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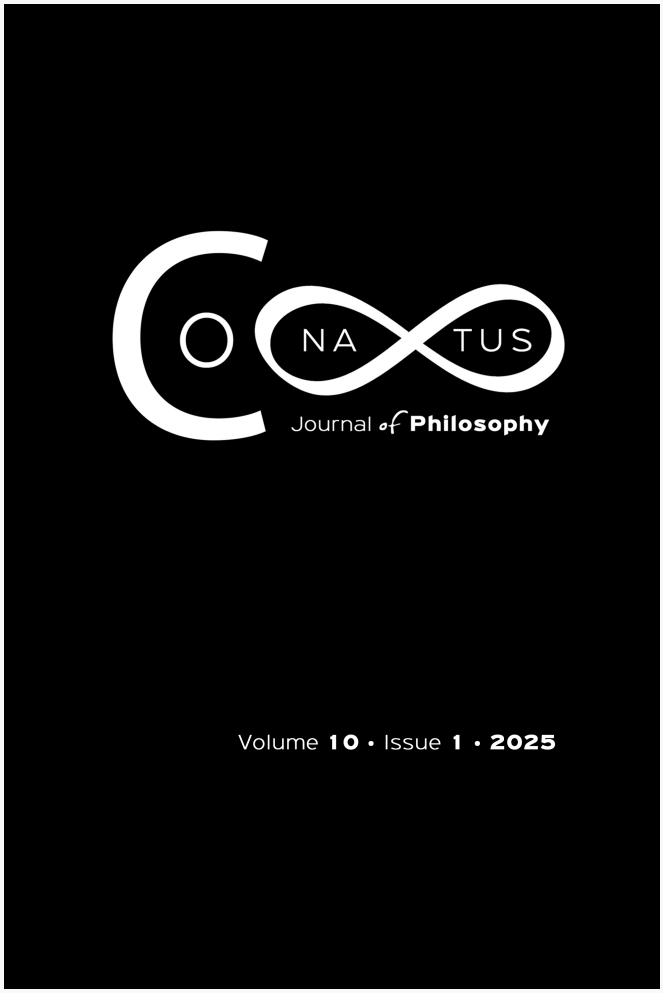

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Liberalism and Aristotelianism: Reflecting on Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue

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Abstract

Alasdair MacIntyre marks liberalism as a key opponent standing in opposition to an Aristotelian virtue ethics framework, and of the ability of communities to base a way of life around virtues centered upon man's telos and what makes a good human life. This paper will argue that this does not need to be the case by citing how classical liberal political aims of decentralization of power and federalism can promote the efforts of communities attempting to build a culture with a focus on inculcating virtue through the lens of an Aristotelian sense of telos. MacIntyre himself acknowledges the vast differences in definitions of the virtues across cultures throughout history, and how there is unlikely to be any moral consensus. This paper will look at examples from the United States of America's early history, as well as the modern example of the European Union, to illustrate samples of societies inculcating and guarding a traditional worldview within a decentralized political environment. The liberal political aim of decentralization of power provides more autonomy to local communities, including allowing those communities to build their own culture with a focus on forming a society interested in answering the question of what a good human life consists of. This paper will argue that it is precisely the liberal individualism that MacIntyre decries as a foe to Aristotelian teleology that provides an avenue for those interested in restoring Aristotelian virtue ethics to thrive.

Keywords: *virtue; liberalism; Aristotelian; federalism; human good*

I. Introduction

Alasdair MacIntyre is a leading philosopher in the revival of virtue ethics. His book *After Virtue* is a major critique of modern philosophical discussion, particularly that stemming from the Enlightenment. The liberal individualism that emerged out of the Enlightenment is cited as a

constant foe to the Aristotelianism that MacIntyre favors. MacIntyre writes the following in the prologue to *After Virtue*:

> My own critique of liberalism derives from a judgment that the best type of human life, that in which the tradition of the virtues is most adequately embodied, is lived by those engaged in constructing and sustaining forms of community directed towards the shared achievement of those common goods without which the ultimate human good cannot be achieved. Liberal political societies are characteristically committed to denying any place for a determinate conception of the human good in their public discourse, let alone allowing that their common life should be grounded in such a conception. On the dominant liberal view, government is to be neutral as between rival conceptions of the human good, yet in fact what liberalism promotes is a kind of institutional order that is inimical to the construction and sustaining of the types of communal relationship required for the best kind of human life.[1]

