**MacIntyre on Practical Reasoning: A Reply to Patrick Byrne**

**Abstract:** Patrick Byrne argues that MacIntyre’s account of practical reasoning is inadequate because it is based upon a notion of flourishing that places too much emphasis on impersonal facts, likewise because it is excessively focused on means without considering the role of desire for ends, and because it is does not account for the role of feelings in explaining how knowledge of ends is attained. In this essay, I argue that MacIntyre’s account provides adequate responses to each of these concerns. But more broadly, I argue that Byrne is right to suggest that a Lonerganian perspective offers important insights that can extend MacIntyre’s neo-Aristotelian practical philosophy. Specifically, Lonergan’s account of the generalized empirical method may inform MacIntyre’s theory of rival, and potentially incommensurable traditions, explaining how standards of argument are both transcultural and historically articulated.

**INTRODUCTION**

Alasdair MacIntyre and Bernard Lonergan are two of the most innovative and influential Thomists of the 20th Century. Both sought to understand the mind of Thomas Aquinas to better address contemporary philosophical questions. And in doing so, both introduced novel insights into the Thomist tradition, insights that seemingly diverge in a number of important ways. Despite their differences, it is surprising to find that Patrick Byrne, a prominent contemporary reader of Lonergan, in a recent article[[1]](#footnote-1), accuses MacIntyre of fundamental missteps in his account of neo-Aristotelian practical philosophy, especially as it is presented in his recent book *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity[[2]](#footnote-2)*.

In this essay, I first address four related criticisms of MacIntyre’s practical philosophy raised by Byrne, drawing upon a wide range of MacIntyre’s published works. The first criticism involves MacIntyre’s claim that judgements concerning human flourishing are judgments of fact. Byrne contrasts MacIntyre’s claim with Lonergan’s view of ethics, concerning the importance of attending to the facts of human consciousness, suggesting that MacIntyre’s notion of flourishing is overly naturalistic. I argue that Byrne has misunderstood MacIntyre’s claim, failing to appreciate the similarity between MacIntyre and Lonergan on this point. The second criticism concerns the role of deductive reasoning, or the practical syllogism, in MacIntyre’s ethics. Byrne argues that because the practical syllogism presupposes a conception of the good embodied in its first premise, MacIntyre’s focus on deliberation fails to explain how knowledge of ends is attained. But MacIntyre both explicitly notes the limits of deliberation, and explains how practices and communal traditions are a primary source for the content of the ends that structure deliberation. Third, Byrne argues that MacIntyre’s focus on reasons for action fails to account for the role of desire for ends, as opposed to desire for means. I explain that MacIntyre also accepts the role of a fundamental desire for the good, as constitutive of human agency, and argue that Byrne’s reading of Aristotle on this point tends in a Humean direction such that MacIntyre’s account more adequately accounts for the relationship between reasons and desires. Finally, Byrne argues that MacIntyre fails to account for the role of feelings in contributing to the knowledge of ends. By contrast, I argue that the problem of disordered feelings and emotions is a primary reason why MacIntyre focuses on practices, communities, and relationships, more generally, as key loci of moral education. And thus that MacIntyre’s account is compatible with Byrne’s claims concerning the importance of feelings.

I conclude by noting that while Byrne’s Lonerganian account of the ethics of discernment complements and potentially extends MacIntyre’s focus on practices, and traditions, this is not because MacIntyre has an overly naturalistic notion of flourishing, or has failed to account for the importance of affectivity and a desire for the good in the moral life. Likewise, I argue that Lonergan’s generalized empirical methods offers a more far reaching contribution to MacIntyre’s theory of traditions, explaining how standards of argument can be both transcultural and historically elaborated, and thus, providing a Thomist theory of subjectivity that complements MacIntyre’s focus on the social context of the tradition of the virtues[[3]](#footnote-3).

**FLOURISHING AS A FACT**

Before stating his first criticism, Byrne[[4]](#footnote-4) notes, “MacIntyre claims that the superiority of the Neo-Aristotelian alternative to Morality and expressivism is to be settled by matters of fact—about what sorts of functionings really do and really do not succeed—do or do not flourish.” MacIntyre[[5]](#footnote-5) offers a representative statement of this view in *ECM*:

[J]udgments about the functioning of wolves, dolphins, and gorillas and... about the functioning of particular human agents... are both factual and evaluative, but not expressive. They too are true or false, depending only on what the relevant facts are about those particular human agents, although, as we have noticed, the relevant facts about human agents are a good deal more complex than the relevant facts about nonhuman animals. And on the account of ‘good’ and good that I am now outlining, if someone judges that it would be good for some particular individual or group to be, do, or have this or that, they are judging that for them to do, be or have this or that would contribute to human flourishing.

