

## OVERCOMING MORALISM: MACINTYREAN INSIGHTS ON ETHICS AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

INTERVIEW TO CALEB BERNACCHIO

*SUPERAR EL MORALISMO: PERCEPCIONES MACINTYREANAS SOBRE LA ÉTICA Y LAS CIENCIAS SOCIALES*

*ENTREVISTA A CALEB BERNACCHIO*

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***Caleb Bernacchio is a doctoral candidate in business ethics at IESE Business School. His research focused on the intersection of Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, especially the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, and organization studies. His work has published in various journals including Business Ethics Quarterly, Journal of Business Ethics, and Acta Philosophica.***

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***ML: To begin with, I would like to invite you to introduce yourself and tell our readers about your academic/scholarly work, particularly as regards how MacIntyre's philosophy has influenced it.***

CB: The focus of my work is primarily in business ethics and to some extent in organization studies, though I am also interested in moral philosophy and political theory. I am currently in my final year of doctoral studies in business ethics at IESE Business School in Barcelona. MacIntyre has completely shaped the way that I think about ethical questions. One of the most important ways he has influenced me concerns the need to think about how ethical questions are linked with questions about social structures and thus how ethics relates to the social sciences.

***ML: To what extent does "Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity" constitute a continuum and a development of topics dealt with in previous works?***

CB: As I have read *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, I think it is very much in continuity with MacIntyre's previous work, representing something like a compendium, capturing the primary themes that have concerned him since *After Virtue*. There is some development and elaboration but, in my opinion, the book is most valuable in providing a complete restatement of MacIntyre's mature views.

***ML: What new horizons of moral-philosophical research have opened up as from this book?***

CB: One of the most interesting questions raised by the book concerns the ethical salience of contemporary modes of work. MacIntyre praises collaborative modes of team production while also suggesting that they manifest forms of injustice, specifically concerning the relationship between owners of firms and employees. Currently, there seems to be no economically or politically feasible alternative to capitalism despite the fact that serious ethical questions have been raised about both levels of income inequality and manifest forms of injustice within all stages of global supply chains. As such, it is crucial to understand if and how the cultivation of the virtues, the promotion of the common good, and the achievement of human flourishing can be achieved under contemporary economic conditions. MacIntyre's most recent work offers some insights into how we should frame these questions and go about pursuing them.

***ML: Do you consider that MacIntyre's adherence to the line of thought of Tomas de Aquino has been strengthened in his last work?***

CB: MacIntyre's regard for Aquinas is certainly evident within *Ethics in the Conflict of Modernity*, both in his discussion of the nature of moral judgment and in his brief discussions about God as the ultimate end of human agency. For me at least, these portions of the text suggest that there is greater opportunity for further investigating how Aquinas's philosophical theology, metaphysics, and action theory can be further integrated within MacIntyre's social and historical mode of inquiry. For example, how might the notion of God be presupposed by and manifested within the practical reasoning of agents within various historically situated practices?

***ML: Which is, in your opinion, the importance of resorting to the narrative form as in "life stories"?***

CB: This is one of the most interesting developments in the book. Of course, narrative has long been important to MacIntyre's work but by developing these extended narratives MacIntyre shows that without in anyway detracting from the objectivity of philosophical questions, these questions are inevitably questions about ourselves, they implicate our self-conceptions, and can only be answered by gaining self-knowledge.

***ML: Do you agree with the statement that all of MacIntyre's philosophy aims at discerning different ways by which the moral tradition of virtues could possibly flourish in our present-day culture? Would you make any additional comments on this thesis?***

CB: I completely agree with this view of MacIntyre's work. Some readers have seen *After Virtue* as a narrative of despair, suggesting that modernity offers no opportunities for agency, cultivation of virtues, or human flourishing. MacIntyre explicitly rejects this type of despair, and in my opinion, rightly so. His work gives us reason to think that there are always more opportunities for moral agency than at first appears. It also suggests that virtues can be cultivated and exercised especially when conditions are less than ideal, that conflict in the face of inadequate institutions provides a prime context for agency.

***ML: How do you assess the lack of systematicity that may sometimes be observed in the works of our author?***

CB: MacIntyre has always maintained that his contribution is to point us toward key figures in the tradition, figures like Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and Marx. He is certainly understating his contribution but there is truth in his claim. We can only understand MacIntyre's novel contribution to the Aristotelian tradition insofar as we read him as presupposing and developing insights of these other thinkers. So that reading MacIntyre necessarily amounts to reading him as in dialogue with other more systematic thinkers, whose views he is presupposing and developing.

***ML: Do you know of other contemporary philosophers that could be highlighted in similar lines of thought? What would you recommend to their work?***

CB: Some of the most interesting recent work (at least in English language context) has developed and elaborated Hegel's views by drawing upon insights from the analytic tradition. I am thinking of people such as Charles Taylor, Robert Brandom, John McDowell, Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard, etc. This work is highly relevant to MacIntyre's project for at least two reasons. First, MacIntyre was heavily influenced by Hegel, an influence that is apparent both in themes discussed, especially in *After Virtue*, and in his more general mode of social and historical analysis. One cannot read the *Phenomenology of Spirit* without seeing it as inspiration for *After Virtue* (despite the vast differences between these two texts). Thus, this work may in some case help to shed light on MacIntyre's approach to philosophical questions, on how social and historical analysis may relate to philosophical inquiry. Secondly, because MacIntyre's work is both influenced by Hegel but also a rejection of Hegel's endorsement of the rationality of modernity and the state, recent work seeking to elaborate and defend Hegel's views, drawing upon similar analytic resources, represents in many ways a challenge to MacIntyre's claims. Thus, engaging with this work is essential to assess and possibly vindicate MacIntyre's claims.

***ML: Could you describe which are the main contributions that MacIntyre has made to your own line of thought?***

CB: As noted above, MacIntyre's biggest contribution to my thought concerns the link between ethical questions and social, political, and historical analysis. In my case, in seeking to answer questions about the ethics of contemporary economic institutions, it is essential to understand how and why they function, what practices they support or fail to support, why the ideals that they embody have become plausible, and whether it is politically feasible to radically alter such structures, whether on a small-scale or more widely. Abstract appeals to ethical norms that have no basis in social reality amount to a form of moralism that may be salutary but cannot really claim to be an example of philosophical analysis. MacIntyre's work can be seen as a response to such moralism (in his case it was the moralism of some Marxist theorists). He has taught me that it is necessary to consider how ethical norms can actually be embodied within social life (whether within dominant institutions, or within political movements that seek to challenge those institutions, among other modes of embodiment).