ISME PAPER II

Alasdair MacIntyre, Utopianism and the Politics of Social Institutions

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INTRODUCTION

In what follows I shall consider what Alasdair MacIntyre has to say about utopianism, from the standpoint of someone who has an interest in the kind of politics that takes place within social institutions. The discussion has two parts. In the first part I survey the various comments that MacIntyre has made about utopianism in his writings over the years, from the publication of *After Virtue* in 1981 down to the present. In the second part I discuss the relevance of these ideas for those seeking to develop a critique of the uses and abuses of power within contemporary social institutions.

PART ONE:
MACINTYRE AND UTOPIANISM

What is the relationship that exists between the Aristotelianism of Alasdair MacIntyre and utopianism in politics? This is an important question which was included among the concerns of the first annual conference of the International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry (ISME) approximately ten years ago. It will be recalled that the title and the central theme of that first conference in 2007, *Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia*, contained a reference to the notion of utopia and hence also by implication of utopianism. It must be conceded, however, that until now the significance of this particular theme has not been sufficiently emphasised.[1] This is clear, I think, from the contents of the two volumes of papers that emerged from the proceedings of that first conference. One of these, a special issue of the journal *Analyse & Kritik*, has the promising title, *Revolutionary Aristotelianism: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia*. However, it contains only one paper, by Timothy Chappell, that is obviously devoted to a discussion of MacIntyre's political thought in relation to utopianism.[2] The other volume, entitled *Virtue and Politics: Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism*, edited by Paul Blackledge and Kelvin Knight, also pays relatively little attention to the theme of MacIntyre and utopianism.[3] It does, however, contain one significant contribution, that of MacIntyre himself, which is entitled 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia.'[4] With the exception of this last piece, MacIntyre himself has not written a great deal about utopianism, although it is not entirely absent from the corpus of his writings.[5] For the purposes of this discussion, it is convenient to differentiate between how MacIntyre thought about these issues in *After Virtue* and how his thinking appears to have evolved since that work was published in 1981. There are, as it were, three 'MacIntyres,' when it comes to this question.

1. MacIntyre in *After Virtue*: A Critic of Utopianism

In *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre again says at one point that 'a moral philosophy' is something that 'characteristically presupposes a sociology.'[6] This is so because every moral philosophy presupposes that its fundamental concepts 'are embodied' or at least can be embodied 'in the real social world.'[7] This is certainly true, MacIntyre suggests, in the case of Aristotle. Later in the same text MacIntyre reminds his readers that 'at an earlier point in the argument' he had 'stressed the close relationship between moral philosophy and sociology.'[8] He also observes that 'Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* are just as much contributions to the latter as to the former.'[9] These remarks, it seems to me, suggest that MacIntyre would not himself be sympathetic to utopianism in politics, as this is usually understood. However, they also suggest that, in MacIntyre's opinion, much the same could also be said of Aristotle.

Of particular interest here is the distinction that MacIntyre makes in *After Virtue* between social practices and social institutions.[10] Generally speaking, MacIntyre holds that practices are 'good,' ethically speaking, whereas institutions are 'bad.' Practices can be associated with certain internal goods.[11] These are inherent to the practice in question and are valuable for their own sake. Examples of such goods include health and education. These are not of value because they are a means to an end. Instrumental rationality, as that notion is understood by Max Weber, and later by the theorists of The Frankfurt School, is not the kind of rationality that MacIntyre associates with practices and with the motivation of individual practitioners. Institutions, on the other hand, are to be associated, not with internal but rather with external goods. Here, following Max Weber, MacIntyre has in mind such things as wealth, status and power. The motivation of those who are associated with institutions, especially those who direct, administer or manage them is not, therefore, the same as the motivation of practitioners. MacIntyre argues that practices cannot exist independently of some form or other of institutional support. They can only exist concretely (to employ an Hegelian notion), that is to say in a particular institutional form. There is always, therefore, going to be a tension or a conflict within a particular social institution between practitioners and managers over the ownership of the institution, having to do with decision taking, policy making, and overall control of the institution and the direction in which it is moving as it evolves historically over time. In MacIntyre's account there is an inherent tendency for practices to become institutionalised, or for degeneration and corruption to set in. This is very far from that optimistic view of historical progress that is usually associated with utopianism.

We saw earlier that at least some of the discussion of MacIntyre's attitude towards utopianism has turned around the distinction which he makes in *After Virtue* between social practices and social institutions. I have suggested in the past that MacIntyre's thinking on this subject might be associated with secular Augustinianism, that is to say with an attitude of pessimism regarding the possibility of significantly improving things, or changing them for the better, within the society of the present. This way of thinking about the ideas of St. Augustine, in relation to the history of utopian thought and literature, is a highly selective one, which overlooks the more positive contribution that Augustine's *City of God* has played in the history of utopian thought and literature.[12]

My reasons for associating MacIntyre's social theory in *After Virtue* with the idea of a secular Augustinianism is as follows. In that text MacIntyre argues that practices are a good thing, whereas institutions are not. He says that institutions are oriented towards certain goods which are external goods, so far as practices are concerned, rather than internal ones. Social institutions, therefore, or the process of institutionalization itself, might be associated with the notion of corruption, or of a 'fall' away from the original or authentic ideals and goals of the associated practice, a process that in turn might be associated with the emergence and solidification of the forces of bureaucracy. Perhaps the best example of this is provided by the history of the Catholic Church, as this is understood by a number of commentators, including Fyodor Dostoevsky, in his story of 'The Grand Inquisitor,' as well as Aldous Huxley and Ivan Illich.[13] At the same time, however, MacIntyre argues that it is not possible for any practice to exist in a non-institutionalised form. Social institutions, although in some sense corrupted, are the embodiment of social practice and a necessary precondition for their very existence as empirically observable social realities. There is, therefore, no scope in MacIntyre's thinking for what might be termed a utopian situation in which we find uncorrupted or non-institutionalised social practices.

