Ethics

Rand and MacIntyre on Moral Agency[1]

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. . . the fact that a living entity is, determines what it ought to do.
– Ayn Rand (1964, 17)

Introduction

How should the modern self be characterized? Charles Taylor's (2004, 1) view that modernity itself is social science's central problematic may be seen as emblematic of the unsettled state of social science. In the twenty-first century, living in an era alleged to be postmodern, there is no settled definition of the modern. Or should that be 'moderns'? For it is one characteristic of modernity that it presents a plurality of styles—the existentialist, the feminist, the revolutionary, the leisured and so on but it is of their essence that they share the claim to a freedom unbound by essential nature or objective reality. For both Ayn Rand and Alasdair MacIntyre, the absence of such notions renders moral agency incoherent.

This paper considers Rand's and MacIntyre's responses and in one sense its purpose is to justify their pairing in the context of a discussion of the moral agency. Why choose such apparent opponents (both substantively and stylistically) as Rand, the novelist and champion of capitalism, and MacIntyre, the philosopher and Thomistic Aristotelian, for a consideration of moral agency in the modern social order?

Indeed, whilst academic interest in Rand finds Aristotelian (Johnson and Rasmussen 2000; Walsh 2002; Rasmussen 2006) and Christian (Robbins 1997) critiques alongside those from enlightenment discourses (e.g., from socialism [Aune 2002] and feminism [Gladstein and Sciabarra 1999]), this paper is the first to explicitly

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contrast Rand with MacIntyre's Thomistic Aristotelianism.[2]

I shall argue in response that we can learn much from the many points of agreement in their positions, not least of which is the suggestion that the only form of a moral philosophy that MacIntyre takes to be coherent, and which enlightenment thought has abjured, is in fact exemplified by Rand.

How should I proceed with such an unlikely endeavor? The paper begins by presenting evidence from the work of both Rand and MacIntyre in respect of the conceptual incoherence that characterizes the modern self. Whilst their terminology differs with Rand writing of their confusion in terms of "mixed premises" and MacIntyre referring to "compartmentalization," I shall provide evidence to show significant resemblance between both the substance of their claims and important elements of their thinking on the relation between this conceptual confusion and the pattern of modern social action and institutionalization. My focus in this argument is with that central character in the modern drama, the business executive, and this for the good reason that it provides much of the subject matter for both Rand and MacIntyre.

The paper proceeds with a necessarily but perhaps improperly brief sketch of Rand's and MacIntyre's radically variant solutions for the modern self, both of which require the repair of conceptual confusion and institutional structures but in remarkably different directions. The paper concludes that Rand's work is innocent of the incoherence for which MacIntyre has condemned much enlightenment thinking and suggests that their moral and institutional visions present two coherent alternatives to it.

Rand on Moral Agency

The work of novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand (1905–1982) has sold in the tens of millions. In a Library of Congress-Book of the Month Club survey, her novel *Atlas Shrugged* was ranked second only to the Bible in its influence on respondents' beliefs (Sciabarra 1995, 3). Nevertheless, while such empirics may be used in a claim that Rand was the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century, her rejection of and by the philosophical profession undermines this suggestion. Recent Rand scholarship—in particular Chris Matthew Sciabarra's book, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*, which places her

thought in the context of the Russian philosophical tradition, and that of contributors to *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* (since its inception in 1999)—shares at least one purpose in encouraging her serious consideration by academic philosophy. While some academic philosophers have subjected her work to critical scrutiny (Hospers 1967; Nozick 1971; Den Uyl and Rasmussen 1984), these are a small minority. One irony of this is that along with MacIntyre (1985, 36), Rand regards the failures of philosophy to be at the root of the fragmentation and incoherence that characterizes the thinking of modernity and that such incoherence is itself at the root of its social and political problems (e.g., Rand 1982, 1–12; Rand 1989, 184–85).

In contrast to such incoherence, Rand provides a distinctive philosophy with fictional and nonfictional work presenting her position on metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics, aesthetics and the relations among them. Hers is an integrated schematic that asserts the centrality of philosophical belief to both the performance and understanding of human action and presents a guide for both individual behavior and institutional structure for what she takes to be a determinate human nature in a determinate (objective) reality. Her commitment to relating philosophical positions to practice resonates with MacIntyre's regular and withering critique of the absence of practical orientations from enlightenment and post-enlightenment philosophy (see, for example, Macintyre 1964, 5–6; 1985, 51–61, [1953] 1995, xxviii–xxx). Rand's fiction provides readers with portraits of integrated and heroic moral beings whose practical rationality is both philosophically informed and consistently applied to their decision-making. They contrast with the non-philosophical, confused or cowardly moderns attempting but ultimately failing to frustrate them.

