

Maritain and MacIntyre on Moral Education

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One of the central themes of the philosophy of Jacques Maritain is his focus upon the person. Following St. Thomas, Maritain writes: “[t]he notion of person signifies what is most perfect in all nature.”¹ In us, as corporeal beings subject to change, the center of liberty that is personality “is only manifested by a progressive conquest of the self by the self accomplished in time.”² This conquest of the self by the self, which gives “a face to the turbulent multiplicity that dwells within him,”³ can be completed only by grace. But it can and must be begun in the natural order by the acquisition and exercise of the natural virtues, united by the commanding activity of prudence. How are the virtues, and particularly prudence, to be acquired?

As any Aristotelian will remind us, the virtues are acquired through habituation, but not of course through the kind of habituation applied to nonhuman animals through conditioning. Habituation into the virtues must proceed through the eliciting of free responses from the human apprentice, through a kind of education adequate to its human object. Thus Maritain tells us “the prime goal of education is the conquest of internal and spiritual freedom to be achieved by the individual person.”⁴ Education is to be an art aimed at integrating a “turbulent multiplicity” into a projectile directed toward Heaven. The conquest is to be achieved, or at least well begun, through the instilling of prudence into the soul. But prudence requires experience, practical intuition, and rightly ordered loves, none of which, Maritain reminds us, can be taught in the classroom. “In spite of all that,” he continues,

¹Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 248. Here Maritain cites the *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 27, a. 3.

² *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 247.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1943), p. 11.

“education should be primarily concerned with them.”⁵ Thus, looking forward in 1943 to the hoped-for victory over Axis Powers, he writes that the “task of moral re-education is really a matter of public emergency.”⁶ Now, not only must students be morally educated: they must be so educated by morally good persons, lest they be corrupted, and indeed by moral persons with a certain kind of intuitive capacity (about which more will be said shortly), who must themselves have undergone a similar education.⁷ Thus Maritain sets for himself quite a problem, and I do not think that he provides an adequate solution. He does drop a number of hints for us as to how moral educators might go about this seemingly impossible task of teaching or educating for prudence and practical knowledge, but they are largely suggestive and sketchy.

My purpose is to develop these suggestions by appeal to the work of a later Thomist, Alasdair MacIntyre, and in particular to his account of practices, which Kelvin Knight has called “the schools of the virtues.”⁸ MacIntyre does not say much under the official heading of “philosophy of education,” but he does say much that is eminently relevant to it. Bringing what he does say under a Maritainian architectonic of education as art assisting nature sheds light upon his implicit philosophy of education, and this in turn sheds more light upon Maritain’s explicit philosophy of education. Showing the connections between these philosophies of education also provides the materials for a response to the claim made by at least one of MacIntyre’s critics, the claim that practices play no important role in a Thomistic account of the virtues.⁹ Practices do play an important role, and even if this was largely implicit in Aquinas, it becomes much more explicit in later Thomistic accounts, such as that of Maritain. This excursion into the writings of MacIntyre will be seen (though here only in brief outline) to come full circle, in that MacIntyre’s invocation of traditions of moral enquiry and his own metaphysics of the human person point us back, or onward, to Maritain’s personalism.¹⁰ I believe that both philosophers are enriched by the revolution.

⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

⁸Kelvin Knight, “Introduction” to *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), p. 10.

⁹See David Miller, “Virtues, Practices and Justice” in *After MacIntyre*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 246. Miller is here speaking of justice in particular.

¹⁰The affinity of MacIntyre’s thought to that of Maritain is of course due in large part to their common master, St. Thomas, and it is important to stress that I do not mean to make the genetic claim that MacIntyre was always consciously and single-mindedly working out

The Degrees of Practical Knowledge

Before turning to what Maritain has to say about practical education, we must see, in outline, what he takes practical knowledge to be. Maritain distinguishes three levels of practical knowledge, in ascending degree of proximity to the concrete action to be done here and now: the speculatively practical, the practically practical, and the prudential. The first of these, the speculatively practical, corresponds to moral philosophy and is largely communicable; it can be taught in a classroom. The latter two, however, depending decreasingly on abstract ideas and increasingly on experience and on uprightness of character, are increasingly incommunicable. These three levels are best distinguished by understanding their objects, modes, and ends.¹¹ For all three, the object is the operable, human action.¹²

The speculatively practical has as its end “*knowing* as the foundation of *directing*” action “*from afar*.”¹³ Its mode is speculative in that it is analytic, breaking actions down into their constituents. Thus St. Thomas in the *Ia-IIae* treats in separate treatises the will, passions, habits, and so forth. But Maritain hastens to point out that its mode is not purely speculative; moral philosophy is not merely a metaphysics or psychology of the virtues.¹⁴ It considers the operable, human action, as related to its end, and is thus a normative science. In this sense its mode is practical and compositive.