However, it does not necessarily need to be the case that liberalism should stand as a nemesis to the realization of a community centered around inculcating Aristotelian conceptions of what a good human life is. According to Bagby, genuine happiness develops gradually via experience, education, friendships, and the development of virtue rather than being something we just happen to find. We must live, struggle, and develop before we can act wisely. Our internal motivation to persevere is what propels that growth. Furthermore, pleasure can foster the growth of virtue by keeping us dedicated to doing the right thing, rather than merely serving as a temptation.[2] MacIntyre overlooks the aspects of political liberalism conducive to building communities interested in reviving an Aristotelian virtue ethics framework. There is an entire political program in the liberal tradition with a focus on decentralization of power and federalism that would create the conditions for smaller-scale political units to emerge with more autonomy, which would be more in line with the idea of the *polis* as envisioned by Aristotle. This paper will argue that contrary to being a foe to Aristotelian teleology, political liberalism should be seen as a potential ally for those who want to build communities with a focus on inculcating Aristotelian conceptions of the good human life in the public square.

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[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), xiv-xv.

[2] John R. Bagby, "Aristotle and Aristoxenus on Effort," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2021): 68.

II. MacIntyre's critique of liberal political order

A brief discussion of classical Aristotelianism is necessary to understand MacIntyre's critique of liberalism's incompatibility with an Aristotelian worldview. MacIntyre's view is blunt. He writes,

> My own conclusion is very clear. It is that on the one hand we still, in spite of the efforts of three centuries of moral philosophy and one of sociology, lack any coherent rationally defensible statement of a liberal individualist point of view; and that, on the other hand, the Aristotelian tradition can be restated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments.[3]

According to MacIntyre, the Aristotelian worldview is one where it is understood that every practice human beings engage in aspires to some good, or some goal. Human beings have a particular nature, "and that nature is such that they have certain aims and goals, such that they move by nature towards a specific telos."[4] He calls the ultimate end towards which human beings seek *eudaimonia*, or what can perhaps be thought of as happiness or human flourishing. MacIntyre elaborates that "It is the state of being well and doing well in being well, of a man's being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine."[5] MacIntyre describes the virtues as "qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve eudaimonia and the lack of which will frustrate his movement towards that *telos*,"[6] and he notes the surprising lack of attention Aristotle gives to rules in his work on ethics.[7] Aristotle's philosophy of ethics is more focused on the building of character through constant exercise of the virtues, as opposed to devising specific rules for people to follow. Although MacIntyre notes that "Aristotle...recognizes that his account of the virtues has to be supplemented by some account, even if a brief one, of those types of action which are absolutely prohibited."[8]

Liberal individualism on the other hand sidelines Aristotelian notions of human beings having a telos that we can discover through the use of reason, and places the following of rules as the highest moral good as opposed to

[3] Ibid., 259.

[4] Ibid., 148.

[5] Ibid., 148.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 150.

[8] Ibid., 152.

any Aristotelian idea of building one's character through active practice of virtue. As MacIntyre writes about modernity,

> Rules become the primary concept of the moral life." Qualities of character then generally come to be prized only because they will lead us to follow the right set of rules...Hence on the modern view the justification of the virtues depends upon some prior justification of rules and principles; and if the latter become radically problematic, as they have, so also must the former.[9]

MacIntyre echoes the thought of legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin that

> the central doctrine of modern liberalism is the thesis that questions about the *good life for man* or the ends of human life are to be regarded from the public standpoint as systematically unsettlable...[And therefore,] The rules of morality and law hence are not to be derived from or justified in terms of some more fundamental conception of the good for man.[10]

MacIntyre has reasons to be skeptical that an Aristotelian focus on man's teleology can be fostered in a liberal institutional arrangement where questions about the good human life are placed to the side. The liberal individualism characteristic of much of the West today is in conflict with Aristotelian notions of man having a telos. MacIntyre acknowledges the challenge in Aristotle's time for a city of tens of thousands of Athenian men to share a common vision of what is good for man.[11] If it was difficult enough for the comparatively smaller city-state of Athens to maintain a shared vision of what is good for man among its people, then there is little hope that the massive cities of today composed of millions of people (who are not even autonomous since they are merely part of a wider nation-state) can hope to come together with a shared vision of how man ought to live. The adage "It takes a village to raise a child" reflects an Aristotelian sensibility of educating youth needing to be a common endeavor, rather than a merely private one. MacIntyre even uses education (along with hospitals and philanthropic organizations) as an example of an area of life that is occasionally viewed as a common project in the way that Aristotle would envision the community

