

The 13th Conference of the International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry

Practical reasoning as citizens

On the shifting conditions of public discourse

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Premise

In *Dependent Rational Animals* (DRA), MacIntyre argues that, to pursue the common good, people need to draw from the resources of intermediate structures of society.

Here the individuals become **practical reasoners**, with the ability to engage in public discourse and political deliberation.



However, two ongoing transformations within these intermediate structures suggest a partial reassessment of the MacIntyrean analysis.

First transformation

Practical reasoning is “reasoning together with others, generally within some determinate set of social relationships” (DRA, p. 107).

However

- (i) Persons increasingly belong to very **diverse communities of practice** among which they transfer cultural beliefs, specifications of virtue and forms of argumentation;
- (ii) Networks of giving and receiving increasingly develop **independently from local geographical boundaries**.

For an individual **to become a practical reasoner is thus to combine these new conditions with the task of finding “one’s place within a network of givers and receivers** in which the achievement of one’s individual good is understood to be inseparable from the achievement of the common good” (DRA, p. 113).

To recognize this inseparable connection citizens have to reflectively acknowledge that the pursuit of the common good requires the engagement with a plurality of conceptions of the good and that **no single network holds all the discursive and ethical resources needed for public deliberation**.

Second transformation

MacIntyre argues that “market relationships can only be sustained by being embedded in certain types of local nonmarket relationship, relationships of uncalculated giving and receiving, if they are to contribute to overall flourishing” (DRA, p. 117).

However

What the sociology of new media observes is not just the detachment but rather the **reverse embedding of nonmarket relationships into market relationships.**

Social networks create digital environments that fuel market goals by **making use of the attention and trust people nurture by sharing their personal lives and affective relations.**

This process has an impact on public discourse, as **it transforms personal relationships into a vehicle to aggregate polarized collective identities** rather than to develop forms of shared reasoning and decision-making on the common good.

On citizenship and public discourse

In the light of this twofold analysis, a partial reconsideration of MacIntyre's account of political interactions among citizens is presented.

The only substantial integration we suggest is that **“the relevant kinds of giving and receiving” now exist across quite diverse communities of practice and beyond the geographical localization** of our networks of relations.

“What extended comparative study of the varying characteristics of communities that embody networks of giving and receiving may teach us is how better to identify what relationships of the relevant kinds of giving and receiving already exist in our own local community and how perhaps to greater extent than we have realized there is already a degree of shared recognition of the common good” (DRA, p. 144)

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The only substantial integration we suggest is that **“the relevant kinds of giving and receiving” now exist across quite diverse communities of practice and beyond the geographical localization** of our networks of relations.

Addressing the First Transformation -> Becoming an independent practical reasoner increasingly involves the reflective **awareness of the plurality of sources of interpretation of the good** with which one comes to interact in a plurality of communities of practice and across local and global boundaries of social interaction. This kind of awareness also provides a solid normative basis to **reject the exclusivity that is typical of polarized collective identifications.**

Addressing the Second Transformation -> In order to preserve healthy conditions of public discourse among the citizens, we must **decouple the ongoing process of extension of our relations of collaboration and solidarity from the hegemonic infrastructure of social communication of corporate social networks.**

Thank you for the attention !

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