What sort of heroism is this? Rand's heroes know first of all that they need to think and act in accordance with what she takes to be their rational purpose. That is, each recognizes that their distinctive human capability is rationality and their only chance of leading integrated and purposeful lives is to be as fully and consistently rational as possible. For each of them, the answer to the question 'How ought I to live?' is always implicit and sometimes explicit in their practical reasoning in the face of alternatives. For example, we find architect Howard Roark, hero of *The Fountainhead* (Rand 1943),

rejecting lucrative external goods (to borrow a term from MacIntyre) of money and reputation rather than incorporate design features that are not his own in work that bears his name. His own integrity and pride in achievement counts more highly with him than external reward and this attitude he describes as 'selfish' (177).

This relationship between rationality, human purpose and selfishness requires us to consider Rand's understanding of the fact-value dichotomy in her move from empirical claim to moral assertion. Rand (1967, 23) asserts that the fact-value, is-ought dichotomy is false because the facts of man's nature attest to man's purposes and the values that *should* inform him:

> the good is objective—i.e., determined by the nature of reality, but [is] to be discovered by man's mind.

For both Rand and MacIntyre, rationality is an essential prerequisite for, and in large part the constitution of, man's purpose. As such, Rand's case for man's rational nature is therefore also an account of the requirements for its flourishing in terms of both individual virtues (Rand [1957] 1992, 1018) and the necessary institutional environment of unbridled capitalism (Rand 1964, 11–35):

> The *moral* justification of capitalism does not lie in the altruist claim that it represents the best way to achieve "the common good." It is true that capitalism does—if that catchphrase has any meaning—but this is merely a secondary consequence. The moral justification of capitalism lies in the fact that it is the only system consonant with man's rational nature. (20)

If this account of Rand's case is correct then it follows that Rand withstands the criticisms MacIntyre levels against modern thinkers, particularly Gewirth (MacIntyre [1981] 1985, 66–68, but see Gewirth 1984 for a response), whose claims for a morality of individual rights are not justified by their factual assertions in respect of human rationality. Why is this?

MacIntyre's *After Virtue* contends that without a notion of essential human nature involving a *telos* (purpose), the defining feature

of ethics (and the moral philosophy that adequately theorizes it) in transforming man as he is into "man-as-he could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos*" is lost (54). This argument is reflected in debates in the *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* around the status of Rand's "choice to live" as a basis for morality. MacIntyre's position is clearly echoed here in the work of those who have argued for the acceptance of the neo-Aristotelian view that "unless living as a flourishing rational animal is a *telos* that provides the ultimate guide for our desires and choices, then the possibility of providing a rational foundation for morality is lost" (Rasmussen 2006, 324).

In addition, Macintyre argues that a notion of essential human nature must be supplemented by additional arguments before it can be used as part of a justification for a set of institutional requirements (such as those required by some notion of rights) and this move is commonly neglected.

Rand makes no such errors. Her view of essential human nature takes the form of 'man-as-he-could-be-if–he-realized-his-*telos*' and therefore meets MacIntyre's formal requirements for a coherent moral philosophy. Similarly the case he makes for the need for additional arguments to justify the move from description of man's purpose to the conditions for its achievement is also met inasmuch as Rand's case for individual rights is not deployed as a logical corollary to her claims in respect of *telos*. It takes the form that only in the context of a particular set of social practices—namely those of uncoerced trade supported by the maintenance of property rights—can such a realization be possible. The form of this argument corresponds closely with MacIntyre's case for the type of political-institutional arrangement he commends to us.

The recognition of such an environment as necessary for individuals to fully realize their potential rationality is pivotal to the plot-lines and purpose of Rand's fictional work. The mode of presentation of such work as fictional accounts of social practices and the institutions that house them is similarly unconventional in the arena of modern philosophy but at home within MacIntyre's insistence on the practical and social roots of intelligible ethical systems, given that morality is always the morality of some social group engaging in some practical activity (MacIntyre [1981] 1985, 225–26).

One of the lessons that Rand's characters discover in their

fictional journeys is the requirement to act on their own rationality and to inhabit a social world in which self-interest, trade and private property are features if they are to realize their purpose. The political-institutional requirements for such flourishing (and here the argument is significantly and perhaps damagingly abbreviated) are those that allow individuals to use their minds free from any interference from others however organized (in gangs, churches, unions or the state). Private property is both exemplification and guarantor of this freedom and it is the achievement of modernity (though Rand did not use this term) and particularly that of the American constitution to institutionalize and protect property rights and hence the possibility of individuals achieving their *telos*.