In making this claim, MacIntyre is in broad agreement with a prominent current of neo-Aristotelianism. Philippa Foot[[6]](#footnote-6) offers a well-known defense of the objectivity of moral judgments in these terms, drawing upon Michael Thompson’s account of “Aristotelian categoricals[[7]](#footnote-7).” In each case, this approach to moral judgment aims to defend its objectivity, arguing that notions such as “good,” “virtue,” and “flourishing,” when applied to human life and action, have determinate conditions of applications that are independent of the desires of any given agent. Likewise, according to this view, moral judgments are not reducible to warranted assertability within a given community or culture[[8]](#footnote-8). This is what it means to say that such judgments are “factual,” and this is MacIntyre’s rationale for adopting a version of naturalism[[9]](#footnote-9).

But Byrne draws a stronger conclusion from MacIntyre’s claim that moral judgments are factual. Continuing the passage quoted at the beginning of this section, Byrne[[10]](#footnote-10) says,

While Bernard Lonergan of course agrees that philosophical issues of many kinds can be resolved by appeal to facts, for him this is by appeal to facts of the dynamic structures of consciousness. This is in marked contrast to MacIntyre’s appeal to the alleged facts about human flourishing.

This appeal to Lonergan suggests a stronger and more controversial reading of MacIntyre’s account of moral judgement. More specifically, Byrne’s appeal to Lonergan and the notion of “facts of consciousness,” as a contrast, suggests that he takes MacIntyre to be claiming that judgments concerning human flourishing can and must be settled by appeal to *impersonal* facts, facts that fall especially within the purview of the empirical sciences. On this reading, oddly enough, MacIntyre would be offering a reductive account of moral judgment, where moral notions, including especially that of flourishing are reducible to facts concerning human psychology[[11]](#footnote-11) and sociology[[12]](#footnote-12), facts about the external world rather than facts about consciousness.

In the same passage, Byrne[[13]](#footnote-13) gives an example of what this sort of reading of MacIntyre, of which he is critical, amounts to, saying, “When practices do flourish, this is because their participants have acquired the virtues and reasons that make them capable of cooperating to produce successful functioning.” In this way, MacIntyre’s moral philosophy would amount to a type of functionalist sociology such as might be found in the work of Durkheim or Parsons, with virtues being qualities of character that are conducive to a stable and cohesive society.

The relationship between Aristotelianism and functionalism is complex and beyond the scope of this essay but a number of points can be noted to dispel both the idea that MacIntyre is primarily concerned with impersonal, scientific facts when discussing human flourishing, and the notion that his account of human flourishing eschews those “facts of consciousness” that were the focus on Lonergan’s work. In a review essay discussing Paul Churchland’s work, MacIntyre[[14]](#footnote-14) argues that “the moral distinction between anger for which there is good reason and irrational anger and more generally the distinction between human beings functioning well and their functioning badly are distinctions that have to be learned and understood prior to neuroscientific enquiry.” In other words, human flourishing is a moral notion that cannot be reduced to scientifically explicable facts about the functioning of the brain. The same conclusions apply to well-functioning communities. As MacIntyre says, “I see no value in community as such—many types of community are nastily oppressive.[[15]](#footnote-15)” Instead, only those communities that are constitutive of human flourishing are of value, and only those qualities of character conducive to such communities are virtues. Thus, it is not impersonal facts about individual or communal functioning, as such, that determine the content of human flourishing. Instead, knowledge of such facts, and scientific research more generally, is relevant to moral inquiry only after a “practical understanding of the virtues” is acquired through “story-telling and…examples[[16]](#footnote-16).”