Practically practical science (and it is a science since it still consists in the organization of universal truths), on the other hand, has as its end the

Maritainian ideas in his development of his notions of practices, traditions, and so forth. He owes intellectual debts also to Cardinal Newman, Wittgenstein, Marx, Gadamer, Anscombe, and so on and on, and he is moreover a very creative philosopher in his own right. But MacIntyre is also happy to acknowledge his explicit debts to Maritain. See *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 260, where he refers to Maritain as one of the “philosophers for whom I have the greatest respect and from whom I have learned most.”

¹¹Maritain’s discussion of these levels is to be found in chap. VIII and Appendix VII of *The Degrees of Knowledge*. Ralph McInerny offers a helpful discussion and criticism in his essay “The Degrees of Practical Knowledge” in his *Art and Prudence*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 63-76. McInerny here argues that Maritain’s division does not map onto that of Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 14, a. 16. He is, moreover, skeptical about whether the three levels of practical knowledge really need involve three distinct sorts of *habitus*. This dispute, to the extent that it is a dispute, is not my concern here. Even if the speculatively practical and practically practical did turn out to run together, this would do nothing to undermine Maritain’s philosophy of education. It certainly does not worry MacIntyre in his working out of his own related project.

¹² *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 484.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

direction of action “from nearby.”¹⁵ Thus, e.g., instead of arriving at a general precept to tell the truth to those who have a right to it, practically practical science will arrive at a much more particular precept to tell the truth to such and such a person in such and such a situation. As to its mode, it is practical and compositive through and through. As Maritain writes, “there is no question here of explaining and resolving a truth, even a practical truth, into its reasons and principles. The question is to prepare for action and to assign its proximate rules. . . . knowledge here, instead of analyzing, composes. . . . it gathers together everything that is known.”¹⁶ Practically practical science knows in a way close to intuition. The practitioner of this science must imagine a situation described in detail, and try to see what a virtuous person would do in it (or a continent person; advice must of course be tailored to the level of the development of the advisee). As examples of practitioners of the science of morals Maritain puts forward such “deeply intuitive men” as Dostoyevsky, and indeed the novel is a splendid medium for this science.¹⁷ Unfortunately absent from his list (but let me now add her) is Jane Austen. In her novel *Mansfield Park*, Austen portrays a situation in which the heroine, Fanny Price, overcomes a dispute, and thus brings some peace to a very troubled household, by making a gift of a silver knife to one of her sisters.¹⁸ In seeing what she should do in this situation and doing it, Fanny acts virtuously. In presenting this scenario, Austen is so far a practitioner of moral science. She imaginatively places herself in Fanny’s situation (and invites us to do the same) and gathers together moral precepts and the thoughts, feelings, and intuitions she takes it that a virtuous person such as Fanny would have, and tells us how she would act. Yet here, it should be pointed out, Austen is not exercising prudence, for though she judges she does not act. And the judgment is still universal, in that, for all its particularity, it applies to anyone of such a type in such a (albeit narrowly circumscribed) situation; Jane Austen is not Fanny Price. Now, Maritain insists that practitioners of this science are not psychologists, but moralists: they educate us; they are teachers.¹⁹ And indeed the possession of the *habitus* of this practical science is the “intuitive capacity” which I said above is required of teachers if they are to be effective moral educators. And, if novelists are practitioners of moral science *par excellence*, there is a more common and humble way of practicing

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 484.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 334.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 335.

¹⁸ I select this example because MacIntyre discusses it in his “How Moral Agents Became Ghosts,” *Synthese*, 53 (1982), p. 311; his discussion, though, focuses upon Price, not upon Austen.

¹⁹ *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 335.

this science, by serving as the knowledgeable friend giving practical advice of the form “Well, what I would do is....”²⁰ We all practice this science, with varying degrees of competence.

In prudence, the “continuous movement of thought inclined toward concrete action to be posited in existence” is completed; its end is “to direct action immediately.” Prudence is knowing incarnate in action. It judges and commands what is to be done here and now, and thus presupposes the rectitude of the will. As to its mode, it is practical and compositive “to the highest degree.” Indeed Maritain remarks that it is only prudence that is, strictly speaking, practically practical.²¹

A word or two should be said about the relation of these three levels of practical knowing. Speculatively practical science presupposes neither of the other two. A vicious person who is lousy as an advisor could be a fine moral philosopher. Similarly for prudence: a simple person ignorant of moral philosophy can be an outstanding human being; and such a person may be incapable of writing novels, or even of giving good advice in a widely accessible way (Joe Gargery of *Great Expectations* leaps to mind). Practically practical science is different. Maritain tells us that it depends upon speculatively practical science, and also upon prudence: it depends upon the right dispositions of the appetite and upon prudential experience and especially upon prudential judgment.²² It does not, of course, involve command.