Given these remarks, it is not too surprising that, in a comment about the important theoretical distinction that MacIntyre makes in *After Virtue* between practices and institutions, Kelvin Knight has claimed that 'MacIntyre is no utopian' thinker.[14] In support of this claim, Knight points to MacIntyre's 'notoriously pessimistic conclusion to *After Virtue*.'[15] He notes

that MacIntyre 'offers no blueprint for a society in which institutions are subordinated to practices,'[16] and that for MacIntyre no 'hierarchy of practices or of their internal goods is given by either nature, *a priori* reasoning, or history.'[17] Knight also points out that MacIntyre has explicitly rejected the idea that, in ethics and politics, there is any 'absolute standpoint,' or ethical standard of the kind that is often associated both with utopianism and with the idea of a natural law, that is 'independent of the particularity of all traditions.'[18]

MacIntyre's belief that there is no absolute or transcendent standard of justice that stands outside of history was not only a rejection of utopianism, it was also a rejection of the notion of natural law, as it has often been understood. For example, the association of utopianism with the concept of natural law, regarded as a transcendent standard of absolute justice, is made by R. W. Chambers in his *Thomas More*. According to Chambers, there is a significant difference between 'men who merely obey the laws of the state,' no matter what those laws tell them that they ought to do, and 'the men who have, as every citizen of Utopia was bound to have, a belief that there is an ultimate standard of right and wrong, beyond what the state may at any moment command.'[19] When making these remarks Chambers is speaking specifically about More's *Utopia*. He invokes the idea that More's utopianism rests upon a commitment to a Platonic, transcendent idea (or ideal) of justice that is assumed to be valid for all societies everywhere, in all tines and all places, and which might be used to criticise existing political arrangements and laws. These are ideas which have traditionally been associated with the concept of natural law. A more recent formulation of this view of the relationship between utopianism and natural law theory is provided by Ruth Levitas, who has also stated that a utopia is 'a regulative ideal, a standpoint or measure for evaluating our circumstances and actions.'[20]

It should be noted that it is not only in *After Virtue* that MacIntyre expresses such views. In 'Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice: What Holds Them Apart?' (1992), MacIntyre again emphasises what he refers to as the 'socially embedded' character of all moral concepts and of all moral theorising.[21] He repeats his earlier view that all theorizing of this kind is rooted in a particular society, or a sociology, and points out that, for Aristotle, 'it was only within a particular type of political and social order that rationally adequate practical and moral concepts could be socially embodied.'[22] MacIntyre refers in this context to Aristotle's conjunction of empirical and normative theorizing' in his *Politics*.[23] MacIntyre also says that if it is claimed that the concepts which are central to moral theorising 'can be fully understood quite independently of any relationship' to current social realities,' then those who make this claim 'owe us and deed themselves an account of why this is so,' and of 'how it is that they have discovered a realm thus characterizable independently of reference' to any 'actual social practice.'[24]

It is clear enough that what MacIntyre is doing here is criticising the views that are often associated with utopianism in politics. He insists that we are entitled to demand from those who think about politics in this way a 'specification of the relationship' that exists between all 'conceptual idealizations' and 'embodied social realities.'[25] He asks whether 'what is being constructed' and offered as a social or political ideal is 'an abstraction' from a currently existing social practice? Or, alternatively, are 'we being offered a blueprint' that is 'designed to be translated more or less immediately into practice?' In the latter case, MacIntyre states explicitly that what we are being presented with 'is a free-floating conceptual Utopia' that is 'innocent of any but the most idle aspiration to connect it with the real world.'[26] It is evident from these remarks that MacIntyre associates utopianism in politics with impracticality and a lack of realism, that he has little sympathy for it, that he does not regard Aristotle to be a utopian thinker and that he does not associate Aristotelianism with utopianism. On the contrary, he suggests that Aristotle was a critic of utopianism, as we find it for example in Plato's *Republic*.

2. MacIntyre and Utopianism Since the Publication of *After Virtue*

Elsewhere, however, MacIntyre seems to be far less critical of utopianism. For example, in 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre' (1990), MacIntyre begins by pointing out that utopianism is often thought to be a bad thing. It is associated with thinking that is alleged to be 'no more than a piece of fantasy,' an 'academic cloud cuckooland,' or 'something incapable of existence.'[27] He states that, according to advocates of this view of utopianism, 'the distance between those present political, social and cultural realities' which are criticised by utopians is 'too great a distance to be actually traversed.'[28] He also says that 'those most prone to accuse others of utopianism are generally those men and women of affairs who pride themselves on their pragmatic realism.'[29] MacIntyre observes that on this view to accuse somebody of being a utopian thinker just is to claim (rightly or wrongly) that they are unrealistic and impractical. For those who think in this way, the point of describing somebody's views as utopian is to criticise both the views themselves and also the person who holds them.