In this sense, for MacIntyre[[17]](#footnote-17) the virtues are “constitutive parts of human flourishing.” And contrary to Byrne’s[[18]](#footnote-18) claim, the virtues are not merely valuable because they are conducive to “successful functioning,” rather the facts that determine good functioning, that is, human flourishing, can only be understood in the light of the virtues, whose acts are elements of a flourishing life “precisely as acts worth performing for their own sake[[19]](#footnote-19).” This point links directly to the second question raised by Byrne’s reading of MacIntyre’s account of human flourishing as factual. More specifically, if the facts underwriting judgments concerning human flourishing are not impersonal facts discoverable through scientific research, since they can only be identified in the light of a knowledge of the virtues, what type of facts underwrite judgments concerning human flourishing and how are they known. Likewise, how do such facts relate to the “facts of the dynamic structures of consciousness[[20]](#footnote-20)” that figured centrally within Lonergan’s work?

Byrne contrasts MacIntyre's understanding of the facts constituting human flourishing from Lonergan’s but this difference is overstated. While Lonergan’s developed understanding of subjectivity offers many important insights that would likely complement and extend MacIntyre’s account of the virtues, a detailed comparison of Lonergan’s axiology with MacIntyre’s is beyond the scope of this essay. But as a prologue to such an endeavor, it should be noted that MacIntyre is also concerned with the role of subjectivity or the first-person perspective in developing an adequate understanding of the virtues that are constitutive of human flourishing. As MacIntyre[[21]](#footnote-21) says, “My ability to learn from my own experiences in a way that will conduce to the achievement of my good depends upon my adopting a certain standpoint toward myself, a standpoint in which I am able to evaluate myself as a rational agent with, so far as possible, the same objectivity that I would evaluate another.” But the “objectivity” in question concerns that of the virtues. He continues this passage, saying, “Truthfulness, the courage of endurance and the courage of patience, a considerateness and a generosity which avoid both mean-spiritedness and self-indulgence, are as necessary in my treatment of myself as they are in my treatment of others[[22]](#footnote-22).” In this way, MacIntyre is also concerned with the ”dynamic structures of consciousness,” such that judging whether some action is virtuous, that is, whether it contributes to human flourishing, is a matter of being honest with oneself, considering all relevant experiences, identifying plausible alternatives, judging on the basis of one’s best evidence, and being open to the good[[23]](#footnote-23). Here one’s deliberations may range over questions concerning the fairness of one’s interactions with friends or coworkers, the proper measure of moderation, or the limits of mercy, amongst other matters. “Did I seriously consider her point of view, when we decided the new schedule? Is an extra piece too much? I gave him three chances, am I being foolish to give him another chance?” Questions such as these are of primary concern when determining what human flourishing amounts to in some specific context and their resolution presupposes an understanding of the virtues.

Thus, the facts that one might appeal in answering these questions will often involve facts about whether one has been honest, just, or patient in one’s dealings with oneself or others. Likewise, moral judgments, such as these, which determine the concrete content of human flourishing, are susceptible to biases of various sorts. This is one reason that friendship is so important to the moral life. MacIntyre[[24]](#footnote-24) says, “I have to find some other human beings such that, when I project on to him or her the unrecognized phantasies that generally distort my perceptions of others, I will gradually become able to identify those distortions as distortions and to free myself from the phantasies that are their source.” Friends teach us how our biases distort our deliberations, causing us to ignore relevant experiences, to offer ad hoc explanations, or to judge without regard for the most salient grounds. Thus, it is through interactions with fellow community members, within various practices that agents develop the capacity to overcome their biases and to judge accurately concerning the role of the virtues within human life, and thus, to assess the facts that are constitutive of human flourishing. There is no appeal to an excessively naturalistic account of flourishing.

None of this is to deny that Lonergan’s[[25]](#footnote-25) developed account of the dynamics of the structures of consciousness or Byrne’s[[26]](#footnote-26) insightful extension of this account concerning the role of feelings in the ethics of discernment offers important insights that can inform MacIntyre’s moral philosophy. But it does suggest that MacIntyre’s understanding of human flourishing as factual includes an understanding of the same sort of first-personal facts that was a focus of Lonergan’s work.

**PRACTICAL REASONING**

Next, Byrne[[27]](#footnote-27) offers a related criticism, arguing that MacIntyre has an “excessively deductive” model of practical reasoning that makes it inexplicable how agents come to a knowledge of ends. As Byrne[[28]](#footnote-28) says,

So formation of universal premises regarding ends cannot be the result of practical reasoning taking place during participation in the practices. Practical reasoning presupposes, rather than delivers, knowledge of the good as end. MacIntyre therefore does not offer a satisfactory answer to this question of how knowledge of ends comes about through immersion in practices.