Modernity's characteristic failure is to misunderstand or evade the nature and requirements of this achievement (Rand 1964, 37). In her appeals to younger readers in a number of nonfiction writings (particularly those collected in 1961, 1964, 1967, 1975, 1982, 1989), she describes these failures as cultural characteristics they would have to challenge. In this culture, individuals operate from mixed premises in which conceptual incoherence sees them acting on reason in some (concrete) contexts but not in others. Her 'open letter' to Boris Spassky is perhaps the most forceful example of this argument (Rand 1975, 52–57). The result is that their virtues are critically undermined (Rand 1964, 144–49). Associated with such failures are business and political leaders who falsely claim "service" as their purpose rather than profit (Rand 1964, 184; 1989, 152–53) and the state's claiming of purposes that cannot but infringe on individual freedoms and rights (Rand 1964, 140–44). The consequences of such "mixed premises" for individuals and economies are manifested in *Atlas Shrugged* in the character and plot-line attending her conflicted hero Hank Rearden.

Rearden is introduced to readers as a brilliant industrialist and scientist who built his company Rearden Steel with nothing but personal ingenuity and courage. From beginning as a mineworker at the age of 14, he bought his first iron ore mine at 30 and subsequently revolutionized steel industry processes and standards and achieved market dominance (Rand [1957] 1992, 30–32). His fictional journey has latterly been compared to that of the (real life) Ken Iverson, the creator of steel mini-mills—a development that has restructured the steel industry and led to both large-scale mill closures and the opening

of thousands of mini-mills worldwide (Greiner and Kinni 2001, 54).

Rearden's greatest achievement occurs in the laboratory where after ten years of experimentation he formulates and forges a new metal, Rearden Metal, greatly stronger than steel but at half its weight (Rand [1957] 1992, 86–87). Rearden understands the value of such a creation not only to his own business but also to the consumers of its outputs in terms of lower costs, greater durability and enhanced flexibility. Rearden Metal is nevertheless rejected by government agencies and unions as unsafe (299). His family regard it as further evidence that his mind and his business are all that count as values to him (35–43). Despite his ability, productiveness, wealth and notoriety, Rearden is introduced to readers as conflicted. His pride is accompanied by acceptance of some of the criticisms others level at him in respect of his failure to have any values other than the material (87) and a contempt for his own desires (204–5, 254–55).

Rand demonstrates through plot developments and a series of discursive encounters between Rearden and the more fully and consistently rational and individualist industrialist Francisco d'Anconia (to whom she gives her own voice) that these problems are symptoms of Rearden's failure to consistently apply a set of values to himself and his relationships. His life is lived in compartments in which his pride is rooted only in his productiveness and guilt has accompanied his desires. He learns through the course of the novel that his error is essentially rooted in his assumption of a mind-body dualism (564–65, 855–60) that has led him to contrast what he considers to be morally right with what he wants (such a contrast marks a key element of irrationality for Rand). The consequence of such mixed premises is *and must be* emotional turmoil.

As evidenced in notes on character and plot development in her journals[3] (Rand 1997, 405,427, 514–15), Rearden's failure to achieve his own *telos* is a dramatic vehicle to illustrate the personal consequences of mixed premises, namely unhappiness. Rand asserts that the achievement of one's *telos* is possible only for the consistently rational individualist for whom mind and body are integrated. This, the form of properly human happiness for both Rand (1961, 123,132; 1964, 32) and MacIntyre ([1981] 1985, 148–49) is only possible for the virtuous and it is only the virtuous who can distinguish between what they want and what is good for them in a way that makes for its

achievement.

Why do moderns fail to become the consistently rational individualists to which their natures should propel them and in which the only properly human happiness consists? Rand does not address this specific question but elements of the answer can be found in a number of her writings. Though no determinist, she holds that the values inherent in the culture and especially those that govern early education (Rand 1975, 187–239) overpower all but the most capable:

> The majority of men are not intellectual initiators or originators; they accept what the culture offers them. (Rand 1989, 39)

Where this culture offers altruism and mysticism in place of self-interest and reason as Rand defines them and as she holds ours to do, most moderns accept it, some through never identifying it.[4] Rand (1989, 32–40) pours most scorn on the more intellectually capable of these as being guilty of moral cowardice in deciding to accept the views of the collective as authoritative.

