

Comparative Analysis of Macintyre's Ethics to Other Philosophical Theories in Contemporary Thought

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Abstract

The paper is comprehensive and looks into the comparative analysis of Macintyre's ethics to other philosophical theories. It offers a proper examination of virtue, narrative unity, tradition, individualism, justice, and relativism. The incorporation of other philosophers such as Aristotle, John Rawls, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill is inevitable as they assist in supplementing Macintyre's ethics. There are also other philosophers included in the paper to ensure that the readers understand Macintyre's ethics from various standpoints. The inclusion of Biblical Allusion, talking about Adam and Eve, shows that the concepts applied by Macintyre are applicable in different capacities. The paper shows that Macintyre does not limit himself to a particular number of schools of thought since he is capable of dealing with various philosophical concepts. Other philosophers such as Aristotle look into particular schools and maintain their focus on the same. Finally, a well-structured conclusion is included in the paper as it surmises all its major points.

Keywords: *Macintyre, Philosophical Theories, Thinkers, Moral, School of Thought.*

Introduction

The ethics of Alasdair Chalmers Macintyre may be explored from different vantage points. Regardless, he does not belong to any particular school of thought as the philosopher treats each of the philosophical theories with equal measure(s). Macintyre looks into virtue, narrative unity, tradition, individualism, justice, and relativism. Each of these concepts is placed in line with other philosophical theories from thinkers such as Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, John Rawls, Aquinas, Philippa Foot, Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur, and David Degrazia to augur a comprehensive comparative analysis. Macintyre's ethics are in-depth and manage to offer substantial information about the field of philosophy from his perspective.

Virtue

Plato in his dialogues writes that a person is known as virtuous when she is intended firmly to achieve the ultimate good. The inclination of virtue makes an individual capable enough to differentiate between good and evil. Macintyre supports virtue ethics and attempts to address the issues and ideas of morality. The philosopher affirmed a relationship between character and personality; reiterating that the former works toward influencing the latter. To sustain peace, Macintyre advocates for morality as an ethical way of

leading one's life. There is a need to compare MacIntyre's virtue and Aristotle's ideas on the same. Like MacIntyre, Aristotle concurs that virtue is affiliated with the highest good which affirms the prevalence of morality. He, however, takes a different approach by believing that every person performs an action believing that it will eventually have positive consequences. While MacIntyre is more inclined toward deciphering one's personality through their character, Aristotle believes that all human beings [whether good or bad] are driven by the urge to act right. Aquinas investigates virtues from the perspective of reason and rationality; describing their role in the character building of human beings. For both Aristotle and Aquinas virtue is that quality in individuals that motivates them to act right. Aquinas' philosophy is closed to MacIntyre's since they both explore the virtues from point of view of rationality and relativity (Wells, 2017).

MacIntyre's virtue-based ethical thought also integrates with Philippa Foot's approach to virtue ethics. After borrowing the Aristotelian conception of virtue she gives a 'modern' edition of Aristotle's virtue ethics. MacIntyre's concern is with the concept of justice because to him, justice plays a central role in attaining a virtuous way of life. Foot's description of virtues is simple in the sense she equally places them with vices. To her, anything which cannot be assigned the status of vice is regarded as a virtue. Her ideas about the attainment of excellence or the highest good are close to Aristotle's (Kunhiyop, 2008). Foot emphasis on the cultivation of virtues of generosity and kindness in a selfish person and by having such virtues the individual will become less interested in being egoistic and ignorant of other people's needs (Culham, 2013). So, to her, the virtues are the qualities of the agents which are helpful to correct the immoral behavior of individuals (Robinson, 2004). In this way, virtues assure that the people urge to remain moral or ethical agents (Groom, 2012).

Tradition

MacIntyre's ethics assert that tradition refers to any form(s) of craft that either progresses or deteriorates with time (Lutz, 2009). Furthermore, these traditions-in simple terms-are belief systems followed by a specific group of people. The philosopher's ideologies show that tradition is not constant; rather, it is generational and moves from one human being to the other. For instance; in African cultures, male circumcision is a tradition that moves from one generation to the other. Even if not all of them are circumcised traditionally, the consistency of tradition is notable. These real-life instances support the truth(s) surrounding MacIntyre's philosophical delineation of tradition. These traditions are historical and cultural as witnessed in MacIntyre's beliefs. It is important to maintain the relevance of particular communal activities to maintain tradition (Stout, 2004). There is evident relativity while exploring MacIntyre's (MacIntyre, 2013) tradition since he looks into its diverse perspectives. A concept that may be traditional in a given community may not hold similar 'relevance' in the next one. These philosophical theories show that tradition has a specific role to play in moral epistemology. With this moral knowledge, (Jun and Smith, 2011) the thinkers reiterate that people will pay more attention to maintaining tradition.