The crux of Byrne’s argument, following Aristotle and Lonergan, concerns the threat of an “infinite regress of deductive inferences[[29]](#footnote-29),” if some additional source of knowledge is not identified, that is, a non-deductive source of knowledge of ends, articulated in the first premise of the practical syllogism. Byrne does not accuse MacIntyre of making this logical error but he argues that his focus on a deductive mode of practical reasoning obscures the manner in which ends are known.

In response, several points should be noted. First, it is right to see deliberation, as a mode of practical reasoning where appropriate means are sought to attain desired ends, as central to MacIntyre’s practical philosophy, especially *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*. In large part, this centrality stems from MacIntyre’s aim to show how philosophical notions can inform and improve the practical reasoning of plain persons. MacIntyre[[30]](#footnote-30) argues that philosophical texts, such as the *Nicomachean Ethics* or the *Secunda Secudae* of the *Summa*, are irrelevant to actual practice, “until and unless we learn how to read them in such a way as to generate specific and particular answers to the practical questions of all of us, moral philosopher and plain person alike.” For plain persons, MacIntyre argues, questions concerning the good always arise in particular contexts of deliberation, for example about how to reform a failing school, protect a cooperative fishing enterprise in the face of changing institutions, or determine whether one’s previous decisions have been appropriate[[31]](#footnote-31).

Second, there is no mystery about how knowledge of ends is acquired through participation in practices: Novices are taught what is important, both what achievements define the practice at any given stage and what type of performance would be an excellent achievement for the novice, given her level of development[[32]](#footnote-32). Byrne[[33]](#footnote-33) notes that for MacIntyre, “‘traditions’ give people the resources they can draw upon in order to form coherent and satisfying narratives of their individual lives.” But he does not highlight the connection between traditions and agents’ conceptions of ends. Particular practices are informed by traditions that provide insight into the shared goals and notions of excellence that predominant at any given time[[34]](#footnote-34). Just as philosophy students learn of the achievements of Plato, Kant, and Frege, amongst others, medical students learn of leading forms of treatment, developed by groundbreaking physicians[[35]](#footnote-35). In both cases, the practice’s tradition gives insight into those achievements that are worth pursuing, which provide a horizon that makes the novice’s more modest actions intelligible. These achievements also provide a context for the expert’s actions, when the philosopher aims to succeed where her predecessors have failed, or the surgeon to develop new, more effective techniques. Likewise, the novice learns what it would be worthwhile for her to pursue given her relative lack of experience[[36]](#footnote-36). She learns what a good philosophical essay amounts to or how to adequately provide some existing form of treatment. In all these ways, the traditions of specific practices provide a set of first premises, conceptions of ends that are worth pursuing, that structure and inform the deliberations of participants.

Likewise, agents gain knowledge of the good, as such, not the ends, or goods, of specific practices, but of human flourishing, through participation in communities that are themselves constituted by traditions[[37]](#footnote-37). MacIntyre adopts an inclusive end reading of the Aristotelian notion of human flourishing[[38]](#footnote-38). So, within particular communal traditions, including religious traditions[[39]](#footnote-39), agents learn of the importance of a range of goods and learn the complex ways that such goods may be rank-ordered in particular contexts. “Welsh mining communities,” for example, were constituted by a “way of life informed by the ethics of work at the coal face, by a passion for the goods of choral singing and of rugby football and by the virtues of trade union struggle against first coal-owners and then the state[[40]](#footnote-40).” In this way, communal traditions provide members within notions of human flourishing, that is, first premises that structure and inform their deliberations.

In light of the inclusive end conception of flourishing, MacIntyre’s[[41]](#footnote-41) comments about deliberating about ends are intelligible. He says,

Practical deliberation, Aristotle remarked, is only about the means and not about the end (Nicomachean Ethics 1112b 33-34). It does not follow that we do not deliberate about particular ends, but only that, insofar as we do so, we treat those ends as means to still further ends.