MacIntyre also observes that, according to this understanding of what utopianism involves, the realist critics of utopianism are 'the enemies of the incalculable' and 'skeptics about all expectations which outrun what *they* [his emphasis] take to be hard evidence.' They are 'deliberately short-sighted' individuals who 'congratulate themselves upon the limits of their vision.'[30] Such people 'not only inhabit contemporary social reality,' but they also 'insist upon seeing only what it allows them to see.'[31] In short, MacIntyre suggests that, in some cases at least, the critics of utopianism are entirely lacking in any creative imagination or vision regarding the possibility, in present circumstances, of there being any social and political change at all that might be for the better. In MacIntyre's view, these claims may well tell us far more about the persons who make them than they do about present social and political reality or about the possibilities of progressive change that are contained within it. As MacIntyre puts it, 'the gap between Utopia and current social reality may on occasion furnish a measure, not of the lack of justification of Utopia, but rather of the degree to which those who inhabit social reality' lack such a creative vision.[32] When discussing this issue, MacIntyre associates utopianism, which he speaks of with approval, with 'the student radicals of the late 1960s and early 1970s.'[33]

The remarks just cited certainly appear to offer a far more positive assessment and appraisal of utopianism than is to be found either in *After Virtue* or in MacIntyre's 'Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice.' It should, however, be noted that when he makes these remarks MacIntyre does not explicitly challenge the view that to be a utopian thinker is always and necessarily to be hopelessly impractical and unrealistic in one's approach to questions of politics. Indeed, he appears to *accept* rather than reject this understanding of the concepts of utopia and of utopianism. The point that he makes, rather, is simply that there have been occasions when those things which alleged realists have considered to be impossible, or unachievable in practice, were in fact no so. The implication remains, therefore, that if it could be conclusively established that something is not in fact practically achievable, and yet nevertheless somebody continued to advocate it, it would follow, not only that the person in question just *is* being utopian in their outlook, but also that, in just these circumstances, to be a utopian thinker would indeed be a bad thing.

In other words, MacIntyre does not challenge here the traditional view of utopianism, which equates it with impracticality. Nor does he argue that there might be another form of utopianism, which might be called realistic utopianism. All he suggests is that some things have in the past wrongly been regarded as utopian, because they were thought practically unachievable, when as a matter of fact this was not the case; or which later turned out not to have been the case; or, perhaps, which later turned out to be no longer the case. MacIntyre's argument in response to the realist critics of utopianism is therefore a relatively modest one. In

this particular essay, he does not challenge the existing way of thinking about utopianism. All he does is argue that we should be far more cautious when making claims about what is or is not practically achievable and therefore also utopian in this particular sense.

3. MacIntyre and Utopianism Today

In an essay entitled 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' which was published in 2011, in the *Virtue and Politics: Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism* collection, MacIntyre is (at times) arguably even more positive in his assessment of the value of utopianism than he had ever been in the past. Here MacIntyre makes a distinction between what he calls a 'Utopianism of the future' and a 'Utopianism of the present.'[34] He is very critical of the first of these, but quite sympathetic to the second.

Here MacIntyre considers the first of these types of utopianism to be 'bad.' Rightly or wrongly, MacIntyre maintains that those utopians who fall into this category have been willing to endorse the 'sacrifice of the present to some imaginary glorious future.'[35] Although MacIntyre does not offer any concrete examples, we may speculate that this form of utopianism could, in his view, be associated with both the French revolution of 1789 and the Russian revolution of 1917. When discussing this kind of utopianism MacIntyre appears to be sympathetic to the critique of utopianism that is to be found in the writings of J. L. Talmon and Karl Popper. Although he does not say so explicitly, MacIntyre suggests that advocates of this first kind of utopianism aim at radical social and political change which is extremely rapid and which may well involve the use of violence. It is therefore, revolutionary change, in the traditional sense of that term. Utopianism of this kind is not, as in the case of Aristotle, associated with a process of change that is oriented towards evolutionary, piecemeal, social and political reform. The aim of those utopians who seek radical change is the immediate and complete transformation of an entire society or social order. Such processes of change are intended to be disruptive of any continuity with the old order of the past. Utopian politics of this kind is also statist, in that those who advocate it attach if not exclusive then at least considerable importance to the role of the state in such a process of change.

In this essay MacIntyre rejects this first form of utopianism. Against those who advocate it, he argues that 'the present is what we are and have.'[36] He also repeats his earlier opinion that the 'refusal to sacrifice it' has to be 'accompanied by an insistence that the range of present possibilities is always far greater than the established order is able to allow for.'[37] It is important to note, however, that here MacIntyre does not reject utopianism outright, or all forms of utopianism. By drawing a distinction between two different types of utopianism, one of the future and one of the present, he opens the way for an argument that there is at least one form of utopianism, that of the present, which is good, which is to be recommended and which ought to be pursued.

In response to utopianists of the future, and in defence of the idea of a utopianism of the present, MacIntyre suggests that what is required today is that we should create and sustain a 'transformative political imagination,' which will encourage people to do things 'that they hitherto had not believed that they were capable of doing.'[38] This can be achieved, he suggests, by getting involved in 'community organisations,'[39] or in what others refer to as 'civil society' groups or associations.[40] His utopianism of the present, therefore, is not statist. It is oriented more towards the institutions of civil society than towards those that are usually associated with the state. The politics associated with this kind of utopianism is 'micro' politics rather than 'macro' politics. It has to do with the internal structure and organization, and processes of decision making, that take place within societies, institutions, groups, organizations,

associations, communities, and the like, which occupy that intermediate social sphere that exists mid-way between the family or household and the state.

