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COMMUNITY THINKING IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF ALASDAIR MACINTYRE*Nguyen Hung Vuong*

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**СООБЩЕСТВЕННОЕ МЫШЛЕНИЕ В ФИЛОСОФИИ ПОЛИТИКИ
 АЛАСДЭРА МАКИНТАЙРА**
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ABSTRACT

We can consider community as a prism to explore Alasdair MacIntyre's Communitarianism, which is the reasoning problems of self, morality, and justice. In his theory of self, he advocates that the community should be prioritized over the individual, opposing Libertarianism; in moral theory, he asserts that the public interest must take precedence over individual rights, opposing the liberals' view that "rights take precedence over goods"; while in the theory of justice, he upholds the principle of fairness in the distribution of justice, against the principle of equality regarding to rights of liberalism. However, MacIntyre's own reasoning, morality, and justice also encountered certain insurmountable difficulties.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Мы можем рассматривать сообщество через призму учений Аласдера Макинтайра о коммунитаризме, которые затрагивают проблемы самосознания, морали и справедливости. В теории самости А. Макинтайр настаивает на том, чтобы общество считалось приоритетным по отношению к личности, при этом выступает против либертарианства; в теории морали он утверждает, что общественные интересы должны иметь преимущественное значение над правами личности, но выступает против мнения либералов о том, что "права превосходят блага". В теории справедливости он поддерживает принцип лояльности правосудия, в отличие от принципа равенства в отношении прав либерализма. Однако, А. Макинтайр столкнулся с непреодолимыми трудностями, пропагандируя собственные рассуждения, мораль и справедливость.

Keywords: MacIntyre, Communitarianism, philosophical criticism, community.

Ключевые слова: Макинтайр, коммунитаризм, философская критика, сообщество.

MacIntyre is a famous philosopher in the world and the primary representative of the philosophical movement of contemporary Communitarianism. His thought is divided into two parts: (1) the critique of Liberalism and (2) research and proposal of Communitarianism. The connection point between these parts is his concept of community. On the one hand, he criticized Liberalism, which was

essentially a type of Individualism. Its reasoning was based on the individual rather than the community. Hence, this view was wrong. On the other hand, he proposed Communitarianism to oppose the libertarians, and its theory was based on the concept of community.

We can use the community as a lens to understand MacIntyre's Communitarianism, especially reasoning

about self, ethics, and justice. It leads to two purposes that are (i) to know the fundamental difference between Liberalism and MacIntyre's Communitarianism on the reasoning problems in the three theories above, and (ii) to understand his views on human nature, the concept of the good, and the principle of distributive justice corresponding to reasoning about self, morality, and justice.

Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre is a philosopher researching Ethics and Politics. He has spent a great deal of time and effort formulating the concept of virtue ethics that can be found throughout philosophy's history, from Plato and Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas and Emmanuel Kant, and even Karl Marx. Along with Charles Taylor, Amitai Etzioni, and M. Sandel, he has led the ideology of Communitarianism around the world for many years. Therefore, he is considered one of the great moral and political thinkers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries and a philosopher co-founding contemporary Western Communitarianism.

MacIntyre was born on January 12, 1929, in Glasgow City, located in the west of Scotland. He received a bachelor's degree from the Queen Mary College, London in 1949, a Master of Arts degree in philosophy from the University of Manchester in 1951, and a doctorate from Oxford University in 1961. He taught at the University of Manchester, the University of Leeds, the University of Oxford, and the University of Essex before moving to the US in 1970. Since 1970, he had researched and taught philosophy of religion and theology at Brandeis University, Boston University, Vanderbilt University, Duke University, and the University of Notre Dame. He retired in 2010.

During the period of research and teaching in England and the United States, MacIntyre published a number of famous works such as: *"Marxism: An Interpretation,"* 1953, *"The Unconscious,"* 1958, *"A Short History of Ethics,"* 1966, *"Secularization and Moral Change,"* 1967, *"After Virtue,"* 1981, *"Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry,"* 1990, and numerous research papers on a wide range of topics, including Theology, Marxism, Metaphysics, and the history of philosophy.