Narrative Unity

MacIntyre's concept of self is based on the narrative unity of life. To him, life is a gradual process from birth to death and the self is recognized as a narrative in united form; including other narratives too. So, the storytelling beings through their death realize the narrative nature of life. Died persons' biographical and other kinds of data show their very nature of being storytelling animals (Wells, 2017). MacIntyre appreciates the method of storytelling for the moral education of individuals. He also refers to the pattern of stories narrated in the Holy Quran for the guidance of humanity. As he focuses on the lives of individuals from birth to death like a plot of a novel from beginning to middle or climax and the end. In this background, we can have a look at the childhood fairy tales that are usually used as a medium of moral and practical training for the kids. For instance, in the tale of Cinderella, the message for the kids is to accept the reality that perfection is overlooked by the people who are not capable of being perfect. So, the concept of narrative unity with the notion of self-identity persuades the persons to understand the connections

between birth, life, and death (Wells, 2017). To compare Macintyre's ethical thought with other thinkers, it is helpful to look at Freud's psychoanalysis; a theory indicating the development of human behavior through various stages (Lutz, 2009).

Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur's concept of self is also based on the notion of narrative unity. For Taylor self is depicted through the biographies of persons. Like Macintyre, both Taylor and Ricoeur believed that personal and moral identity can be interpreted along with the narrative unity or the whole journey of life (Groom and Harden Fritz, 2012). Mary Schechtman's thoughts also revolve around narrative unity and are limited to autobiographies rather than biographies. To him, Individuals built up their identity with the help of narratives in their lives and compose autobiographical information that unites the inner and outer persons (De La Torre and Floyd-Thomas, 2011). It is through the concept of narrative unity that individuals learn about the various segments of their personalities. The concept of the progressive and continuing nature of life is shared by both thinkers; Macintyre and Schechtman (MacIntyre, 2009). David Degrazia's interpretation of personal identity is supported by his understanding of bioethics. His contributions affirm the ideas of Macintyre and Schechtman. Degrazia argues that personal identity can be defined with both physical and psychological components. Following the concept of narrative unity Degrazia asserts that human beings explore and learn their attributes throughout their life span. He agrees with Macintyre and other thinkers who are the proponents of the concepts of narrative unity and personal identity.

Individualism

Macintyre's ethics reveals that individualism refers to the idea(s) of focusing on an individual as independent and autonomous. There is the need to place accurate concentration on both the physical and psychological form(s) of these individuals. Human beings cannot simply be understood from a superficial point of view; therefore, looking into the emotive and psychological parts works toward achieving the same. The philosopher goes ahead to delve into the concept of individualism showing that human beings are complex. There are different perceptions of individualism as underlined by various philosophical theories (Keulartz, et al, 2002). Alexis de Tocqueville is a philosopher who deals with individualism as an idea that upholds selfishness, reiterating that people should only be concerned with their personal needs. Macintyre (MacIntyre, 2015), on the other hand, only concentrates on individualism as a way of acquiring independence. He does not endorse the idea(s) of supporting any form(s) of selfish acts simply by advocating for individualistic tendencies.

Free will-under the bracket of individualism- means that people can make independent choices. Individualism is, however, a selfish concept since it only focuses on the need(s) of a sole individual, leaving out the group concerns. Free will has increased the chances of deteriorating moral philosophy (Zack, 2018) since it gives human beings room to indulge in evil and heinous activities. In the Garden of Eden, for instance, the decision(s) that Adam and Eve made to disobey God led to the downfall of mankind. Even if God limited their free will, the truth is, it cannot be separated from an individual(s). He forbade Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of knowledge but they deliberately disobeyed His word. Individualism shows that free will often causes people to misuse their ability to make particular decisions. The concept is denounced by most philosophers and thinkers since it only assists a certain portion of people. They would rather delve into the application of communitarianism and justice which ensures that all people enjoy equality.

Proper morals (Tapper and Mooney, 2019) require the instigation of laws that are supposed to guide people in the right direction. When human beings are allowed to simply focus on their personal needs, they may end up living in oblivion apropos of other people's existence. It is easier to act upon morals as a group rather than as an individual (Tapper and Mooney, 2019). With a group, there are different characters; each of which may assist people in either making (Polanowski, 2004) the wrong or right decisions. An individual may be less tempted to participate in derogatory activities when they are advised by their fellow group members. They become role models whose good behaviors are emulated and used as directives

toward fulfilling communitarian rather than individualistic needs. Nonetheless, the ideas of Macintyre and Alexis de Tocqueville about individualism should still be given priority due to the existence of drawbacks affiliated with communitarianism. There are instances where individuals should work toward concentrating on their lives since group mentalities may be slow and non-progressive.

