Educating Virtues in a Plural World: In Defence of Revolutionary Aristotelianism

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In this paper I consider two different responses to the question of whether the virtues needed for a flourishing life are local or universal in nature. Firstly, MacIntyre who suggests that if different concepts of virtue are viewed with historical awareness, certain unities in the concept emerge. Secondly, Nussbaum who maintains that virtues are non-relative and that an Aristotle inspired, historically sensitive essentialism about human nature should inform international public policy. I maintain MacIntyre's response is more persuasive than Nussbaum's for two reasons. First, in taking essentialist capabilities as the starting point for global policy and action Nussbaum does not value the traditions, practices and agency of local communities as MacIntyre does. Second, MacIntyre more directly and convincingly addresses two key challenges posed to Aristotelian ethics by Bernard Williams. I conclude that while Williams rejects the Aristotelian ethics that MacIntyre and Nussbaum broadly endorse, all three thinkers nonetheless share general agreement that ethical dispositions should be cultivated in education in ways where children also learn how to subject the ethics of their education to criticism.

1. Are virtues local or universal in nature?

Are the virtues needed for a flourishing life local or universal in nature? A philosophically satisfactory answer to this question needs must go well beyond simply stating that the virtues in question are 'local' or 'universal'. I certainly do not though believe there is good reason to think that the specific character traits that mark flourishing lives are, always have been and always will be, everywhere the same. It seems clear that different cultures have taken the excellent life to mean different, and sometimes radically different, things. Alasdair MacIntyre in After Virtue famously argued that conceptions of virtue have and will continue to alter over time. I think he is fundamentally correct. He argued that in order to make sense of the nature of virtue it is necessary to compile a history of the concept. In his history of the concept at least three very different versions of virtue emerge. First we have Homeric virtue which requires that flourishing individuals take on the social role of excellent warrior or athlete. Here, the virtues needed for flourishing involve physical prowess, competitiveness, cunning and fearlessness about death. Secondly, are the virtues of Aristotle, Aquinas and The New Testament. In this version of the concept virtue is a quality which enables individuals to move toward their specifically human telos in this life or the next. The virtues needed for flourishing here (at least for Aristotle and Aquinas) centrally involve the rational ordering of activities, goods and relationships that are worthwhile in themselves. If the different virtues of Homer, Aristotle and the New Testament are considered MacIntyre states that 'it would be all too easy to conclude that there are a number of rival and alternative conceptions of the virtues, but…no single core conception' (1984, p 181). MacIntyre does not however draw the all too easy conclusion. Instead, he argues that a core unity to the concept of virtue can be found and that understanding the history of the concept is necessary to finding this unity (ibid, p 186). Though there is a unity to be found in the concept of virtue, the unity in question is not for MacIntyre based upon universal aspects of the human condition that are constant irrespective of time and place.

MacIntyre states that ‘there are in no way universal features of the human condition’ (1984, p 67). Instead, he suggests the concept needs to undergo three phases of development before the unities in virtue can be understood. First it needs to be recognised that practices are the primary (but not the only) arena in which virtues can be exercised. Practices refer to well established, social human activities that have standards of excellence internal to them. The agent who pursues a practice in such a way that they learn to value that practice in its own right and not as a means to something else like money or status is in effect pursuing that practice virtuously. In doing so they are going some way to leading a flourishing life. However, flourishing secondly requires comprehension of the fundamentally narrative and teleological character of human life. Human beings are, as MacIntyre famously put it, ‘story telling animals’ not essentially but through their history. There is for MacIntyre a unity to be found in each human life. This narrative unity takes the form of a telos or quest for the good. This quest for the good ‘is always an education’ (MacIntyre, 1984, p 219). Virtues are needed to not only sustain the health of practices but also to help people in their quest for their good. Thirdly, MacIntyre suggests that what the existence of different concepts of virtue like the Homeric and Aristotelian show, is not that virtue is always at base culturally relative but that different concepts of virtue belong to a moral tradition of virtue. A tradition which, if in good order, will embody continuity and conflict over time. MacIntyre’s suggestion that concepts of virtue differ and evolve perhaps has a certain relativistic hue. However I think MacIntyre resists the idea that the virtues are irrevocably local or relative in nature. Instead he suggests that if the different versions of virtue that have come in to being are viewed with historical awareness, certain unities in the concept emerge. These unities are threefold; 1) practices are the primary place in which virtues are developed and exercised, 2) each human life has a narrative unity brought together by a teleological quest for the good, 3) the tradition of virtue needs to embody ‘continuities of conflict’ if that tradition is to continue to sustain people in their quest for the good.