Since the 1960s, most MacIntyre's studies have concerned ethical and social theory. In *"A Short History of Ethics,"* he attacked the notion that moral concepts were timeless, unchanging, determinate set. He believed that morality was embodied in, partially constitutive of, forms of social life, so it would change if social life changed [2, p. 159-162]. He developed in detail the problems of modern morality in *"After Virtue"* and claimed that modern morality was in deep disarray [3, p. 46-47]. It was no more than the fragments of a conceptual scheme that had lost the context which once made it intelligible. If morality is again to make sense for us, we must recapture something of the Aristotelian tradition of moral philosophy [3]. Moreover, considering the nature of our society and the dominance of liberal individualist ideas will not be easy. It will entail recapturing some ideas that are now lost.

The concept that MacIntyre calls "a practice" is a partnership in pursuit of external goods. Therefore, he advises us to recapture the concept of whole human life

and an idea lost now because bureaucratic modernity has made our lives have no unity. MacIntyre has played an important role in the revival of classical Communitarianism. He has advocated the individual view belonging to the community and opposed other forms of individualism.

In addition, MacIntyre's Communitarianism also focuses on the concept of Teleology. From his perspective, a rational kind of moral and political philosophy should put purpose first because it could provide the necessary foundation and unity for reasoning, similar to Aristotelianism. Modern ethical theories accept the object that people pursue as "purpose," but the difference is that modern moral philosophy considers the "ends" pursued the good. In contrast, MacIntyre considered the good the "telos" and agreed that this type of purpose held precedence over all kinds of ends. It can be stated that MacIntyre's studies have a great influence on contemporary Western society, especially community thinking. However, some people have questioned his interpretation of history, and most of them fail to see that modern moral thought is as chaotic as he says.

Self-determination theory and the problem of human nature

To distinguish between Liberalism and Communitarianism, it's necessary to understand their conception of the relationship between the individual and the community. In Liberalism, the individual is a single entity, and many individuals form a community. The value of life and the existence of the individual are insurmountable, and "the community or the state is neither an entity nor a being" [8, p. 32]. In this sense, Liberalism prioritizes the individual over the community. In contrast, in Communitarianism, the community is an entity. Individuals cannot exist without communities and cannot escape their communities. Thus, Communitarianism prioritizes the community over the individual.

Relating to the relationship between the individual and the community, some libertarians (including J. Rawls) acknowledge that individuals cannot exist independently and separately from others. Everyone needs to form their own community. Therefore, we need to point out that the opinion "Communitarianism prioritizes the community" doesn't imply that individuals cannot live without having a community. It reveals that people won't understand their identity if living outside their communities.

Understanding the individual from the community perspective is considering him a community member. For Liberalism, each person is an autonomous entity, so he has the power to choose. However, for Communitarianism, each person is a community member, so he has a particular position in society. Liberalism supposes that individual identity belongs to the realm of metaphysics and epistemology. He will have the same status as everyone else, regardless of his identity. However, in Communitarianism, individual identity is dependent on society and history, so his social position will determine his identity. According to MacIntyre, each person has a defined place in the community: "I am someone's son or daughter, someone's elder brother, cousin, or uncle, a citizen of a state or another city, a member of a clan or someone's

co-worker. I belong to this family, that tribe, or this nation" [3, p. 220]. For a person to be aware of himself or to be known by others, it should be based on the membership to which he belongs, his social status, and the inseparable links between him and others.

Liberalism agrees that the individual is a free entity. Man is a metaphysical reality in nature, or at least, it's a metaphysical reality in ethics. Communitarianism's individualist conception is like a function, and human nature exists in the social role in which he participates. MacIntyre said: "one must perform a series of roles to become an individual. Each role has its own meaning and purpose: a member of a family, a citizen of a country, warrior, philosopher, or servant of King" [3, p. 59]. There are many roles that individuals participate in. One person can be both a brother, a cousin, a father, and a member of a family, a village, and a quarter. These roles are a person's nature rather than his accidental characteristic because they define his responsibilities and obligations. In this social network, each person has a specific position. However, he will be nothing if he gets out of these positions and disassociates from this network.

