees up valuable time to deal with all the other papers one has to submit that month for courses taught by stricter professors?). Perhaps if this were only to occur in a single course taught by a single professor, the corrupting effects would be more or less negligible in the grand scheme of things; but if it were to become a part of the institutional culture as a whole, it would systematically impede students' abilities to achieve the internal goods of the practice, as when in the latter half of the 18th century, German universities had acquired a reputation for having outright corrupt faculty, with popular literature of the period telling stories of debaucherous students neglecting their studies and then bribing their professors for diplomas only to find that they are incapable of reading them because they are written in Greek and Latin³¹.

³¹ See Theodore Ziolkowski, "The University: Model of the Mind", in *German Romanticism and Its Institutions*, Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 218-308.

Coming back to the more commonly-found laconic characterization of corruption mentioned earlier, such activity generally occurs because the corrupting actor desires external goods of some kind and chooses to disregard the internal goods of the practice in order to pursue those external goods. On this basis, I believe that “corruption” in practices can be defined as follows: corruption refers to when certain practitioners make the pursuit of external goods their primary objective within the practice, which includes both the abandonment of the primary pursuit of internal goods and, in turn, engagement in vicious behaviour; and the consequences of this vicious behaviour within the practice are such that they impede other practitioners’ ability to achieve the internal goods of a practice in some systematic way.

However, in order for this definition to be fully lucid, we need to further qualify yet another term that is similarly taken to be elementary and self-evident in the literature, thereby obscuring certain important details: that of “external goods”. To this end, let us turn to Paul Hager.

Hager borrows a distinction first made by David Miller³² between what Miller calls “self-contained” practices and “purposive” practices, with the former being practices whose point “consists entirely in the internal goods achieved by participants and the contemplation of those achievements by others”, such as chess or football, and the latter being practices that “exist to serve social ends beyond themselves” (Miller 1994 250), such as farming and architecture. For Hager, a difficulty arises when considering purposive practices, since the good of excelling in such practices “involves considerations around [their] broader social ends”, but these broader social ends—such as “the production of food for the community” in the case of farming and “the creation of attractive

³² See David Miller, “Virtues, Practices and Justice”, in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus, University of Notre Dame Press 1994. pp. 245–64.

and comfortable buildings” in the case of architecture—are, by MacIntyre’s own definition, external goods, since they can be acquired by other means. This, then, poses a problem insofar as Hager sees MacIntyre placing the good of social ends into the category of external rather than internal goods—the former being a category which he deems “morally dubious”—and Hager maintains that a thorough consideration of the social ends of practices shows that the contrast between internal and external goods “is much less sharp than MacIntyre suggests in his reply to Miller” (Hager 2011 549).

Two things need to be said about this. The first is that Hager’s reading of external goods as “morally dubious”—just as with Burns’ reading of institutions as “necessarily bad”—is something that can arguably be picked up from the tone of MacIntyre’s characterizations, but nevertheless doesn’t hold up to scrutiny when considered in the broader context of MacIntyre’s project. For external goods are, after all, *goods* of a particular kind. It wouldn’t even make sense to invoke the idea of a functional concept to rehabilitate external goods as I just did with institutions, since to do so would be tautological: nothing would be added, conceptually, if we posed the notion of a “good external good”. In this case, instead of viewing external goods as a functional concept, they should rather be understood as a concept *with a function*: that is to say, external goods serve a particular function in the framework of practices, and can thus be used correctly or incorrectly, just as how a hammer is morally neutral insofar as it can be used either to hammer a nail into the frame of an orphanage or to bludgeon someone to death. And what constitutes the “correct” use of external goods we should, in turn, be able to draw out of MacIntyre’s framework rather easily. For the function of institutions is to sustain practices, and institutions do so by accumulating and distributing external goods; so it follows that the correct use of external goods lies in their deployment to sustain practices by providing for the worldly needs of its practitioners, which

includes the sustaining of that practice's institutions (in the case of philosophy, this would mean things like building and maintaining universities, creating and awarding scholarships, and so on). This does not mean that practitioners are not morally permitted to spend their monetary rewards on themselves to a certain extent: a graduate student using scholarship money to pay their rent is hardly engaging in a vicious act. But the *purpose* behind such expenditures must be in pursuit of furthering one's own abilities (as well as that of others) to achieve internal goods and otherwise attain human excellence³³. So when, for example, a university president is given a millionaire's salary, as is the case at some American universities (with the average full-time professor making only between 5-10% as much and contract professors and graduate students being paid a pittance), all the while engaging in funding cuts (citing depleted coffers) and then turning around and erecting football stadiums that cost hundreds of millions of dollars (which are then used to give coaches million-dollar salaries while simultaneously exploiting "student athletes"), can be firmly identified and denounced as a string of vicious acts, with the corresponding vice being *pleonexia*. This, in turn, leads into a good point that Hager makes later in his paper, namely, that "keeping a judicious balance of [external and internal goods] is vital for the ongoing flourishing of the practice", citing the example of a symphony orchestra that annually puts on a number of pop-style concerts "centered on more mainstream popular music, and aimed at drawing full houses"

³³ The graduate student, for example, in using scholarship money to pay their rent as well as their other expenses (groceries, books, clothing, etc.) is ensuring that they do not need to engage in wage labour to make ends meet, thus giving them more time to focus on their academic pursuits. I do not wish to intend that there is some sort of utilitarian moral calculus to be done as to what the correct sorts or amounts of expenditure are: I merely wish to highlight that the *reason* for which a particular expense is paid for by external goods is important. In terms of MacIntyre's second stage of his framework of virtue (the narrative unity of a human life), the same action (say, going out for a beer) can have drastically different moral status in this regard depending on how that action fits into the agent's narrative: compare "going out for a beer after a productive day to socialize with colleagues and mentally recharge for the upcoming week of work" versus "going out for a beer for the fifth time this week to get away from a paper that is due in two days, which I have been putting off working on all week".

every year in order to fund their primary objective, which is “the major internal good of excellent performance of great orchestral music” (Hager 2011 554). As with Burns, Hager creates a problem that stems from an initial misreading of MacIntyre’s work, only to solve that problem a number of pages later merely by presenting a view that is more in line with an accurate reading of MacIntyre; for Hager and I agree, ultimately, that the sort of arrangement exemplified by the symphony orchestra “will be optimal when the institution that supports the practice clearly accepts that all preoccupation with external goods is there to support the achievement of the internal goods that comprise the orchestra’s reason for existing” (Hager 2011 554).

The second thing that needs to be said is that Hager’s claim that the social ends of practices are external goods because they can be obtained by other means does not hold up to scrutiny. For the claim that the food generated by farming is external in the sense that food can also be generated through fishing or through animal husbandry only makes sense insofar as we talk about “food” in the abstract. In reality, of course, there is no “food” as such: there is only wheat, fish, beef, and so on, and anyone who believes this distinction is not important is invited to attempt subsisting on gruel for a year (or, perhaps less hyperbolically, to abstain from consuming a number of their favourite foods). And this claim makes even less sense in the case of architecture; for how is “the creation of attractive and comfortable buildings” to be achieved by other means?

The fault in this case, however, is not Hager’s, for in bringing up this argument he highlights what is precisely a major shortcoming in MacIntyre’s own conception of external goods. Note that terms like “money”, “prestige”, and “status” apply to practices *in general* but are clearly far too broad to simply be applied to any particular practice without any further qualification if we hope to arrive at a sociologically adequate portrait of that practice. The money, prestige, and status rewards proper to being an A-list Hollywood actor or a professional athlete, in terms of what can

be reasonably expected from such a role, are obviously quite different from that of being a tenured Professor of Philosophy (even at an elite university). So if we were to paint a complete portrait of philosophy as a practice, it would also require a more precise qualification of the exact sorts of external goods that are proper to contemporary philosophy: for example, the status and prestige that takes the form of tenure (a reward for which it is quite difficult to find an analogue in non-academic practices, except perhaps for life tenure in the case of the appointment of federal judges); money that takes the form of a salary that, while comfortable, will likely never exceed—with very few exceptions—about \$200,000 (compare this to the multi-million dollar contracts an A-list actor can reasonably expect from playing a leading role in a blockbuster film, or the \$700,000 minimum salary of a hockey player in the NHL); and a sort of very narrow celebrity where those in your discipline might be aware of you, but you will almost certainly remain anonymous with regards to the general public (even philosophers with a certain degree of pop-cultural celebrity, like Slavoj Žižek or Cornel West, could never hope to attain the celebrity status of a Brad Pitt or an Alexander Ovechkin). The prestige and status associated with a materially successful career in academic philosophy translates largely to a very narrow form of institutional and cultural capital that can be capitalized on only in highly specific intellectual (and mainly bourgeois) circles.

Why is this important? Because it responds to the common point articulated in that familiar joke that goes, “I got into philosophy for the money—the fame and power are just extra benefits”. The sentiment behind this joke implies that philosophy is not a good avenue to pursue any of those things. But this surface-level self-effacement is often punctuated with the implied ascription of a sort of inherent nobility to the practice of philosophy such that its practitioners are not liable, or at least not *as* liable, to corruption. Such an attitude would neglect an important point. The external goods that philosophy in particular provides are characteristically the sorts of external goods that

a philosophically-oriented person will seek insofar as every person is at least a bit egotistical—and it would be a mistake to assume that they are not simply because they do not desire the external goods proper to being an A-list actor or a Wall Street hedge fund manager. In his essay “Why I Write”, George Orwell identifies what he sees as the four key motives pushing any writer to write. It is notable that he identifies the first motive in the following way:

Sheer egoism. Desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death, to get your own back on grown-ups who snubbed you in childhood, etc. etc. It is humbug to pretend that this is not a motive, and a strong one. Writers share this characteristic with scientists, artists, politicians, lawyers, soldiers, successful businessmen—in short, with the whole top crust of humanity. The great mass of human beings are not acutely selfish. After the age of about thirty they abandon individual ambition—in many cases, indeed, they almost abandon the sense of being individuals at all—and live chiefly for others, or are simply smothered under the drudgery. But there is also a minority of gifted, wilful people who are determined to live their own lives to the end, and writers belong in this class. Serious writers, I should say, are on the whole more vain and self-centered than journalists, though less interested in money. (Orwell 2005 4-5)

While the other three motives Orwell lists—aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse, and political purpose (“in the widest sense possible”)—belong much more clearly to the category of the internal goods of writing, it is telling that his first motive identifies the uncomfortable human fact that we all, to some degree, desire the external goods proper to those areas of social life that we are most attracted to. To imply that the prestige and status of a successful essayist like Orwell is in any way exchangeable with the prestige and status of, say, an action movie star is simply absurd³⁴. An individual’s ideal external goods need not necessarily take the form of millions of dollars and having one’s face on billboards and magazines: a comfortable salary, tenure, and being respected

³⁴ Coming back to my earlier point about “networks of practices”, I use the specific term “action movie star” here because it could defensibly be argued that the sort of status and prestige enjoyed by a figure like Orwell would not be *wholly* untranslatable into the status and prestige of a well-known actor in the world of art house films like Jean-Pierre Léaud, Marcello Mastroianni, Gunnar Björnstrand, and so on—but this is only because the sort of person more likely to enjoy Orwell’s writing is also more likely to be the sort of person who will enjoy films like *Les Quatre Cents Coups*, *8½*, and *The Seventh Seal*.

by one's peers and idolized by one's students can be just as powerful of a sensation (if not more powerful) to those with a sensibility for the life of the mind, because those external goods hold far more import within the network of practices that individual finds themselves engaged in. In other words, though money, prestige, and status—broadly construed—are not specific to any one practice, the status and prestige proper to certain particular practices is more often than not of a highly particular kind of character and only able to be capitalized on within specific social contexts, and the further removed one is from that social context, the more meaningless those external goods become. Any Professor of Philosophy who disagrees with this ought to spend a weekend in Los Angeles trying to get noticed by the tabloids.

Institutional hegemony

Having acquired a more thorough understanding of institutions as a concept, let us now return to the *de jure-de facto* gap mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. In his paper “‘What Is Philosophy?’ The Status of World Philosophy in the Profession”, Robert Solomon notes that

Universities as far flung as Singapore, Sierra Leone, and New Delhi have prided themselves on their fidelity to Oxbridge philosophy. It seems that the globalization of free market economics goes with the globalization of one brief moment in philosophy, with similarly devastating effects on local cultures and rich varieties of human experience. (Solomon 2001 100)

We might add to Solomon's observation that not only do universities across the world subscribe to the Oxbridge model, but also that when they do stray from it, they nevertheless stick to the larger model of the modern European research university, whether its main point of reference be Oxford, Berlin, or Paris; and not only is it the case that universities have adopted this specific model worldwide, but also that philosophy (as it is recognized today) is by-and-large only practiced within institutions of this kind.