When community members deliberate about how best to reform a failing school[[42]](#footnote-42), they necessarily take the existence and proper functioning of the school as a good, and consider various means, such as grassroots campaigns, petitions, lobbying local officials, efforts to attain community sponsors, etc., in terms of which best promote the goal of school reform while satisfying various ethical, political, and economic constraints. But if community members deliberate about whether to reform the school, they must consider the role and importance of education within their shared form of life, questions of justice concerning what is owed to children, and how efforts to reform the school weigh against alternative projects that promote other fundamental goods. In other words, when deliberating about whether to reform the school, community members will treat it as one element, amongst many others, that make up a coherent notion of human flourishing. Thus, it is again clear how premises concerning ends figure within agents’ deliberations: Either the good in question is taken as a key component of flourishing and deliberation is focused on the means of bring this good about, or human flourishing is taken as one’s end, and the good in question is considered as a constitutive means[[43]](#footnote-43) toward flourishing, and it its importance is considered by comparing it with other goods that may also partially constitute flourishing[[44]](#footnote-44).

**DESIRE FOR THE GOOD**

These criticisms of MacIntyre rest upon a more fundamental point. Byrne[[45]](#footnote-45) says, “MacIntyre’s reading of *prohairesis* overlooks the possibility that Aristotle (and Aquinas) thought of desire as also having to do with the ends.” Surprisingly, Byrne takes issue with MacIntyre’s claims that “there are standards *independent of our feelings*, attitudes, and choices which determine what is and is not good[[46]](#footnote-46).” He argues that in contrast, “both Aristotle and Aquinas identified a desire for ends and distinguished it from other desires for means, the latter coming as the results of practical reasoning (deliberation).” On Byrne’s reading, MacIntyre is correct to see the desire for means as grounded in reasons, particularly those reasons expressed in the conclusion of a practical syllogism, but his account fails to accurately identify a fundamental desire for the end that is prior to the reasons articulated in practical syllogisms. Byrne[[47]](#footnote-47) concludes,

This means that MacIntyre is mistaken in thinking that the fundamental ethical question is whether I have good reasons for my desires. Some desires—especially the desire for *eudaimonia*—necessarily precede and guide practical reasoning about other desires.

This criticism misses the mark for two reasons.

First, MacIntyre explicitly agrees that human agency is grounded in a fundamental desire for the good. But, he disagrees with Byrne’s view of the relationship between one’s reasons for action, what is referred to in the quote above as “standards,” and the desire for the good[[48]](#footnote-48). More specifically, he argues that what is good for human beings is what is reasonable, such that the fundamental desire for the good is a desire for that which is good according to reason. MacIntyre[[49]](#footnote-49) says,

The desire for one’s own good is a desire to desire only what one has good reason to desire. If we lacked any such desire, we would lack any motivation to transform our other desires, so that what we in fact desire might come to coincide with what we have good reason to desire.

Thus, MacIntyre claims that the desire for the good according to reason is constitutive of human agency, insofar as it involves the capacity to reevaluate and reconceive one’s past actions and goals in order to better attain one’s good. In this sense, for MacIntyre desire for the good is fundamental, in Byrne’s[[50]](#footnote-50) terms “preced[ing] and guid[ing] practical reasoning.”

Second, Byrne’s account of the independence of desire from reason tends in a Humean direction that MacIntyre explicitly rejects. Specifically, he rejects the notion that desire is prior to the reasons that one has for viewing the object of desire as good, where “desires,” are treated “as surd realities from which rational decision making beings[[51]](#footnote-51).” MacIntyre says further, “

[T]he Humean may retort that no claim about matter of fact can move us to action. Only some passion or desire can do that. And to this, the Aristotelian reply is to agree: no action without *orexis*. But among the species of *orexis* is *boulesis*, and the objects of *boulesis* are specified by the agent's beliefs about her or his good[[52]](#footnote-52).

MacIntyre follows other commentators in viewing *boulesis* as rational desire, as a mode of desire directed toward objects that we have reason to conceive of as good[[53]](#footnote-53). In terms of his inclusive end conception of flourishing, we have reason to view particular goods as good, insofar as they are constitutive elements of flourishing. Likewise, we have reason to view flourishing itself as good insofar as it represents the perfection of our nature. For this point, MacIntyre notes his reliance upon Aquinas’s notion of good in Question 5 of the first part of the *Summa*[[54]](#footnote-54). But in each case, for MacIntyre, the human good is that which is according to reason[[55]](#footnote-55). This is not to say that we reason ourselves into a desire for flourishing, which is a natural desire, but rather that the pursuit of flourishing is intelligible in terms of a broader theoretical conception of human nature[[56]](#footnote-56). Thus, contra Byrne, MacIntyre gives desire for the good as an end a fundamental place in his account of agency and practical deliberation. And while doing this he maintains a link between desire for ends and reasons for action.