Maritain on the Teaching of Practical Knowledge

We can now turn to what Maritain has to say about the teaching of practical knowledge.²³ He insists that “The only dominating influence in the school... must be that of truth... from the very start the teacher must respect in the child the dignity of the mind;” he continues, “if the one who is being

²⁰McInerney makes just this point in “The Degrees of Practical Knowledge,” p. 70.

²¹ *The Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 333, 481, 483-84.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 334, 336, and 487. Importantly, Maritain reminds us that rectitude of the will is “*even more* necessary for prudence” (p. 487n7), since only prudence involves actual command. It seems to me that a merely continent, or even an incontinent person (though not a vicious person) could act as a practitioner of moral science, since practically practical science deals with absent situations, and the incontinent characteristically does have practical knowledge, although he acts against it. Thus Maritain qualifies this dependence, stating that practically practical science depends upon prudence “if not in respect to the experimental material and partial truths it can gather up, at least for its complete truth and scientific certitude” (p. 488). The incontinent practitioner would lack certitude because he is always susceptible to distraction.

²³I focus on *Education at the Crossroads*, where his concern with practically practical science is largely implicit.

taught is not an angel, neither is he inanimate clay.” Although there is of course no innate knowledge, “the vital and active principle of knowledge does exist in each of us.” Education, then, is an art that ministers to nature, and in which the student himself is the principal agent and the teacher an effective but only secondary agent.²⁴

In the case of speculative truths, which are communicable through the medium of ideas, truths are not simply placed in or imposed upon the mind. Rather, they are set clearly before the student’s mind so that it naturally and freely assents to them.²⁵ Now, just as the mind is fundamentally disposed toward the true, so is it disposed toward the good.²⁶ So it would seem that the same technique, that of setting the object before the mind and so eliciting a natural movement toward it, should be applicable to moral education. The difficulty, of course, is that it must be set before the mind as good, *sub ratione boni*. The student must be brought to see something, a concrete action to be done here and now, as good. Now we can hold out certain moral standards, and we can teach moral philosophy, at least to those with enough lived experience to understand it, and thus Maritain thinks that we can exert a certain indirect influence upon the will.²⁷ But as we descend toward the concrete, where particulars loom large and passions can intervene, we must lean on two things that cannot be shared in the classroom, or strictly communicated at all: experience and character. Thus Maritain insists that “that right appreciation of practical cases which the ancients called *prudentia*, and which is an inner vital power of judgment developed in the mind and backed up by well-directed will, cannot be replaced by any learning whatsoever.”²⁸ And this is the problem.

The solution Maritain points us toward involves taking the students out of the classroom and submerging them in the extra-educational sphere of cooperative labor and play in the context of largely self-organized teams. This sphere

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 26, 30-31.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 36-38, where Maritain quickly enumerates a partial list of fundamental human dispositions: toward the love of truth, and of justice, toward simplicity or openness to the real, toward working well, and toward cooperation with others in common work. Maritain’s list is similar to, and perhaps able to be mapped onto, that of St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae*, I-II q. 94, a. 2.

²⁷ *Education at the Crossroads*, p. 27. Aristotle warns us that it is useless to teach ethics to the very young, and Maritain concurs, counseling that ethics and political philosophy not be taught until the fourth year of college. Personal and social morality will have been taught all throughout the students’ education, but on the sly, through the reading of history’s great humanistic authors (pp. 67-68) (the reading, that is, of practitioners of moral science).

²⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

embraces “the entire field of human activity, particularly everyday work and pain.” The paradox, Maritain tells us, is that “all this extra-educational sphere exerts on man an action which is more important in the achievement of his education than education itself.”²⁹ In his essay entitled “Moral and Spiritual Values in Education,” Maritain suggests forming students into self-organized teams “intent upon improving the work and discipline of their own members, as well as their sense of fairness, justice and good fellowship in their mutual relations.” Such teams, he thinks, may provide students with the “effective beginnings of a real formation of the will.”³⁰ What forms might such teams take, and what sorts of activities might they embrace?