The consequences of undermining one's own rational faculties by the inclusion in one's decision-making of irrational criteria such as those provided by an altruistic stance towards others or the belief in God are illustrated most vividly in *Atlas Shrugged*. The novel illustrates the confusion and misery that not only do but must result from decisions to remain in relationships that should be abandoned for fear of 'hurting' others, working for 'good causes' that bring no personal satisfaction and giving up on the possibility of a rational existence altogether. Rand would later adopt Nathaniel Branden's concept of "social metaphysics" to characterize those whose view of reality substitutes the opinions of others for the results of one's own judgment (Sciabarra 1995, 304–5), an understanding that bears a striking similarity to MacIntyre's critique of Goffman (MacIntyre [1981] 1985, 115–16).

For Rand (1964, 152–52; 1967, 144–49; 1989, 123–24), individual mixed premises and societal mixed economies are doomed refusals to recognize the contradiction between capitalism's requirement that individuals act on what they rationally determine to be their own interests and the altruistic goal of service for others. Once again,

MacIntyre agrees. He argues that modern Americans are:

> brought up to give their allegiance to two distinctive sets of norms. One of these enjoins each individual to pursue her or his own happiness, to learn how to be successful in competing against others for position, power and affluence, to consume and enjoy consumption, and to resist any invasion of her or his rights. The other set instructs individuals to have regard for the welfare of others and for the general good, to meet the needs of those who are especially deprived, and even to be prepared on some particular occasions to sacrifice one's immediate happiness for the sake of the happiness of particular others. On many occasions these two sets of norms are not in conflict. But in others, and among them some of the more significant in individual lives, Americans not only recognize that such norms make rival and incompatible demands for their allegiance, but also that they possess no third, higher-order set of norms that would enable them to make a rationally justifiable choice between these conflicting demands. (MacIntyre 2006b, 112)

Having seen the outlines of Rand's understanding of the way in which the modern self acts from mixed premises and the reasons why such "irrationality" persists we turn then to MacIntyre.

MacIntyre on Moral Agency

Regarded as a "major contemporary thinker" alongside Foucault and Habermas by Charles Taylor (1992, ix) and the subject of a recent volume in the series "Cambridge Modern Philosophers" (Murphy 2003), MacIntyre has authored publications now stretching back for more than half a century, and barely a year passes without a volume having been published about or collection made of his work (e.g., Perreau-Saussine 2005; MacIntyre 2006a; MacIntyre 2006b; D'Andrea 2007; Knight 2007; and Blackledge and Davidson 2008).

This work has moved through a number of stages (interview in Knight 1998, 267–69), the culmination of which has been the advocacy of a form of Thomistic Aristotelianism beginning with the 1981 publication of his seminal *After Virtue*. For our purposes,

however, it is critical to note two earlier papers (1977 and 1979) which came at a time of "sometimes painful self-critical reflection" (Reddiford and Miller 1991 cited in Knight 1998, 268). These presaged *After Virtue* in respect of their argument as to the failure of both the ideologies and institutions of modernity to present the modern self with a coherent and actionable self-understanding. For it is in these papers that compartmentalization was first deployed to describe the incoherence of the moral self-understandings of business executives. This finding was presented in the context of empirical work carried out with colleagues at the University of Notre Dame on the morality of the power generation industry (Goodpaster and Sayer 1979).

What does MacIntyre mean by "compartmentalization"? He argues that the role of the executive (regardless of sector or industry) is geared to the performance of utilitarian calculations designed to enhance organizational effectiveness. However, while systematically excluding from his purview considerations "which he might feel obliged to recognise were he acting as parent, as consumer, or as citizen" (MacIntyre 1979, 126), the executive also carries roles as parent, consumer and citizen. A number of consequences follow from this, not least of which is the addition of a new virtue—that of adaptability—to the list of required virtues inasmuch as the executives adopted different codes of behavior towards business associates, family members, and fellow citizens. In each of these relationships, not only are different values deployed but different modes of reasoning, different understanding of what constituted a relevant fact and so on. By 1999, MacIntyre's definition of compartmentalization is formalized as follows:

> Compartmentalization goes beyond that differentiation of roles and institutional structures that characterizes every social order and it does so by the extent to which each distinct sphere comes to have its own role structure governed by its own specific norms in relative independence of other such spheres. Within each sphere those norms dictate what kinds of consideration are to be treated as relevant to decision-making and which are to be excluded. (MacIntyre 1999a, 322)

How does compartmentalization develop? In 1964, MacIntyre (1964, 13) asserted that "[t]he faceless men of the contemporary corporation are themselves instruments not by virtue of some act of will of their own . . . but by virtue of the *structure of the corporation*" (emphasis added). In his most recent account, such determinism is heavily conditioned, although "there is indeed a type of social structure that warrants for those who inhabit it a plea of diminished responsibility" (MacIntyre 1999a, 325), the plea is not accepted for contemporary managers. Their ability to change roles and role requirements as they move between social settings is understood as a "dramatic feat" (326).