**FEELINGS AND THE GOOD**

In large part, Byrne’s aim in marshalling these criticisms of MacIntyre’s view is to suggest that he has failed to give adequate scope to the role of feelings in generating conceptions of the good, that inform first premises of practical syllogisms. Byrne[[57]](#footnote-57) says, ‘So the basic ethical question cannot be whether I have good reasons for my desires. Instead, the basic questions must be ‘What am I doing when I am deliberating?’ and “Is my deliberating governed by ordered or disordered feelings?’” Two points should be noted about this claim. First, the question of whether deliberation is governed by “ordered or disordered feelings” is not in any sense overlooked by MacIntyre. Instead, it is a focal point of his consideration of the role of communities, practices, and other social relationships in facilitating the development of virtues[[58]](#footnote-58). Second, MacIntyre rejects the dichotomy between the question of whether one’s feelings are ordered or disordered, and the question of whether one has good reasons for one’s desires.

The following passage, from *Dependent Rational Animals*, where MacIntyre[[59]](#footnote-59) offers a poignant example of this issue, is worth quoting at length:

Consider that kind of disablement which consists in gross disfigurement of the surface of body parts, perhaps of a swollen, inflamed, scarred, and secretion-exuding face, where the horrifying and disgusting appearance of the sufferer becomes an obstacle to addressing her or him as a human being. Nurses or physicians whose duty it is to understand the sufferer’s appearance as a set of symptoms of an underlying condition have perhaps an easier task than the rest of us who need to find some way of avoiding both the mistakes involved in pretending that the sufferer does not in fact present an horrifying appearance and those involved in being too distracted by that appearance to be able to deal rationally with the sufferer. What we may learn about ourselves from grappling with these difficulties is in part the nature and degree of the value that we have hitherto placed upon a pleasing appearance in other human beings and indeed in ourselves and the errors in those judgments of value.

What we have to overcome, in such an encounter, is a range of disordered feelings, likely including feelings of disgust and fear.

Agents must learn neither to suppress their feelings, since they provide important insight into the needs and condition of other persons, nor to allow their feelings to overwhelm the ability to properly judge the value of the person in the question. So the task of discerning whether or not one’s feelings are disordered is one and the same with that of identifying the reasons that one has for feeling disgust, a fortiori, the putative reasons that one has for devaluing the other person,i.e., avoiding her or dismissing her point of view, because of her disability. This might occur, when one finds oneself making excuses to avoid a disfigured person until she directly asks, “Why are you avoiding me?” The burgeoning realization that one has allowed one’s feelings of fear and disgust to overwhelm one’s judgment is the realization both that one’s feelings are disordered and that one lacks sufficient reason for the desires informed by those feelings.

This focus on disordered emotions is a fundamental reason why practices, institutions, and communities are of such importance in MacIntyre’s work, since, he argues, it is through relationships with others that we learn to identify the ways in which our desires and emotions are disordered[[60]](#footnote-60). Likewise, it is through such engagement that we gain a proper understanding of the good, that is, the first premises that structure our deliberations. But just because MacIntyre focuses so much on the communal aspects of moral development, Byrne’s Lonerganian account of the ethics of discernment[[61]](#footnote-61) promises to provide a complementary perspective. Where MacIntyre has largely eschewed any focus on subjectivity, as a result of his rejection of Cartesianism[[62]](#footnote-62), from a Lonerganian perspective such a cure may be worse than the disease. In this sense, Byrne is right to suggest that an analysis of, what he terms, “a horizon of feelings” may enrich MacIntyre’s neo-Aristotelian ethics, by giving more insight into the dynamic structures of consciousness that undergird moral development, but not because MacIntyre has ignored the importance of affectivity, failed to consider the importance of a fundamental desire for the good, or adopted an account of flourishing that is excessively naturalistic. Rather a Lonerganian perspective may complement MacIntyre’s practical philosophy by offering a Thomist account of subjectivity.