In this essay MacIntyre evidently approves of utopianism of the present. This is a significant departure from, and an improvement on, the somewhat dismissive attitude that he has taken towards utopianism in some of his earlier writings. However, when MacIntyre talks about this particular form of utopianism, we might ask whether the understanding that he has of utopianism in general has significantly altered as a result? One presumes that this must be so, precisely because it now becomes clear that, in his current view, not all forms of utopiansim are bad. Here there appear to be only two possible readings of MacIntyre's views. The first is that MacIntyre continues to associate utopianism with impracticality and a lack of realism, but now thinks that these are a good rather than a bad thing. The second is that MacIntyre no longer thinks that utopianism is necessarily impractical and unrealistic. On this second view, if it were true that all forms of utopianism are impractical and unrealistic, then that would undeniably be a bad thing. However, or so the argument goes, MacIntyre no longer believes that this is the case. He no longer thinks that utopianism is necessarily or inevitably impractical and unrealistic and accepts that this is not true of at least one form of utopianism, his utopianism of the present. Nor, therefore, does he now think that all forms of utopianism are bad.

Which of these two readings of MacIntyre's views regarding utopianism is to be preferred? The remarks about this issue that are expressed by MacIntyre in his essay cut in two different and opposed ways. They support both of the above readings of his views, even though they are incompatible with one another. For example, consider what MacIntyre has to say about the association that is sometimes thought to exist between utopianism and impracticality at one point in his essay. In this passage MacIntyre observes that if you are a radical critic of the existing social and political order then it is very likely that you 'will be told by those who represent established power' that 'the kind of institutions that you are trying to create and sustain are simply not possible.'[41] Moreover, you will also be told that told that 'you are unrealistic, a Utopian.'[42] How, MacIntyre asks, should one reply to this accusation? 'It is,' he goes on to say, 'important to respond' to it 'by saying "Yes, that is exactly what we are."'[43] MacIntyre explicitly states here that in his view to be utopian just is to be impractical or unrealistic in one's approach to political questions. It appears to be the case, therefore, that he continues to endorse the current or standard view of what utopianism involves. Although, of course, it is clear from what he says about utopianism in this passage that he no longer consider utopianism, understood in this sense, to be a bad thing. He has a pro-attitude towards utopianism here, which he has not had in the past. This seems to me to be a very significant alteration in his thinking and a departure from the assessment of utopianism that we find in his earlier writings, such as *After Virtue*.

On the other hand, however, when making these remarks MacIntyre also takes a significant step in the direction of challenging this conventional view of what utopianism involves, especially the view that all utopian thinkers are impractical and that utopianism is necessarily associated with a lack of realism. For example, when talking about utopianism of the present he appears to have in mind the ideas and practices of those who are committed to (and actively pursue) reformist change to existing social institutions. As he conceives of it, this change is or will be short to medium term. Moreover, it is change that is intended to take place more at the micro than at the macro level. The focus of utopians of the present is on civil society and its institutions rather than on the state. The change that they advocate does not directly and immediately focus on the state. Nor is it aimed at the immediate and radical transformation of an entire society all at once. Moreover, change of this kind does not or would not necessarily involve the actual use or the threat of the use of force or violence. One might perhaps refer to this as moderate, reformist, or piecemeal utopianism, a notion that is somewhat analogous to Karl Popper's notion of piecemeal engineering. It

might be suggested, therefore, that MacIntyre's remarks in this essay about a desirable utopianism of the present have an affinity with what might be called a practical or realistic utopianism, the inspiratrion for which is derived from the writings of Aristotle. It may be conjectured that this is at least part of what MacIntyre has in mind when he says, in 'Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas,' that 'utopianism rightly understood is no bad thing.'[44]

PART TWO:
MACINTYRE AND THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

The ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre, especially his distinction between practices and institutions, seem to me to be a valuable resource for those interested in developing an ethical critique of contemporary social institutions. MacIntyre's remarks about practices and institutions, which usually come up in any discussion of his attitude towards utopian theorising, have to do with the organizational structure, and hence also the internal politics of these institutions. It is sometimes suggested that in *After Virtue* MacIntyre gives up on contemporary society and recommends that his readers should, for example, go and live as a member of a fishing village community in Galway. His views, therefore, have little to offer, practically speaking, for those who seeking to engage in a programme of radical politics. Indeed, the communitarianism with which MacIntyre has sometimes wrongly been associated, has also been regarded as inherently conservative, or even reactionary, so far as its theoretical assumptions are concerned. It is associated with a nostalgic looking backwards, not to the year 2000, as in the case of Edward Bellamy, but rather to pre-modern forms of community that have been lost, and which cannot in contemporary society be restored, at least not on any large-scale, rather than a constructive programme for proponents of radical change of existing society and its institutions.

There has been some debate about this issue in recent years, in the course of which a number of commentators have drawn attention to the links that MacIntyre has had in his earlier years with Marxism. According to these commentators, although it is true that MacIntyre might be regarded as a contemporary Aristotelian thinker, nevertheless the Aristotelianism in question is not at all conservative in terms of its political implications. Indeed, as we saw earlier, they have characterised it as a form of revolutionary Aristotelianism, with a close affinity with Marxism. In their view MacIntyre is, therefore, very far from being the nostalgic, communitarian conservative that some commentators seem to think he is. My own assessment of the significance of MacIntyre and his ideas today is somewhat different from this. In my opinion, it is what MacIntyre has to say about bureaucracy and institutionalization, about practices and institutions, that is most significant today, especially for those who are interested in the politics of recognition. This is so because these ideas might be put to use by those seeking to develop a critique of managerialism and the abuse of power within hierarchical social institutions by those who are responsible for their administration or management.