In his most recent work, *Ethics and the Conflicts of Modernity*, MacIntyre pushes back further against ethical and cultural relativism. There he maintains there can be a ‘large measure of agreement’ (2016, p 223) about the sorts of virtues needed for flourishing. He also claims it is hard to deny that at least eight different goods can be identified that can contribute to a good life irrespective of one’s culture. These are:

1. Good health and a standard of living that is free of destitution
2. Good family relationships
3. Sufficient education to develop one’s powers
4. Productive and rewarding work
5. Good friends
6. Leisure time for athletic, aesthetic and intellectual activities good in themselves
7. The ability to rationally order one’s life
8. The ability to learn from one’s mistakes (MacIntyre, 2016, p 222)

MacIntyre insists it is possible to lead an excellent life without one or more of these goods. However, he stresses the more of these goods that are absent the more resourceful an agent will have to be to compensate for the absence. Importantly the resourcefulness needed involves a capacity to see what requires alteration in either the agent or the agents wider social and institutional order so that the agent can achieve goods characteristic of an excellent life. MacIntyre suggests that items 3 and 7 are especially important if agents are going to be able to deliberate well and make choices that enable their flourishing. He states that it 'is by their initial education as practical reasoners and by their subsequent exercise of their reasoning powers in the making of such choices that agents play their part in determining the goodness of their lives' (MacIntyre, 2016, p 223). It is important to note that MacIntyre does not renounce his earlier denial of there being universal features of the human condition or his suggestion that there is a unity to be found in different concepts of virtue. He only says it is hard to deny these eight goods will likely support human flourishing whatever social and political order one belongs to. He does not say the eight goods are universal features of the human condition per se. MacInyre described the eight goods listed above in order to address criticisms levelled against Aristotelian ethics by Bernard Williams. Indeed, MacIntyre remarks that some of the most pertinent objections against Aristotelian ethics (and thus his own) come from Bernard Williams. It is to Williams that I now turn.

2. Two problems for Aristotelianism in Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy

'Aristotle saw a certain kind of ethical, cultural and indeed political life as a harmonious culmination of human potentialities, recoverable from an absolute understanding of human nature. We have no reason to believe in that' (Williams, p 59)

In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* Bernard Williams maintained that in the modern world there is no good reason to believe the Aristotelian story about how the dispositions of the virtuous agent are founded in universal facts about human nature. Williams also claimed Aristotle should not have believed human beings responsible for their character. It is Aristotle's account of habituation which Williams finds particularly problematic. It provides the foundation for a person's character yet 'leaves little room for practical reason to alter radically the objectives that a grown-up person has acquired' (Williams, 2011, p 44). According to Williams, as Aristotle thought the virtues can only be acquired through habituation in the early years, then the practical reasoning of adults will quite simply come too late for any fundamental reformation of character to be possible. Habituated persons are already 'preemptively good or irrecoverably bad' (ibid, p 44). It is the irrecoverably bad person that Williams is especially concerned with. Williams insists Aristotle did not say enough about why it is in the real interests of the person of bad upbringing to be virtuous (ibid, p 50). What he is getting at is that the unrepentant person of bad upbringing presents a challenge to a core aspect of Aristotle's ethics - that human beings need to lead a life of virtue in order to flourish. The challenge concerns how to convince a person of bad upbringing, say the career gangster brought up in to a life of crime from a young age, to realign their desires, goals and doings towards what is really and not mistakenly in their interests. Williams thinks this is a challenge Aristotle's ethics is not well placed to solve.