Moreover, MacIntyre now asserts that its achievement necessarily involves a deliberate termination of the agent's practical reasoning in order to resist *inescapable* questions that might undermine the conduct of the managerial role. For MacIntyre, this habitual discipline of intellectual abstinence requires the active cooperation of the individual manager who is thus regarded as a co-author of his or her own divided state (327). Neither the mixed and potentially conflicting norms with which they were brought up (as we saw earlier) nor the compartmentalization inherent in their institutional environment is sufficient to acquit them of personal responsibility for their judgments.

The importance of MacIntyre's work with practicing managers is in part that it introduced the contrast between what he takes to be the partitioned morality of corporate modernity and what he takes to be its alternative, the integrated morality of practice-based communities: "a total order which both integrates diverse roles and subordinate orders" (MacIntyre 1979, 132). He closed his 1979 paper with a question that dominates the pages of *After Virtue*:

> What positively would have to be the case to provide the conditions for a society in which *man as such* and of rational criteria could have a place? To answer this question would require more than a single paper. (132)

Compartmentalization thus plays a more significant role in MacIntyre's later work than might have been evident in the 1970s. From *After Virtue* onwards (particularly MacIntyre 1988 and 1990), we

learn that it requires an historical reconstruction of the development of moral philosophy. While the abbreviation of the argument here is such that it cannot avoid distortion, MacIntyre essentially holds that Enlightenment philosophy's abstraction of moral rules from the requirements of social practices necessitated such a fragmentation. By the modern era, moral rules come to be seen as almost freely floating, available for individuals and institutions to employ *inter alia* utilitarianism in the workplace, a form of Kantian deontology at home and some sort of social contractarian position as citizens.

If conceptual incoherence contributes to this, the absence of appropriate institutions completes the process, for moderns characteristically lack those social milieus in which such inconsistencies are systematically put to the test and within which individuals might become aware of the limitations such inconsistencies place on their effective moral agency (MacIntyre 1999a, *passim*; 2006b, 101–21). In Rand, we find that Hank Rearden needs the interventions of questioning others in order to identify and overcome his inconsistencies. But characteristically, moderns do not encounter such others in any cultural or social milieu that they would normally frequent and this deprivation contributes to their moral downfall (MacIntyre 1999a, *passim*). It also provides a reason to condemn the institutional order of modernity, both capitalist market and bureaucratic state.

Without such encounters, moderns fail to develop the virtues of integrity and constancy required by moral agency:

> Where integrity requires of those who possess it, that they exhibit the same moral character in different social contexts, constancy requires that those who possess it pursue the same goods through extended periods of time, not allowing the requirements of changing social contexts to distract them from their commitments. (MacIntyre 1999a, 318)

In place of such virtues, modern agents deploy fragments of moral schemes in compartmentalized social contexts, none of which requires them to account for their agency as such. In highlighting the context dependence of such fragments, MacIntyre (1979, 127) suggests an exercise in imagining the application of utilitarian reasoning to the family in which children or invalids might be made redundant. On

this point, it is fitting to return to Rand as it is precisely Hank Rearden's abandonment of his family and withdrawal of his financial support from them that dramatizes his rejection of mixed premises. What MacIntyre uses as ironic commentary—the application of the decision-making premises of trading relationships to personal and familial ones—is precisely what Rand advocates as the solution to the problem of compartmentalization. Her heroes exhibit integrity and constancy in their ruthless individualism.

Rand's Solution: The Discovery of Virtuous Selfishness

Hank Rearden overcomes his incoherence when he discovers the virtue of selfishness and applies to his family, his associates and to the agents of government the same ruthless rationality that enabled him to create Rearden Metal. Rearden simultaneously abandons his family and his business to be destroyed rather than continue to attempt to meet the contradictory demands of the state (Rand [1957] 1992, 963–99). His family, including a socialite wife and socialist brother, have long spurned his values while living from the income of his company, providing him with a mixture of criticism and disdain and relying on his sense of obligation to ensure his continued financial support. The state had claimed his support on the basis of national/social need, attempted to blackmail him and finally organized a riot at his mills in order to force him into agreeing to run his business at a loss.

In rejecting the claims of both family obligation and national/social need, Rearden becomes a fully heroic Randian figure whose integrity is manifested in applying a consistent set of characteristics across contexts. He now acts only as a trader who will exchange with others to mutual benefit. His definition of mutual benefit includes but goes no further than each party's voluntary acceptance that the trade is to their own advantage (971). He recognizes no claim as legitimate that he has not generated.