[9] Ibid., 119.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 156-157.

as a polis interested in a holistic view of life.[12] The direction of education, including the more all-encompassing educational aspect of raising one's family within an environment of similar values to one's own, will struggle to be formed by any Aristotelian sense of man's telos within a culture of liberal individualism that places questions of man's telos into the arena of subjective opinion. In fact, a liberal individualist mindset is prone to think of any group of people who attempt to form tightly-knit communities separate from others, while actively discouraging outside values opposed to the group's values, as "cultish."[13] MacIntyre himself realizes that given the state of moral discourse where moral concepts mean different things to different people based on one's own subjective opinions, that "It follows that our society cannot hope to achieve moral consensus."[14] However, another significant contributor to such questions of what human good is being placed to the side in favor of a liberalism as described by Ronald Dworkin is that modern states are behemoths by the standards of Aristotle's time. While it might be a valid Aristotelian critique of liberalism to point out how liberalism hampers the ability of a culture to focus on the fundamental issue of what a good human life consists of in favor of leaving that problem to subjective individual opinion, it may also be unfair to expect any other outcome given the sheer size of states today. The Athenian city-state of Aristotle's time is minuscule compared with the size of jurisdictions today, with MacIntyre mentioning that the number of Athenian men[15] numbered somewhere in the tens of thousands.[16] Meanwhile, non-autonomous cities in the West today have populations running into the millions. MacIntyre makes clear his discontent in how the field of ethics moved away from an Aristotelian focus on developing character through

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[12] Ibid., 156.

[13] Jeff Zeleny, "Prominent Pastor Calls Romney's Church a Cult," *The New York Times,* October 8, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/08/us/politics/prominent-pastor-calls-romneys-church-a-cult.html. Consider the case of religious groups. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints have traditionally been known for their strong sense of community, including a preference of supporting one another's businesses, education, and other endeavors as opposed to those of non-members. They are also encouraged to avoid material inconsistent with their church's values. However, this sense of community has led to accusations of them being a cult. This debate entered the American political sphere prominently when Mitt Romney, a Mormon, won the Republican Party's nomination for president in 2012. Any group of people who try to inculcate a particular moral outlook into their community while trying to keep out opposing moral outlooks hostile to one's own values is going to be at odds with a liberal individualist framework.

[14] MacIntyre, 252.

[15] Ibid., 159. MacIntyre also acknowledges Aristotle's blind spot when it comes to his assessment that groups such as non-Greeks and slaves are incapable of political relationships. His blind spot towards the role of women must be acknowledged too.

[16] Ibid., 156.

discipline and practice of the virtues, and towards the Enlightenment focus on following universal rules, such as in a Kantian mold. But such a move is unavoidable given the scale of modern nation-states. MacIntyre even admits that "different and rival lists of virtues, different and rival attitudes toward the virtues and different and rival definitions of individual virtues are at home in fifth-century Athens"[17] even though he ultimately thinks that "nonetheless the city-state and the *agōn* (ἀγών) [or contest] provide the shared contexts in which the virtues are to be exercised."[18] And consider also that despite the diversity of lived experiences endured by the various ancient Athenians, this diversity of lived experience has only increased with populations continually growing for centuries and economies becoming far more complex. It should be no surprise that a growing population in a rapidly changing economy will lead to the creation of different groups of people with dissimilar values, interests, and goals. MacIntyre describes the Aristotelian notion of friendship as requiring "a shared recognition of and pursuit of a good,"[19] and that "We are to think then of friendship as being the sharing of all in the common project of creating and sustaining the life of the city."[20] But such a notion of friendship is not sustainable in ever-growing communities as a practical matter. Given the size of political states today, the most efficient way to keep such disparate people together is to place questions about human goods on the side and instead adopt basic rules for everyone to follow. Attempts in a large nation-state (or even just a large city today) at trying to nurture a particular moral outlook based on an Aristotelian sense of telos are going to lead to discontent among those who do not share that vision. Likewise, those in support of traditional ancient and medieval virtue might be at risk of having a moral outlook imposed on them that they do not support. MacIntyre runs into the problem that the current political entities are far too big for any notion of a shared, common project in an Aristotelian sense to thrive. Attempts at trying to inculcate a shared moral vision are going to alienate at least one group of people, and likely many more.