In a community, everyone recognizes themselves and others via membership. On the one hand, if we consider the community to understand individuals, a person can only own some societal roles and can only be identified via his roles. On the other hand, these social roles will tie individuals to the communities they belong to. Hence, he is forced to assume various roles, duties, and responsibilities corresponding to his position. MacIntyre understood human beings not only from a social perspective but also from a historical perspective. Human sociability was reflected through the horizontal network of social relationships, but historicity reflected people vertically. An individual was born and inherited the traditions of family, nation, homeland, and all kinds of debts, legacy, expectations, and obligations. These things constituted the giving in personal life and were the starting point for morality. These factors would make one person's life morally special [3, p. 220]. The historicity opens up a new direction to comprehend the human being. Personal life cannot begin without history. People cannot grow up without their past and will be disoriented and aimless without tradition.

According to MacIntyre, everyone has a certain coincidence in historical and social status. Understanding the social and historical network in relationships of a person plays a crucial part in comprehending him. A person's status is determined as a community member through reference to the horizontal network of social relations and the vertical historical network. Thus, expectations, responsibilities, and obligations that the community has entrusted to him have been defined.

An individual can only exist and be known via a community, so what is the community? MacIntyre didn't provide a concept or definition of a community but listed what he considered a community. Furthermore, there were different communities in different places. In some areas, the community was seen as "family, nation, tribe, city, town, or country" [3, p. 172]. Elsewhere, the community was crews of fishermen, schools, or even a laboratory [4, p. 239]. They had a big difference and different

functions. Some communities were formed based on bloodline, but some were established based on practical life. Others were built based on political activities. MacIntyre believed that the communities created based on political activities, also known as political communities, were the most substantial. Because the members were organized in a unified form and towards the goal that was "politics would maximize the good to bring more good to the community." Moreover, MacIntyre thought that this model of the political community was an ancient Greek city-state and was a kind of political life in which the city-state or state was always concerned with a particular good, human kindness [6, p. 33-34].

Although MacIntyre believed that the political community was paramount, and its distinctive model was the ancient Greek city-state, he rejected the view "the modern model of state was a community" [1, p. 330], including liberal democracies [4, p. 241]. It caused him a lot of trouble because his notions of community and state were placed in a tense relationship. On the one hand, Communitarianism should be based on political communities, but the communities he listed were not political ones. On the other hand, although modern states were political, he argued that they were not communities. This view caused his community to lose its firm position because it wasn't built based on the community (they were not political communities) or wasn't established on the national foundation (they were not considered communities.)

Moral reasoning and the concept of the good

Understanding the relationship between the individual and the community is a sign to distinguish between Communitarianism and Liberalism, and understanding the relationship between rights and the good is another sign to differentiate them. For Liberalism, rights always take precedence because they bind the individual in the pursuit of the good. Therefore, the rights take precedence over the good. However, Communitarianism argues that the good should take precedence. According to communitarians, rights are the means to explain the good, and they are the best tool to achieve the good. Therefore, the good should take precedence over the right. In MacIntyre's moral philosophy, the good has the highest place, and the human virtue holds the second place. The rights take the last place.

However, it should be noted that the concept of the good that the communitarians talk about is different from that of the libertarians. The good of Communitarianism is the common good. In contrast, the good of Liberalism is the individual good (the self-interest). Therefore, their statements about the good are incompatible. The following logic can be used: The common good takes precedence over individual rights, and individual rights take precedence over the individual good. However, Liberalism will not accept the first part of this statement as it denies the existence of the common good. In contrast, Communitarianism will reject the second part of this statement because it believes that the common good is closely related to individual good.

Communitarianism puts the good first, which is comprehensible. However, the point is: the good that comes first is the common good, not the individual good.