On Aristotle's account what is really in a person's interest is that which conduces to their long term wellbeing or flourishing. MacIntyre explains that an 'Aristotelian theory of virtue does therefore presuppose a crucial distinction between what any particular individual at any particular time takes to be good for him and what is really good for him as a man. It is for the sake of this latter good that we

practice the virtues' (1984, p 150). Williams and MacIntyre agree that Aristotle thought people may choose to pursue objects that they perceive to be in their interests when in point of fact these objects will not really be good for them in the specific sense of good for their long term flourishing. Williams held that agents could not be motivated to act by reasons that are external to their subjective motivations. According to Williams (1981) an agent has an internal reason to perform an action if that action will help a subjective desire of theirs to be satisfied. Agents lacking subjective motivation to do something have no internal reason to do it. Williams appears then to be suggesting this: that adults who have been habituated to pursue what Aristotelians would take to be mistaken interests, have no internal reasons to act in ways that will aid their flourishing, and that this may be through no fault of their own. They were not responsible for their habituation so they should not be held responsible for the resultant patterns of desire, thought and action established by habituation.

Williams acknowledges how Aristotle's ethics can help strengthen the resolve and deepen the insight into the ethical life of those already 'inside' it. Williams also credits Aristotle with a more true to life portrait of the 'bad' character than Plato. While Plato tended to portray the vicious person as a compulsive addict lacking in rationality, Aristotle saw that the vicious person could use their reason to help them attain whatever vicious ends they sought. However, this more realistic portrait of the vicious person presents a problem for Aristotle's normative theory – why should the person habituated into vice pursue a life of virtue? Williams had another related reason for rejecting the justification of morality provided by Aristotle's ethics – its foundation in a teleological view of human nature. Williams (2011) argued that Aristotle was not very successful in demonstrating how the telos of human nature could be harmoniously brought to fruition through the life of virtue. This argument in no small part hinges upon how Williams thought contemporary developments in psychology and evolutionary biology, do not support Aristotle's conclusion that an ethics of virtue and flourishing is part of human nature and human purpose. In sum, Williams presents at least two challenges to Aristotelian ethics. Firstly, Aristotle did not provide a satisfactory theory of error about how people of 'poor upbringing' can fail to recognize their real interests. Secondly, in light of the findings of modern science it is no longer plausible to accept the connection between the facts of nature and ethical considerations that Aristotle's teleological view of human beings requires. I will now draw upon first MacIntyre and then Nussbaum to show how Williams's criticisms of Aristotle have been challenged.

3. MacIntyre and Nussbaum responding to Williams

MacIntyre (2016) addresses Williams charge that Aristotle fails to provide a convincing theory of ethical error. He suggests there are two possible ways in which to rebut Williams. One could firstly document the various moral and political errors Aristotle does delimit – the mistakes of the akratic or intemperate person or of those communities like the Spartans who excelled at war but were intellectually limited. However, I do not think Williams would likely be convinced by this line of argument. All these examples illustrate is that Aristotle did describe some ways in which communities and persons could ethically err. They do not explain why it is in the real interests of the person or community that ethically errs to change their ways. However, MacIntyre's second line of rebuttal more directly confronts the issue of real interests and ethical error and is more promising for it. According to MacIntyre, ethical error involves an agent desiring what they do not have good reason to desire. MacIntyre argues that in Aristotelian ethics it should not be assumed that the source of moral and/or political error must be the individual moral agent. Instead the source of error could be either in the individual agent or in the social

relationships that influence or have influenced the individual moral agent. Why is this distinction important?