Maritain accords a great importance to play, taken broadly as activities in which the mind freely expands. In this category he includes games and sports, handicraft work and home economics, gardening, and training in the arts.³¹ He also, of course, accords a great importance to common work, and thus to training in common labor, in trades.³² Thus examples of Maritain’s self-organized teams might include chess clubs or dramatic acting associations, baseball teams or reading circles or quilting clubs, electricians’s or mechanics’s guilds or fishing crews. But how is participation in such activities to do the work set for it? Participants will, of course, acquire much needed practical experience through the activities, but how is it that participation effects the formation of prudence, or at least the beginnings of it? Part of the answer lies in the (suitably circumscribed) moral authority that Maritain recognizes that the educator must possess over the educated, an authority the possession of which will also extend to the coach, to the club advisor.³³ In the extra-educational sphere we will see something along the lines of a master teaching his trade to his apprentice. But this sort of practical teaching, however much it helps us answer the first question, about the teaching of prudence (and more needs to be said), raises a second, for it is just the sort of teaching that most requires in the teacher the habit of practical science, the habit of giving good advice. Was this habit acquired during the master’s own apprenticeship, and if so how? Maritain has pointed us in the right direction, but has not led us to the goal.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁰ Jacques Maritain, “Moral and Spiritual Values in Education,” in *The Education of Man*, ed. Donald and Idella Gallagher (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1962), p. 110. I do not take Maritain to mean by “self-organized” anything like “completely autonomous;” I assume that such teams will have advisors.

³¹ Ibid., p. 55.

³² Ibid., pp. 45-46

³³ Ibid., p. 33.

Here I turn to MacIntyre, for if we begin to describe Maritain's cooperative activities in a general way (they are coherent, complex, socially established, cooperative, develop human capacities, etc.) we will see that they are examples of what MacIntyre calls practices. And in his elucidation of this notion, MacIntyre offers a more detailed account of the moral development of the participants. Thus I will turn to the subject of practices with two central questions: how can participation in practices (begin to) instill the habit of practical science, and how can it (begin to) instill the habit of prudence?

MacIntyre on the Teaching of Practical Knowledge

These two presuppose a third question: what are practices? MacIntyre defines practices (and we may as well have the greater part of this rather long sentence before us) as:

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.³⁴

Briefly, we may discern seven characteristics of a practice: it is, first, human activity; second, coherent and complex (MacIntyre excludes tic-tac-toe but includes chess); third, socially established and cooperative (he excludes throwing a football with skill but includes football); and it is the sort of activity that, fourth, realizes goods internal to that sort of activity; fifth, is partly constituted by accepted standards of excellence; sixth, extends human powers to achieve excellence; and seventh, extends conceptions of the goods of that activity. A little more needs to be said about the last four characteristics.

Goods internal to a practice are best understood by contrasting them with external goods, goods that, first, can be obtained in many other ways; second, can be specified and appreciated as goods by (nearly) anyone; and third, are competitive. Thus, the prize money won in a chess tourney is an external good: money can be obtained in other ways, its possession can be seen by non-players to be a good, and its possession by the winner prohibits its possession by others. Goods internal to a practice, then, first, can be obtained only through participation in that or a similar practice; second, can be

³⁴ *After Virtue*, p. 187.

specified and recognized as goods only by reference to a practice; and third, are typically common goods with respect to all practitioners.³⁵ The good of confounding the opponent's Stonewall Defense by fianchettoing one's bishops is a good internal to chess: it cannot be obtained outside of chess, it can be specified only in terms of chess, and can be appreciated only by players, and it contributes to the excellence of the game in a way shared by the players and the knowing onlookers, and perhaps also by players of later games. MacIntyre distinguishes two kinds of internal good.³⁶ First, there is excellence of product. Artistic painting being a practice, an excellent painting (or perhaps better, the excellence of a painting) is an internal good of this type. Second, there is the excellence of character, the excellence of living a certain kind of life, the life of an artist, or of a baseball player or fisherman. I will have more to say about this shortly.

Practices also involve, and are partly defined by, standards of excellence. "To enter a practice," MacIntyre writes, "is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them."³⁷ As a beginning pitcher in baseball, I must learn from others (coaches, senior pitchers, or the catcher) when it is best to throw a fastball and when it is best to throw a curveball. If I do not accept the authority of established standards, and of senior practitioners as experts on what those standards require, "I will never learn to appreciate good pitching let alone to pitch."³⁸ A beginner in a practice, then, in order to excel, must first apprentice himself to recognized masters (coaches, advisors, senior practitioners).

Through this apprenticeship, the participant in a practice extends his powers to achieve excellence in that practice. It is not only that he becomes more technically skilled; he also extends his powers of practical reasoning. The young pitcher at first learns the general rules of pitching, and then, with the acquisition of experience, learns to see each situation, each pitch, in its particularity. Having mastered the basics, he learns to *see* what pitch he should choose. The freshman gets beat up when he shakes off his senior catcher—the sophomore, maybe not. The freshman "knows" that he should always throw a fastball when facing a 3-0 count; the sophomore sees that sometimes, he should throw a curve. Thus, an apprentice gradually emerges from being under the authority of senior practitioners to become more or less self-governing. He becomes what MacIntyre later calls an "independent prac-

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 188-90.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 186-90.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 190.