III. Liberalism as a political program

The way forward for a culture to develop with an openness to Aristotelian ideas of humans having a telos, and to reexamining the assumptions of liberal individualism is, ironically, to embrace political liberalism in the form of political decentralization and federalism. Perhaps liberalism itself is a loaded

[17] Ibid., 138.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 155.

[20] Ibid., 156.

term, and it would be helpful to think of liberalism in a couple different ways. What MacIntyre is objecting to is only one aspect of philosophical liberalism. This would be a form of liberal individualism with roots in the Enlightenment that discards notions of teleology, and instead assigns moral agency to the individual, which eventually dilutes morality to a meaningless subjective opinion. MacIntyre even applauds Nietzsche's dismantling of any notion of objective morality developed by Enlightenment philosophers. MacIntyre writes the following in praise of his intellectual foe:

> In a famous passage in *The Gay Science* (section 335) Nietzsche jeers at the notion of basing morality on inner moral sentiments, on conscience, on the one hand, or on the Kantian categorical imperative, on universalizability, on the other. In five swift, witty and cogent paragraphs he disposes of both what I have called the Enlightenment project to discover rational foundations for an objective morality and of the confidence of the everyday moral agent in post-Enlightenment culture that his moral practice and utterance are in good order.[21]

MacIntyre is in stark disagreement with Friedrich Nietzsche, but is of the mindset that Nietzsche is a far more logical alternative to Aristotelianism than anything produced out of the Enlightenment. He even calls Nietzsche's moral philosophy "one of the two genuine theoretical alternatives confronting anyone trying to analyze the moral condition of our culture,"[22] with the other alternative of course being Aristotelianism. MacIntyre considers liberalism to be an inconsistent and muddled moral philosophy, as well as inferior to the Aristotelianism that it dethroned. MacIntyre writes:

> I take it then that both the utilitarianism of the middle and late nineteenth century and the analytical moral philosophy of the middle and late twentieth century are alike unsuccessful attempts to rescue the autonomous moral agent from the predicament in which the failure of the Enlightenment project of providing him with a secular, rational justification for his moral allegiances had left him. I have already characterized that predicament as one in which the price paid for liberation from what appeared to be the external authority of traditional morality was the loss of any authoritative content from the would-be moral utterances of the newly autonomous agent. Each moral agent now

[21] Ibid., 113.

[22] Ibid., 110.

> spoke unconstrained by the externalities of divine law, natural teleology or hierarchical authority; but why should anyone else now listen to him?[23]

As MacIntyre summarizes in his conclusion,

> ...ever since belief in Aristotelian teleology was discredited moral philosophers have attempted to provide some alternative rational secular account of the nature and status of morality, but...all these attempts, various and variously impressive as they have been, have in fact failed, a failure perceived most clearly by Nietzsche.[24]

MacIntyre makes clear that individualism with its "modern liberal distinction between law and morality"[25] is antithetical to the Aristotelian notion of a shared moral vision among a community. He writes,

> There is of course a crucial difference between the way in which the relationship between moral character and political community is envisaged from the standpoint of liberal individualist modernity and the way in which that relationship was envisaged from the standpoint of the type of ancient and medieval tradition of the virtues which I have sketched. For liberal individualism a community is simply an arena in which individuals each pursue their own self-chosen conception of the good life, and political institutions exist to provide that degree of order which makes such self-determined activity possible. Government and law are, or ought to be, neutral between rival conceptions of the good life for man, and hence, although it is the task of government to promote law-abidingness, it is on the liberal view no part of the legitimate function of government to inculcate any one moral outlook.[26]

This is certainly a revolution away from an Aristotelianism focused on virtue and man's ultimate good that MacIntyre describes in his book. MacIntyre is correct to be wary of this style of liberal individualism that ignores the

[23] Ibid., 68.

[24] Ibid., 256.

[25] Ibid., 172.