Communitarianism also emphasizes community. So what is the individual good? Obviously, a person pursues what he considers the good, and people follow the different goods. What is the common good? What purpose does the community pursue? It is complicated to answer these questions. Therefore, Liberalism has denied the common good and tries to refute Communitarianism via these questions.

If MacIntyre puts the good first, and the good that comes first must be the common good, he needs to answer the question: “What is the common good?”

In many studies, MacIntyre gave various statements about the common good. We can summarize two basic concepts: (i) the highest good and (ii) the common good. One of them seems inappropriate, and MacIntyre appears to be hesitating between them. Regarding the first concept, he had other names, such as the “highest good,” the “overall good,” the “supreme good,” or “goodness of God” [2, p. 44]. In this article, I use the term “*highest good*” to describe it. MacIntyre had two interpretations of the highest good. The first came from Aristotle because Aristotle considered the prosperity and happiness of humankind the highest good. MacIntyre was hesitant about this interpretation. MacIntyre linked the highest good to Aristotle’s purposefulness in *After Virtue* and believed that the different moral theories would have profound differences in prosperity and happiness. Therefore, he didn’t admit that the highest good was the prosperity and happiness of humanity. However, in many subsequent articles, especially *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* he acknowledged the view that the well-being and pleasure of humankind were the highest good.

Due to hesitation about the first interpretation, MacIntyre proposed the second one. He argued that there would be a reason for the community’s existence, and the only valid one was to create and maintain a form of communal life. This form not only integrated different good things in real life to make them unified but also provided the telos for the community. This purpose went beyond all sorts of good things in reality. This form of communal life with telos was “the highest good” [5, p. 123]. In this sense, asking “what is the highest good?” is asking “what is the best way to live for the community?”

The highest good not only provides a purpose for the community to pursue but also provides a standard to arrange the particular goods. However, the notion of the highest good has some issues. Firstly, it is the concept of Aristotle, so it possesses metaphysical and ethical characteristics. Unfortunately, his metaphysics and ethics are difficult to gain trust. Secondly, although the highest good is suited for the wealth and satisfaction of people or the good life of the community, it is only suitable for the political community, city, or country. It doesn’t fit communities based on other forms, such as schools or fisheries associations. Finally, one of the functions of the highest good is to arrange the particular goods and categorize their rank or priority. However, the particular good corresponds to a specific class and belongs to a particular group, so it varies in degree. In other words, if the rank of the good is that of people, the community that MacIntyre has stated is the aristocracy.

The highest good is the good action of the community, but it still has its downsides. Therefore, MacIntyre came up with a different concept of the good, which was the “common good” or the “common interest.” What is the common interest? As explained by MacIntyre, in some social communities, all members (such as members of a family, fishing association, club, etc.) shared a common goal that was the “common good” [4, p. 239].

If the common good is the goal of a society, other ethical theories (pragmatism and contemporary liberalism) may also know this “common good.” Therefore, MacIntyre ought to distinguish the notions of the “common good” to differentiate from other ethical doctrines. The “common good” of Individualism is the sum of the good things that people are pursuing because society is a tool helping them achieve their ends. In contrast, Communitarianism’s “common good” is neither individual good nor the sum of all individual goods. It is formed from collective actions and shared understanding, such as the good of fishing associations, families, and groups of scientists [4, p. 240].

The most crucial issue in MacIntyre’s “common good” is composition. Accordingly, the “common good” is composed of the collective and shared understanding, and the individual good is bound up with his contributions to the common good. Based on this concept of “common good,” realizing “what my good is and the best way to live is” will be inseparable from determining the common good and the best way to live for the community. If the private good that individuals pursue isn’t separate from the common good, my good and your good have reached unity (in the term of the form). I won’t conflict with you in the pursuit of the good. We are members of a community because we share the same good.