³⁸ Ibid.

tical reasoner.”³⁹ The apprentice can become an adept, and can even go beyond the standards established to this point. This points to the final characteristic of practices.

Participation in practices can extend conceptions of the goods of that practice, both of the individual participant and of the practicing community. The individual’s conceptions alter drastically, of course: he must first come to see the goods internal to a practice as goods at all, and then move to a greater and greater understanding and appreciation of them. This is a function of education, whereby he must in many ways become like senior practitioners. But, as noted, the participant can surpass previously set standards, and in this way can extend the whole community’s conceptions of the goods of that practice. Sticking to baseball, the conceptions of a good power hitter before and after Babe Ruth were very different, because Ruth “broke” all the rules. The four-minute mile that used to be an ideal is now a commonplace. Excellence in chess is raised to a new level when a player develops a new opening or an effective counter to a certain strategy. And so on. What it is to be excellent, to excel, in a given practice, develops over time. Thus MacIntyre writes that practices “never have a goal or goals fixed for all time ... the goals themselves are transmuted by the history of the activity.”⁴⁰

Let us look at the example MacIntyre gives of how participation in a practice operates in the ways he says it does, that of the chess-playing child.⁴¹ MacIntyre asks us to imagine an intelligent seven-year-old, Ruth, let us say, whom he wishes to teach chess. Ruth has no desire to play, but MacIntyre bribes her to play with candy, and promises her more candy if she wins, promising further that he will always play so as to make it difficult but possible for her to win. Desiring candy, Ruth plays to win, but, MacIntyre points out, has as yet no motive not to cheat, as her only motive is to win candy. But we may hope, he says, that after a time she will “find in those goods specific to chess, in the achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytic skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity, a new set of reasons...for trying to excel in whatever way the game of chess demands. Now if the child cheats, ...she will be defeating not me, but...herself.” She comes to value the internal goods of chess more than external goods, or at least some of them. She comes to acquire a new set of motivations. How does this work? For the details, we should ask a child psychologist, but we know that it often

³⁹ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1999), especially chap. 8.

⁴⁰ *After Virtue*, pp. 193-94.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

does: if not with chess for this particular child, then perhaps with skating, or handicraft work, or fishing. However the psychologist cashes out the details for us, I think that we should see this as the operation of the fundamental inclination toward excellence in work (and play) that Maritain attributes to us.⁴² Ruth comes to see what is excellent in chess in her struggles to win, even when motivated solely by candy, and the more she sees certain modes of play as excellent, the more she will see them as desirable in their own right. And what holds for chess will hold for baseball, for fishing, for crafts, or for other activities in Maritain's extra-educational sphere, which we saw should be construed as practices.

So it should be clear that Ruth's conceptions of the good are extended through her participation in the practice of chess, and this holds not just for her conception of the good of chess, but for her conception of her good as a person. It is not of course that she sees excellence in chess as her good, but she does come to see it as a real good, and therefore at least potentially as part of her good. We can see also that her "human powers" are extended. Playing chess of course extends her analytic skill and strategic imagination, but it also allows her to begin the development of moral habits, of virtues. It is in the context of his discussion of practices, of course, that MacIntyre offers us his "first, even if partial and tentative definition of a virtue:"

A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.⁴³

This definition does embrace intellectual excellences such as strategic imagination, but it also embraces moral virtues. Thus MacIntyre notes that Ruth came to see fairness in play as a good, and indeed argues in *After Virtue* that at least three moral virtues are necessary for success in any practice: justice, honesty, and courage.⁴⁴ We must correctly accord merit to goods and to other practitioners, giving what is due to all. We must tell the truth (I will return later to this very important point). And we must have the courage to risk what is lesser for what is greater. In later writings, MacIntyre explicitly recognizes as well the need across practices for temperance (I must not be diverted from greater internal goods by lesser or external goods) and, of course, for a sort of prudence (obviously, to succeed in a practice, I must be able and inclined to deliberate, judge, and command with respect

⁴² *Education at the Crossroads*, p. 38.

⁴³ *After Virtue*, p. 191.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

to actions to be done here and now).⁴⁵ The development of moral virtues is an example of the second kind of internal good MacIntyre posits, the good of a certain way of life, or, excellence of character (as well as, of course, an extension of human powers).