[26] Ibid., 195.

fundamental question of what makes a good man and puts little emphasis on the development of virtue and character. However, this does not mean that liberalism is entirely at odds with Aristotelianism. Alasdair MacIntyre argues that liberalism's focus on individualism undermines the communal pursuit of virtue, which is central to an Aristotelian vision of the good life. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre critiques liberalism for its inability to sustain a shared moral framework, asserting that it fragments society into competing moral claims without a common telos.[27]

However, Aristotle's own political theory, as presented in *Politics*, offers a more nuanced view. Aristotle recognizes the importance of local communities, or *polis*, in cultivating virtue, but he does not impose strict limits on the size of political entities. Unlike Plato's rigid and idealized state model, Aristotle acknowledges that larger political structures, such as empires, can function effectively if they operate through subsidiarity granting local units' autonomy to address their unique needs.[28] This insight challenges MacIntyre's skepticism about larger liberal political frameworks, suggesting that liberal federalism could in principle, support the cultivation of Aristotelian virtues at the community level. Despite MacIntyre's belief that the history of political and moral action cannot be separated from the history of political and moral theorizing,[29] there are elements of liberal political action compatible with strengthening communities interested in pursuing questions of human good in the public square from an Aristotelian perspective. The reality of politics is messier than the world of pure theory, meaning that the philosophy of liberal individualism and the political program of liberalism are not necessarily the same thing. In fact, political liberalism may be used to push for illiberal aims when tools such as decentralization of political power through federalism are employed to specific ends. For example, the early American republic is often thought of as being engaged in a program of political liberalism, and that is true to an extent. However, part of the political program of liberalism in the American context was the idea of states' rights and federalism, which were often employed to protect the traditional features of life for each of the various states that shaped the United States of America. Consider liberalism's political history as it has been advanced in the United States. One major concern at the American Constitutional Convention was that the new general government was going to eventually supplant the authority of the state governments that initially formed the United States government with the constitution. The various state governments all developed their own unique cultures from their colonial days that citizens were interested in protecting,

[27] Ibid., xiv-xv.

[28] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 1252a1-10.

[29] MacIntyre, 61.

including a number of states maintaining official state churches supported with taxpayer money.[30] None of the original thirteen British colonies in North America wanted to be politically dominated by the other states, particularly those with whom they shared the most disagreement with. The Bill of Rights was added to the constitution to quell the fears of Anti-Federalists[31] that the general government would overtake the states and begin regulating their internal affairs. As Akhil Reed Amar of Yale Law School observes, speech and religion were put together in the original First Amendment largely for reasons of federalism"[32] and "Congress was prohibited not only from establishing a national church, but also from disestablishing a state church."[33] Thomas Jefferson even wrote in an 1804 letter that "While we deny that [the United States of America] Congress has a right to control the freedom of the press, we have ever asserted the right of the States, and their exclusive right to do so."[34] In these cases, the liberal political tactics of federalism and decentralized political power could be used for illiberal aims, such as allowing local communities to make autonomous political decisions in the name of protecting their own set of values separate from those of other cultures. There are plenty of forms of political liberalism that are not conducive to Aristotelianism as well. If we look at the liberalism of the French Revolution, we see a movement interested in destroying French tradition. But on the other hand, the political liberalism of the American Revolution helped to preserve the traditional system of British Common Law that the representatives of

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[30] David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford University Press, 1989). Consider that three New England states – Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut – each had official state churches when the First Amendment was ratified, and Massachusetts maintained an official state church all the way until 1833. The colonies did not always have amicable relations with one another either. David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed* is a helpful book for understanding the various waves of immigration from Great Britain to North America in the colonial period, and how the colonial period led up to and informed the development of the United States of America's early years as a republic.

[31] "Anti-Federalists" was the name attached to those who were more disposed to support a decentralized government with more power in the hands of the state governments, and who also opposed the centralizing tendencies of the new American constitution. Ironically, it is the faction labeled Anti-Federalists who were advocating for federalism and decentralized political power in the new republic. Hence, another example of politics as a practice not necessarily meshing perfectly with politics as elaborated in theory.

[32] Akhil Reed Amar, "Anti-Federalists, *The Federalist Papers*, and the Big Argument for Union," *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 16, no. 1 (1993): 115. https://openyls.law.yale.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.13051/233/Anti_Federalists__The_Federalist_Papers__and_the_Big_Argument_for_Union.pdf.

[33] Ibid., 116.