It has not always been this way. Spinoza was a lens grinder; Montaigne and Bacon were statesmen; Hume was a librarian who was systematically excluded from academia due to his

alleged atheism; and Nietzsche, who had indeed for a time held the Chair of Classical Philology at Basel, did not compose his most renowned works until after he abandoned that post to find refuge at Sils Maria. But when we try to find more contemporaneous examples, what we are apt to find is that the further along we move in the history of our discipline, the less likely we are to find figures who did philosophy outside of academia and nevertheless achieved a place in the philosophical canon: though in the first half of the 20th century we could still perhaps point to certain figures like Simone Weil, György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, and Jean-Paul Sartre³⁵, today, this is a much less common phenomenon, and the most we can point to are generally fringe figures and “public intellectuals” whose work broadly consists in presenting “philosophical” ideas to a decidedly un-philosophical public, as opposed to contributing to the practice as it stands today. To put it differently, though we could discuss the relative merits and faults of these figures (such as the ones mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis), it can be asserted with a fair degree of certainty that such figures are highly unlikely to hold the status of a Spinoza or a Hume in the practice of philosophy a hundred years from now. So why is it that, since the formal inauguration of the modern university model with the University of Berlin in 1810, it has increasingly and now overwhelmingly become the case that philosophers have been sequestered into the halls of compartmentalized university departments? MacIntyre has supplied his own highly insightful answers to this question—in fact, over the years, it seems to have become one of the primary preoccupations of his writing—but I will not be able to do them justice until later. For now, I wish to only lay the groundwork for MacIntyre’s own account by first introducing a descriptive concept

³⁵ It is probably not an unimportant detail that all four figures were Marxists.

that seeks to more fully articulate the present situation without attempting to ascertain how we got here. I will call this concept “institutional hegemony”.

I define institutional hegemony as a state of affairs wherein a single institution comes to be the dominant (or even the sole) institution that instantiates a particular practice. An institutional hegemon can either be a single localized institution in the way that MacIntyre seems to define institutions (individual chess clubs, laboratories, universities, and hospitals) or, alternatively—and this is my own addition to MacIntyre’s definition of institutions—a standardizing institutional apparatus that comes to exist as a sort of genus for institutions of the MacIntyrean kind. This would extend the definition to include (and indeed would in many key ways re-center it around) institutions of a more abstract sort whose corporeality could be said to be found in organisations such as the *Fédération internationale des échecs* (FIDE), the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), and the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), insofar as these institutions codify and enforce key procedural aspects of other more localized institutions. Institutions of this kind—I will call them “architectonic institutions”³⁶—turn institutions like individual chess clubs, universities, and so on into instantiations of an Ideal institution adhering to a set of uniform standards, the standards set out by the architectonic institution. It is on the basis of such architectonic institutions that we are able to speak of “academia” and not merely of, say, the University of Ottawa or the University of Cambridge as two wholly distinct entities.

³⁶ In the sense in which Aristotle uses *ἀρχιτεκτονικῶν* in the opening chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to describe crafts like horsemanship in relation to bridle-making, or generalship in relation to the actions of warfare.

Let us examine this idea in the context of the contemporary practice of chess. Kelvin Knight has correctly noted that “chess is sustained locally by chess clubs and internationally by [FIDE]” (Knight 2008b 318). But what must be additionally noted is that local chess clubs are not of the same status as an organisation like FIDE. For FIDE not only hosts the highly prestigious World Chess Championship, it also—by doing so, and by having done so for over sixty years—comes to be the primary rule-maker of the practice of chess *as a whole*. In other words, it occupies a double status as both a very large and important chess club, as well as a “chess-club club” of sorts; for the internationally standardized rules set by FIDE will generally be observed by smaller chess clubs and leagues³⁷, and those that do not will be partially defined in some substantial way by their key divergences from the standards set by FIDE. Analogous situations can be found throughout the entire world of sports and games: the *Fédération internationale de football association* in football, the International Tennis Federation in tennis, and no doubt myriad other institutions all carrying names of the form “International Something-Or-Other Federation”.

Things become slightly more difficult to characterize, however, when we consider a practice such as philosophy. Though, in searching for an analogous institutional hegemon, something like the INQAAHE comes to mind, the status that the INQAAHE occupies with regards to the practice of philosophy is not quite the same status that FIDE occupies with regards to the practice of chess. First and foremost, the INQAAHE is not concerned with philosophy in particular, but rather with higher education in general (or, more specifically, the accreditation of what counts as “true” higher education). But the INQAAHE is not quite “higher education” itself—it is rather an institution

³⁷ An important detail to note here is that FIDE does not itself enforce smaller chess clubs’ adherence to FIDE regulations, but rather, due to its status as an institutional hegemon, the regulations are more often than not naturally taken up by smaller clubs, who look to FIDE as a kind of “default” for rules and regulations in the practice of chess.

whose task it is to ensure that all institutions that call themselves “universities” meet a certain baseline standard of excellence. So it is not so much the INQAAHE that stands as the institutional hegemon of contemporary philosophy—rather, the INQAAHE formally enforces the standards of a less tangible institutional hegemon, that of academia itself. I take “academia” here to mean the sum total of standardized activities that all accredited universities partake in: standardized courses, transferable credits, standardized or easily translatable grading scales, the standard four-year degree (and all other standard program requirements, alongside the very idea of a “program” itself), the conferral of diplomas, thesis defenses, academic journal publishing standards, peer review, academic conferences, tenure appointments, and so on. Strip away the peculiarities of the Oxbridge *milieu* that Solomon references (perhaps best—if most comedically—exemplified in a sketch by John Cleese and Jonathan Miller, and more soberly exemplified in the televised conversation between Bernard Williams and A.J. Ayer entitled “Appearance & Reality”³⁸) and what we are left with is, in fact, everything that Oxford and Cambridge have in common with the great mass of all other universities, whatever the peculiarities of any one departmental culture may be.

Recall that my objective here is not to examine or justify how we have arrived here, but merely to point out that this is indeed the present state of affairs. With this in mind, I wish to raise one key concern that I have with institutional hegemony: namely, that institutional hegemons greatly reduce the field of what is possible within practices by rendering their mode of engagement in the practice the only legitimate mode.

³⁸ See <https://youtu.be/qUvf3fOmTTk> for the former, <https://youtu.be/dsTwcjY0gOo> for the latter.

Begin with the observation that a given architectonic institution is always in part constituted by a number of specific procedural standards and activities that are standardized in such a way as to ensure a certain degree of order and consistency both within itself as well as among the institutions under it. So, for example, while the first three articles of the FIDE Laws of Chess concern the rules that are constitutive of the game itself (in other words, the rules which, if not followed in a match, would render that match unintelligible, and thereby must be followed by any and all institutions of chess), much of the remaining eleven articles concern procedural and etiquette-related aspects of play that could, in principle, be violated or amended in such a way that the played game of chess still intelligibly remains a game of chess, but have nevertheless come to be the default standards of “serious” ranked chess-playing. This includes rules such as Article 4.1, “Each move must be made with one hand only”, or Article 6, which governs the use of the chess clock, a tool that was only first introduced in 1883 and is still generally not used during casual (but still intelligible) games of chess between friends.

The particularities of FIDE’s laws, of course, are fairly innocuous, and generally speaking, the additions that FIDE has made to the most basic rules of the game have been in service of extending chess players’ capacities to achieve excellence in the practice³⁹. But there are many such phenomena in other practices—some more codified, some less—that are deserving of further examination, precisely because their effects are less innocuous. What is of particular interest to me are the procedural specifics that arise somewhat unintentionally due to the social configurations

³⁹ See, for example, Article 12.6: “It is forbidden to distract or annoy the opponent in any manner whatsoever. This includes unreasonable claims, unreasonable offers of a draw or the introduction of a source of noise into the playing area.”

that result from certain institutional configurations. Let me briefly explain what I mean by this by reference to another practice that I have a certain degree of familiarity with: that of bartending.

There is a highly peculiar etiquette in the restaurant industry⁴⁰ when it comes to taking breaks. Legally, a bartender—like any other employee—is entitled to one unpaid half-hour break for every five hours of work. Realistically, however, this is simply not a possibility for the sorts of shifts where you would need it most, namely, the weekend nights where you get “slammed”, since there is hardly ever a thirty-minute window during evening service where your bar manager would be fine with being one staff member short, or, to frame it differently, where you would feel comfortable with leaving your coworkers to pick up the slack for your absence. This is such a commonplace phenomenon in the industry that, if questioned, managers are perfectly comfortable with saying to your face that they are indeed violating that particular aspect of employment law: “yeah, no, you’re going to have to get used to the nature of this job.”

There has always been, however, one implicit agreement, one culturally acceptable excuse for a bartender to disappear for approximately five (but absolutely no more than eight) minutes during brief lulls in service, provided someone can cover for them: the smoke break.

There is a certain inherent justification present in the statement “I’m going to go for a smoke” when uttered at the opportune moment that is not shared by, for example, “I’m going to go stand outside for a few minutes to get some fresh air”. Perhaps the element of chemical dependency implies that the smoke break is more immediately “needed” in a way fresh air is not; or perhaps the fact that most anyone who has worked for any considerable amount of time in the industry has

⁴⁰ I speak mainly from my own personal (Canadian) experience, having bartended in several bars and restaurants in British Columbia and Ontario.

been a smoker at some point in their life lends a more readily-available empathy to the craving from coworkers and managers alike. Whatever the ultimate reason, it's a ready-made excuse to steal away a precious few minutes of time to cope with the stress of a shift, to get a chance to sit down after standing for hours on end, and to suppress your appetite (a convenient aspect, since most nights you probably won't get a chance to eat until you clock out, which could be anywhere from midnight to 3 o'clock in the morning). And precisely for this reason, many newcomers to this line of work eventually come to pick up smoking in order to take advantage of this informal agreement⁴¹.

Similarly to the bartending example, certain institutional expectations and procedures in academic philosophy will encourage certain semi-related behaviour that is not itself explicitly stated in those expectations and procedures; and similarly to the FIDE example, those expectations and procedures will come to be partly definitive of any "serious" engagement in that particular practice. Let us briefly examine two such aspects of academic-philosophical culture: the prioritization of a certain kind of form and content, and the demands placed on the act of reading.

It is no secret that MacIntyre has a bone to pick with the *modus operandi* of contemporary academic philosophy. The first traces of his discontentment begin to appear in *After Virtue*, when

⁴¹ Of course, at a certain point, smoke breaks also cease to be a mere convenient excuse to get away from work—one eventually comes to take great aesthetic pleasure in the experience of a smoke break. The sudden dulling of the noise of a crowded bar from cacophonous clink and roar to muted undulation when the door to the smoking area closes behind you; the simultaneous briskness of that first breath of crisp, fresh, Saturday-night downtown air; the rhythm of the tap-tap-tap of your pack of cigarettes against the base of your palm (which nobody has needed to do since the filter was invented, but you saw Humphrey Bogart do it in a movie once); and finally, the calming rush—part nicotine, part satisfaction of the craving you've had since that ticket for nine (*nine?!*) god-damned espresso martinis came through thirty-five minutes ago—that immediately follows the first exhalation, with the knowledge that the next five minutes are yours and yours alone. And that feeling then becomes something you can bond over with your coworkers, something that lends a certain charm to "the bartending life", something that becomes a key part of bartending culture. It would be perfect if you weren't all killing yourselves in the process.

he suggests that part of the reason that academic philosophy has been incapable of seeing, much less resolving, the moral catastrophe he describes in the famous opening passage of the book has to do with the profoundly fragmented and ahistorical way that it now approaches its subject matter:

It is because the habits of mind engendered by our modern academic curriculum separate out the history of political and social change (studied under one set of rubrics in history departments by one set of scholars) from the history of philosophy (studied under quite a different set of rubrics in philosophy departments by quite another set of scholars) that ideas are endowed with a falsely independent life of their own on the one hand and political and social action is presented as peculiarly mindless on the other. (*AV* 72)

Later, in the 1985 postscript which was added to the second edition of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre would reaffirm that his central claims are “deeply incompatible with the conventional academic disciplinary boundaries, boundaries which so often have the effect of compartmentalizing thought in a way that distorts or obscures key relationships” (*AV* 307).

This distortion has a dual effect of both leading to a misunderstanding of the history of philosophy as well as producing an insular, fragmented philosophy in the present. There is, on the one hand, the presentism that is committed when we attempt to understand the moral theory of Hume or the metaphysics of Descartes as enquiries that are or can be distinct from the enquiries of science, history, or theology, for, as MacIntyre points out, “Hume’s ambition was to be the Newton of the moral sciences; and Descartes thought the relationship of his metaphysics to his physics was that of trunk to branches in a single tree” (MacIntyre 1984 31). So we cannot correctly understand such enquiries unless we take seriously the far less compartmentalized intellectual context that they arose in; but the current academic division of labour is set up in such a way that it enables us to “pretend that our pupils can understand Aristotle’s *Ethics* without reading the *Politics* and vice versa” (*Ibid.* 38). But what is subsequently revealed through an examination and contrast between such past enquiries and their inheritors in the present (or at least those inheritors whom MacIntyre is criticizing) is that, in the wake of philosophy ceding areas of enquiry to the

newly-constituted domains of psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, and so on, “the scope of morality has diminished along with that of moral philosophy”, for “cost-benefit analyses, psychological evaluations of personality traits and studies of political order and disorder are nowadays characteristically conducted in a way that presupposes that these are not essentially moral enterprises” (*Ibid.* 32).

This state of affairs then causes a change in “the internal structures of philosophy in terms of what issues are taken to be central, what peripheral, what methods fruitful, what sterile” (*Ibid.*); and we might note that the prioritization of questions and methods that align with the present compartmentalization of contemporary academia pushes philosophy further and further down the path of narrow academic specialization divorced from social consequences, creating a feedback loop which has less and less incentive to be rectified by each subsequent generation of philosophers, and whose primary characteristic is that it reduces philosophy to “a harmless, decorative activity, education in which is widely believed to benefit by exercising and extending capacities for orderly argument, so qualifying those who study it to join the line of lemmings entering law school or business school” (MacIntyre 1987 85).