In my view, however, if MacIntyre's ideas are going to be put to use in this way, then it will be necessary for us to get away from the idea that practices are good, whereas institutions are essentially, necessarily and inevitably bad. MacIntyre's view that practices cannot exist on their own, but only in an institutional form, when combined with his further view that all institutions might be regarded as corrupt practices leads inevitably to the conclusion that no institution at all could ever be good. This view appears to imply that if we are to achieve anything good in the world, then it will be necessary for us to do away completely with institutions, in the hope of replacing them with the corresponding practices, pure and unalloyed. We saw earlier however that, given his understanding of the nature of the relationship that exists between practices and institutions, MacIntyre consider this to be an impossibility. We

are left, therefore, with an extremely pessimistic view regarding the possibility of transforming the world – i.e. the real world of existing social institutions – for the better. What we need, here, is to be able to differentiate between good institutions and bad ones. We need criteria for the ethical evaluation of existing social institutions. A blanket condemnation or dismissal of all institutions as such is not helpful. It seems to me, therefore, that if MacIntyre's distinction between practices and institutions in *After Virtue* is to be put to use in a political project that is associated with the idea of a realistic utopianism, or with what MacIntyre has called a utopianism of the present, then certain modifications to it will be required, along the more optimistic lines suggested by MacIntyre himself in his more recent comments about utopianism.

In this regard, at least, the thinking of the earlier MacIntyre in *After Virtue* seems to me to be inferior to that of, for example, Ivan Illich, which was far more optimistic and willing to engage with the world of institutions as they currently exist, with a view to improving them.[45] Illich, in a number of works published in the 1970s, including *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution* (1971); *Deschooling Society* (1971); *Tools For Conviviality* (1973); and *Limits to Medicine: Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health* (1976), was interested in what I have called the politics of social institutions, especially those issues which are generated by the forces of bureaucracy in advanced industrial or post-industrial societies.[46] From the standpoint of a radical humanism, Illich subjected contemporary social institutions to a critique because, in his view, life for those who are associated with them has become increasingly dehumanized, alienated and machine-like. In specific works he looked at the institutions of education (schools), those related to medicine and health (hospitals), and those associated with religion (churches).

Much like MacIntyre, Illich argues in these works that as soon as institutionalization sets in things start to go wrong. One example of this, that of institutions of education (especially schools), is discussed in Illich's *Deschooling Society*. However, education and schools are just one example that Illich uses to illustrate a more general thesis about the problems that are associated with contemporary social institutions. His objection is not so much to 'schooling,' in particular (although of course it includes that) but to institutionalization in general. A second example of what Illich has in mind is provided by the history of the Catholic Church,[47] or what Illich himself refers to as 'institutionalized religion.'[48] Dostoevsky's story 'The Grand Inquisitor' (in *The Brothers Karamazov*) immediately spring to mind here.[49] Illich suggests that for each problem that one attempts to solve, or indeed does actually solve, by institutional means, another two are created. The final outcome, therefore, is a situation that is in certain respects at least worse than the situation from which one started. A more accurate formulation of Illich's general thesis might, therefore, employ the phrase 'deinstitutionalizing society.'

However, Illich does not give up on society or on contemporary social institutions, or recommend that we simply retreat from them. Rather, he seeks to transform them. In *Deschooling Society*, for example, he distinguishes between what he refers to as 'convivial institutions,' which support autonomy and 'personal growth,' on the one hand, and 'manipulative institutions,' which do not do this, on the other.[50] It is clear from what Illich says about this issue that he thinks this it is only the latter type of institution that is bad. Unlike MacIntyre in *After Virtue,* Illich does not hold, as a matter of principle, that all institutions are necessarily bad. He holds that in an advanced, industrial or technological society it is, practically speaking, not feasible or realistic to think in terms of doing away altogether with existing social institutions. Nor is it particularly constructive simply to withdraw or absent oneself from society – to give up on society and its institutions altogether. We can, however, seek to transform existing social institutions, in an effort to make them more convivial. We can, in a variety of ways, attempt to humanise them. We can try to make them more personal and sensitive to the needs of the individuals who come into contact with them. A precondition

of this is, arguably, democratization of the work-place: the inclusion of the work force as citizens of a small-scale political community, not at the macro level of the state but, rather, at the micro-level, in the sphere of civil society. It is arguable that although the MacIntyre of *After Virtue* in 1981 would, for a number of reasons, have had little sympathy for this kind of project relating to the politics of social institutions, nevertheless this is not the case today. What MacIntyre has referred to as a utopianism of the present seems to me to be compatible with, and indeed lends its support to, the idea of promoting such a political project, which MacIntyre is right to regard as utopian, in some sense of the term,

It is not that difficult to connect a discussion of MacIntyre's views regarding the politics of social institutions to the writings of a number of theorists who have contributed to the history of political thought, from the time of Aristotle himself down to the present, and who have addressed this same issue in their writings. MacIntyre's treatment of this theme falls within and contributes to the development of a quite specific intellectual tradition. So far as the writing of the history of that intellectual tradition is concerned, the name of one individual stands out, namely that of Otto von Gierke. For it is Gierke, above all others, who has done most to explore this theme, as it is explored in the writings of a myriad number of authors from the time of Aristotle down to the end of the 18th Century.[51] All scholars who are interested in this theme owe an enormous debt to Gierke and his writings, not least because of the immense amount of intellectual labour that has gone into them.[52]