[34] Thomas Jefferson, "From Thomas Jefferson to Abigail Adams," *Founders Online*, National Archives, September 11, 1804, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-44-02-0341.

the original thirteen colonies believed they had developed through their tradition as English subjects.[35] However, both events are referred to as "revolutions" even though they were each fought with different motivations in mind. Likewise, the political program of liberalism contains a wide array of perspectives and strategies that can be used either for or against the kind of society MacIntyre desires. Liberalism is a political tactic just as much as it is a theory. It is an oversimplification to label liberalism as an unambiguous rival to Aristotelianism, and the topic must be covered with more nuance.

Or perhaps we can consider the modern-day case of the European Union. There is considerable difference in opinion within the political class of the European Union's leaders today on issues such as immigration. Political decentralization allows individual member states to enact different policies in response to immigration. Some countries such as Germany will be more open to refugee immigration, while others like Hungary will be less open to refugee immigration. But both sides are making their own autonomous decisions within the decentralized political format of the European Union. This political tactic of liberalism can be employed in ways that appeal to either the political right or the political left. Individuals in countries such as Hungary even use rhetoric of protecting their identity and sovereignty when operating within the decentralized political environment of the European Union, such as Viktor Orbá n referring to the current decade of politics as being about Hungary maintaining its sovereignty, and claiming that "Hungary remaining a sovereign country is not in the interest of the world around us, and neither is it in the interest of that world's people inside Hungary."[36] Advocates for a society

[35] Consider these two works from Edmund Burke discussing the French Revolution and American Revolution respectively. Figures like Edmund Burke felt no contradiction in their commiseration for the pleas of the American Revolution while expressing disdain for the French Revolution. Burke saw the American Revolution as a mere defense of traditional English law in the American Revolution, but saw the French Revolution as a violent destruction of tradition. Liberalism as a political program must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine if it is useful for advancing Aristotelian virtue ethics. The early American republic is an example of a cause where the political program of liberalism, in the form of secession, was able to defend a society's traditional way of life from being interfered with by a stronger power. The political program of liberalism is not always at odds with community tradition, and Aristotelians should take notice of historical examples of communities protecting particular values, especially when those examples lead to outcomes as extreme as war. There should be no naivete about the potential resistance that someone advocating for a culture based on Aristotelian values could face if those values are seen to be in conflict with the wider culture. See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution & Other Essays* (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1951), https://archive.org/details/reflectionsonthe005907mbp/page/n5/mode/2up, and Edmund Burke, *Burke's Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies*, originally delivered March 22, 1775 (Leach, Shewell, and Sanborn, 1895), https://archive.org/details/burkespeechon00burkrich/page/42/mode/2up?view=theater&q=right.

[36] Viktor Orbá n, "Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbá n at the Szá zadvég Sovereignty Conference," Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, November 13, 2023, https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-the-szazadveg-sovereignty-conference/.

based on Aristotelian grounds can take note of movements in countries like Hungary that make appeals to establish their own communities in defiance of a worldview they disapprove of. Namely, using the tools of liberalism's political program to advance a decentralized political environment allowing smaller communities to develop their own understanding of how society ought to be run. Large-scale political entities are often left with little choice but to adopt a rules-based system that puts the question concerning what a good human life is to the side, in favor of instead being a utilitarian arrangement. The European Union itself contains hundreds of millions of people from varying backgrounds, and there is a low likelihood of agreement on several issues. MacIntyre also acknowledges the vast differences across cultures in how to define virtue and what specific attributes should be considered virtues, as well as admitting that there is unlikely to be any moral consensus. He even finds common ground with Karl Marx by stating that "Marx was fundamentally right in seeing conflict and not consensus at the heart of modern social structure."[37] MacIntyre shares a view that "...modern politics cannot be a matter of genuine moral consensus...[and] Modern politics is civil war carried on by other means."[38] But what can be added to this view is that the size of modern political entities is a contributor to this experience of politics as a low-intensity civil war. Smaller-scale political units are not subject to the same challenge of rallying its people to a particular worldview, and it is far easier to form a consensus about what a good human life is when political entities are smaller. Smaller jurisdictions give local populations more say in their own local political spheres, and perhaps someone like MacIntyre could find benefit in a program of political decentralization advanced by liberalism. It is far easier to inculcate a particular worldview within a small community than a large nation-state or international union of states.