Justice

In defining justice, Macintyre resorts to focusing on the idea of a desert to show that the concept aligns people in a community together. Justice means there is a common ground set for all the parties within the 'desert.' The philosopher also uses Aristotle's (Knight, 2013) idea(s) of justice to supplement his understanding of the concept. He agrees with Aristotelian (Knight, 2013) theories stating that rewards and punishment would be accorded to well-mannered and rebellious people, respectively. Like virtues, Macintyre's description of justice shows that the concept is more inclined toward the achievement of the highest good. Justice cannot be placed on theoretical pedestals since it is an actuality that works toward instilling lawfulness in human beings. When there is a survey on different parts of the world, people realize the truth in Macintyre's (MacIntyre, 2008) ideologies. Each region handles justice in different ways thus, offering support for the philosopher's ethics. The division of justice into three parts: corrective justice, justice in exchange, and distributive justice shows that equality is a large constituent of justice. These types of justice each look into a variety of qualities that are necessary for creating a balance in society. An inclusion of John Rawls' communitarianism, however, may be relevant to accentuate the prevalence of ideas affiliated with the good. Rawls' theory focuses on both the individual and community; giving each one of them prominence on a distinct level. Unlike individualism, communitarianism shows that both the individual and the larger society are useful in achieving some form(s) of satisfaction. If at all there should be a comparison between individuals and the community, these communitarians are inclined toward fulfillment of the latter's needs.

Macintyre's (Lutz, 2012) philosophical position on justice slightly resembles John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism as both concepts are interested in fulfilling the majority. Like justice, Mill's philosophy strives to ensure that all people are treated equally, fairly, and on acceptable moral grounds. The two philosophical ideas are interrelated as justice is often dependable on utility. Additionally, when people are treated well by the law, it is inevitable to bring about the idea(s) of utilitarianism; which leads to their overall satisfaction. It is due to the essence of justice that Macintyre and other philosophers manage to develop ideas and information on the same. Delving into Immanuel Kant's (Ficarrotta, 2016) assertion on justice, he focuses on the issue of punishment; stating its necessity in enforcing law and order in various societies (Keulartz, 2002). Justice, according to Kant, revolves around the idea of creating order by dealing with individuals that indulge in criminal activities. He aims to solely show that justice-through punishment-makes it easier for the instilment of certain values in human beings. The philosophical ideas are similar to the ethics of Macintyre and Aristotle as all these thinkers concur with the reparative nature of punishment.

Relativism

Macintyre is closely associated with relativism and to be precise, moral relativism. The philosopher's prominence is seen particularly amidst the debate(s) and ultimate non-acceptance of the mundane [and regular] theories of morality (Reed, 2007). According to other philosophical theories, relativism is a perception showing there is no confirmation that an idea is either completely correct or wrong (Bilimoria et al., 2007). Philosophy asserts that; with moral relativism, there is no confirmed truth about a particular moral judgment. Truly, every moral judgment is placed on its pedestal as none is wholly (Sønnesyn, 2012) accurate. Looking into woman-to-woman marriages, for instance, affirms that the habit is condemned in most African cultures, but accepted in cases where one of the women is barren and needs children. Macintyre's philosophical ideologies are similar and agree that moral judgment should not be on obvious grounds (Tapper and Mooney, 2012). Other philosophical ideas also believe in the ability to explore an issue from different and versatile capacities before coming to a concrete solution(s). Harvey Siegel's

philosophy of relativism challenges MacIntyre's ideas as the latter is more lenient than the former in defining the concept. Since there is a possibility of different truths, MacIntyre emphasizes that there are truths that cannot be neglected or forsaken. According to Aristotle, relativism shows that elements cannot exist as single units since they are related to other aspects, as well. An element can't stand by itself since existence does not incorporate an 'empty' mass.

Conclusion

It is concluded that comparative analysis shows the similarities and slight differences too between the various fundamental concepts of MacIntyre's ethical thought and other philosophical theories given by many thinkers. The differences depict the diverse nature of various schools of thought and show the versatility in the thoughts of MacIntyre leading him not to label himself to any particular school of thought. The analysis is in-depth as it involves various philosophers and thinkers such as Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, John Rawls, Aquinas, Philippa Foot, Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur, and David Degrazia. Unlike MacIntyre, each of these scholars focuses on a particular school of thought. It is only Aristotle whose philosophical prowess allows his prevalence in most of the theories. Thinkers like David Degrazia and John Rawls are simply affiliated with narrative unity and justice, respectively. An analysis of MacIntyre's ethics also assisted in offering ideas about other philosophers and their theories. Additionally, the inclusion of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis supplements MacIntyre's narrative unity by showing that life is a gradual process. These philosophies focus on different aspects of life, therefore, giving prominence to MacIntyre's philosophy.

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