It is important because it calls in to question Williams's assertion that Aristotle should not have believed human beings responsible for their characters. What MacIntyre brings out is that on Aristotle's view a teacher or parent may be at least as, if not more responsible for, the ethical errors of their student or child. However, the crucial issue for MacIntyre is not whom should be held accountable for ethical error, but what might be learned from ethical errors when they occur. In particular what might be learned that will help agents become more able to desire what they have good reason to desire in the future. MacIntyre argues that the virtuous exercise of practical reason requires not only individual but also shared deliberation about what agents have good reason to desire. Contrary to Williams he maintains that it is not just early habituation that makes a person desire what they do. Instead, human desires change over the course of life. Importantly human desires can be redirected through reflection upon errors and through practices of shared deliberation. MacIntyre argues that moral agents can only learn how to reason well in their lives by engaging in 'mutual criticism' with family members, friends, co-workers or anyone else in their life with whom they share practical concerns (2016, p 224). On Aristotle's account agents do not reason about their desires and ends in isolation - they need to reason with others about their desires and ends. Such shared deliberation can help moral agents come to see that what they thought they had good reason to desire was not really in their long term wellbeing interests after all. It is therefore my argument that as such shared practical reasoning can help agents identify errors in their desires and ends, in ways that can lead to agents desiring new ends that are in their real interests, Aristotelianism can provide a coherent theory of ethical error.

Nussbaum (1995) takes issue with Williams second criticism, maintaining that Aristotle's ethical and scientific inquiries are not neatly comparable to what we would today recognize as science. When he in various places took a fact about human nature in order to defend an ethical conclusion he was not adopting a modern scientific view of the human being. Instead he took for granted that human beings are not beasts or gods or jellyfish. The human condition is one of both capability (the capability to be social and to lead a life of practical reason) and limitation (all humans have for example distinctively human bodies that are mortal). These capabilities and limitations are facts of nature that are internal to human being and they are facts that shape what it means to lead a human life well. Nussbaum argued that Aristotle grounded his views on human nature and ethics upon beliefs and social traditions and the background of myths and tragedies that all ancient Greeks were aware of. Myths that revealed how human beings, to be true to their nature (unlike gods and beasts), need to live social and political lives. Williams (1995) replied to Nussbaum. He liked the connection Nussbaum made between tragedies and Aristotle's views of human nature. He also conceded that he no longer wanted to claim that 'the Aristotelian enterprise requires a 'top-down' derivation of ethical conclusions from a scientifically respectable account of human beings' (Williams, 1995, p 200). Williams however thought Nussbaum's picture of human nature was in danger of not being representative of the range of different forms of human association that are possible. Nussbaum has in turn maintained that an Aristotelian account of human nature is compatible with plural forms of social life.

4. Nussbaum in Defence of Aristotelian Essentialism

'we do recognise others as human across many divisions of time and place. Whatever the differences we encounter, we are rarely in doubt as to when we are dealing with a human being and when we are not. The essentialist account attempts to describe…those features that constitute a life as human whatever it is.' (Nussbaum, 1992, p 215)

In Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defence of Aristotelian Essentialism Nussbaum maintains that an Aristotle inspired, historically sensitive essentialism about human nature and human goods should inform international public policy. Such essentialism is warranted, she suggests, because it can help to better cater for the needs of many marginalised, vulnerable and disenfranchised persons and groups in various different international contexts. In building this argument she considers three common criticisms of essentialism. Firstly, that essentialism is neglectful of historical and cultural differences. Here the charge is that human life is and has been actualised in widely differing ways at different times and places so that 'any attempt to produce a list of essential human properties is bound to enshrine certain understandings of the human and to denote others (Nussbaum, 1992, p 208)'. Normally it is the understandings of the dominant group that come to the fore to the exclusion of the minority group. Furthermore, the coherence of any list of essential characteristics of all human persons will only be secure if there is unanimous agreement about the characteristics in question being possessed by all human persons. As no such agreement will be forthcoming in practice, essentialism is doomed to fail. The second objection to essentialism involves a neglect of autonomy. If the criteria of a good human life are determined in advance then any essentialist account of the human must by definition neglect the right of human persons to choose their own future and their own good in any ways that deviate from the pre-established criteria of a good human life.