**MACINTYRE AND LONERGAN**

Taking a broader perspective, MacIntyre and Lonergan represent differing, but arguably complementary developments within the Thomist tradition. Both sought to integrate historical consciousness with Thomism, but in radically different ways. One fundamental way in which Lonergan’s work may inform MacIntyre’ concerns the question of the standards of argument, as this relates to the rationality of rival traditions. MacIntyre has argued that whereas rival traditions are often incommensurable, the standards of rationality, standards determining which arguments are good and why, what type of evidence is appropriate for which claims, and what inferences are valid, etc., are both transcultural and historically elaborated[[63]](#footnote-63). It is evident that MacIntyre’s theory of traditions is in need of such an account in order to avoid the threat of relativism, for if the standards of argument were themselves culturally relative, it would be impossible to state that any tradition has failed, no matter how myopic, ad hoc, or arbitrary its claims. But it is also unclear how, given MacIntyre’s account of incommensurable rival traditions, standards of argument can be both transcultural and historically developed.

Noting the importance of Lonergan’s account of standards of rationality, Byrne says, for Lonergan, deductive reasoning “derives its normativity from the dynamism of questioning that guides and thoroughly permeates the process of reasoning.” But he does not connect this account with MacIntyre’s theory of traditions. Seen in the light of MacIntyre’s account of rival traditions, Lonergan’s focus on the knowing subject ensures the transculturally validity of, what he calls, *the generalized empirical method*[[64]](#footnote-64). For any account that would aim to challenge Lonergan’s would have to adopt the same method; it would have to gather evidence, offer an insight that explains the relevant data, and provide sufficient grounds for this insight. According to Lonergan this is what we are doing when we know anything. Likewise, as Lonergan’s own work indicates, first in the articles collected in *Verbum*, and then in *Insight*, and finally in *Method in Theology*, as well as through his dialogue with earlier philosophers including Aristotle, Aquinas, and Hegel, this transcultural account of the standards of rationality and argument develops over time. It is an account for which we must gather evidence, formulate insights, and provide sufficient conditions for our judgments.

Joined with MacIntyre’s account of rival traditions, Lonergan’s generalized empirical method would not completely overcome the potential incommensurability of differing traditions. Substantive moral theories may still be incomparable, as MacIntyre has argued[[65]](#footnote-65), but Lonergan’s account would enable MacIntyre to explain what is wrong with rival traditions that ignore relevant evidence, appeal to explanations that fail to capture the salient elements of a particular context, or ground their theories in putative grounds that are not adequate for their purpose. In other words, MacIntyre could appeal to Lonergan’s answer to the question, “What are we doing when we are knowing?” as a way of partially adjudicating debates between rival traditions, divided by their commitment to alternative, substantive moral and metaphysical principles. A full engagement between Lonergan and MacIntyre is beyond the scope of this essay, but I hope that this brief discussion indicates the fruitful possibilities for an engagement between these two prominent strands of the Thomistic tradition, developed, respectively, by MacIntyre and Lonergan.

**CONCLUSION**

Patrick Byrne argues that MacIntyre’s account of practical reasoning is inadequate because it is does not account for the role of feelings in explaining how knowledge of ends is attained, likewise because it is excessively focused on means without considering the role of desire for ends, and because it is based upon a notion of flourishing that places too much emphasis on impersonal facts. I have argued that these criticisms fail to capture the full breadth of MacIntyre’s account, and that MacIntyre’s account provides adequate responses to each of these concerns. But more broadly, Byrne is right to suggest that Lonergan, and his own Lonerganian account of the ethics of discernment, offers important insights that can extend MacIntyre’s neo-Aristotelian practical philosophy. Specifically, Byrne’s work provides a Thomistic account of subjectivity that sheds light on how agents may overcome disordered feelings in their interactions with others within practices and communities. Similarly, Lonergan’s account of the generalized empirical method, provides important resources that can inform MacIntyre’s account of rival, and potentially incommensurable traditions, explaining how the standards of argument are both transcultural and historically articulated. Further insights are needed to understand how these rival versions of Thomism may fruitfully inform each other.