This academic influence on the *content* of contemporary philosophy is accompanied by a particular *form* in which that content is presented: the academic journal article, which MacIntyre dubs “that most eccentric latecomer of all philosophical genre forms” (MacIntyre 1984 32). More than just this, the journal article has now become, in effect, the only institutionally-acceptable format for the exposition of philosophical thought⁴². For none of the other literary genre forms that

⁴² The sole exception to this is the modern academic monograph—but this is, in essence, little more than a long-form journal article.

MacIntyre contrasts the journal article with—Plato’s dialogues, Augustine’s prayers, Dante’s poetry, Sartre’s novels (and to which we might add Nietzsche’s aphorisms and Wittgenstein’s remarks)—would be deemed acceptable submissions to most any academic philosophy journal today⁴³, and such submissions constitute all but the sole form of career advancement in the contemporary practice of philosophy. This is not to say that philosophy *is not* or *cannot* presently be done in unorthodox styles—Jan Zwicky’s *Lyric Philosophy* stands out as a brilliant and compelling counter-example to such a claim—but Zwicky’s work is precisely that, *unorthodox*, and it is not an unimportant detail that she ultimately left academia. In sum, the institutional and disciplinary demands placed on philosophy as a separate, compartmentalized department in the modern university exert a very strong pressure on practitioners of philosophy to produce work of *a certain kind in a certain way*.

But it is not only the output, so to speak, that is affected by such institutional arrangements, but also input and throughput (and the material facts of academic production unfortunately make such language all too fitting). For the institutional demands placed upon philosophers today force us (or at least very strongly encourage us) to not only produce a certain kind of text in a certain kind of way, but also to *read* a certain kind of text in a certain kind of way. Consider, for example, the following exchange, which occurred during an interview with Rebecca Comay⁴⁴ conducted by three graduate students:

RC. ... we all seem to be experiencing this time crunch. Whether it is because one's days are numbered, or because this may be the only time in your life that you have this luxury of reading, or because of terrible working conditions, or because of the weird reading habits we're developing by

⁴³ It should be additionally noted that we are trained to write in this way, and only in this way, from the very beginning as philosophy majors.

⁴⁴ Professor of Philosophy and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto.

spending all our time on screens, or because of an unthinking adaptation to this production mill, I do think our sense of time is suffering a serious distortion.

DM. I think that is the life we are experiencing in the university production mill: you are never going to have time, there will never be enough time. Maybe that is why you work seven days a week and at night, I don't know, but that is my sense of my life, "I don't have time." So there is a fantasy that you entertain: Can you imagine having a whole summer and you didn't have anything to do but read? I have thoughts like this, of someday having time to read.

RC. Time to read without being driven to be constantly getting something from the reading.

DM. Yes, away from the sense of having continually to produce.

RC. Reading without even a pencil in one's hand! That is why I love reading hard-back books. I have bred into me from earliest childhood a basic awe of the hard-back. I was trained not to ruin my books when I was a child: "Don't bend the pages, don't write in your book, don't bend the spine." So I am still incapable of making notes in a hardback. I find this inhibition both liberating and scary. Its untouchability releases you from the pressure to react. You are forced to read. (Comay 2017 16)

Comay's final observation is perhaps the most telling, as it gives some material content to the slightly vaguer notion of "having to get something out of the reading": the image of the pencil in one's hand (or, increasingly, a keyboard within one's reach). In the never-ending feeling of a time crunch, every reading becomes an economic calculation: the opportunity cost of reading this text versus another, the decision to extensively annotate the chosen text so as not to waste any time in the future with going back and reading everything from scratch (or to speed-read because "it's not worth the time" to read it carefully), the drive to archivally process only the key information of scholarly import as intellectual standing-reserve to later be called upon during the writing of a paper—this hurried and tunnel-visioned strip-mining of philosophical texts, coupled with the narrow academic expectations regarding form and content, turn the great mass of academic production into the mass-manufacture of a consumer product that most often has no consumer.

Just as the institutional demands of academia pressure us to read in a particular way, they also reinforce disciplinary compartmentalization by identifying what is, in the grand scheme of things, an extremely narrow body of texts that count as being "strictly relevant" to oneself as an intellectual. The philosophy major today is not strictly-speaking required to be familiar with, let

alone to actually read, core texts in the social sciences (except perhaps as a matter of adjacency, such as when an all-too-brief historical contextualization of some contemporary philosopher's ideas in a philosophy course makes reference to Weber, Lévi-Strauss, or Saussure). So publish-or-perish culture in many ways forces us to read a highly delineated body of texts—nowadays not even by field, but by subfield—in a hurried style evocative of Mozart composing his Requiem on his deathbed, and to then present our work in a highly specific format, a format which perhaps is not even the most suitable one for the sort of idea trying to be expressed.

There are two things to note about this state of affairs. The first is that these specific demands are not internal to the practice of philosophy itself. In other words, there was no philosophical congress that got together and decided that academia, with all of its institutional peculiarities, constitutes the best form of philosophy, and from that moment on philosophers decided to migrate into that institution; rather, we were all shepherded towards this institution and then molded within it, and the demands it places upon us is increasingly outside the purview of the practitioners of philosophy as university administrations have accrued ever-increasing control over the material realities of our practice ever since the (ongoing) neoliberalization of the university.

The second thing to note is that this is not necessarily an absolute evil. It is certainly plausible that certain kinds of thoughts and ideas, certain kinds of texts, *are* perhaps best produced in the style proper to the academic mode of production. My intention is not so much to demonize the very institution of academia itself (though it *is* my intention to demonize certain specific and contingent activities within it), but rather to identify the great risk that this state of affairs poses within the context of institutional hegemony, which is a risk I see as being quite similar to the risk that Heidegger ascribes to Enframing in “The Question Concerning Technology”: namely, the risk of all other modes of revealing being closed off from us. For Heidegger, when Enframing becomes

the dominant mode of revealing, we cease to grasp Enframing as a claim rather than as a given, and thereby close ourselves off from all other modes, including those which are perhaps more amenable to us—or, in Heidegger's terms, from those modes of revealing in which we are able to encounter our own essence as *Dasein*. Similarly, academia's status as the institutional hegemon of philosophy imposes itself as a given and as the only mode of philosophical enquiry, closing off other modes of philosophical production.

The ideas expressed here so far are admittedly rather vague. In the interest of making them more concrete, I wish to now examine some of the specific ways in which this dynamic of institutional hegemony, coupled with the actual power relations through which it has historically exerted its influence, has had a damaging effect not only on the practice of philosophy itself, but also particularly on certain groups of people who have historically been excluded from the practice.

CHAPTER FOUR: EVIL PRACTICES

The historical reality of the situation described in the previous chapter is that the “certain groups of people” who have been historically excluded from practices such as philosophy are those who do not align with the main axes of power and privilege that have characterized human history thus far, such as it is: whiteness, maleness, affluence, and so on. In this chapter I want to look at four different critics—two from the perspective of feminism, two from the perspective of postcolonialism—to get a clearer picture of the ways in which such groups have faced and continue to face a very specific set of challenges when it comes to becoming members with full standing in MacIntyrean practices. I will begin with Nicola Frazer & Elizabeth Lacey’s “MacIntyre, Feminism, and the Concept of Practice” (*MFCP*), which takes on MacIntyre directly from a critical feminist perspective. I will then extend that criticism to philosophy more generally through a consideration of Cressida Heyes’ “Justification, Pluralism, and Disciplinary Discontents; or, Leaving Philosophy” (*JPDD*). Following this, I will extend the critique from the domain of feminism to the domain of postcolonialism through Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, and then finally, I will use Edward Said’s *Orientalism* to make the critique as a whole more pointed in its criticism of MacIntyrean practices specifically.

Frazer & Lacey, Cressida Heyes, and sexism in the academy

Frazer & Lacey begin their paper by noting the “striking affinities” between academic feminism and MacIntyre’s work⁴⁵. These affinities revolve around what they call a “shared methodological complaint” levied against much of political philosophy, namely, that of its sociological inadequacy. For MacIntyre, this sociological inadequacy principally takes the form of the disembodied and asocial understanding of the individual in moral reasoning, whose normative expression can be found in, for example, Rawls’ notion of the “veil of ignorance”, which MacIntyre critiques in Chapter 17 of *After Virtue*. Frazer & Lacey, on the other hand, emphasize how this disembodiment leads to a major sociological inadequacy specifically with regards to gender relations, citing largely ignored phenomena such as “the sexual division of labour, male violence against women and the experience of the social and material worlds which is typical for women and not for men or so-called ideal subjects” within political philosophy (*MFCP* 265). To these disembodied theories they contrast the embodied nature of feminist practical politics, which they also see reflected in MacIntyre’s concept of practices.

However, Frazer & Lacey claim that there is an “eventual dissatisfaction [among feminists] with MacIntyre’s work” since his particular conception of practices presents him with the problem of dealing with evil practices, a problem which Frazer & Lacey claim MacIntyre fails to resolve. This problem arises when Frazer & Lacey contrast MacIntyre’s concept of practices with one grounded in the work of Althusser and Foucault. This latter concept is somewhat wider in scope,

⁴⁵ This does not appear to be an idiosyncratic position, either—Annette Baier has noted, for example, that MacIntyre deserves the title of “honorary woman” due to the tone of his moral philosophy, which she places closer to that of Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* than to the standard tone of 20th-century analytic metaethics (see Baier 1985).

as Frazer & Lacey define it as “human action which is socially based and organized, underpinned by formal or informal institutions” (*MFCP* 268), which notably lacks the teleological character of MacIntyre’s account as well as its connection to virtue. Under this definition, Frazer & Lacey include things such as “motherhood, sexuality, social interactions and events like dinner parties and demonstrations” as practices. These practices, they say, are also “bound up with discourse [...] which both is produced by and produces the practice”—so, for example, standards of scholarship are produced by intellectual practices, which in turn mold the subsequent development of those practices (an observation which notably aligns with the reflections in the previous chapter of this thesis); and similarly, locker-room talk will both be produced by and subsequently impact team-based athletic practices like football or hockey.

This emphasis on discourse is accompanied by a more central concern with the institutional embodiment of practices, particularly “practices institutionalized in the ideological and repressive state apparatuses” (the police, the courts, etc.) and “practices institutionalized in the disciplines” (psychiatry, medicine, criminology, etc.), which have an irreducibly political dimension. Frazer & Lacey note that “feminist theory understands male power as exercised and maintained in and through [such] practices” (*MFCP* 271). As such, they are primarily concerned with the ways in which practices accomplish this, and are thus, in contrast to MacIntyre, “overwhelmingly *critical* of the practices in question” (*MFCP* 273); and it is ultimately this lack of a theory of power in MacIntyre’s concept of practices that Frazer & Lacey identify as the root of the problem of evil practices.

Frazer & Lacey first attempt to fully discredit MacIntyre’s concept of practices by portraying this as an insurmountable problem. They begin with the observation that “MacIntyre [...] defines virtue as the exercise of what is necessary to attain goods internal to practices”; as such, “the

exercise of virtue is bound up with the existence and moral value of practices”, and this makes practices “by definition good” (*MFCP* 273). They then interpret MacIntyre’s brief passage on evil practices in pp. 232-3 of *After Virtue* as claiming that “wholehearted participation in [evil practices] is virtuous notwithstanding that they are evil” (*MFCP* 274). This, then, presents a problem insofar as (1) there is a conceptual incoherence in positing the existence of practices that are both “evil” and “by definition good”, and (2) there is an understandable hesitancy to characterize participation in evil practices as virtuous.

The issue with this particular part of the argument, however, is that it treats MacIntyre’s account of virtue within the framework of practices as terminal, whereas this is in actuality only the first stage of a three-stage framework of virtue, and thus is only preliminary and incomplete. Elsewhere in their paper, Frazer & Lacey correctly note that practices are “prior to the good” in MacIntyre’s account—but this is something that is very different from saying that practices are “by definition good”. For practices are only “prior to the good” in a definitional and conceptual sense (as opposed to a moral sense), insofar as MacIntyre initially grounds the social function of virtue in its role within practices. But as he shows towards the end of that same chapter, certain virtues—most notably that of justice—cannot be adequately articulated in this first stage, for justice must be capable of ordering and evaluating the relative desert of various individuals within a society; and this cannot be done if each practice has its own internal understanding of justice, an internal understanding that might be at odds with that of some other practice. As MacIntyre has shown (in his consideration of Gauguin, for example), two different practices will sometimes make two incommensurable demands upon an agent; and without a conception of justice that goes beyond mere practices, there would be no way to rationally choose between those two demands. So from practices being “prior to the good”, it does not follow that practices are thereby “by definition

good”. MacIntyre initially builds a conception of *goods* from practices, but the latter two stages of his three-stage framework aim to articulate *the good* as something more than and above the individual goods of practices—his *actual* terminal (albeit, in his own words, still provisional) conclusion about the good in *After Virtue* is that “the good life for man is the life spent in seeking the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is” (*AV* 254). And as he notes in his (admittedly brief) consideration of evil practices, there is “no inconsistency in appealing to the requirements of a virtue to criticize a practice” (*AV* 233).