IV. Subsidiarity and universal governance

The notion of subsidiarity, which seeks self-governance or devolution rooted in liberal political thought, comes out clearly in Aristotle's features of the state and its structure. For Aristotle, every political society aims to enable various individuals and social units to exist happily, which calls for an active role of the populace in managing the affairs of the state. Although the polis is basic in Aristotle's conception of the cultivation of Virtue, he does not also lose sight of the significance of other larger political entities such as empires, which one may think he will undergird because they contain populations who

[37] MacIntyre, 253.

[38] Ibid.

are sub-sourced to the menial work of administration.[39] Many empires, such as that of Alexander the Great, which ruled over many people and places, noted the need to respect local self-rule.

Madison and other US Federalists and their contemporaries believed in retaining local sovereignty and the need for some centralized rule for effective governance, the same reason argued in this American conception of subsidiarity. It was held that various localities would remain intact with their diverse practices and beliefs as a single nation or state. Although Alasdair MacIntyre shifts the focus from the disagreement between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, he might hold British and other economic thoughts common among the Heineman's anti-federalist perspective.[40]

These issues reach out to mere nation-states. In supranational organizations, like the EU, similar problems are faced, where the liberal ideal of self-determination and multiplicity of views faces reality. Kant's viewpoint on these problems can be traced in Perpetual Peace. A visible trend in Kant's argument is the emphasis on a federation of states where the members subscribe to and uphold certain values and standards to sustain peace and reduce instances of war.[41] While this argument is indeed reflecting liberal ideas, it seems to contradict sharply what MacIntyre considers to be the dominant focus of emphasis, namely the primacy of specific traditions and the role of social order in the development of good character. In MacIntyre's view, it is quite likely that, by embracing Kant's global approach, there will be a loss of culture and history, which is necessary for the attainment of Virtue.

In conclusion, Aristotle's idea of subsidiarity and power distribution concerning federalism explains how liberalism can be reconciled philosophically with Aristotelian concepts if implemented correctly. Creating systems that respect certain local cultures and promote collective aims helps preserve the values MacIntyre himself would even argue liberal governance allows one to do while operating in more relevant settings of modern-day politics.[42]

V. Conclusion

Alasdair MacIntyre views liberalism as an adversary to the building of a society based on Aristotelian notions of human good and flourishing, but this does not mean liberalism must always be a foe to his preferred philosophy.

[39] Aristotle, 1253a20-25.

[40] James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (Penguin Classics, 2003), 45.

[41] Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 41-47.

[42] Alasdair MacIntyre has not directly addressed the Federalist/Anti-Federalist debate. His writings on European unification give little sense of his position on this matter.

A more nuanced perspective is in order. The political program of liberalism can be used by a wide variety of cultures to suit specific needs. In an age when Aristotelianism is not a dominant popular or academic viewpoint, perhaps those interested in Aristotelianism should consider the benefits of traditionally liberal political initiatives, such as decentralization of political power and federalism, to advance one's own perspective. Aristotelians are unlikely to dominate the cultural mainstream any time soon, and most people are never going to hold political offices like governor, mayor, or sheriff where he or she can use one's authority to resist political initiatives hostile to the development of Aristotelian sensibilities.

According to Donev and Skalovski, the breakdown of common ethical traditions is the cause of the moral disorientation that characterizes modern liberal societies. Based on the philosophical systems of Aristotle and Alasdair MacIntyre, they suggest that virtue ethics, with its emphasis on moral character, social ties, and the development of a meaningful human life, offers a workable basis for restoring harmony and significance in a world that is ethically disjointed.[43]

However, a normal person can still work in their own local community to advocate for building a culture focused on inculcating a moral outlook in step with Aristotelianism. They can use what influence they have at their disposal to begin building the kind of culture they want, creating an attachment among one's local community to a specific place with various initiatives to form a sense of home, and supporting local political initiatives to protect one's community from values he or she thinks are harmful. Measures that can be taken at a local level to build the kind of community one wants are numerous. There are local school boards who take an active role in the education system of a local community, town council positions, and numerous ways to volunteer locally. As Aristotle recognized thousands of years ago, and MacIntyre knows today, character and virtue must be developed through active practice and participation within society. That means local purposeful action is the most readily available option for constructing a culture focused on man's telos.

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[43] Dejan Donev and Denko Skalovski, "Responsibility in the Time of Crisis," Conatus – Journal of Philosophy 8, no. 1 (2023): 101.

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