Contributors to the intellectual tradition that is identified and explored by Gierke have focused on those intermediate societies, or corporations, that are located in what Hegel terms refers to in his *Philosophy of Right* as the sphere of civil society, that social space that exists between the household and the state. In particular, they have considered the relationship that ought to exist between these societies and the state.[53] Of particular importance, here, is the question of the extent to which these intermediate societies should be regarded as autonomous, and as having an independent life of their own. Ought they to be left alone, free to go their own way, and not be interfered with by the laws of the state? Or alternatively, at the opposite extreme, might they legitimately be regarded as being nothing more than arms of the state? Indeed, might they justifiably be suppressed altogether, because the corporate interests with which they are associated are deemed to conflict with those of the state, which have priority over them? However, these are not the only questions that are of interest to the thinkers associated with the corporatist tradition in the history of political thought. For in addition to considering how these intermediate societies ought to be related, not so much to the state, but rather to one another, they have also taken an interest in the question of their internal organization and the relationship that ought to exist between their members, especially between their ordinary members and their administrative officials. They have addressed the issue of the internal politics of the institutions of civil society and of citizenship, that is to say the involvement of their members in the process of decision making or policy making that takes place within them.

MacIntyre has been critical of existing social institutions because they are oriented towards external rather than, as they should be, towards the internal goods of the corresponding practice. However, for those familiar with the corporatist political tradition, there are other issues which are also important for critics of contemporary social institutions. One of these has to do with the question of the internal structure and organization of these institutions and of the associated practices. So far as existing social institutions are concerned, it might be argued that their internal structure is currently based on the principles of order, hierarchy and authority. They are what Hugo Grotius refers to in his *Laws of War and Peace* (1625) as 'unequal societies,' as opposed to 'equal societies.'[54] Grotius associates unequal societies with what, he says, 'may be called a right of superiority' and equal societies with 'the right of equality.'[55] In the case of Grotius's unequal societies, because they are hierarchically ordered and rest upon

the principle of authority, decision making within them is top down rather than bottom up. A key question, here, is whether MacIntyre thinks that a similar hierarchical ordering of social institutions today is a good or a bad thing. Is this at least one of his reasons for subjecting existing social institutions to an ethical critique? Would MacIntyre agree that at least one of the defects that might be associated with the corruption of practices, in and through the process of their institutionalization, is the introduction of the principles of order, hierarchy and authority within them? If so, does this imply that an appropriate response to this problem would be to call for the democratization of existing social institutions and the introduction, or perhaps the re-introduction, of the ideal of citizenship within them? Such an argument should be of interest to those who have an interest in virtue ethics, especially in the writings of MacIntyre, and who are working in the area of business ethics,[56] or critical management studies.[57]

CONCLUSION

One reason for taking an interest in the issues discussed above is that they are of course still with us. To illustrate this point I shall refer to the example of a particular social institution, within the field of education, namely that of the university. The work of John Neville Figgis, especially his *Churches in the Modern State*, which was published in 1914, is important in this regard. In this text Figgis addresses a number of the issues identified earlier as being of interest to corporatist political thought.[58] His particular concern is with the autonomy of churches in relation to the state. However, Figgis appreciates that what he has to say about that issue has implications for other corporate societies, such as universities, also. For example he refers at one point to 'the educational struggle' in society that, in his view, was taking place in the early 20th Century over the issue of the autonomy of universities and other institutions of education against the authority of the state.[59] A similar work, if it were written today, might perhaps have the title *Universities in the Modern State*.

Of particular importance, in this connection, is the issue of the kind of politics that is associated with these educational institutions, their internal structure and organization and the decision making processes that take place within them. Again employing the terminology of Hugo Grotius, ought they to be equal societies or unequal societies? In order to address these questions today, from an Aristotelian perspective, the conceptual distinction that is drawn by MacIntyre in *After Virtue* between the external goods of an institution and the internal goods of a practice seems to me to be particularly valuable.[60] MacIntyre has said that 'when an institution – a university, say' is 'the bearer of a tradition of practice or practices,' then 'its common life will be partly, but in a centrally important way, constituted by a continuous argument' that is engaged in by their members 'as to what a university is and ought to be.'[61] This ongoing conversation touches on issues that do not have anything directly to do with the state, but which are nevertheless most definitely political, in some sense of the term, precisely because they have to do with a form of citizenship.

These issues possess a vital practical as well as a theoretical significance for all of those who are studying and working in universities today.[62] For those who work within universities, in whatever capacity, it is here that it is most necessary to develop and apply the principles of a practical or realistic utopianism, inspired by some of the more progressive ideas that are to be found in the writings of Aristotle, which we might appropriate and put to a more critical use from that which Aristotle himself intended. Alasdair MacIntyre's ideas regarding practices and institutions, suitably adapted, have a significant contribution to make to this project. They provide us with resources for developing an ethical critique of managers, of management and of managerialism, and of the specific form of power with which they are associated, not only in universities but in other social institutions also. Such a critique involves an examination of

the ideas which are employed by managers in their efforts to legitimate their activities. It involves an examination of managerialism as a political ideology, a subject which hitherto has been neglected by the majority of students of the various political ideologies.[63]

NOTES

[1]There are one or two exceptions. See, for example, Andrius Bielskis, 'Teleology and Utopia in Alasdair MacIntyre's Ethics and Politics,' *Politikos sociologija, Sociologija. Mintis ir veiksmas,* 1 (2008), pp. 48-59; and John Dobson, 'Utopia Reconsidered: The Modern Firm as Institutional Ideal,' *Philosophy of Management,* 7, 1 (2008), pp. 67-75.

[2]Timothy Chappell, 'Utopias and the Art of the Possible,' *Analyse & Kritik,* 30 (2008), pp. 179-203.