For Rand, the only set of characteristics that can be consistently held are those of a thoroughgoing individualism. Whereas MacIntyre asserts (see above) that there is no decision process commonly available for moderns to choose between the norms of individualism and altruism, Rand's argument is directed precisely to the way in which such mixed premises should be arbitrated—through an appeal

to a human nature as part of an objective order at once positive and normative. For Rand, rationality provides human nature with this distinguishing and integrating feature but its proper use requires individuals to recognize that such rationality requires them to act on their understanding of their own best interest as rational beings. The relationship between rationality, individualism, and *telos* is such that the definition of each implies the others:

> … from the wheel to the skyscraper, everything we are and everything we have comes from a single attribute of man—the function of his reasoning mind. But the mind is an attribute of the individual. (Rand 1961, 78)

This association between rationality and individualism provides Rand's argument for capitalism with its unique flavor. Rand's defense is unlike Smithian and Hayekian utilitarianism, whose justifications of capitalism flow from its ability to produce and allocate resources more efficiently than any other system of economic transactions, and both Rawlsian and Nozickian liberalisms stemming from the 'moral fiction' of universal rights. Rand's advocacy is founded in its relation to the achievement of human flourishing in the context of a distinctive human nature. The productivity of capitalism is as irrelevant to its justification for Rand (1989, 149) as it is to its condemnation by MacIntyre (2006b, 148–49). In this as in much of her work on epistemology, she is Aristotelian. The assertion of the individual's absolute claim to be directed only by the judgments of their own mind requires the freedom of others to similarly act and when we leave a newly consistent and happy Rearden in *Atlas Shrugged*, he has entered a fictional utopia to which entry is conditional upon only the following pronouncement:

> "I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man nor ask another man to live for mine." (Rand [1957] 1992, 731)

For Rand, compartmentalization is only fully overcome in a community where there is full recognition by each of the rights that are justified by their role in the flourishing of our rational nature. As

Wheeler highlights, Rand's utopia has much in common with Aristotle's "community of concord between good men" (Wheeler 1984, 94). To live well in such society requires a set of individual virtues—"rationality, independence, productivity, integrity, honesty, justice, productiveness, pride" (Rand 1961, 128). The requirement for the exercise of the virtues as integral to overcoming compartmentalization bears close comparison with MacIntyre's wider argument for the necessity of the virtues in the successful conduct of human life.

Their differences, including those of definition, are also significant. While MacIntyre ([1981] 1985, 229) argues that the egoist errs in excluding himself from human relationships, Rand's egoism requires a particular kind of human community for its achievement: "Man *is* a social being, but not in the way the looters preach" (Rand [1957] 1992, 747). For Rand, it is only in a community in which each individual understands that they and others will act only on their own self-interest, dealing with others only on the basis of trade, that the role of compartmentalization in manipulation and avoidance strategies can play no part in the achievement of objectives. Correspondingly, only in such a society can truth-telling and the behaviors emanating from the other virtues be effectively exercised in supporting and partly constituting our flourishing as rational productive beings.

MacIntyre's solution, similarly requiring a distinctive type of community and this for the same reasons as Rand, is based on a quite different principle of association.

MacIntyre's Solution: The Discovery of Dependent Rationality

For MacIntyre, the requirements of practical rationality have been (as a matter of historic record) understood variously in societies whose differences manifest themselves in the self-understandings of their subjects. In contrast to Rand whose notion of the individual and institutional requirements for human flourishing is distinctly a-historical, MacIntyre argues that our self-understandings (as part of our wider conceptual frameworks) reflect theory-laden conceptualizations themselves intimately related to the social structures we inhabit. Such self-understandings characteristically involve (though to varying degrees) decision procedures by which they are themselves put to the test so that the question 'what sort of life should I lead?' is itself

subject always to the question 'what sort of reasons should I have to choose one sort of life rather than an another?'

MacIntyre's book, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), presents the transitions between different understandings of what are to count as both reasons and reasoning in the constitution of practical rationality. This historically situated account of rationality demonstrates the way in which MacIntyre's notion of a distinctive human nature sees the self as an historical as well as biological subject, whose own conceptualization of self/other and of their relations in terms such as those of individualism and altruism are themselves the outcomes of particular theoretical and social histories. MacIntyre's agreement with Rand that individualism and altruism are the two alternatives characteristically held to be available in modernity (MacIntyre [1981] 1985, 229) is, for him, unlike Rand, but one example of the historically situated theorization of social life.

Whereas Rand presents her positive claims as a complete and final statement of man's nature and the requirements for his flourishing, MacIntyre holds that it is the continued ability of human societies to put such claims to systematic test—a test including that of the norms against which to make such a test—that is the fundamental requirement of rationality. It is in understanding the type of social arrangements that allows for this test that we discover the appropriate form of human society. The kind of closure offered by Rand's philosophy is thereby rejected.