The third objection concerns prejudicial application. If a determinate conception of the human being is defended then it becomes all too easy to exclude the powerless and marginalised. Here, Nussbaum notes that Aristotle's own essentialist account of human nature has been criticised precisely because women, slaves, children and many productive workers were excluded from the political sphere as they were deemed to lack all the properties of the 'fully' human. The 'suggestion here is that renouncing the use of such a determinate conception of the human will make it easier for such people to be heard and included' (Nussbaum, 1992, p 208). Nussbaum acknowledges each of these objections has some merit, but she does not in the end not want to renounce essentialism. Why? Because she believes there is a version of essentialism that can 'survive' these objections. But what type of essentialism is this? How moreover does this essentialism survive these three objections? Nussbaum's overarching argument is that a historically sensitive and empirically informed essentialism is needed because it can enhance social justice. Nussbaum reasons that it is only after a set of especially important human functions have been identified that individuals and groups will be in a position to ask what social and political institutions are doing to support them to flourish. According to Nussbaum the core functions of a good human life are:

1. Being able to live to the end of human life
2. Being able to have good health
3. Being able to avoid unnecessary pain and have pleasurable experiences
4. Being able to use the five senses and being able to imagine, think and reason

5. Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves
6. Being able to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life
7. Being able to live for and with others
8. Being able to live in relation with animals, plants and the world of nature
9. Being able to laugh and play
10. Being able to live one's own life

(adapted from Nussbaum, 1992, p 222).

It is important to note that Nussbaum regards the features of the good human life as capabilities, as things that legislation and policy must seek to ensure for all human beings. Nussbaum also provides insight into how her Aristotelian theory of the human good can survive the three common objections against essentialism. In respect to the objection of neglecting cultural differences, Nussbaum believes her list of common human properties is flexible enough to accommodate local and personal variations in lived practice. Indeed, she refers to this list as a 'thick vague' theory of the good human life; vague as 'it is better to be vaguely right than precisely wrong' (ibid, p 215). She insists that the Aristotelian essentialist about the good human life will want to retain plurality in two ways: via plural and local specification. In terms of plurality she indicates that her deliberately vague and general framework enables substantial scope for citizens to realise their own good 'in accordance with local traditions or individual taste' (ibid, p 224). In terms of local specification, she rightly avers that Aristotelian practical reasoning is always carried out with deep sensitivity to the concrete local conditions in which the person or persons live. In regard to the objection of neglecting autonomy Nussbaum points out that hers is a list of human capabilities not actualities. As such individual agents retain the right to choose whether or not to realise the human goods in question. The 'good' human life does not therefore require that persons must develop the capabilities in question – only that they have the choice to. However, she points out that for Aristotelians, human choices are not highly individualistic or spontaneously arising. In much the same way that MacIntyre does, Nussbaum insists that human choices are shaped by the material and social conditions that persons live in. In regard to the final objection of prejudicial application, Nussbaum again demurs. She suggests that her list of capabilities is deliberately designed to be non-prejudicial in so far as it refers to all human beings. The crucial point being that in her framework no person will be excluded from accessing goods on account of their being less than fully human.