Now, there is a problem in that MacIntyre's definition at this stage relativizes virtues to practices. It is for this reason that I referred to "a sort of prudence." We might refer to the prudence, and to the other virtues, developed in this way as *practical* prudence, or *practical* virtues.⁴⁶ I will come back to MacIntyre's response to this problem, but it should be fairly clear how activities in Maritain's extra-educational sphere, seen as practices, can at least begin to instill the virtue of prudence. It is not of course that they stamp out apprentices shaped in a certain mold. Rather, they provide an encouraging environment in which the apprentice's natural inclinations and powers of practical reasoning begin spontaneously (though not without guidance) to develop into virtues.⁴⁷ And this is all we should expect from more or less narrowly circumscribed spheres of activity. At this point, I need to come back to practical science: how is this habit developed through participation in practices? The answer to this question will simultaneously shed further light on the development of prudence.

When beginning to participate in a practice, MacIntyre says that we must learn from senior practitioners to make two different kinds of distinction:

that between what merely seems good to us here now and what really is good relative to us here now, and that between what is good relative to us here now and what is good or best unqualifiedly.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 40, 44.

⁴⁶By *practical* I just mean relative to a practice; saying *practical* prudence seems redundant and, in this context, ambiguous. It is worth noting briefly that St. Thomas seems to recognize this sort of prudence, in his discussion of what is sometimes called regional prudence, which is ordered to business, say, or to sailing, in the *Summa Theologiae*, II-II q. 47, a. 13.

⁴⁷Appeal to natural inclination or internal dynamism here and in the case of the chess-playing child above might seem spooky to some philosophers. It might seem that instead of explaining the learning I am just saying "that's what apprentices do." It seems to me that any explanation must eventually reach such a step. And I might note that this not a "problem" only for Thomists. Addressing the question "How is it that the pupil, given that sparse instruction, goes on to new instances in the right way?" John McDowell writes, "we can say: it is a fact (no doubt a remarkable fact) that, against a background of common human nature and shared forms of life, one's sensitivities to kinds of similarities between situations can be altered and enriched by just this sort of instruction." In other words, acquiring a sensitivity to situations is just the sort of thing human beings do. See John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist*, 62 (1979), p. 341.

⁴⁸ *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, p. 30.

It is upon the second distinction that I wish to focus. An example of this distinction is that made between excellent apprentice work and a true masterpiece. It is my contention that the habit of accurately making this distinction between what is best simply and what is best for someone at a certain level of development is partly constitutive of the habit of practical science (it should be obvious that it is also necessary for prudence). How so?

Consider a novice pitcher. He learns the art of pitching largely through observation of, teaching by, and imitation of more expert pitchers. But though he does become better by imitating them, he must constantly keep in mind that he is not yet as good as they are. Thus he may have learned that in a certain situation, say with a 3-2 count with the bases loaded facing a certain kind of hitter, the best thing to do would be to throw a hard curve that nicks the outside corner, thus catching the batter off guard. But he must also remember that his control is not good enough yet to risk throwing a curve; he should throw a fastball down the middle and hope for the best. Now, later on, after hanging up his spikes and becoming a coach, he can keep alive the habit of making this sort of distinction between what is best simply and what is best for someone at a certain level of development. And when he later visits the mound in a similar situation, he will, taking into account his pitcher's skill, be able to give advice tailored to that pitcher's situation, even though he himself is not in that situation. And, when he writes his "How to" book on youth league baseball, he will be able to give advice tailored to narrowly circumscribed situations of this and other sorts. He will be able to do so by composing, by bringing together, the various things he has learned about baseball: the rules of the game, general guidelines, and recollections and imaginings of certain types of situation. He will have acquired, that is to say, the habit of practical science that is required of coaches and advisors of all sorts.

Making this sort of distinction requires taking up the viewpoint of another (a junior or senior practitioner, or a peer). In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre gives a more detailed account of how this works. Recall that the goal of the practice of practical science is to regulate action from nearby, to give advice, and thus in some sense to speak for the other. "I learn this [how to speak for others]," MacIntyre writes, "in the course of learning how to speak for myself," in the course of learning, that is, to be an independent practical reasoner.⁴⁹ As we have seen, we learn how to do this through participation in shared structured activities, in practices in which we submit ourselves to shared standards and to the authority of senior practitioners: "It is by having our reasoning put to the question by others, by being called to

⁴⁹ *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. 147.

account for ourselves by others, that we learn...to understand ourselves as they understand us.”⁵⁰ Indeed, it is often only through this sort of dialogue that we come to understand ourselves at all, for we may have acted unthinkingly, on unconscious motives. Now, if you question my actions or comportment, I make myself intelligible to you, and justify myself, by telling you the relevant part of my history and explaining to you my ends, what individual or common goods I take myself to be pursuing at this time in these ways. But to engage in such a dialogue successfully, I must be able to assume your point of view, at least to the extent that I am able to respond to the concerns that you are actually expressing in questioning me. And to the extent that “we are successful in doing so, we become able to speak with the other’s voice.... In achieving accountability we will have learned to speak for the other.”⁵¹ An example would be helpful here. Let us stick with our novice pitcher.