However, Frazer & Lacey’s argument is two-pronged. I have just argued that the first—their claim that MacIntyre defines practices as “prior to the good” and thus cannot adequately address the problem of evil practices—ultimately fails. But the second prong nevertheless reveals a much deeper avenue for serious critical engagement with MacIntyre’s framework. It is, as they have already noted, “the neglect of a theory of power and the analysis of power relations in social life—of the political relevance of practices” (*MFCP* 275); and it is to this aspect that they return in the final (and strongest) section of their paper.

To examine this aspect, Frazer & Lacey choose to look at a practice that has been of central concern to feminism: the practice of heterosexuality⁴⁶. They note that the contemporary practice of heterosexuality is tied up with a number of different related discourses (propagated via various

⁴⁶ It is unlikely—though not necessarily impossible—that heterosexuality can be understood as a practice in the narrower MacIntyrean sense. MacIntyre himself would more likely see heterosexuality as a body of norms and conventions related to the practice of sustaining forms of community (namely family). But this would, of course, ignore heterosexual activity that is not interested in—and often takes steps to purposefully avoid—family life. Regardless, the upshot of Frazer & Lacey’s consideration of heterosexuality can be very easily extended to practices that fit more readily into the MacIntyrean scheme.

media—advertising, fiction, advice columns, scientific papers, etc.) with the dominant discourses invoking “conceptions of health (both psychic and physical), pleasure, reproduction, and crucially, and especially for girls, trouble” (*MFCP* 276). A key element of feminist politics has therefore been to show how all of these discourses currently center and prioritize male desire and pleasure (perhaps most evident in the conception of trouble, where the demand is placed upon women to manage male sexuality, exemplified in the “what was she wearing?” platitude), and to subsequently try to change the practice of heterosexuality by altering the nature of the goods internal to it from the status quo of a practice “whose central good is the affirmation of male superiority and activity, and of female passivity” (*MFCP* 276) into something more equitable.

In light of this understanding of the feminist project, Frazer & Lacey examine four issues that arise in trying to accomplish it. They are: “first, the terms on which social actors do or do not participate in a practice; second, their differential power to alter a practice; third, the existence and status of competing interpretations of the nature of the good internal to a practice; [and] fourth, the status and grounding of such critical understandings and struggles over practices as the feminist campaigns about heterosexuality” (*MFCP* 276). Frazer & Lacey examine these four issues in a way that appears to classify the latter two issues as offshoots of the former two; as such, it is these former two issues that I will focus on.

Frazer & Lacey frame women’s participation in the practice of heterosexuality as one of inclusion, but an inclusion characterized by “an asymmetric power structure” (*MFCP* 277) which realizes men’s, but not women’s, interests and good. This negative inclusionary status is then contrasted with a negative exclusionary status, namely, that of women’s historical exclusion from “the legislature, the judiciary, [and] the university” (*MFCP* 277), or, in other words, the principal power-wielding institutions of society. MacIntyre’s account puts every participant on equal

footing—assuming, of course, that the key virtues of honesty, justice, and courage are exercised. But the fact of the matter is that the terms in which MacIntyre characterizes the virtuous participant’s relationship to the other participants in the practice is not the lived reality of the women in those practices; and, as we shall see in a moment with Cressida Heyes, the simple intellectual awareness of this fact among men generally does little to change implicit bias. As a result, even when women do finally manage to attain a certain level of inclusion by being appointed as judges, elected as representatives, hired as university professors, and so on, and begin to engage in the MacIntyrean shared pursuit of internal goods, what they find, on Frazer & Lacey’s account, is that “the particular conceptions of good generated in these institutions have the exclusion of women at their very heart” (*MFCP* 277).

This unequal level of participation is matched with an unequal level of power in altering practices—namely, in altering those very internal goods that function at least in part to exclude women. Frazer & Lacey see MacIntyre as only offering two models of how change takes place within practices. The first is what they call “the football case”: this is when, for example, “over time, it is understood that the game goes better if the offside rule is changed; this change will be the outcome of suggestions, argument, counterargument, players unofficially altering the way they play, and so on”. The second is “the case of representatives and bearers of rival traditions engaging in enquiry and argument in some cultural and institutional setting (the university, for example)” (*MFCP* 278). It is this latter case that MacIntyre puts a much greater emphasis on in his work, since it is, in effect, the essential structure of *After Virtue* itself, as well as that of the entirety of his intellectual projects since then.

Frazer & Lacey see the feminist project as being incompatible with such a conception of change when placed within the context of the asymmetric power structures that govern women’s inclusion

and exclusion from practices. For, according to them, a key aspect of this project is “the process of identifying the ways in which what is said in the dominant discourse to be the good for women (motherhood, feminine virtue, the maintenance of the private sphere, passivity and so on) is good *only from a particular standpoint*” (MFCP 278). Since that particular standpoint is one that upholds a conception of the good based in (what Frazer & Lacey identify as) the internal goods of “male dominance and transcendence”, the pursuit of the feminist project involves “the pursuit of goods which would be positively damaging to the tradition being criticized”, and this in an incommensurable way—for if Frazer & Lacey are correct in positing “male dominance and transcendence” as key internal goods of practices such as law, politics, medicine, psychology, heterosexuality, and indeed philosophy, then the feminist project would constitute a challenge so severe to the practice’s dominant tradition so as to challenge not just a practice’s internal goods or standards of excellence, but the very practice itself.

I want to offer a suggestion here that aims to take seriously the criticisms made by Frazer & Lacey while still doing justice to MacIntyre’s framework. It is not *prima facie* evident that “male dominance and transcendence” (henceforth “male power”)—though it is indeed the key objective of the patriarchal power structures that have historically dominated and continue to dominate those practices instantiated by the power-wielding institutions that Frazer & Lacey are most concerned with—are, in MacIntyrean terms, separate and essential goods internal to those practices. By “separate” I mean that it doesn’t seem to make sense to posit male power as a stand-alone internal good, relatively isolated from the other internal goods of practices (such as, for example, well-ordered argument or subtle and thoughtful interpretation in philosophy); by “essential” I mean that it doesn’t seem to make sense to posit male power as such a cornerstone of these practices that its elimination would render that practice totally unrecognizable.

I think that, even on Frazer & Lacey's own terms (and this is likely truer to the actual intention of their argument), it would make much more sense to understand male power not as a stand-alone internal good, but rather as a significant characteristic and perspective that permeates most practitioners' (or at least most *power-wielding* practitioners') *understanding* of the internal goods of the practice. The distinction that ought to arise at this point is that male power is not a good internal to these practices, but rather a key aspect (usually implicit and obfuscated) of the dominant *standards of excellence* regarding those internal goods. By way of example, let us briefly look at the internal good of well-ordered argument in philosophy. On its own, there is nothing about a well-ordered argument—that is to say, an argument that is logically sound and rhetorically compelling—that requires that male power be attained or reinforced. However, the *standards* by which academic circles judge “good” logic and rhetoric will tend to center the male experience (as Carol Gilligan has shown in *In a Different Voice*, for example, when it comes to judging moral reasoning⁴⁷). These inequitable standards could therefore be exposed and argued against in such a way as to require no contestation of the actual internal good they are standards for—Gilligan challenges the dominant standards of excellence for moral reasoning, but not moral reasoning itself. When it comes to contesting these standards, then, the feminist project is not so radical and alien to the internal structures of the practice of philosophy so as to constitute a conceptually

⁴⁷ Regarding criticisms of Gilligan's essentialization of the feminine experience, the salient point here is that of the prioritization of the experience of individuals who have been socially conditioned in a particular way as opposed to another; therefore, the point ought to still stand even if one levies an anti-essentialist critique against Gilligan, for what is being centered in Kohlberg's theory is a particular way of thinking and acting which is socially conditioned, and this social conditioning has traditionally aligned with masculine gender norms. There is therefore nothing that essentially precludes a woman from going through this same conditioning and, for example, engaging in moral reasoning on “masculine” terms; and Gilligan herself says as much in the introduction to her book.

incommensurable project. This is not to undercut the importance of the actual procedural difficulties of accomplishing this project—but this will be addressed in a moment.

There also appears to be little reason to claim that the realization of feminist objectives in dismantling patriarchal power structures within practices would render that practice unrecognizable. In other words, though Frazer & Lacey’s analysis of heterosexuality points out the nefariousness and deep-rootedness of male power within heterosexuality, implementing the changes they discuss—de-centering male pleasure to make equal room for female pleasure, or the re-allocation of the burden of managing male desire and sexuality from women to men themselves, for example—would leave us with a practice that would still recognizably be one of heterosexuality, i.e. of the sexual relationship between men and women. Even Andrea Dworkin, considered to be one of the more radical feminist critics of the practice of heterosexuality, ultimately affirmed that “both intercourse and sexual pleasure can and will survive equality” (Dworkin 1995)⁴⁸. In fact, in responding to critics who misrepresented her views as claiming that “all sex is rape”, Dworkin makes the much more subtle counter-point that the current practice of heterosexuality is so centered around the male experience and the dynamic of male domination that her criticisms cannot but be misinterpreted in this way by someone who subscribes to such an understanding of intercourse and heterosexuality. This touches more deeply on the problem at hand—it is not that the feminist project is *actually* incommensurable with the internal goods of these practices, but rather that the chronic misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the project

⁴⁸ Dworkin, of course, was also notoriously pessimistic of such reform actually occurring—writing, for example, that “Male-dominant gender hierarchy [...] seems immune to reform [...] This may be because intercourse itself is immune to reform” (Dworkin 1987 174). But Dworkin’s pessimistic conclusions regarding the feasibility of her prescriptions are not necessarily part-and-parcel either of those prescriptions themselves or of the terms in which she conducts her analysis.

and of the practices it targets by those who wholeheartedly subscribe to the dominant discourse gives rise to an erroneous *perception* of incommensurability. The key difference, of course, is that true conceptual incommensurability cannot be corrected; but perceptions can be.

If what I have just said is correct, then Frazer & Lacey's feminist project is not so radical as to be unamenable to a MacIntyrean framework. However, as they very justly point out, "this picture [still] demands an account of the political process by which the excluded find a voice and make it heard, and by which the included (but dominated) come to a critical understanding [...] but MacIntyre offers no gesture towards such an account" (*MFCP* 279). This claim is, if anything, reinforced by MacIntyre's very brief and somewhat tone-deaf response to Frazer & Lacey's paper in the concluding "A Partial Response to my Critics" in the *After MacIntyre* volume, where he merely mentions that, in their analysis, "Frazer & Lacey could have indeed remarked on the amount of harm done thereby not only to women, but also to practices" (MacIntyre 1994 290), and that his full account of justice (as I myself point out above) is sufficient for denouncing evil practices. What is notably absent is a response on MacIntyre's part to the much more difficult criticism regarding the absence of a theory of power. And so, just as MacIntyre once had to do the legwork of articulating the sociology behind emotivism since the emotivists had failed to do so themselves, so we shall now do the legwork of incorporating observations stemming from a theory of power into MacIntyre's framework since he has failed to do so himself.

To look at some of these considerations specifically in the context of contemporary academic philosophy, let us turn to Cressida Heyes' "Justification, Pluralism, and Disciplinary Discontents; or, Leaving Philosophy" (*JPDD*). In this paper, Heyes gives a theoretical background context to her decision to leave the Department of Philosophy for the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta in 2013. She begins by referring to a number of highly specific and concrete

examples of overt sexism and other forms of discrimination within academic philosophy that had gained significant media attention around that time, including the deluge of harrowing anonymous testimonials on the “What is it like to be a woman in philosophy?” blog⁴⁹, the 2012 case of Colin McGinn, and the 2013 APA Committee on the Status of Women report on the Philosophy Department at the University of Colorado Boulder, among a number of other events. She then connects these events not only (as might be expected) to “a tangled combination of sexist utterances [and] sexual harassment”, but notably also to “the belittling of feminist philosophy as a field of study” (*JPDD* 4). In doing so, she ties the ongoing abuse of and discrimination against women that occurs in philosophy departments not just to a number of external social configurations (such as those Frazer & Lacey touch on in their examination of heterosexuality) or to the existence of vicious individuals (as MacIntyre does), but also to a lack of intellectual pluralism within the actual discipline of philosophy itself, whose overcoming Heyes sees as necessary if we are to “see an end to even the bluntest forms of discrimination and harassment in Philosophy” (*JPDD* 5).