This position has seen MacIntyre accused of relativism. As one observer has commented: "it may be MacIntyre's special distinction to strike half of his readers as an old-fashioned universalizing metaphysician (since he defends a version of tradition and teleology) while striking the other half as a dangerous relativist" (Higgins 2004, 35). We would do well therefore to attend to the ways in which the "universalising metaphysician" overcomes the compartmentalization associated with such relativism in suggesting the form of human society that allows itself to be put to such tests. It is notable that MacIntyre's own position on the demarcation between those aspects of human nature that might be termed biological and those that we might label historically situated has been amended in his more recent work (MacIntyre 1999b, x; see also Den Uyl and Rasmussen 2005, 126–27 nn. 16, 226) and it is this more recent statement that I use to

outline his position here.

MacIntyre's book, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (1999b), proposes the conditions for such a society. This is the "total order which both integrates diverse roles and subordinate orders" (MacIntyre 1979, 132), which he calls the practice-based community and describes both in terms of institutional/political requirements and in terms of the self-understandings of its participants. As we have seen, the intimacy between social arrangements and self-understandings is such that the latter characteristically and for the most part depends upon the former.

What kinds of self-understandings are these? MacIntyre's positive notion of essential (that is those elements that are not regarded as subject to historical circumstance and social structure) human nature involves three mutually supporting elements—rationality, animality, and dependency—and it is in their recognition that the possibility of an integrated sense of both self and community is established. His descriptions of rationality's historical transformations give it a quite different flavor from Rand's but for both it involves (and this again seriously abbreviates his discussion) the need to choose from alternatives and to reflect on both the reasons for such choices and the standards against which such reasons are to be judged (MacIntyre 1999b, 65–66). Similarly both see rationality as our distinctive means of avoiding threats and securing our survival, given our animal vulnerabilities. However, where MacIntyre diverges from Rand is in relation to the implications of this in respect of our ongoing dependence on others.

Whereas Rand holds that our vulnerability can be overcome to the extent that we successfully use our rationality (e.g., 1961, 78,120), MacIntyre argues that such vulnerability additionally and necessarily involves us in a variety of relationships in which we are dependent upon others to become practically rational (particularly in terms of our development as children) to maintain our practical rationality as adults (as we have seen) and to support us when our practical rationality is diminished or extinguished by infirmity (MacIntyre 1999b, *passim*). While we users of English have no virtue term covering the acknowledgment of such dependence, other language users do (120–28), and such a virtue acknowledges both that our dependencies on certain others may never be directly repaid with the corollary that we may not

be repaid by those who have depended on us. Critically, the facts of dependency are in themselves of no moral consequence. For MacIntyre, feelings of guilt or shame are an inappropriate response to the fact of our dependence upon certain others. Here the contrast with Rand could not be starker.

In what sort of a community would genuine dependencies be met and practical rationality flourish? Once again, a "community of concord between good men" (Wheeler 1984, 94) but for MacIntyre, this "practice-based community" is in complete contradistinction to Rand. For this is a community in which the relationships required by the principle 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need' are at least acknowledged as standards (MacIntyre 1999b, 129–30). For Rand, such a society would be a slave state in which the virtuously able would be continuously required to serve the needs of the viciously inept. The plot-line of *Atlas Shrugged* centers on the decision of such virtuously able to withdraw their services from such a society, a decision that begins with one individual refusing to participate in the introduction of a plan to introduce 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need' in a single factory (Rand [1957] 1992, 672). The subsequent history of the factory prefigures that which befalls the world as the book progresses. It is a descent into chaos in which workers exaggerate their needs and reduce their levels of performance to the point where less and less income is being distributed across ever increasing claims of need, a process accompanied by moral disintegration (664–72), described by one of its victims:

> "We saw that we'd been given a law to live by, a *moral* law, they called it, which punished those who observed it—for observing it. The more you tried to live up to it, the more you suffered; the more you cheated it, the bigger reward you got. Your honesty was like a tool left at the mercy of the next man's dishonesty. The honest ones paid, the dishonest collected. The honest lost, the dishonest won. How long could men stay good under this sort of a law of goodness?" (665)

MacIntyre's response to this scenario would be interesting to

know but I would hazard the contention that he would regard this as not unlikely if the social structure that was being imposed were so divergent from the self-understandings of its subjects. So long as individuals (as in Rand's illustration) were acting on what appeared to them to be self-interested premises in trying to minimize effort and maximize reward for themselves and their families, then no genuine practice-based community would be possible. Such a community requires a conception of the common good that goes beyond an accumulation of individual goods and is one in which "argument to, from and about such a conception" (MacIntyre 2006b, 154) is integral. No such argument took place in Rand's example as distribution was first undertaken by factory vote and then by a bureaucratic procedure (Rand [1957] 1992, 667).