[3]Paul Blackledge & Kelvin Knights eds., *Virtue and Politics; Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism* (Notre Dame University Press, 2011).

[4]Alasdair MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' in Blackledge & Knight eds., *Virtue and Politics; Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism,* pp. 11-19.

[5]See Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre,' in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990), pp. 216-36, esp. pp.232-35; Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice: What Holds Them Apart?' in *Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Vol. I, pp. 104-22, at pp. 111-12; Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas,' *Selected Essays*, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 41-63.

[6]Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007 [1981]), 3, p. 23.

[7]MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3, p. 23.

[8]MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 9, p. 116.

[9]MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 9, p. 116.

[10]MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 14, pp. 187-203; see also Kelvin Knight, 'Practices: The Aristotelian Concept,' *Analyse & Kritik*, 30 (2008), pp. 317-29;

[11]For this see Kelvin Knight, 'Goods,' *Philosophy of Management*, 7, 1 (2008), pp. 107-22.

[12]I have in mind St. Augustine's influence on the ideas of those anarchist and utopian members of the Christian sects of the late medieval and early modern periods. For this see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millennarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Paladin Books, 1878 [1957]); and Michael G. Baylor ed. & trans., *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[13]Fyodor Dostoevsky, 'The Grand Inquisitor,' in *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans David McDuff (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003 [1880]), Book V, Chapter 5, pp. 322-44. See also Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Panther, 1983 [1959]), pp. 186-87; Ivan Illich, 'The Vanishing Clergyman,' in *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution,* intro Erich Fromm (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 59-79, and Ivan Illich, 'The Powerless Church,' in *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution,* pp. 81-88. My thanks to Peter McMylor for drawing my attention to the work of Illich.

[14]Kelvin Knight, 'Revolutionary Aristotelianism,' in Blackledge & Knight eds., *Virtue and Politics: Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism,* pp. 20-34, at p. 26.

[15]Knight, 'Revolutionary Aristotelianism,' p. 31.

[16]Knight, 'Revolutionary Aristotelianism,' p. 34.

[17]Knight, 'Revolutionary Aristotelianism,' p. 34.

[18]Alasdair MacIntyre, 'A Partial Response to My Critics,' in John Horton & Susan Mendus eds., *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 283-304, at p. 295; Knight, 'Revolutionary Aristotelianism,' p. 34. I discuss Hegel and utopianism in 'The "Struggle for Recognition" in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the Idea of Utopia,' a paper presented to the annual conference of The Utopian Studies Society of Europe, Ralahine Centre, University of Limerick, 3rd-5th July, 2008; and in Tony Burns, 'Realism and Utopianism in Hegel's

Political Thought: National Sovereignty, International Relations and the Idea of a "World State",' Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice, School of Politics & International Relations, University of Nottingham, Working Paper Series, No. 8.

[19]R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963 [1935]), p. 380.

[20]Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (London: Palgrave, 2013), pp. xvii.

[21]Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice: What Holds Them Apart?,' *Selected Essays*, Vol. I, pp. 104-22.

[22]MacIntyre, 'Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice: What Holds Them Apart?,' p. 111.

[23]MacIntyre, 'Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice: What Holds Them Apart?,' p. 111.

[24]MacIntyre, 'Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice: What Holds Them Apart?,' p. 111.

[25]MacIntyre, 'Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice: What Holds Them Apart?,' p. 111.

[26]MacIntyre, 'Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice: What Holds Them Apart?,' p. 111.

[27]Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre,' p. 232.

[28]MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre,' p. 234.

[29]MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre,' p. 234.

[30]MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre,' p. 234.

[31]MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre,' p. 235.

[32]MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre,' p. 234.

[33]MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre,' p. 234.

[34]MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' p. 16.

[35]MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' p. 16.

[36]MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' p. 16.

[37]MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' p. 17.

[38]MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' p. 17.

[39]MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' p. 17.

[40]Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Neera Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory* (Delhi: Sage, 1990); Michael Edwards ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 15-28; John Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea,* 2nd ed. (NYU Press, 2017 [1999]).

[41]MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' p. 16.

[42]MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' p. 16.

[43]MacIntyre, 'How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary: Ethics, Resistance and Utopia,' p. 16.

[44]MacIntyre, 'Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas,' p. 63.

[45]See Ivan Illich, 'Institutional Spectrum,' in *Deschooling Society* (Hrmondsworth: Penguin 1973), pp. 57-68.

[46]See Ivan Illich, *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution*. Intro Erich Fromm. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971); Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971); Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1973); Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health* (London: Penguin Books, 1984 [1976]).

[47]See Ivan Illich, 'The Vanishing Clergyman,' in *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution,* pp. 59-79, and Ivan Illich, 'The Powerless Church,' in *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution,* pp. 81-88.

[48]Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society,* p. 31.

[49]Fyodor Dostoevsky, 'The Grand Inquisitor,' in *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans David McDuff (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003 [1880]), Book V, Chapter 5, pp. 322-44. See also Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Panther, 1983 [1959]), pp. 186-87.