Heyes’ central claim regarding this point is that the blanket dismissal of feminist philosophy is an irreducibly sexist act. This is because for Heyes, “the idea that one could dismiss a large, highly variegated, and well-moderated sub-discipline *tout court*, without familiarizing oneself with the work within it most likely to conform to whatever a judging individual considers excellent, is the very definition of prejudice” (*JPDD* 5)⁵⁰. She says that this point became markedly clear to her while she was editing the four-volume *Critical Concepts: Philosophy and Gender*, an anthology containing 75 essays representing what she considered to be some of the best feminist scholarship

⁴⁹ <https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/>

⁵⁰ We might note that similar dynamics tend to exist within the analytic-continental divide.

in philosophy. These essays covered a wide range of topics, including but not limited to “the feminist politics of Descartes’ view of reason, [...] the role of the family in Black feminist thought, [...] and] how feminist philosophy contributes to the study of logic” (*JPDD* 5). The 75 essays in the anthology are not monolithic in either form or content, and often represent highly diverse and conflicting views within the sub-discipline. As Erin Tarver notes, the only thing that unites feminist philosophy as a sub-discipline is “a few shared concerns and/or shared origins”, notably a concern “with gender—and perhaps more strongly, the philosophical implications of women’s subordination, which is understood in some way or other as problematic” (Tarver 2013 9). In this sense, feminist philosophy can be analogously understood not as a particular method or school of thought, such as transcendental phenomenology or logical positivism, but rather as a broad area of multifarious enquiry directed at a cluster of interrelated issues, not unlike “philosophy of mind, ancient Greek philosophy, and American pragmatism” (*Ibid.*). As such, for Heyes, dismissing feminist philosophy *a priori* would not be dissimilar to dismissing those three fields *a priori*. She notes that

the critic looking for tightly made analytic arguments; for close textual engagement with canonical figures; for philosophical claims deeply situated in the history of ideas; for scholarly familiarity with any extra-feminist literature one cares to name; for positions that treat gender as a concept relatively autonomous of actual women *or* that engage closely with empirical claims about gendered persons—all will find something somewhere in feminist philosophy to suit their justificatory tastes. (*JPDD* 6)

Therefore, to dismiss feminist philosophy as a field in its entirety “cannot be premised on any actual assessment of its various intellectual merits”, generally confirmed by the notable lack of reference to particulars when such sweeping dismissals are made.

Heyes locates the source of such dismissals not in some rationally-grounded reasoning, but either in overt sexism or in implicit bias, the latter presenting a particularly tricky challenge. She notes that recent psychological evidence has confirmed that implicit bias is widespread in

academic judgment, even among those who outwardly uphold egalitarian views, citing a study that concluded that “subjects (including from the targeted group) are more likely to rate the same CV more highly when it comes under a male name than when the same information is presented under a female name [...] although those same subjects deny if asked directly that men or women with the same qualifications should be treated differently in a job application” (*JPDD* 6). This notion of implicit bias introduces another shortcoming of MacIntyre’s framework in *After Virtue*: not only does it neglect to consider power relations, but it also makes no attempt to acknowledge that an agent’s own beliefs and actions are sometimes (we might even venture to say *often*) opaque even to themselves, and that professed beliefs often fail to line up with actions in ways that are perhaps more difficult to deal with than by appeals to the virtues of courage, justice, and honesty—though, as we shall see in the next chapter, MacIntyre does eventually deal with this topic in his later paper “Social structures and their threats to moral agency”, and the traces of a more nuanced account surrounding these issues can be detected even in *After Virtue* itself. Before turning to this, however, I want to show how a related set of issues arises when we consider the particular struggles faced by racialized peoples within academia.

A postcolonial critique of contemporary academia

I want to begin with a brief consideration of a few important elements from the first chapter of Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. In this text, Coulthard examines the contemporary colonial relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples, and in doing so asks a key question: what accounts for the reproduction of colonial hierarchies in liberal democratic contexts today? Historically, colonialism and imperialism had most frequently resorted to overt subjugation and violence to accomplish their objectives. However, Coulthard argues that today this relationship has been for the most part

replaced by much more subtle forms of domination that were the subject of Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*, namely, the psycho-affective attachments to colonial rule that form colonized peoples into colonial subjects. In the Canadian context, this takes the form of the state's ability to "entice Indigenous peoples to *identify*, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *nonreciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler state and society" (*RSWM* 25). Fanon critiqued Hegel's master-slave dialectic by noting that, in colonial settings, "the terms of recognition [are] usually determined by and in the interests of the master" (*RSWM* 26), and that the acceptance of those terms on the part of the colonized leads not to a mutual recognition in which their identity is fully realized, but rather a deformed identity marred by an internalized self-hate and a subsequent psycho-affective attachment to the skewed and racist forms of recognition granted by the colonial power. This skewed form of recognition then serves as a cornerstone of the long-term stability of a colonial system of governance.

It is on this basis that Coulthard critiques Charles Taylor's politics of recognition. For Coulthard, though the politics of recognition represent a marked improvement over the historically violent and genocidal relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples, it ultimately does not leave that relationship very far behind; for when recognition, on Taylor's terms, is "something that is ultimately 'granted' or 'accorded' a subaltern group or entity by a dominant group or entity", then this "prefigures its failure to significantly modify, let alone transcend, the breadth of power at play in colonial relationships" (*RSWM* 30-1). To explain why this is the case, Coulthard considers one of the most famous passages from *Peau noire, masques blancs* where Fanon has an encounter with a white child on the streets of Paris:

“Look, a Negro!” Fanon recalled the child saying, “Moma, see the Negro! I’m frightened! frightened!” At that moment the imposition of the child’s racist gaze “sealed” Fanon into a “crushing objecthood”, fixing him like “a chemical solution is fixed by a dye”. He found himself temporarily *accepting* that he was indeed the subject of the child’s call: “It was true, it amused me,” thought Fanon, but then “I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects.” Far from assuring Fanon’s humanity, the other’s recognition imprisoned him in an externally determined and devalued conception of himself. Instead of being acknowledged as “a man among men,” he was reduced to “an object [among] other objects.” (*RSWM* 32)

For Fanon and Coulthard, such interactions serve as microcosms to illustrate how “the imposition of the settler’s gaze can inflict damage on [racialized peoples] at both the individual and collective levels” (*RSWM* 33). By projecting an image onto a colonized populace as their being inferior and uncivilized, and then having a tacit assent to that image serve as a pre-condition for accepting the skewed form of recognition offered by the colonizer, the colonial relationship is cemented both through having the colonized populace assent to the basic terms of what counts as acceptable discourse, as well as through having colonized individuals internalize the degrading image that has been projected onto them. Under such conditions, the colonized can never attain true freedom—they can only attain the status of “emancipated slaves” (*RSWM* 39).

In contrast, attaining true freedom consists in a *struggle* for desubjectification—and Coulthard takes care to note that this is, in effect, a critical component of Hegel’s own master-slave dialectic, which is taken up by Fanon, but not by Taylor. The problem, as Coulthard notes, is that in contemporary liberal democratic societies, such a struggle no longer takes place: instead, freedom is generally *granted* by the settler state onto the colonized populace through various political processes. As a result, though some progress does occur, the fundamental background framework of the colonial relationship itself remains unchallenged, meaning that “the best the colonized can hope for is ‘white liberty and white justice; that is, values secreted by [their] masters’” (*RSWM* 39);

and over time, the colonized themselves will come to identify with this white liberty and white justice, which restrains their understanding of what is possible with regards to true freedom.

The upshot of all these considerations with regards to academia and institutionally-powerful practices more generally becomes more apparent towards the end of the chapter, where Coulthard identifies what he sees as a shortcoming in Dale Turner's *This Is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy*. According to Coulthard, Turner approaches the issues surrounding Indigenous activism by assuming that "colonial relations of power operate primarily by *excluding* the perspectives of Indigenous peoples from the discursive and institutional sites that give their rights content" (RSWM 45). As such, Turner argues that in order to combat colonialism, Indigenous peoples have to engage the very legal and political practices they have historically been excluded from in order to interject their own perspectives into those areas of discourse where their rights have traditionally been framed. Though the underlying assumption here is that "the counterdiscourses that [Indigenous activists] interject into the field of Canadian law and politics have the capacity to shape and govern the ways in which Aboriginal rights are reasoned about and acted on", Coulthard believes that Turner fails to "attribute the same degree of power to the legal and political *discourses of the state*" (RSWM 46). In other words, the assimilative power that these discourses have over Indigenous activists—the very same power considered by Fanon—is not given sufficient consideration in Turner's account; and furthermore, neither is "the role that *nondiscursive* configurations play in reproducing colonial relations", that is to say, the force that the "economic, political, and military might of the state itself" (RSWM 47) exerts over Indigenous activists.

There is an analogy to be drawn here between Coulthard's critique of Turner and my own critique of MacIntyre in this chapter. For Coulthard is not dismissing Turner outright—rather, he

is broadly sympathetic to Turner’s objectives, but feels his account would benefit from a more thorough consideration of the effects that hegemonic power exerts on marginalized peoples, not only through exclusion, but also through asymmetric inclusion as a means of perpetuating relations of dominance. Based on various fragments throughout MacIntyre’s works and his public lectures, it can be gleaned that he is broadly sympathetic to issues of reparations and corrective justice for historically marginalized peoples⁵¹. However, as Frazer & Lacey noted, no real attempt to account for the specific difficulties in addressing such issues—namely, the difficulties I have been considering thus far in this chapter—is made by MacIntyre. Even his allusions to discrimination and its relation to the virtues feels whitewashed, such as when he uses the following example:

If A, a professor, gives B and C the grades that their papers deserve, but grades D because he is attracted by D’s blue eyes or is repelled by D’s dandruff, he has defined his relationship to D differently from his relationship to the other members of the class, whether he wishes it or not. Justice requires that we treat others in respect of merit and desert according to uniform and impersonal standards; to depart from the standards of justice in some particular instance defines our relationship with the relevant person as in some way special or distinctive. (*AV* 223-4)

“Blue eyes” and “dandruff” can be seen to act as sterilized stand-ins here for more politically-charged attributes: namely, skin colour and gender, among other things⁵². Naturally, this can be excused on the grounds that the particular point MacIntyre is trying to make in this passage is purely conceptual, but the fact remains that MacIntyre never seriously engages with the more visceral realities of actual systemic discrimination in his work, which ultimately becomes a major shortcoming: for example, the above case is rendered more complex when we take into consideration Heyes’ comments on implicit bias, for in many cases, “A” will still grade “D” at

⁵¹ See, for example, MacIntyre’s argument that contemporary white Americans must accept responsibility for the legacy and lasting effects of slavery (*AV* 255).

⁵² Research has shown, for example, that attributes like height, weight, and more generally physical attractiveness play a significant role in professional contexts—usually on the level of implicit bias—for both men and women.

least in part due to such unjust standards, but this aspect of the judgment will be opaque to “A” themselves. Moreover, that implicit bias is normally not a mere individual bias, but is representative of a broader culture that affirms and reproduces those biases through the subtle machinations of non-violent power. It is this notion of the cultural reproduction of power relations within practices that presents the most serious problem for MacIntyre, and we are now at a place where we can examine how the unjust dynamics considered so far operate through the core structure of practices—i.e. internal goods, standards of excellence, and institutions. To this end, let us now briefly turn to Edward Said’s *Orientalism*⁵³.

Whereas Fanon is primarily concerned with the degrading image imposed upon colonized Black peoples, and Coulthard is primarily concerned with the degrading image imposed upon Indigenous peoples in the Canadian context, Said is concerned with the broader designation of the “Oriental”, though he comes to focus primarily on Arabs. Where Said differs most significantly from these previous two scholars, however, is that while the former take the degrading racist image and its use in colonial subjugation as a starting-point for their analyses, Said is interested in uncovering the very processes by which that image came to be constructed, propagated, and institutionalized in the first place.

Said designates “Orientalism” as three separate but interrelated things. There is, firstly, Orientalism as a Western academic discipline; secondly, Orientalism as a style of thought that makes an ontological and epistemological distinction between “Orient” and “Occident”; and finally, Orientalism as a Western style of dominating the Orient. Taken together, these three modes

⁵³ Naturally, it would be impossible to do justice to the full scope and extent of Said’s arguments here. I note that my analysis is largely limited to the introduction and the first two sections of the first chapter of *Orientalism* insofar as these are the most relevant to the specific point I wish to make.

of Orientalism come to create a discursive formation characterized by a particular set of concepts, imagery, and vocabulary that are seen as valid ways to speak of “the Orient”. What Said reveals, however, is that Orientalism has not historically been concerned with creating a discourse that accurately describes the actuality of the Arab world, but rather with the construction of an elaborate imaginary world (“the Orient”) which was then imposed onto the actual geographies it was supposedly meant to correspond to.

It is important to note from the outset that Said is not claiming that there is no correspondence whatsoever between the discourses of Orientalism and the actual Arab world—in other words, Orientalism is not a *pure* fabrication. However, Said’s point is that any actual correspondence between Orientalism and its associated geographies has largely been unimportant to Orientalism itself. This is because, for Said, Orientalism has been primarily and centrally concerned with what he calls an “essentialized” Orient: in other words, an Orient with a fixed ontological and moral essence (which gives rise to concepts such as, for example, “the Oriental mentality” or “ineradicable Muslim sensuality”) which can then be held up as representative of the “true” Orient, to be used as a paragon against which the *actual* Orient can be compared. The problem, of course, is that this “true” Orient is by-and-large something that was selectively fabricated over several centuries by the West, and had always served more to render the Orient intelligible to the West rather than to accurately represent the Orient in and for itself; and when this image ended up clashing with lived experience (such as when Orientalists would “go east” and see the object of their studies for themselves), it is the image that would be consistently accorded epistemic priority.

Said notes that the processes by which Orientalism came to establish itself—in his words, “the domestication of the exotic” (Said 1979 60)—are not *inherently* bad or evil, and that this is something that occurs in effect between all cultures; but these processes have the very important

consequence of imposing a limited vocabulary and imagery, and it is the inability to account for this phenomenon that gives rise to more serious epistemic issues as these discourses grow and develop over time. For according to Said, as Orientalism develops from its classical origins in Aeschylus and Euripides all the way to its contemporary manifestations in the rhetoric of the U.S. State Department, what is expanded and refined over the years is not some Western body of positive knowledge about the Arab world, or Islam, or whatever else, but rather a complex body of Western *ignorance* regarding those same things; and this reality is obfuscated by the fact that “fictions have their own logic and their own dialectic of growth or decline” (*Ibid.* 62).