Like the concept of “highest good,” the idea of “common good” also faces some challenges. (1) The “highest good” is only relevant to political communities, but the “common good” is only suitable for different practical communities. For instance, prosperity cannot be the goal of a music club, or growing vegetables is the goal of scientists working in a laboratory, not a political community. (2) A specific community (like a laboratory) has a common good, but it is not large enough to eliminate conflicts among members. In other words, I, a scientist in pursuit of the good (that is, becoming the inventor of a new high-yielding vegetable variety), may contradict your good (because you also want to be an inventor and a scientist).

Theory of justice and the principle of distributive justice

In the political philosophy of communitarians, the good is the priority regardless of an individual or a community. Thus, how the good is distributed is a fundamental issue related to the theory of justice. According to MacIntyre and the communitarians, justice is a matter of the distribution of the good, although the theory of justice has broad implications. Because Liberalism was the primary trend and influenced contemporary society, MacIntyre wanted to establish a theory of justice for Communitarianism. Firstly, he criticized the Liberal conception of justice. Then, he introduced two hypothetical characters, A and B, when discussing justice. Thanks to them, he

expanded the debate and wrote a radical critique of Liberalism and its views of justice. A was the owner of a small shop (a police officer or a construction worker). He wanted to save money to buy a small house, support his children studying at a local university, and pay his parents' medical care service. However, he realized that the tax increases were threatening the implementation of this plan. He considered this threat an injustice and thought he had a right to what he earned. No one could take them, even in the name of taxes. B was a freelancer (a social worker or an heir). He saw inequality and arbitrariness in wealth, income, and opportunity distribution. He knew that this inequality would make the poor poorer, and there was no way to change the situation. He considered it an injustice, but he believed that taxes could be used to support social services and welfare, that was, to carry out the redistribution process required by justice.

According to A, acquiring legal rights as a principle of justice will help establish limits on redistribution. If this principle of justice creates inequality, accepting such inequality is seen as a trade-off for justice. B supposes that distributive justice restricts the right to establish legitimacy and limits rights. If applying this principle of distributive justice interferes with obtaining legitimate rights in present society, accepting such a limit is a price to pay for justice. The most important thing is that the enforcement of justice by both sides requires a response from the other. MacIntyre pointed out that the principles of justice proposed by A and B were incompatible in practice and that their opposition couldn't be reasonably resolved. A wanted to build a concept of justice in terms of rights, but B wanted to create it based on equality. In terms of property or resources, A claimed that the justice that he was possessing was lawfully obtained. In contrast, B believed that justice was giving it to others because they needed it. According to MacIntyre, the debate between legal rights and the need for equality couldn't be resolved in contemporary culture because there was no standard to evaluate this unjust conception of justice [3, p. 244].

It's clear that MacIntyre has used the contrast between A and B to simulate the argument between Robert Nozick and J. Rawls (A is Robert Nozick, B is J. Rawls). He believed that this debate indicated the inconsistency of political philosophy in daily life. Philosophically, their argument recreated "incompatibility" and "disproportion," which made the dispute between A and B unresolvable in practice. However, he said that A and B's positions were not similar to Robert Nozick and J. Rawls. The point of view of A and B had one factor that both Robert Nozick and J. Rawls overlooked: desert. A and B were based on the right to interpret justice. Not only did A give his opinion that he was entitled to all things he had gained, but he also believed that he had to work hard to get them. Therefore, he deserved them. B represented the views of the poor and exploited. He said that poverty and lack were undesirable, so his current situation was unjust. There was no reason for him to live like that. Therefore, MacIntyre believed that the arguments of Robert Nozick and J. Rawls about justice and rights

had no fundamental positional considerations, and even some statements were not related to justice and injustice.

According to MacIntyre, the principle of distributive justice is a sort of arrangement for each person, including himself and what he deserves. This principle contrasts with J. Rawls's principle of equality and Robert Nozick's principle of interest. The principle of the distribution of desert came from the conception of Aristotle when he agreed that justice meant giving people what they deserved, and injustice shouldn't appear in two situations: (1) a person did not gain things he should have, and (2) a person got more than he should have [6, p. 193].