1. Patrick Byrne, “Desiring and Practical Reasoning: MacIntyre and Lonergan,” and the Isomorphism between Intellect and Reality,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 60 (2020): 75-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning and Narrative* (New York NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016); cited hereafter as *ECM*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue, 3rd Edition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007),p. 23 xv; MacIntyre says, “A moral philosophy...characteristically presupposes a sociology. For every moral philosophy offers explicitly or implicitly at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions, and in so doing generally presupposes some claim that these concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real social world.” Henceforth cited as *AV*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *ECM*, p.29. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Richard Rorty, “Hilary Putnam and the Relativist Menace,” in *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 43-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See *AV*, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), Chapter 3 for the suggestion that the notion of human flourishing depends upon facts of empirical psychology. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See John McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s *Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 23-40, for a criticism of this type of account. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Alasdair MacIntyre, “What Can Moral Philosophers Learn from the Study of the Brain,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58 (1998): 865-869. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *AV*, p. xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “What Can Moral Philosophers Learn,” p. 867. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1999), p. 112; cited henceforth as *DRA*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *DRA*, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Aladair MacIntyre, “How can we Learn what *Veritatis Splendor* has to Teach,” *The Thomist* 58 (1994), pp. 171-195, p .84. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Ibid*, pp. 84-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Conflicts of Desire," in Tobias Hoffmann, ed. *Weakness of Will from Plato to Present* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), pp. 276-292. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *The Unconsciousness,* p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding,* ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); *Method in Theology* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1972). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Patrick Byrne, *The Ethics of Discernment: Lonergan's Foundations for Ethics* (Lonergan Studies) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Ibid.*, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Ibid.*, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues, and Good,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 66 (1992): 1-19,p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Alasdair MacIntyre, "How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary," in Paul Blackledge and Kelvin Knight, eds. *Virtue and Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), pp. 11-19, p. 16; “Plain Persons,” p. 8; *ECM*, pp. 176-183. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry Encyclopedia Genealogy and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 61-62; cited henceforth as *3RV*; *DRA*, p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *AV*, p. 205; Alasdair MacIntyre, “Colors, Cultures, and Practices” in *The Tasks of Philosophy, Selected Essays, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 24-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 142; cited hereafter as *WJWR*. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *3RV*,p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *AV*, p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *WJWR*, p. 142; J.L. Akril, “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,” in ed. Amélie Rorty *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (Berkely and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 15-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *3RV*. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *DRA*, p. 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *DRA*, p. 106; *WJWR*, p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. “How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary,” p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *DRA*, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Compare David Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *ECM*, 190; cited at “Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. “Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Critical Study: Virtues in Foot and Geach,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 52 (2002): pp. 621-631, p. 628; MacIntyre says, “if someone acts from desire, he only has reason so to act, if the satisfaction of that desire will achieve some good.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. “Conflicts of Desire,” p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. “Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. “Conflicts of Desire,” p. 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Artifice, Desire, and their Relationship: Hume against Aristotle,” in Joyce Jenkins, Jennifer Whiting, and Christopher Williams eds. *Persons and Passions, Essays in Honor of Annette Baier*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 192-210, p. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See Giles Pearson, *Aristotle on Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *AV*, p. xi; MacIntyre says, “So I discovered that I had, without realizing it, presupposed the truth of something very close to the account of the concept of good that Aquinas gives in question 5 in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. “Virtues in Foot and Geach,” p. 628. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Flourishing natural Desire DRA; ECM; Alasdair MacIntyre, “On Not Having the Last Word, Thoughts on our Debts to Gadamer,” in Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnswald, and Jens Kertscher eds. *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 157-172, pp. 168-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Desiring and Practical Reasoning,” p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. ““Plain Persons,” p. 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *DRA*, p. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Alasdair MacIntyre, *The Unconscious: A Conceptual Analysis Revised Edition* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), pp. 26-27; *WJRW*, p. 194 on knowledge of the virtues by connaturality; *DRA*, Chapter 8; “Plain Persons,” p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *The Ethics of Discernment*. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *3RV*, pp. 58-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. “On Not Having the Last Word,” pp. 157-172. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. *Insight*, pp. 95-96; *Method*, pp. 13-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Incommensurability, Truth, Virtues: Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians About the Virtues,” in Eliot Deustch ed., *Culture and Modernity* (Honolulu, HI, 1991), pp. 104–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)