Suppose that he has just given up a three-run home run to a powerful hitter. His part in the business had been to shake off his senior catcher’s call for a low curveball and to throw a high fastball. The coach approaches the mound, and pointedly asks, “Why did you do that?” Is the coach asking, “Why did you, with your fastball at the stage of development that it is, try to overpower this particular hitter?” Or is he asking, “Why did you, a freshman, shake off your senior catcher?” The pitcher must know his coach, but he is probably asking both questions. Perhaps the pitcher will shame-facedly admit that he let his pride get the better of him. In this case, he will see, or have it pointed out to him, that he had allowed himself to be distracted from the proper goal of helping the team. Or perhaps his answer will take the form of telling a part of his history (he’d been working on his fastball, and thought it was improved; moreover, he did not fully trust his catcher because such and such had happened) and explaining his goals (he thought a fastball would catch this hitter off guard, thus furthering the good of the team). Perhaps the light of day will reveal to the young pitcher the weakness of his reasoning, or perhaps the coach will point it out to him. Perhaps he had seen a better player do it. Here he will see, or have it pointed out to him, that he is not such a player yet (here, of course, is the aforementioned distinction between the best and his best, in explicit form). Through this dialogue (in this admittedly idealized conference on the mound), guided by the coach’s questions, he learns to reason better about what to do in such situations. He is also, in the process, beginning to learn how to think about pitching and about baseball as

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 150.

his coach thinks about them. It is worth remarking here that both this ability to take up the perspective of another, and the disposition to tell the truth to that other, are essential to the submission to standards (and to the senior practitioners who represent the standards) that is itself essential to progress in a practice.

In the case of the coach's questioning, a largely shared framework, and a largely shared history, that of the practice of baseball in the context of a certain team, is presupposed. But now suppose that the hitter's father, ignorant of baseball and just released from a psychiatric hospital, interrupts the summit on the mound, asking the same question: "Why did you do that?" Here it is even more obvious that the pitcher must take up the questioner's point of view in order to respond appropriately to the question, for it is now likely that the question has nothing to do with his behavior described as a pitch in a game of baseball. Perhaps the father saw the action as the throwing of a hard object at his son. The pitcher will be unable to respond appropriately at all, until, probably through questioning of his own, he has come to a greater understanding of his questioner's concerns. This points also to the need for moral education to go beyond what can be acquired in practices.

The point of this example, of course, is to make clear the fact that, to succeed in a practice, to develop what I have called practical prudence, an agent must learn to make his reasoning intelligible to other practitioners, and especially to those who are senior to him and from whom he must learn. And in learning to do this, the agent simultaneously develops the habit of practical science relative to that practice. In learning to take up the viewpoint of another practitioner and address the concerns specific to that viewpoint, he learns to exercise the kind of judgment necessary for the giving of advice. He starts down the road to becoming a coach. To become a good coach, of course, many other qualities will be needed (memory, imagination, articulateness, a sort of charisma, and so on).

Thus, participation in Maritain's extra-educational spheres of activity, seen as participation in MacIntyre's practices, does turn out to be a vehicle for the "teaching" of both practically practical science and of prudence. As Maritain told us, the "teaching" here is very different from the teaching that goes on in a classroom. Much more is required of the student-apprentice. Participation in practices does afford an opportunity for apprentices to acquire the experience necessary for the making of informed practical judgments, and it does provide an arena in which his or her natural inclinations can expand and develop into virtues. But here the apprentice is required to mobilize more of his natural inclinations. In the classroom, the inclination to know the truth is sufficient, provided

only that it is not interfered with. In practices, more of the person must be invested to assure success. What Maritain calls the fundamental dispositions to justice, to work well, and to cooperate with others in common work must come into play. I have not focused on this, because my chief concern here is with practical knowledge, but of course, as both Maritain and MacIntyre realize, prudence and, to a lesser extent, practical science, cannot be separated from the moral virtues. We have already seen that MacIntyre thinks that at least the cardinal virtues are required for successful practice. And he sees truthfulness as especially important, as we cannot profit from the advice of others if we are not truthful with them about, e.g., what we were thinking and feeling when we did such and such (throw that fastball, e.g.). We cannot exercise practical prudence without being truthful to ourselves about our present state of expertise, and we certainly cannot give good advice without being truthful about what we take the other's state of expertise to be. A great deal more should be said about this, but here is not the place.

What I do need to address, if only briefly, is the worry that I have already raised that in practices we can acquire only practical virtues, virtues relativized to a practice (this same worry, of course, will arise in the context of Maritain's spheres of activity). In presenting in outline form MacIntyre's response to this worry, I will also point out that that here too we see a development of Maritain's thought.