[50]Ivan Illich, 'Institutional Spectrum,' in *Deschooling Society* (Penguin 1973), pp. 57-68

[51]See Otto von Gierke (1841-1921), *Das Deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht,* or *The German Law of Associations*, which was published in four volumes between 1868 and 1913. There is no complete English translation of Gierke's *magnum opus*. There are, however, English translations of particular sections of it. Volume 1 is entitled *The Legal and Moral History of the German Fellowship* (1868). Volume 2 is entitled *The History of the German Concept of Corporation* (1873). Volume 3 is entitled

The Ancient and Medieval Doctrine of the State and of Corporations and its Reception in Germany (1881). Volume 4 is entitled *The Theory of the State and of Corporations in Modern Times* (1913). Extracts from the first two volumes are available in Otto von Gierke, *Community in Historical Perspective*, translated by Mary Fischer, selected and edited by Antony Black (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). §11 of Volume 3 was translated by F. W. Maitland as *Political Theories of the Middle Ages,* trans & intro. F. W. Maitland (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958 [1900]). §§ 14-18 of Volume 4 appeared as *Natural Law and the Theory of Society: 1500-1800,* ed. & trans. Sir Ernest Barker (Beacon Press, 1957/1934 [1913]). See also Otto von Gierke, *Associations and Law: The Classical and Early Christian Stages*, translated with an introduction by George Heiman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); and Otto von Gierke, *Johannes Althusius and the Development of the Natural Law Theory of the State* (1880), English translation under the title *The Development of Political Theory,* trans. Bernard Freyd (H. Fertig, 1966/1939).

[52]For secondary literature on Gierke see Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London: Methuen, 1984); and John D. Lewis, *The Genossenschaft-Theory of Otto von Gierke: A Study in Political Thought* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1935).

[53]For literature that follows in the footsteps of Gierke see J. N. Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State,* 2nd ed. (Thoemmes Press, 1997 [1914]); Paul Q, Hirst ed., *The Pluralist Theory of the State: Selected Writings of G.D.H. Cole, J.N. Figgis and H.J. Laski* (London: Routledge, 1993); David Nicholls, *The Pluralist State* (London: Macmillan, 1975); David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [1997]).

[54]Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, in 3 Volumes, ed. Richard Tuck (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005 [1625]), Book I, Chapter I, §3, 2, pp. 136-37.

[55]Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I, I, §3, 2, pp. 136-37.

[56]Ron Beadle, 'Why Business Cannot be a Practice,' *Analyse & Kritik: Zeitschrift fur Sozialtheorie*, 30, 1 (2008), pp. 229-42; Ron Beadle & Geoff Moore, 'MacIntyre on Virtue and Organization,' *Organization Studies,* 27, 3 (2006), pp. 323-40; Geoff Moore, 'On the Implications of the Practice-Institution Distinction: MacIntyre and the Application of Modern Virtue Ethics to Business,' *Business Ethics Quarterly,* 12, 1 (2002), pp. 19-32; Geoff Moore, 'Corporate Character: Modern Virtue Ethics and the Virtuous Corporation,' in *Business Ethics Quarterly,* 15, 4 (2005), pp. 659-85.

[57]K. B. Brewer, 'Management as a Practice: A Response to Alasdair MacIntyre,' *Journal of Business Ethics*, 16, 8 (1997), pp. 825-33; Samantha Coe & Ron Beadle, 'Could We Know a Practice-Embodying Institution if We Saw One?' *Philosophy of Management*, 7, 1 (2008), pp. 9-19; I. Mangham, 'MacIntyre and the Manager,' *Organization,* 2, 2 (1995), pp. 181-204; D. McCann and M. L. Brownsberger, 'Managements as a Social Practice: Rethinking Business Ethics After MacIntyre,' *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1990), pp. 223-345; Geoff Moore, 'Re-Imagining the Morality of Management: A Modern Virtue Ethics Approach,' *Business Ethics Quarterly,* 18, 4 (2008), pp. 483-511; Geoff Moore, *Virtue at Work: Ethics for Individuals, Managers, and Organizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Geoff Moore & G. Grandy (2017), 'Bringing Morality Back in: Institutional Theory and MacIntyre, *Journal of Management Inquiry* **26,** 2, pp. 146-164.

[58]See especially Figgis, 'A Free Church in a Free State,' *Churches in the Modern State,* pp. 3-53; and 'The Great Leviathan,' *Churches in the Modern State,* pp. 54-98.

[59]Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State,* p. 252.

[60]I have discuss this aspect of MacIntyre's work in Tony Burns, 'Revolutionary Aristotelianism? The Political Thought of Aristotle, Marx and MacIntyre,' in Paul Blackledge & Kelvin Knight eds., *Virtue and Politics: Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), pp. 35-53.

[61]MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* p. 222; see also Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre,' in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Duckworth, 1990), pp. 216-36; Ronald Beiner, 'The Parochial and the Universal: MacIntyre's Idea of the University,' *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 67, 2 (2013), pp. 169-82; John Rist, 'MacIntyre's Idea of a University: Theory and Practice,' *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 67, 2 (2013), pp. 157-68.

[62]See for example John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University,* ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996); also Edward Bacon, *Neo-Collegiality: Restoring Academic Engagement in the Managerial University* (The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, 2014); Stefan Collini, *What are Universities For?* (London: Penguin Books, 2012); Bruce Macfarlane, 'The Disengaged Academic: the Retreat from Citizenship,' *Higher Education Quarterly*, 59, 4 (2005), pp.296-312; Duke Maskell & Ian Robinson, *The New Idea of a University* (London: Imprint Academic, 2002); Mark Taylor, 'Shared Governance in the Modern University,' *Higher Education Quarterly,* 67, 1 (2013), pp. 80-94.

[63]See W. E. Enteman, *Managerialism: The Emergence of a New Ideology* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1993; Judith A. Merkle, *Management and Ideology: The Legacy of the International Scientific Movement (*Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980);   and Martin Parker, *Against Management: Organization in the Age of Managerialism* (Cambridge: Polity Press).