5. MacIntyre on what makes human beings human

'Aristotle is…obviously someone whose arguments go badly astray…His conception of the natural slave…and his claim that women are unlike men in their inability to control their passions as reason dictates are…wrongheaded…Modern Aristotelians – I think, for example, of Martha Nussbaum – have not found it difficult to exercise these absurdities, while remaining Aristotelian in their account of the virtues' (MacIntyre, 2016, p 85-86)

MacIntyre and Nussbaum read Aristotle in some very similar ways. Neither philosopher takes Williams's arguments against Aristotelian ethics to be fatal. They both nonetheless think that Aristotle's ethics

needs to be understood historically and be open to plural forms of social life if it is to continue to be relevant and defensible. They both relatedly think his idea that slaves and women lack the capacity of reason to be wrongheaded and in need of rejection. However, in spite of these similarities the Aristotelianism of MacIntyre and Nussbaum is not identical. Nussbaum describes her Aristotelianism as essentialist (1992) and defends a 'non-relative' (1993) theory of virtue. MacIntyre does compile a list of 8 goods he thinks it is hard to deny help human flourishing irrespective of one's social order but he does not insist flourishing is impossible without some or all of these goods. Nor does he argue that virtues are non-relative. He only suggests there can be a large measure of agreement about what virtues are needed for flourishing. MacIntyre's Aristotelianism therefore strikes me as less essentialist than Nussbaum's. Indeed, MacIntyre's Aristotelianism has been described by Kelvin Knight (2013) as 'revolutionary' not essentialist and I think this is right. MacIntyre not only thinks objectionable features in Aristotle's outlook are in need of revolution. He also thinks virtues are needed by agents if they are to learn how to challenge unjust social orders. The differences do not end here. MacIntyre is not convinced by the particulars of Nussbaum's response to Williams's claim that modern science renders Aristotelian teleology untenable. MacIntyre and Nussbaum do to be sure both think human beings have flourishing as the end of their actions and that this is part of their nature qua human being - Williams does not. However, in order to rebut Williams, MacIntyre takes a different strategy to Nussbaum. MacIntyre seeks to explain how there is more to human nature and purpose than what evolutionary biology can tell us. In contrast to this Nussbaum's main strategy was to insist that the 'science' of Aristotle and the science of today are fundamentally incomparable and that because of this we should not expect Aristotelian ethics to be relatable to the facts of modern science.

MacIntyre agrees with Williams not Nussbaum on this important point though – that Aristotelian ethics requires commitment to some sort of thesis about how teleology can explain the facts of nature. Williams claimed that the identification of rationality as the characteristic aspect of human beings is arbitrary and that falling in love is just as human a quality as rationality. In response to this MacIntyre continues to maintain that human beings can be differentiated from other species 'by realizing possibilities that cannot be accounted for in solely evolutionary terms' (ibid, p 226). These actualized possibilities include: having a concept of the good, being able to reason and order goods, spending longer in leisure pursuits that no longer confer reproductive advantage than other species and by the amount and kind of education given to the young. MacIntyre does not dispute that falling in love is very human. However he adds that educating our feelings and subjecting them to critical appraisal is also part of what makes us human. He says that 'Williams was right in taking some human affective capacities to be distinctively human. Part of what makes them distinctive, however, is the ways in which they can be educated and their exercise criticised' (MacIntyre, 2016, 226). The way in which MacIntyre explains how each human life can be unified through its specifically narrative teleological structure is a further way in which MacIntyre's ethics differs from Nussbaum's. MacIntyre also in his most recent work provides a theory of ethical error, suggesting that adults need to learn from their mistakes and continuously subject their actions, feelings and choices to critical scrutiny. He stresses that we need others to help us work out what we have good reason to desire. Nussbaum and MacIntyre do nonetheless agree that is it vital to educate in such a way that ethical habits are formed but where plural forms of human life and association are still valued. Interestingly so does Williams.