It is this last quote that ought to ring a bell for the MacIntyrean. For what ought to be evident at this point is that Orientalism, particularly as an academic discipline, has all the hallmarks of a practice; but it is a practice that is flawed on a rather fundamental level, and this in a way that could also be extended to certain aspects of philosophy as a practice. As with the previous thinkers considered in this chapter, the central concern is with the ability for individual actors to change the internal goods or standards of excellence of a practice when the odds are institutionally stacked against them. Said recounts, for example, the shock among the European Orientalist community when Simon Ockley tried, at least in part, to tell Arabic history from an Arabic standpoint in his *History of the Saracens* in 1708, and notes William Whiston’s expulsion from Cambridge in 1709 for his “Islamic enthusiasm” (*Ibid.* 75-6). If the gold standard of Orientalism—in other words, the key set of internal goods and standards of excellence by which contributions to the practice are judged—is fundamentally predicated on a correspondence to the constructed, imagined, *essentialized* “Orient” rather than to, say, the Arab world in, of, and for itself, then how is it even structurally possible for scholars to put those standards into question by presenting contributions that aim to correspond to the actual, rather than essentialized, Orient? Any appeal of this kind

within a practice such as Orientalism would have to be systematically rejected, for such an appeal—with little to no hyperbole—would be calling for the very *dismantling* of Orientalism as a practice, insofar as the demand would be to flip the key internal good of the practice on its head. Should the appeal be successful, Orientalism might be replaced in turn by some new practice that studies a similar geographic entity; but the proximity in subject matter would not change the fact that what is being called for is, in effect, *a quite new kind of practice*. This could perhaps be seen as a MacIntyrean expression of Said’s statement that “Orientalism, in its post-eighteenth-century form, could never revise itself” (*Ibid.* 96).

If we allow this possibility, namely, that some practices can be essentially understood as highly complex but fundamentally misguided bodies of (not knowledge but) ignorance, where reform would mean dismantling, then some of the earlier claims made by the scholars previously considered in this chapter have the potential to return with renewed vigour. Recall, for instance, Frazer & Lacey’s claim that the feminist project demands certain changes that run in certain key ways so antithetical to the practice itself that they could not be understood as a wholly immanent critique, as they would be positively damaging to the practice itself. I had initially responded to this by claiming that male power is not such a cornerstone of the practices that Frazer & Lacey identify so as to render them wholly unrecognizable if male power were to be subverted. But my consideration of Said reveals another way of articulating Frazer & Lacey’s point, one that uses a MacIntyrean vocabulary and therefore allows the critique to cut much deeper.

Recall the discussion in Chapter Two about the relativism that arises when Irish claims over Doire Colmcille are articulated in 17th-century English. MacIntyre’s key point had been that to articulate the Irish claims outside of their own framework and within the conflicting framework of 17th-century English would be to characterize those claims in such a way that they are bound to be

rejected. Similarly, it could be said that the changes demanded by Frazer & Lacey's articulation of the feminist project are only truly at home within a particular framework of their own—namely, that of feminism—and that to translate those demands into the pre-existing language of a practice that is in some key way embroiled with the objectives and pursuits of male power would be to preclude truly understanding them (recall also the common mischaracterization of Andrea Dworkin's position as claiming that "all sex is rape" considered earlier). So, in the same way that Said's critique in *Orientalism* could be said to demand the very *dismantling* of the practices he critiques insofar as those practices are built on flawed presuppositions that are so fundamental to the practice that they could not be challenged without toppling the entire edifice, it could potentially be argued that philosophy built up its key presuppositions on much the same basis as *Orientalism* did, such that to challenge them (on the basis that Frazer & Lacey do, for example) would similarly demand the dismantling of philosophy (understood here as a practice with a specific history rather than in the more nebulous terms it is usually spoken of).

In the second chapter, I showed how MacIntyre circumvents this form of relativism by positing that modernity contains the epistemic conditions—at least in principle—for adequately characterizing the beliefs of rival traditions due to the accumulation of scholarship and historical consciousness; and I myself later argued that practices in modernity become (at least conceptually) delocalized, allowing for—even requiring—the coexistence of multifarious traditions within a single practice. What I have been trying to account for since then, however, is that it is simply not the case that material reality lines up with such an egalitarian state of affairs; and it ought to be quite clear at this point that the reason for this cannot be understood independently of a consideration of asymmetric power relations (as opposed to vicious individuals, or a society that does not sufficiently promote the flourishing of the virtues, as MacIntyre might have it). Therefore,

if we wish to defend a MacIntyrean conception of philosophy as a practice—or even more generally, the MacIntyrean concept of a practice itself—it becomes necessary to integrate the claims of this chapter into that concept in order to provide an account of how the sort of change demanded by marginalized groups is not only conceptually, but also *actually* feasible.

CHAPTER FIVE: SOME MACINTYREAN RESPONSES

In this final chapter, I want to make an attempt to provide a more holistic response to all of the concerns enumerated thus far in this thesis by reconciling them with a close reading of MacIntyre. Let us briefly review them here.

Recall that, after building up my initial account of philosophy as a practice in Chapter One, I briefly considered two objections: that of the “prime mover of legitimation” and of conflicting currents of (non-)recognition. With regards to the former objection, I argued that practices always originate dialogically rather than monologically; with regards to the latter, I argued (through a brief consideration of Derrida’s status in the practice of philosophy) that when someone is recognized by a sizeable number of practitioners as having achieved the internal goods and standards of excellence of a practice, then disagreement over that person’s place within the practice in reality constitutes not a question of inclusion versus exclusion, but rather serves as a focal point for an internal debate within the practice concerning its pre-existing internal goods and standards of excellence.

In Chapter Two, I considered MacIntyre’s view that practices always exist in some distinct spatiotemporal background context to see whether it is possible, within his framework, to speak legitimately of “non-Western philosophy” if we take “philosophy” to be a practice that is (supposedly) grounded in a Western tradition of thought. Through a reading of MacIntyre’s “Relativism, Power and Philosophy”, I suggested that the epistemic conditions of modernity allow for what I called “delocalized practices”, that is to say, practices with a spatiotemporal background context that transcends local communities (such as, for example, Flanders in the case of portrait-painting), such that practices are today characterized by an interplay between many radically different traditions from across the world, rather than being restricted to some small region, with

no one tradition being privileged over the others for any reason other than ones relating to the internal logic of the practice itself.

In Chapter Three, I contrasted this “delocalized” account with the empirical reality of the practice of philosophy today, wherein the Western philosophical tradition is indeed emphasized over all others. I then tried to account for this state of affairs by taking a closer look at MacIntyre’s account of institutions. In doing so, I provided in-depth accounts of two key concepts associated with institutions that receive little treatment in *After Virtue* itself: external goods and corruption. I then advanced a concept of my own— “institutional hegemony”—wherein a practice comes to be dominated by a single institution and its associated procedural standards, and showed how in academia, this manifests in part via the prioritization of a certain kind of form and content in the production of philosophical writing as well as the demands placed on the act of reading. I argued that, in the case of institutional hegemony, such procedural standards change the very fabric of the practice itself, insofar as the practitioners who follow these procedural standards will have a much easier time obtaining external goods and thereby cementing themselves in the practice’s tradition: in other words, those who follow pre-existing expectations, those who *reproduce* the practice (in Bourdieu’s sense) are most likely to acquire prestigious positions, lending a kind of inherent conservatism to academia.

These reflections in Chapter Three ultimately proved insufficient in accounting for the “*de jure-de facto* gap” that I identified insofar as they lacked a consideration of power relations—particularly their actual historical manifestation along patriarchal and white-supremacist lines—to which Chapter Four was then devoted. I first considered Frazer & Lacey’s feminist critique of MacIntyre’s concept of a practice, which highlighted the asymmetric inclusion experienced by women within practices linked to key power-wielding institutions, as well as the way that the

historic exclusion of women from these practices has had an effect on the dominant conceptions of the internal goods and standards of excellence within them. This in turn leads to an asymmetry in marginalized practitioners' power to alter their practices, perhaps even to the extent—as Frazer & Lacey argue—that the emancipatory goals of these practitioners would be so at odds with the *status quo* of the practice that the changes they demand would not be amenable to a MacIntyrean conception of progress in practices. I responded to this last concern by arguing that this is, at least conceptually, not necessarily the case—but what remained unaddressed is that on more empirical terms, MacIntyre's account fails to consider the actual, lived procedural difficulties encountered by marginalized practitioners in such cases. I then explored this last point through a consideration of three different scholars. Through Cressida Heyes I highlighted the unjust dismissal of feminist philosophy within mainstream academic philosophy; through Glen Coulthard I showed that marginalized peoples within practices can come to participate in the perpetuation of unjust power structures by accepting and internalizing a degrading and skewed form of recognition granted to them by their oppressors; and through Edward Said I explored the processes by which such unjust power structures are intellectually constructed and institutionalized, and considered the possibility that some practices might in fact be immune to true feminist or postcolonial reform, such that they would indeed need to be *dismantled* in order to rectify the problems that served as the key focus of the chapter.

In short, it could be said that the thesis thus far aligns with Daniel Callahan's observation that *After Virtue* is “powerful in what it contains, and lacking because of what it omits” (Callahan 1982 25). But MacIntyre himself would hardly be opposed to such a characterisation: he has always seen *After Virtue* as tentative, as a project in need of further expansion and critical engagement. To believe otherwise would be, in effect, to fly in the face of the very account MacIntyre gives of

both practices and the good life, for on his view there is never a terminal and timeless conception of internal goods or of the good, but only ever the best account so far.

The hanging question, then, becomes the following: how can a conception of philosophy-as-a-MacIntyrean-practice both *conceptually* incorporate the emancipatory goals of feminist and postcolonial philosophy in the face of the critiques considered in the previous chapter and *practically* incorporate those goals in the face of the realities faced in a climate where the institutional hegemony of academia forces philosophers to channel progress through one (and only one) architectonic institution—indeed, an architectonic institution that has historically served as one of the primary vectors through which patriarchy and white supremacy are upheld and justified?

It ought to be noted from the outset that asking to decisively answer such a question would essentially be asking to “solve sexism and racism”, a feat that is certainly beyond the scope of a master’s thesis, to put it lightly. As such, my goal in this last chapter must be understood rather as a humbler one of *responding to an objection*: that is to say, I wish to show here that it is in fact possible to incorporate the feminist and postcolonial projects into a MacIntyrean framework—and more than this, that their pursuit actually constitutes a key objective for the contemporary practice of philosophy from this perspective—such that the framework can be defended against an outright dismissal on those grounds.

The conceptual commensurability of the feminist and postcolonial projects with MacIntyre’s framework

I want to begin by explicitly drawing what I see as two key distinctions: first, the distinction between internal goods themselves and our own (flawed) conceptions of those internal goods; and second, the distinction between internal goods or standards of excellence being *informed by* racism or sexism as opposed to being *essentially* racist or sexist. I had already alluded to this first

distinction in responding to Frazer & Lacey's arguments in Chapter Four, when I argued that Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* aims to contest not the internal good itself of well-ordered argument in philosophy, but rather of a particular conception of that internal good (generally articulated through some set of standards of excellence) which is informed by a particular viewpoint. In the context of the emancipatory projects of feminism and postcolonialism, this ensures a certain amount of common ground with those projects' adversaries, such that the conflict constitutes not the confrontation of two incommensurable wills to power, but—crucially—an internal dispute within one and the same practice, indeed precisely the sort of internal dispute that MacIntyre sees as integral to a practice's health. For despite MacIntyre's stress on "tradition" lending his framework a conservative appearance, he intends something very particular by "tradition" that diverges significantly from modern conservative understandings of the term. He writes:

We are apt to be misled [...] by the ideological uses to which the concept of a tradition has been put by conservative political theorists. Characteristically such theorists have followed Burke in contrasting tradition with reason and the stability of reason with conflict. Both contrasts obfuscate. For all reasoning takes place within the contest of some traditional mode of thought, transcending through criticism and invention the limitations of what had hitherto been reasoned in that tradition; this is as true of modern physics as of medieval logic. Moreover when a tradition is in good order it is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose.

So when an institution—a university, say, or a farm, or a hospital—is the bearer of a tradition of practice or practices, its common life will be partly, but in a centrally important way, constituted by a continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be or what good farming is or what good medicine is. Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict. Indeed when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or dead. (*AV* 257)

I shall return to this notion of both the feminist and postcolonial projects on the one hand and the currents within that tradition that they antagonize on the other being part of the same "tradition" (in this MacIntyrean sense) imminently, but prior to this I want to first turn to the second distinction. What is at stake with the distinction between an internal good being *informed by* sexism and racism versus being *essentially* racist or sexist is the possibility of genuine reform. This

distinction might be best explained through a consideration of Heidegger's relationship to Nazism, as it serves as a way of understanding the crisis in Heidegger scholarship since the publication of the Black Notebooks. For what is at stake is precisely whether Heidegger's philosophical thought is *recoverable* in light of the content of the Notebooks. There are, in my own terms, broadly two ways for the Heidegger scholar to respond to this crisis: either they recognize that the Black Notebooks reveal that Heidegger's philosophy is irreducibly and *essentially* fascistic, such that it cannot be divorced from those ideological commitments (and presumably, then, that his work ought to be shunned on that basis); or, they recognize that Heidegger's philosophy is *informed by* his relationship to Nazism, but that this relationship is not so essential to the content of his philosophy that it cannot be (obviously with a large degree of effort) divorced from it, or from subsequent reconstructions of and improvements upon it, and that the fallout of the Black Notebooks ought not lead us to jettison Heidegger entirely, but rather that we use them as a tool in adequately interpreting and revising his philosophy⁵⁴.