In the principle of distributing desert, MacIntyre gave three fundamental problems. *Firstly*, he supposed that Liberalism ignored the principle of "who deserves what" in distributive justice. The desert was things people received under their deeds (behavior) in the past. For instance, a person's income was exactly equal to his contributions in the past. According to MacIntyre, libertarians have attempted to dismiss this principle in different ways. For example, J. Rawls thought that justice was "fairness." MacIntyre said that it was the kind of principle that only considered the future (the place things are distributed to) and did not consider the past (the place things distributed exist.) Robert Nozick's principle of justice was the rights, and it considered the present (who has what rights?) to protect private property. *Secondly*, the concept of "who deserves what" and the community are closely linked. Similar to Aristotle's idea, "who deserves what" was considered the principle of distributive justice to ensure fairness and was applied to the community in ancient society. MacIntyre supposed that the concept of "who deserves what" could only use in a society where everyone had a common perception of individual good and the common good. They aimed for good things to determine their essential good. Moreover, Liberalism did not have this concept, so it could not give the principle of "who deserves what." It also didn't have a principle of substantive justice but formal justice on equality and rights. *Lastly*, the notion of "who deserves what" is at the marginal point of constant decline in modern society. According to MacIntyre, only we live in a community can we own and pursue the common good, and "who deserves what" will be determined in this pursuit of the common good. The process of development and modernization has erased the ancient social community, and the concept of "who deserves what" is being eliminated. Therefore, it exists in a few communities with deep historical ties, such as Catholics in Ireland, Orthodox people in Greece, or Judaists. In other words, the concept of justice that is official in the West is equality, right things, rights, or interest, and the idea of "who deserves what" is a thing remaining.

MacIntyre's three arguments were against Liberalism and had some meanings, but when researching and analyzing them, there were some problems as follows:

Firstly, MacIntyre believed that libertarians (such as Robert Nozick and J. Rawls) took equality or rights as the principle of justice, which was correct. However, it was wrong when he affirmed that they had dismissed the principle of "who deserves what" in distributive justice.

In fact, the theories of Robert Nozick and J. Rawls consisted of this principle. For example, in J. Rawls's theory of justice, it was embodied in a thing called the "legal expectation." In Robert Nozick's theory of justice, it was reflected in "the individuals."

Secondly, MacIntyre supposed that the principle of "who deserves what" was in constant decline in modern society, which was false. Modern society is operating a free market economy, and the market is only based on our contributions. In other words, the notion of "who deserves what" has reached its peak [7, p. 257]. Since the modern market economy implements this principle, contemporary political philosophers have proposed the principle of equality to correct it. They think that distributive justice under the previous principle will lead to inequality.

Lastly, MacIntyre created cohesion between the principle of "who deserves what" and Communitarianism, which was consistent with his view of the community. However, this concept came from ancient Greece, and it had many different meanings. It was used to talk about the origin (bloodline), status (nobility), and morality. All of these meanings were different from their current ones. If he attaches this concept to the community, it will best fit the "required morality." Due to this reason, libertarians

don't want to use the term "must-have" or "should have" in their reasoning about justice. Instead, they use "legal expectation" or "citizenship."

Along with philosophers like M. Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Amitai Etzioni, Alasdair MacIntyre contributed to building and forming the movement on the philosophy of Communitarianism in the 1970s and became an influential political philosopher in the contemporary West. Of all his political philosophy, the theory of the community is most significant, helping us explore his Communitarianism. In particular, he made severe criticisms of liberalism (given by J. Rawls). He asserted that it was indispensable to prioritize the good over justice, and the good was the sole purpose that took precedence. In the theory of justice, he upheld the principle of distributive justice and opposed J. Rawls' view that was "justice is fairness." In essence, the idea of "who deserves what" Alasdair MacIntyre used was that of Aristotle. Therefore, it is said that he has played a principal role in the revival of classical Communitarianism. However, there are some restrictions to his theory of community. In all theories of community, he didn't define a community but listed the types of communities. Furthermore, he valued the political community but rejected the opinion "the modern state model is a community".

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