Practice-based communities must be voluntarily built rather than imposed (MacIntyre 2006, xi; 1985, 263), the disposition to act virtuously must be shared if the community is not to degenerate, possibly in the way that Rand predicts. For Rand, MacIntyre's notion of the human as a dependent rational animal is oxymoronic—it is our independence that defines us and those relationships that involve dependence should themselves be seen as trades between individuals, those of adulthood in which the community of others in all its aspects is undertaken only in the mutual anticipation of personal benefit and those in infirmity so long as the infirm had built up enough personal resource to buy the support they required. In no case does the fact of dependence establish any claim on the attention of *any* others in itself.

Conclusion

Rand and MacIntyre's rejection of the idea of founding a rational and universalist ethics without an essentialist conception of human nature is shared along with their rejection of its associated separation of morality from practical rationality. As we have seen, both argue that moral agency requires the application of a consistent moral code across relationships with others[5] and neither finds these evident in modernity.

Consequently, Rand and MacIntyre share a common diagnosis of the moral predicament of the modern in which compartmentalization is itself evidence of moral failure in undermining the integrity necessitated by any intelligible moral schema. In this, they stand in

contrast to both those moderns such as Du Gay (2000) for whom compartmentalism is appropriate to a society in which agents' participation in different life-worlds require them to dispense different values and modes of judgment and against those postmoderns for whom an integrated schema evidences a failure to understand or admit to the precariousness of human meaning.

Despite their radically divergent solutions to the problems of compartmentalization, the proximity of their critique should go unnoticed no longer, hence the animus for this paper. I would tentatively suggest that this is an aspect of a wider convergence in the structure of their work, which though radically divided in both content and style, nevertheless attests to a common Aristotelian inheritance in respect of the derivation of political and ethical conclusions from metaphysical and epistemological premises.

In their commitment to metaphysical realism and rational epistemology, they are at odds with those moderns (a Sartre or a Foucault) whose rejection of either or both is inherent to their notion of freedom as defining the condition of human subjectivity. That man and reality have a distinctive nature, that this determines the appropriateness of their moral and institutional codes is common ground, or so I have argued, but their answers to the question of establishing that nature and describing its appropriate institutional embodiment sees them as radically divergent yet internally coherent responses to the problem of modernity's incoherence.

Postscript

It turns out that there is a personal connection between Rand and MacIntyre. In the summer of 2007, I mentioned this paper to MacIntyre with some trepidation given my assumptions as to his view of her work. He mentioned that he once had an assistant who was a former member of Rand's circle. It would be wrong to outline MacIntyre's views of Rand given that he has not written about her himself but he did focus on the definition of rationality as the central point at issue between them.

In writing this paper, I am all too aware therefore that the case to which I am pointing requires a far more thoroughgoing comparison between Rand's and MacIntyre's understanding of rationality than is presented here. If the paper has been successful, however, it is to the

extent that it suggests that this is a project worth undertaking. Such a task requires a mind more powerful than mine.

Notes

1. I am grateful for the comments of an anonymous reviewer and of Dr. Christopher Lutz on aspects of this paper.

2. MacIntyre is mentioned by Sciabarra (1995, 378) but despite the presence of a number of neo-Aristotelian essays in *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* (e.g.. Walsh 2002; Rasmussen 2006), this is the first to mention MacIntyre. The only neo-Aristotelian liberal critique of MacIntyre's politics can be found in Den Uyl and Rasmussen 2005, especially 225–44.

3. Her sympathetic account of Frank Lloyd Wright's mixed premises (Rand 1997, 412–15) is testament to her attempts to understand why even people with powerful minds can succumb to such incoherence.

4. The issues involved in explaining this require an understanding of Rand's notion of differences in capability which Martyn Dyer-Smith and I consider elsewhere (2002).

5. An anonymous reviewer has rightly pointed out that both may be regarded as natural law theorists in consequence of their essentialism. As Den Uyl and Rasmussen (2005, 184) state, all natural law theories are ethical theories "for which the nature of human beings is crucial to an account of both human goodness and moral obligation." It follows from the argument above however that Rand and MacIntyre diverge widely on the constitution of natural law. Again, Den Uyl and Rasmussen (240) rightly note Murphy's (2003, 169) account of MacIntyre's divergence from other natural law views in respect of individual rights.

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