Practices, Politics, and Traditions

The first thing that needs to be said is that, although one does not acquire the virtues, strictly speaking, through participation in practices, one does, in acquiring practical virtues, acquire the matter of virtue. In baseball, an excellent player can acquire the disposition to "take one for the team," to allow himself to be hit by a pitch. This would be an act of practical courage commanded by practical prudence. Although this is not yet true virtue, the disposition to overcome the fear of a lesser evil for what is judged to be a greater good is there, waiting to be further informed by a more adequate conception of the good.

MacIntyre realizes that a human life informed by a conception of the good and of the virtues as relativized to practices would be pervaded by "*too many* conflicts and *too much* arbitrariness.... The claims of one practice may be incompatible with another."⁵² There is no place yet for a "*telos* of a

⁵² *After Virtue*, p. 201.

whole human life” or for such virtues as constancy.⁵³ The various practices and their goods, MacIntyre tells us, must be ordered in two ways. They must be ordered within the community, and here MacIntyre appeals to the architectonic practice of politics in an Aristotelian sense.⁵⁴ And they must be ordered within the life of the individual person, and here MacIntyre appeals to traditions, which are historically extended rational enquiries into the good human life, and which are socially embodied in institutions, practices, and practitioners.⁵⁵ The individual can learn how to order the various practices and their goods through adhering to a tradition and subscribing to the conception of the human good that it professes.⁵⁶ For MacIntyre, it is ultimately through adherence to traditions, to include participation in the practices in which they are partly embodied, that we pursue wisdom, practical as well as theoretical, and through traditions that we move toward achieving our good as persons. And it is from traditions that come the resources for the crowning elements of Maritain’s vision of liberal education: theoretical and practical philosophy, and ultimately the foundations of wisdom that can unite the many ways of knowing.⁵⁷

The progression of individuals’s pursuit of their goods that MacIntyre portrays for us—from our starting point in a family situation forward through practices, civil society, and on to adherence to a tradition—almost exactly mirrors what Maritain calls “a vertical movement of the persons themselves in the midst of social life.”⁵⁸ Maritain of course singles out just one tradition as adequate to the task, and furthermore sees this vertical movement as metaphysically grounded in a way that the MacIntyre of *After Virtue* would not have liked. But he comes around, to a significant extent. In his essay, “Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy,” he begins by describing plain persons as “proto-Aristotelians,” noting that through participation in practices they become full-blooded, even if unwitting, Aristotelians, and ends by noting that his account must be situated within a certain metaphysical and theological

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 202-03. *Constancy* is a virtue concept taken from Jane Austen, and which makes sense only in the integrated context of a whole human life. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre also recognizes the similar standing of such virtues as justice and patience; the later MacIntyre would surely include charity in this list.

⁵⁴ See *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, p. 47, 107.

⁵⁵ *After Virtue*, pp. 222-23.

⁵⁶ My point is not that these two modes of ordering practices must be actually separate; at its best politics itself will be informed by a tradition in good order, and ideally by the same tradition that guides all or most citizens.

⁵⁷ *Education at the Crossroads*, pp. 67-68, 71-72.

⁵⁸ Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. FitzGerald (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), pp. 79-80.

context.⁵⁹ And by the time he writes *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre seems ready to sign back on to Aristotle's "metaphysical biology" (albeit minus certain "important elements" of it (which are here unspecified); see the Preface, p. x).

Concluding Remarks

So MacIntyre can be seen improving upon Maritain's philosophy of moral education, for his work on practices, as the schools of the virtues, makes clear, or at any rate clearer, how extra-educational activities perform the moral tasks set for them. By way of a brief summary, they do so by:

1. Lifting the student-apprentice into a cooperative sphere of activity where practical reason operates under a new set of motivations and is engaged in the pursuit of new goods held in common with others.

2. Teaching student-apprentices to make the twin distinctions between real and apparent goods, and between their current best and the best simply—this helps to set fundamental inclinations free to follow their natural course toward virtue, and toward practical science.

3. Instilling the capacity to take up the viewpoint of others, and thus to speak for those others—this is important for developing prudence and for becoming an independent practical reasoner, but is even more central to the capacity to give good moral advice, and thus to the practice of practical science.

But if MacIntyre moves the inquiry forward, he does so in a way that is deeply indebted to Maritain, and that ultimately points back toward him. In the end, both men are engaged—and I think successfully so—in working out a true philosophy of education, which sees that education's real aim is neither to cater to the untutored individual nor to force him into the mold of some cultural type, but is rather "to make a man."⁶⁰

⁵⁹Alasdair MacIntyre, "Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues, and Goods," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (Winter 1992); cited from *The MacIntyre Reader*, pp. 138, 140, 152.

⁶⁰*Education at the Crossroads*, p. 100.