6. *Educating virtues in a plural world: In defence of Revolutionary Aristotelianism*

In this paper I have considered two different responses to the question of whether the virtues needed for a flourishing life are local or universal in nature. Firstly, MacIntyre who suggests that if different concepts of virtue are viewed with historical awareness, certain unities in the concept emerge. Secondly, Nussbaum who maintains that virtues are non-relative and that an Aristotle inspired, historically sensitive essentialism about human nature should inform international public policy. Which response is best? I think MacIntyre's response is the most philosophically persuasive for two reasons. First, in taking essentialist capabilities as the starting point for global policy and action Nussbaum does not value the traditions, practices and agency of local communities as MacIntyre does. Unlike Nussbaum, MacIntyre does not take a list of essential capabilities as a starting point for global debate, action and policy concerning human wellbeing. Nor does he insist as Nussbaum does (2011) that there is a list of ten human capabilities that political orders must ensure for all citizens if that region or country is to be considered minimally just. Instead MacIntyre stresses ethical debate and action must begin from within the traditions and practices of particular cultures. Communities in good working order don't ignore other cultures though. They learn from other moral traditions so as to improve their own (1988). His account of the virtues is therefore less essentialist and transculturally meddlesome than Nussbaum's. Nussbaum (2011) does of course stress that her list of capabilities can be adapted by local cultures but in stressing this the implication is clear – capabilities ought to form the starting point and foundation of well-being policy and action irrespective of place. Other cultures need to adapt to her list of capabilities. Nussbaum is thus more inclined to impose aspects of her Aristotelian ethics on others than MacIntyre.

Second, I think MacIntyre more directly and convincingly addresses two key challenges posed to Aristotelian ethics by Williams. MacIntyre employed a different strategy than Nussbaum in response to Williams second objection. He tried to explain how there is more to human nature and purpose than what evolutionary biology can tell us. While it is true that Nussbaum's key paper (1995) in response to Williams stressed that understandings and practices of science in the ancient Greek world are at base incomparable with those of today she has elsewhere (1992) claimed that human beings need to achieve certain capabilities if they are to flourish. It might therefore be possible to argue that Nussbaum like MacIntyre provides an explanation about how the facts of human nature can be reconciled with teleological ethics. However, MacIntyre responded to Williams first objection. Nussbaum has not done this so far as I am aware. He sought to explain how Aristotelian ethics can provide a coherent theory of ethical error. MacIntyre acknowledges that Williams or those sympathetic to him would not be convinced by his theory of ethical error (MacIntyre, 2016, p 221). This thought may not be entirely right though. Williams maintained that 'the formation of ethical dispositions is a natural process in human beings' (1984, p 53). Related to this he also maintained that as ethical life is sustained by the dispositions of people 'we have much reason for, and little reason against, bringing up children within the ethical world we inhabit' (ibid, p 54). In The Primacy of Dispositions Williams goes further. He suggests that only a disposition view can generate a realistic account of ethical criticism, maintaining that if ethical life is to be changed this will ultimately require changes in peoples dispositions.

Williams doubted if Aristotelian ethics could value plural forms of human association or educate people in such a way that they could change the ethical dispositions of their habituation. He insisted however that institutions must value such association and education. However, while Williams rejected a teleological account of human nature and purpose and did not consequently agree with MacIntyre and Nussbaum at the level of ethical theory he does appear to be in general agreement with them about the

purpose of education. Though I cannot explain this point fully here Williams, MacIntye and Nussbaum do share general agreement that ethical dispositions should be cultivated in education in ways where children also learn how to subject the ethics of their education to criticism. In different ways MacIntyre and Nussbaum also show how any tenable Aristotelian ethics and education needs to value plural forms of human association. MacIntyre (1988) stresses the importance of educational institutions initiating students in to different practices, traditions and social orders in such a way that students can learn how to think critically about them. Nussbaum elsewhere argues that education should cultivate humanity in ways where the plurality of human cultures and knowledge is valued (1997). However, in taking capabilities as the starting point for ethics and policy Nussbaum does not value the traditions and practices of local communities as MacIntyre does. MacIntyre's ethical and educational theory is also more compelling than Nussbaum's for insisting that adults can and should carry on subjecting their desires, practices, dispositions and ends to critical scrutiny long after their formal education and childhood is over. Contrary to Williams, MacIntyre thinks Aristotelian dispositions can be changed when agents commit to learning from ethical errors.

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