I would be remiss if I did not note that the more recent controversy surrounding the Black Notebooks could in some ways be seen as a repeat of the controversy that emerged in 1987 following the publication of Victor Farías' *Heidegger et le nazisme*, which did posit such an essential link between Heidegger's philosophy and his Nazism. A brief but thoughtful intervention was made in this latter controversy by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his paper "Back from Syracuse?", where he commented on the question of dispensing with Heidegger:

⁵⁴ This is, of course, a thorny question in Heidegger scholarship, and my dichotomy here doubtless does very little justice to the significantly more nuanced individual responses that actual Heidegger scholars have taken up (such as Marion Heinz, for example). My intention here is not to intervene in this debate, but rather to merely highlight how this distinction between what is *essentially x* vs. what is *informed by x* can be used to understand two very broad, general camps under which the varied responses to the Black Notebooks have fallen.

It is not that easy to get by Heidegger. Even one who lost faith because of Heidegger's political adventures, kept away from him for years, and together with him and others lived through to the end the increasingly dark future of their common country—even such a person could never dream of denying the philosophical impetus he received early on from Heidegger, an impulse often renewed later [...] Whoever thinks we can here and now dispense with Heidegger has not begun to fathom how difficult it was and remains for anyone *not* to dispense with him, as opposed to making a fool of oneself with supercilious gestures. (Gadamer 1989 429-30)

Here Gadamer is displaying an attitude which claims that, though Heidegger's work is undeniably informed by his associations with Nazism, it would be a grave error to dispense with his thought entirely, for there is something profoundly important to be found within it—notably, something that can be extracted and taken up in such a way that does *not* render everything that flows out from it essentially fascist.

Having drawn these two distinctions, what I now want to claim here is that, firstly, the problematic aspects of the internal goods and standards of excellence in philosophy considered throughout this thesis are a matter of those internal goods and standards of excellence being *informed by* racism and sexism, and that secondly these constitute *flawed conceptions* of those internal goods and standards of excellence; and what ought to emerge from this as a result is that the feminist and postcolonial projects fit squarely into a MacIntyrean conception of philosophy-as-practice.

I want to justify this claim by paying close attention to the *form* via which the feminist and postcolonial projects (as I have considered them in this thesis) carry out their tasks. Begin by noting that the structure of Heyes' argument for *tout court* dismissal of feminist philosophy being sexist is largely executed along the very same lines as my defense of Derrida towards the end of the first chapter of this thesis. Her paper opens with a consideration of some actual, tangible instances of overt sexism in academic philosophy in recent years. She then claims that these instances—and the general culture they are symptomatic of—are politically connected to the lack of intellectual

pluralism in academic philosophy, more specifically to the dismissal of feminist philosophy as a legitimate enterprise. She first characterizes such dismissals in much the same way that I characterized the “weak objection” against Derrida, that is to say, as dismissals that make no attempt to appeal to the internal goods or standards of excellence of philosophy, and are thus worthless. She then defends feminist philosophy against a possible “strong objection” (as I had characterized it) by arguing that feminist philosophy does indeed meet the practice’s pre-existing standards of excellence (“tightly made analytical arguments”, “close textual engagement with canonical figures”, “philosophical claims deeply situated in the history of ideas”) and thereby achieves the practice’s internal goods, making it a valid enterprise. In other words, the form of Heyes’ argument for acknowledging the legitimacy of feminist philosophy appeals implicitly to the internal logic of MacIntyrean practices in just the same way as many academic procedural activities like thesis defences and tenure appointments do.

What ought to emerge from this point is that there exists some shared common ground between the feminist philosopher and the philosopher who is dismissive of feminist philosophy that allows them to speak to one another regarding these topics in some intelligible way, with continual appeal to a set of at least some shared standards of excellence and internal goods that render a rational decision between two conflicting views possible. In adhering to some shared understanding of what constitutes an appropriate and logically sound argument, the philosopher who is dismissive of feminist philosophy *must* concede—at least as far as rationality is concerned—that merely claiming “there’s a lot of bad stuff in feminist philosophy”, and this (as Heyes notes) “suspiciously without any reference to particulars” or to “any actual assessment of its various intellectual merits” (*JPDD* 6), cannot constitute a valid argument worth taking seriously. And though those very standards of rational adequacy may themselves be challenged in some separate context (or perhaps

even in a related one, as some papers in feminist epistemology might do), this is never done in such a way that the entirety of the philosophical edifice is thrown out the window in order for the point to be made. The contestation and reform of standards of excellence and internal goods in practices is never a wholesale enterprise; it is always a matter of swapping out the rotted planks of some Neurathian boat, and this only by the sort of person who is equipped to do so adequately—that is to say, a practitioner within the practice in question, one who has already (to some substantial degree) gone through the process of accepting the authority of the practice’s pre-existing standards of excellence and the inadequacy of their own performance as judged by them (*AV* 221).

Related to this is the other point I made about Derrida, namely, that the controversy surrounding his status as a philosopher constitutes an internal debate within philosophy itself rather than a besieging of the practice by some foreign enemy. Such a state of affairs is equally the case for feminist or postcolonial philosophy. Recall that Frazer & Lacey claim that the feminist project cannot be understood as a “wholly immanent critique”, for certain changes it demands are “positively damaging to the tradition being criticized” (*MFCP* 278). But this is only the case if the internal goods central to those practices and traditions are *essentially* sexist: if what is being contested is understood rather as a flawed conception of those internal goods informed by sexist attitudes, then the feminist project can be recast within the MacIntyrean framework as a movement of progress within the practice which brings us closer to an understanding of, say, concepts like “justice” that are more faithful to the universalist terms they are generally cast in, even when some of their specific articulations turn out to be sexist (as many scholars have argued, for example, in the case of Rousseau, or as Frazer & Lacey themselves argue in the opening section of their paper with regards to much of 20th-century political philosophy). Because this feminist project—as I

have just argued above—is rationally intelligible to those it criticizes due to a shared common ground, it would seem that its true objective (thus conceived) is not to tear down the very foundations of the practices and institutions it criticizes—in other words, to dismantle the practice itself, or some essential aspect of it—but rather to identify and exorcise certain specific elements within those practices and institutions that are deformed in some crucial way due to their being informed by sexism, in just the same way as a surgeon removes a malignant tumor without dispensing with the whole organ.

Pragmatically-speaking, this aligns with Heyes' own account of progress regarding this cluster of issues. For she does affirm that, though there is still much work to be done, things *have* improved over the last few years, citing such developments as: the founding of the Pluralist's Guide as a response to the shortcomings of the Leiter Report; the Gendered Conference Campaign, which seeks to promote equal representation at philosophy conferences; and the appointment of a number of feminist philosophers, such as Sally Haslanger and Elizabeth Anderson, to leadership roles in the American Philosophical Association (*JPDD* 10). These sorts of small, incremental changes, she claims, occur due to both the political struggle against the problems which feminist philosophers identify as well as the increased visibility of those problems that the struggle itself engenders. We could perhaps offer a reply at this stage to Glen Coulthard's critique of Dale Turner—not one that provides anything close to a satisfying answer, but one that might nevertheless lay the groundwork for such an answer in the future. It is that, when we observe the actual historical progress made surrounding these issues, we see that raising the visibility of these issues—and this often demands the creation of language to adequately seize and analyze them—is a critical first step to genuinely rectifying them. Thus, in criticizing Turner in the way that he did, Coulthard has already broken key ground when it comes to the problem of ensuring that

Indigenous activists are not moulded into colonial subjects through the very process of engaging in activism by engaging the institutions of the Canadian settler-colonial state; and in a similar sense, what I have tried to do here is to provide a certain kind of language for understanding and engaging with these problems that is able to lay a certain kind of groundwork for approaching a certain set of problems in a very particular way, namely, one which aims to reflect the sociological reality of philosophy as accurately as possible in order to better understand how to make use of pre-existing structures to advance these feminist and postcolonial projects.

A key insight into the process by which such a language comes to be created can be gleaned from an answer Edward Said gave to one of his former students during an interview found in *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said*. Said, on being asked about developing alternative knowledges (not only in response to Orientalism, but also clearly in a sense that can be extended to feminism or any other project relating to social justice) and on what the “starting-point [is] for those whose history has been denied to tell their own stories”, had this to say:

... I have a very contradictory and perhaps, in some respects, conservative view about scholarship. In the first instance, I don't believe that one can provide a counter-alternative to the prevailing orthodoxy or the grand narrative of the official kind, without some really serious understanding of what that narrative is in the first place. Nor do I think that you can start out by telling your own story. I think one really has to understand and respect the structures of knowledge that over the years have been contributed to by men and women. I learned this very early from Vico, who makes you understand that history is not divine or sacred but is made by men and women. And, in order to understand the world in which one lives and the world of scholarship in which these activities take place, I think one really has to have a very strong sense of what it means to do scholarship. And, to the extent that I was able to do that, it took me a long time to try to master the techniques of traditional scholarship. It's not something you can just blow away and say it's all dead white males or imperialist clap-trap. I'm very interested in the process by which people produce things. So, I think that's the first step, and then, I think, the second step is gradually to acquire a point of view, and not just because you're looking for an angle but because, in some way, you relate to it. (Said 2001 262-3)

What is being articulated in this passage aligns in many ways with MacIntyre's understanding of practices. Said's “understanding and respecting pre-existing structures of knowledge” clearly echoes MacIntyre's “accepting the authority of pre-existing standards and the inadequacy of my

own performance as judged by them”: in both cases, there is the recognition that one enters into a practice as an ignorant novice, and must go through an initial period of learning from an at-first-authoritative source in order to be adequately initiated into that practice, hence Said “trying to master the techniques of traditional scholarship”. The second step that Said identifies—gradually acquiring a point of view which might be radically dissident with regards to those initial sources and influences—is then conducted from the place of someone who has gone through that process of initiation and is now able to participate in that “continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be or what good farming is or what good medicine is” (AV 257). And the validity of this state of affairs can be confirmed by contrasting *Orientalism* itself—which stands as a veritable paragon of erudition, of careful and patient exegesis—with less subtle and generally ignorant and worthless critiques, perhaps such as those advanced by some zealous undergraduate after one or two semesters of study, who might feel confident in sweeping Kant off of the table with twelve weeks of instruction and just as many pages of double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman text. What makes *Orientalism* such a strong and challenging work, such a compelling contribution to a critical analysis of its subject matter, is that Said took the time to understand what he was critiquing before critiquing it, and in some key ways to understand it *better than anyone else*, and to therefore be able to see both its virtues and its deep, structural flaws.

From this, then, it should be clear that the feminist and postcolonial projects are not conceptually incommensurable with this MacIntyrean understanding of practices, for the very form via which the critiques are advanced implicitly subscribe to its logic. But a certain problem remains, namely, the potential for *practical* incommensurability given academia’s state as an institutional hegemon that has historically marginalized and, in many ways, continues to

marginalize the sorts of critical enterprises among which feminism and postcolonialism find themselves a part.

MacIntyre's conception of the university as a roadmap to practical commensurability

I had promised in the third chapter of this thesis to discuss MacIntyre's account of how philosophy became the narrow academic discipline that it is today. I want to deliver on this now by looking at his position through one final key text: the tenth and closing chapter of *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, "Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre". In this text, MacIntyre first goes over what he sees as an important cultural shift that occurred roughly around the turn of the 20th century, which led to both the fragmentation of the academic curriculum and the rise of academia's status as a hegemonic institution; he then identifies a key problem that he has with this state of affairs, namely, that representatives of rival traditions of enquiry are not able to have fruitful debates under such conditions; finally, he proposes a new understanding of the function of the university that serves as an important conceptual starting-point to rectifying this latter problem.

MacIntyre begins by contrasting the Ninth Edition (1889) and Eleventh Edition (1910) of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in order to reveal what he sees as a distinct shift in the purpose of the encyclopaedia during this time. According to him, earlier forms of the encyclopaedia served two distinct functions: "they were all works of reference increasingly indispensable to a growing reading public", and some—like the *Britannica*—"were also the bearers of a unified secular vision of the world and of the place of knowledge and enquiry within it". MacIntyre claims that this latter function disappeared by the time of the Eleventh Edition, whose editors simply declared that it was a work of universal reference—"and it was certainly no more than this", adds MacIntyre (3RV 216).

MacIntyre identifies three related changes that were the underlying cause of this shift. He claims, first and foremost, that “enquiry had become finally fragmented into a series of independent, specialized, and professional activities whose results could, so it seemed, find no place as parts in any whole” (3RV 216), echoing his earlier account of the sociology presupposed by emotivism in the third chapter of *After Virtue*. As a result, encyclopaedias could not be anything other than “collections of facts pragmatically ordered for convenience of reference” (3RV 216), having lost the unified context of enquiry that gave their earlier vision coherence. The second change is much the same one he discusses in “Relativism, Power and Philosophy”, for according to him, the earlier vision of the encyclopaedia relied on the notion of an educated public that “reads to a significant degree the same texts, draws upon the same figures of speech, and shared standards of victory and defeat in intellectual debate” (3RV 217)—in other words, a public embodying a single tradition with a single canon. With the progression of modernity, “an encyclopaedia could no longer be a set of canonical books for an educated public, since increasingly such publics disintegrated” (3RV 216). Finally, relating to these first two changes, the very nature of education changed: as formal education was increasingly professionalized and specialized, “moral and theological truth ceased to be recognized as objects of substantive enquiry and instead were relegated to the realm of privatized belief” (3RV 217), thereby further fragmenting enquiry, which was now devoid of the very elements that had at one point in time given all of education its unified point and purpose.

Despite the loss of this older culture of the Ninth Edition, MacIntyre nevertheless identifies this loss as “a background fact [...] a present absence” in our own time; for though that mode of enquiry had been disowned, “the manner of its disowning still shapes contemporary cultural institutions and intellectual dispositions” (3RV 217). He considers this claim through an examination of a

second rival mode of moral enquiry, namely, what he calls “the genealogical”—that tradition that extends from Nietzsche through to Foucault and his successors. He notes that “it has become natural for us to characterize [the demise of the encyclopaedic form of moral enquiry] in a post-Nietzschean genealogical idiom”, but it would be a mistake for us to infer from this that contemporary academia is any more hospitable to the genealogical mode than it is to the encyclopaedic one. For when academia cemented itself as philosophy’s institutional hegemon⁵⁵, it was able to enforce a particular mode of academic discourse within which the genealogist could not be fully at home. MacIntyre notes that “genealogists now occupy professorial chairs with an apparent ease which might have discomfited Nietzsche and that even when they praise the aphorism as the genuinely Nietzschean genre, that praise is expressed [...] in conventional academic journal articles and lectures”. Thus, when genealogists are invited to give such a set of lectures, “his or her academic hosts can reasonably expect the conventional form of his or her utterance at least partially to neutralize its content” (*3RV* 218). He explores this point through a consideration of Foucault’s inaugural lecture at the Collège de France:

There is a double movement within that lecture. On the one hand Foucault in the radical opening of that lecture catalogues the ways in which protection against the hazards and dangers of discourse has been afforded by organisational devices as different as the conventionalization of the functions of an author, the traditions of commentary upon established texts, and the standards of acceptability for propositions imposed within scientific disciplines. In so cataloguing them and thereby revealing them for what they are, Foucault neutralizes or seems to be about to neutralize their protective power, so that the dangers of the voices of discourse summoning up disorder almost become real—but not quite. For we suddenly realize that this is after all just one more conventional academic catalogue, itself an ordering, protective device, and where at the beginning Foucault had to resist the temptation to allow Beckett’s Molloy to displace his own words, by the end he wishes that the voice which is to speak through his might be that of one more professor, his own teacher, Jean Hyppolite. The radical has become a conserver, if not a conservative. Subversion has been subverted through its employment of the very academic mode which it aspired to undermine. (*3RV* 219)

⁵⁵ This is my language, and MacIntyre never speaks explicitly of “institutional hegemony” as a concept—but he alludes quite clearly to this state of affairs throughout the entirety of the chapter, and especially on pp. 218-9.

This dynamic, which was a radically new development in Foucault's time (we could perhaps call it "the domestication of the post-Nietzschean"), would itself later become institutionalized as the ever-expanding profusion of Foucault scholarship became increasingly mainstream over the subsequent decades. As Daniel Zamora once rightly noted in an interview,

[Foucault] offers a comfortable position that allows a certain degree of subversion to be introduced without detracting from the codes of the academy. Mobilizing Foucault is relatively valued, it often allows his defenders to get published in prestigious journals, to join wide intellectual networks, to publish books, etc. Very wide swaths of the intellectual world refer to Foucault in their work and have him saying everything and its opposite. You can be an adviser to the MEDEF and edit his lectures! [A reference to François Ewald, adviser to the main French business federation.] (Zamora 2014)

Both Frazer & Lacey as well as Coulthard have stressed in their work that systems of oppression operate not only through exclusion but also through asymmetric inclusion. In line with this, MacIntyre notes that the academic *status quo* "characteristically achieve[s] this exclusion not by formally placing the excluded doctrine under a ban or a prohibition, but by admitting it only in reduced and distorted versions, so that it unavoidably becomes an ineffective contender for intellectual and moral allegiance"; and in doing so, the modern university is able to not only "dissolve antagonism [and] to emasculate hostility, but also in so doing to render itself culturally irrelevant" (3RV 219).

The contemporary genealogist, then, is faced with a dilemma: either they must write and speak from outside the academy, and thus face the marginalization that would entail in a context of institutional hegemony; or they accept their peculiar admission into the university, but in so doing "saying and being heard to say only what the standard formats of the current academic mode permitted" (3RV 220). This leads MacIntyre to ask the following question: if the academic mode of discourse is ill-fitted to the genealogist's mode of moral enquiry, then in what sort of discursive

context could we genuinely hear the genealogist's putting into question of the culture of the Ninth Edition?

This is equally a problem, MacIntyre thinks, for the third mode of moral enquiry that he is concerned with in *Three Rival Versions*—namely, his own, that of the Thomist. For according to MacIntyre, the discursive context within which Thomism would be intelligible “requires both a different kind of curricular ordering of the disciplines from that divisive and fragmenting partitioning which contemporary academia imposes and the development of morally committed modes of enquiry, for which contemporary academia affords no place” (3RV 220). Thus, these eponymous three rival versions of moral enquiry (the encyclopaedic, the genealogical, and the Thomistic) and their ability to converse with one another in intelligible terms becomes the key concern of the book's final chapter.

Despite his pessimistic outlook thus far in the chapter, MacIntyre does note that “possibilities seem recently to be opening up within the university system which may afford new points of entry for radical dialogue and new opportunities for recasting old genres, so that they may allow new antagonisms to emerge” (3RV 221). This, he believes, is an unintended consequence of the social pressures that have increasingly accumulated since the 1980s which have required that universities “produce more cogent justifications for their continued existence and their continued privileges than they have hitherto been able to do” (3RV 221). Here, MacIntyre appears to be alluding to both the material and ideological challenges that universities have faced from what we generally now refer to today as “the neoliberalization of the university”, which has served as one of the key focal

points of the “culture wars” first in the late 1980s through the 1990s⁵⁶ and more recently since roughly 2016.

MacIntyre’s intervention in this former culture war—Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* had just been published the same year that MacIntyre first gave the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh which were to eventually become *Three Rival Versions* in 1990—begins with his own response to the key question “what are universities for?” or “what peculiar goods do universities serve?”, which is that “They are, when they are true to their own vocation, institutions within which questions of the form ‘What are x’s for?’ and ‘What peculiar goods do y’s serve?’ are formulated and answered in the best rationally defensible way”⁵⁷. Or, in more systematic terms:

when it is demanded of a university community that it justify itself by specifying what its peculiar and essential function is, that function which, were it not to exist, no other institution could discharge, the response of that community ought to be that universities are places where conceptions of and standards of rational justification are elaborated, put to work in the detailed practices of enquiry, and themselves rationally evaluated, so that only from the university can the wider society learn how to conduct its own debates, practical or theoretical, in a rationally defensible way. (*3RV* 222)

It ought to be immediately evident that what MacIntyre is essentially proposing here is that universities ought to be understood as the places where the logic of practices is rendered explicit and itself put under scrutiny, so that when controversy arises in other domains of social and moral life where practices play a central role, individuals inhabiting those domains and participating in

⁵⁶ Charles Taylor’s “The Malaise of Modernity” serves as both a good overview of and a thoughtful intervention in the ’90s “culture wars”.

⁵⁷ To consider the full extent of MacIntyre’s conception of the university—which centers philosophy as the key discipline—and its effect on, say, the sciences, would be far beyond the scope of this thesis. In this particular case, we can take the general prescriptions MacIntyre makes regarding the university *as a whole* and use them in a more humble way, namely, to guide our own enquiry here as to what philosophy is and, consequently, what a Department of Philosophy ought to be (or, to rephrase this in the language of the third chapter of this thesis, what the best configuration of the institutions of philosophy ought to be such that they best serve their function).

those practices can look to the university to gain insight into how best to navigate that controversy in the most rationally defensible way.

Such a configuration requires that the university be a place where rival and antagonistic views of rational justification—such as the “three rival views” MacIntyre presents— “are afforded the opportunities both to develop their own enquiries, in practice and in the articulation of the theory of that practice, and to conduct their intellectual and moral warfare” (3RV 222). And it is precisely because universities have *not* been such a place, according to MacIntyre, that they have been largely inept at responding to social criticisms regarding their continued existence⁵⁸. Thus, he concludes that the contemporary university “can perhaps only defend that in itself which makes it genuinely a university by admitting these conflicts to a central place both in its enquiries and in its teaching curriculum” (3RV 230).

On a more normative level, this requires that the university community change itself into “a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict, in which a central responsibility of higher education would be to initiate students into conflict” (3RV 231); and this would, in turn, prescribe a double role to all those involved in such a project. We could perhaps call the first role that of the “actor”, the second that of the “stage director”. The role of the actor consists of two main components: on the one hand, they task themselves with making progress within their own tradition and mode of enquiry, from within the point of view of that mode (essentially, what most academic philosophers generally do today). On the other hand, they would also enter into conflict with representatives of rival modes of enquiry, both in an attempt to show

⁵⁸ This seems to be confirmed by continuing marginalization of the humanities and the centering of STEM and professional programs in academia.

what is mistaken in those rival modes from the perspective of one's own mode and to "test and retest the central theses advanced from one's own point of view against the strongest possible objections to them derived from one's opponents" (3RV 231).

This role is then supplanted by that of what I have called the "stage director". This requires that we play the role "not of a partisan, but of someone concerned to uphold and to order the ongoing conflicts, to provide and sustain institutionalized means for their expression, to negotiate the modes of encounter between opponents, to ensure that rival voices were not illegitimately suppressed ..." (3RV 231). In other words, such a role requires that we participate in sustaining the very form of the university within which the role of the "actor" can be properly executed. Crucial to this is MacIntyre's distinction between understanding the university as "an arena of neutral objectivity", which is what he claims the modern liberal university tries to see itself as, and "an arena of conflict", that is to say, as a place where it is understood that the very notion of "neutral objectivity" itself is centrally put into question. MacIntyre thus closes his book calling us all to "the importance of the task now imposed upon us, of continually trying to devise new ways to allow these voices to be heard" (3RV 236).

Particularly given that much of the feminist and postcolonial projects trace their lineage quite explicitly back to the genealogical mode of moral enquiry (usually with Foucault as the key figure), this position of MacIntyre's would appear to entail not only that those projects be given serious consideration within the university, but that that they in fact become in some ways one of the focal points of what is essential in university life. For re-imagining the university not as a place where projects that dare to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy are brushed off for failing to adhere to some biased standard of neutral objectivity (whether that brushing-off be valid from the perspective of that orthodoxy or simply a matter of implicit bias), but where such projects are

valued in themselves as being crucial—even if only, from the perspective of a rival mode of moral enquiry, as a foil against which one’s own mode can be vindicated—presents an image of university life that is far more likely to give projects like feminism and postcolonialism a place to not only exist within the university system, but to do so on their own terms, without forcing them to distort themselves to fit an ill-fitting mould. It should thus be clear that, though MacIntyre himself never explicitly articulates these commitments in his own work, he would necessarily have to agree with the demarginalization of these projects within the university, even if only to serve as an intellectual foil to his own professed Thomism.

It would be quite natural, at this point, for the reader to feel underwhelmed by this conclusion. MacIntyre’s vision, by his own admission, is a utopian one; and his retort to such an accusation that “the charge of utopianism is sometimes best understood more as a symptom of the condition of those who level it than an indictment of the projects against which it is directed” (3RV 235) does little, if anything, to assuage the practical concerns that have served as a key sticking-point in this thesis. In effect, those concerns very much remain an open question; but I believe this is not due to purely conceptual reasons. For the sort of program that MacIntyre proposes—or any other program of this kind that proposes a major reform for universities as institutions, for that matter—is never implemented (nor could ever be implemented) wholesale onto universities in general. Such changes only ever occur at *some particular university* when implemented by *some specific individual or group of individuals*. Addressing practical concerns about the implementation of such programs would thus require not just theoretical justifications of the kind in which MacIntyre has been dealing his entire life: changes would need to be proposed for specific departments, specific individual personalities would need to be considered; in more general terms, the scope of the entire context of some specific university would be required in order to make phronetic

decisions, as Aristotle would say, “in accord with the opportune moment” (1110a12). But what nevertheless ought to be clear at this point is that a MacIntyrean view of philosophy as a practice, at least on the level on which I have presented it here, can be vindicated against some of the harsher critiques that might be advanced against it from the various perspectives I considered in Chapter Four. And what the MacIntyrean theory itself contributes to such perspectives in return is the possibility of a kind of lens correction. For when we begin to see ourselves and what we do in the terms in which I have presented them here, some of the most common talking points within our practice regarding issues of social justice are recast in a light that makes us understand them on terms profoundly different from those in which they are commonly expressed; and it is my contention that understanding those problems on these terms is more reflective of the sociological reality of our practice, and that consequently the paths to actual, tangible change and progress become undistorted as a result.

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